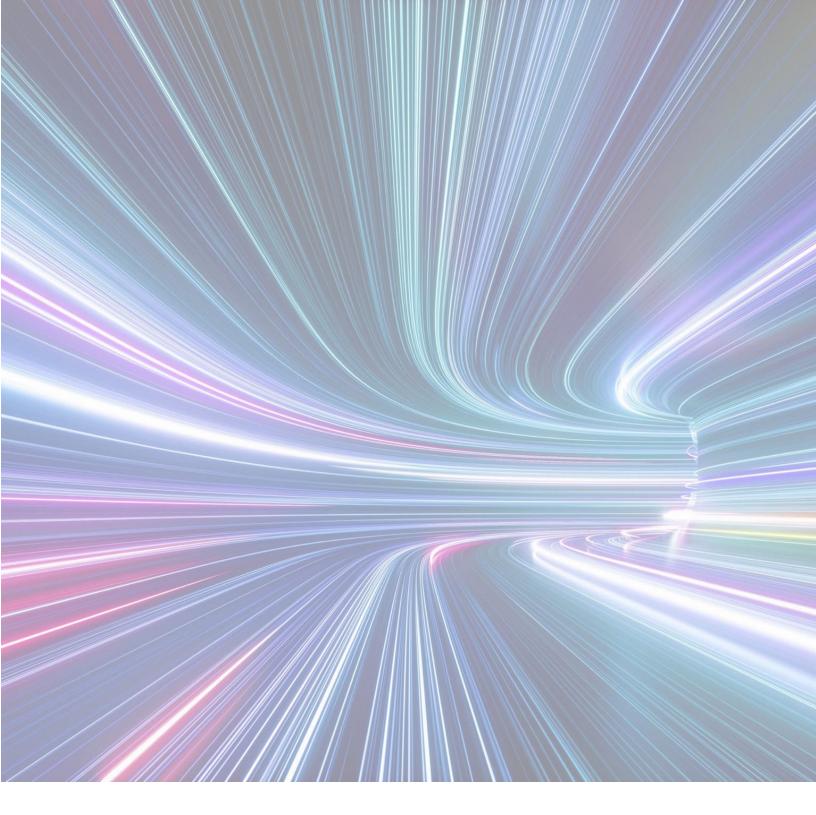# PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT AND CITIZEN CONSULTATIONS to Sustain Peace during Electoral Processes

Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes (SELECT) Project

Contents

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CO	Country Office (UNDP)
COE	Council of Europe
CPA	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
DPPA	Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
ECEC	European Centre for Electoral Control
EMB	Electoral management Bodies
EU	European Union
FPI	European Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI).
GOPAC	Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
INTOSAI	International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions
IPU	Inter-parliamentary Union
JTF	Joint Task Force
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
NDI	National Democratic Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OGP	Open Governance Partnership
OIF	International Organization of La Francophonie
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly
PALOP	**Programme for Consolidating Economic Governance and Public Finance Management Systems in Portuguese Speaking Countries**
Parlatino	the Latin American Parliament
PDR LAO	Peoples Democratic Republic Lao
SAI	State Audit Institution
SELECT	Sustaining Peace during Electoral Process
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TI	Transparency International
TL	Timor Leste
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisaiton
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USA	United States of America
VNR	Voluntary National Report (SDGs)
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Development
WPN	Women Parliamentary Network

Acknowledgement & Disclaimers

Key terms and concepts

All-party group is an informal group formed by MPs, usually from different parties, who share a common interest in a particular policy area, region or country. See also: *Caucus* and *Cross-party group* (UK Parliament, 2024).

Cross-party group is a group of MPs from two or more political parties who work together towards a common goal. Usually, a cross-party group is not an official parliamentary body and can also include external stakeholders as well as MPs. See also: *All-party group and Caucus*.

Deliberative democracy is a wider political theory that claims that political decisions should be a result of fair and reasonable discussion among citizens. (Interparliamentary Union, 2023)

Development discourse. The term is used in a variety of ways. For this report, it is defined as an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories though which meaning is given to a phenomena.

Digital Transformation of Parliaments is the action of applying new digital-based tools and technologies to parliamentary processes and culture. It happens as part of the wider drive to modernize and improve parliaments, making them more efficient and effective. Digital transformation delivers optimized, more user-centric services to members, staff and the wider public. (Interparliamentary Union, 2023)

Electoral Violence is a form of political violence, designed to influence an electoral outcome, and thus the distribution of political power. It may be considered a tool to (re)direct the trajectory of the elections by actors who are dissatisfied with the expected outcome or hold issue with the perceived credibility of the process, taking place in the pre-election, during the election day(s) or post-election periods. It may also be an expression of protests against a process that was seen as unfair − be it by incumbents or challengers. Election Violence may take the form of physical violence or other forms of aggression, such as coercion or intimidation. Accordingly, certain forms of online abuse and digital repression are included.

Hate Speech is "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor. This is often rooted in, and generates, intolerance and hatred, and in certain contexts can be demeaning and divisive." (Parliament, 2024)

Independent Scrutiny bodies. Institutions independent from government that report to parliament and help parliament perform its scrutiny function. They are usually State Audit Institutions, Ombudsperson, Commissioner for Information, Anti-corruption Agency, Commissioner for Equality, Commissioner for Future Generation etc. They are also called parliamentary watchdogs, independent oversight institutions.

Legislation. A law or a set of laws that have been passed by parliament. The word is also used to describe the act of making a new law. See also: *Act of parliament, Law and Law-making.*

Outreach. Means by which a parliament can communicate with its citizens and provide access to information about how it operates. Such activities are crucial for citizens to better understand the mandate of the parliament and what it is capable and incapable of accomplishing. (Agora, 2024)

Parliamentary administration/secretariat/service. A set of administrative services and administrative staff that serve a parliament. Offices and staff of the parliamentary administration are professional, neutral and impartial in their work and actions.

Parliamentary oversight/scrutiny presents a close examination and investigation of government policies, actions and spending that is carried out by parliament to ensure they are reaching their intended beneficiaries appropriately, equitably and with integrity.

Parliamentary staff are employees working for the parliamentary administration who provide professional and impartial support and services

to enable MPs to fulfil their legislative responsibilities. In this publication, the term "parliamentary staff" does not include political staff who provide support to individual MPs or parliamentary (party) groups. It should be noted that parliamentary staff are categorized differently across the globe, and the term may refer to individuals who work under either partisan or non-partisan capacities in parliament. In this publication, the term refers to individuals who are non-partisan. Typically, parliamentary staff are separate and independent from the executive's civil service.

Pre-legislative and post-legislative scrutiny. Pre-legislative scrutiny: detailed examination of an early draft of a Bill that is done by a parliamentary select committee before the final version is drawn up by the Government. Post-legislative scrutiny: an inquiry by a parliamentary select committee into how a new law has worked in practice since it came into force. (Parliament, 2024) (Nations, 2024)

Public engagement are various methods and processes through which the community is involved in an activity, process or decision, including education, information, communication, consultation and participation.

Public Participation: The process by which people, individually or in groups, get involved in an activity or decision.

Rules of procedure are rules approved by parliament to regulate its proceedings and govern the way it conducts its business.

Supreme Audit institution (SAI) is a body responsible for auditing public financial administration and the management of public funds. It plays a central role in the efficient, effective, transparent and accountable use of the public resources approved by parliament through the annual budget process. In some jurisdictions, the SAI may be known as the "national audit office", "court of auditors", "audit bureau", "board of audit" or "auditor-general".

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Global goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that, by 2030, all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Together, the SDGs constitute the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a series of 17 interlinked goals designed as "the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all".

Transitional justice is an approach to systematic or massive violations of human rights that both provides redress to victims and creates or enhances opportunities for the transformation of the political systems, conflicts, and other conditions that may have been at the root of the abuses. (United Nations, 2024)

Summary

This United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and European Union (EU) publication is designed as a knowledge product for practitioners in the field of governance and in particular electoral assistance and parliamentary support. The purpose of this report is to explore the nexus between the prevention of electoral violence and parliamentary support for public engagement. It seeks to present both challenges and opportunities as well as specific entry points offering new programmatic approaches. This Research provides practitioners with valuable lessons learnt from the UNDP experience in the field and its partner organisations.

The knowledge gained through this Research should help development of various approaches to mitigating political violence. Looking at the wider governance framework it will seek to encourage more synergies and understanding for different contexts. In order to navigate the unprecedented social change coming with digital platforms, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and just transition, parliaments in particular can no longer remain in the siloed legislative process but need all the support they can get to adapt to the people's demands.

Elections are about changes and noting social divergence. Electoral processes may either contribute to creating legitimate governments or be the catalysts of conflict, hence, Chapter 2 looks into political violence its causes and effects. The Research takes note that electoral violence may appear before, during and even after voting day with a higher probability for violence in conflict and post-conflict countries. Moreover, it may have a violent spillover effect to parliament, but violence may also come from parliament. The consequences of political violence can be political, social and economic amongst other things, and may impact elections and public participation profoundly. In complementarity to the previous UNDP SELECT workstreams, this Research makes the much-needed connection with hate speech, disinformation and violence against women in politics through the lens of public participation in parliament. The Research goes even further to explore the role of women politicians in parliament and peacebuilding for their direct contribution to sustaining peace. Moreover, the Research looks into a constitutional review approach, that would appear to be much in demand in post-conflict societies, providing the most impactful and sensitive convergence point between electoral assistance and parliamentary support.

The Chapter 3 reflects on multiple dimensions of public engagement for prevention of electoral violence. This section outlines the contexts of electoral violence and seeks further convergence points between electoral assistance and parliamentary support. It explores new niches and under-researched elements of the functioning of parliamentary democracy such as the fragility of the electoral process and in particular the early election phenomenon. Why early elections may have greater potential to reignite conflict than ones conducted to a regular schedule. It points out the importance of political parties and their divergent role – being part of the problem or part of the solution. Hence, understanding how they influence the probability of violence may prove essential to better regulate prevention of electoral violence. The Research looks for solutions through examples of electoral codes and ethical pacts against discrimination as important steps and trends in working with political parties.

Furthermore, the Research highlights digital platforms and artificial intelligence as having a profound and growing effect on elections through online political campaigns and personal data protection. The Research points to the need to strengthen the governance of digitalisation, primarily to combat the misuse of private data during online political campaigning but also to reduce online violence. The Research notes the impact of big data on development, and how it is outpacing the legislative framework and scrutiny mechanisms, leaving citizens' rights without adequate protection. The Research provides different solutions for improving transparency and accountability through a better legislative framework for online political campaigning. Indeed, rules should apply both online and offline with full respect of the relevant laws including the data protection law and the constitution amongst others, calling for continuous work on the governance of digitalisation.

There is a clear need to develop various approaches in addressing the complexity of the prevention of violence in these turbulent times. In Chapter 3, the Research presents a review of existing and new/innovative areas of the parliamentary role in citizens consultations in the contexts of electoral support to adapting parliamentary and electoral processes to the new reality. In order to understand this nexus, we need to reflect on citizens' perceptions, trust in democratic processes and understand how it relates to subsequent interest and engagement in elections and decision-making.

The multifocal nature of parliament offers a unique platform for connecting citizens, civil society, academia, intergovernmental organisations and other branches of government over different societal problematisation. The importance of continued dialogue, adjustment, scrutiny and accountability as the main preconditions for the functioning of a system and the people's trust in the system and therefore willingness to engage in its work cannot be stressed enough. Chapter 3 explains how prevention of conflict and building peace seem highly dependent on parliament's ability to bring all stakeholders together. Building upon the Global Parliamentary Report 2022, the Research looks into specific violence related barriers to meaningful participation. Digital technology may enable wider participation and access to information. However, regardless of how developed the digital solutions are, or how many avenues open up, what makes the difference for a meaningful and sustained engagement of public in parliamentary work seems to be whether the feedback loop is closed.

The Research takes note of the delicate nature of citizen engagement and the need for a strategic and institutional approach as well as a whole-of-society approach. It refers to the pillars of public engagement, as specified by the Global Parliamentary Report: information – keeping the public informed of what parliament is doing; education – increasing understanding of parliament and its work; communication – developing communication avenues; consultations - building a knowledge hub on parliamentary work and; participation –inviting the public to take an active part in parliamentary processes.

Oversight is another element that offers potential for effective engagement for citizens and civil society but also parliamentary oversight bodies. Their role in monitoring political party campaigning and financing, personal data protections, ordering public access to information and similar offer a particular niche for programming. Connecting youth's ability to innovate and interest in participating in formal decision-making processes may help address the challenges of development and creating new social pacts. For work to progress on accountability, public institutions' acceleration of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, oversight and budget planning, a robust regulatory framework needs to be in place. Just transition as part of Agenda 2030 may offer the potential for compromise and balancing on the path towards sustainability.

The Chapter 4 outlines the main observations and entry points taking into account various country contexts. The following recommendations, based on this Research exercise, have been developed as follows:
There needs to be a synergy in approach between electoral assistance and parliamentary support. Strategic programming for a long-term approach should cover the entire democratic process from pre-elections, elections, to post-elections. Violence prevention and meaningful public participation should be the connecting thread for such interventions.
When approaching prevention of violence we need to address all levels of intervention: global, regional and local. Cross party caucuses and peer-to-peer exchange are good examples.
Mainstreaming agile programming, just transition/SDGs, gender equality, electoral violence and parliamentary indicators should help unify and solidify approaches.
Continued maintenance of parliamentary support, regardless of whether there is a project on the ground is necessary. Support may be in the form of participation in donor coordination and orientation sessions for new MPs to public hearings and mobile committee sessions and in particular parliamentary education.
The role of parliamentary secretariats as key to public participation, the digitalization and sustainability of any intervention should not be underestimated.

European Parliament's initiatives such as Electoral monitoring for education and training on election processes and parliamentary electoral dialogues are particularly useful for their primary orientation for electoral violence prevention.

Partnerships are important but internal coordination and inter-agency coordination perhaps even more so. The matter of internal coordination may benefit from rethinking the programming approach, avoiding overlap and coordinating better within UNDP teams as well as between UN Agencies to achieve a minimal but synergetic and coordinated approach as highly desirable.

We need to recognize the realities and appreciate cultural contexts. No one frame will fit all country contexts.

Parliamentary diplomacy deserves a special place for potency to contribute to conflict resolution and highlighting the prevention of violence.

Amongst programming approaches for sustaining peace, we stress the need to identify barriers to meaningful participation and close the feedback loop. Online gender-based violence and the declining numbers of women taking part in elections demand action, where women's parliamentary networks may be the answer. Both men and women need to be involved in dialogue for developing frameworks to fight violence. Engaging with political parties is based on the fact that digital political campaigning is very poorly regulated and presents an area that can influence elections and lead to unrest and protest. A way to regulate the new and rapidly growing field of online campaigning may through parliamentary oversight bodies. Parliamentary independent oversight bodies may be essential for securing accountability and transparency as well as participation in discussing how a particular law may affect citizens and if it needs to be amended. Commissioners for Information and Data Protection seem particularly relevant to protect the rights of citizens to the privacy of their data. Independent bodies can also work directly with the respective committee on organizing public hearings, mobile committee sessions and similar.

The main conclusions revolve around the need for a multidimensional approach, flexibility, trust and a combined programming consideration, in order to tackle the mitigation of electoral violence. Governance of digitalisation is an important precondition for electoral integrity. Dialogue spaces are in high demand in order to curb political violence and ultimately allow for global frameworks for action such as the SDGs and Just Transition. In order to sustain peace, we need to focus on enabling fairly and justly the processes of participation, implementation and commitment. Parliaments need to be understood in their entirety and supported in the form that we have them today, in order to establish a basis for safe and free elections and sustainable peace while maintaining the commitment to developing new approaches.

Chapter 1 Introduction

The SELECT project

Credible, inclusive, transparent, and peaceful electoral processes are essential to confer legitimacy to national and local governments. When these processes are conducted in a well-organized and transparent manner, they can offer the means of channelling grievances and expectations into respectful and constructive debate. Yet, electoral processes can also exacerbate underlying conflict dynamics triggering violence, sometimes undermining years of development and peace-building efforts. The overall objective of the "Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes" (SELECT) project is to build the capacity of both national electoral stakeholders and international partners to a) identify risks factors that may affect elections b) design programmes and activities specifically aimed at preventing and reducing the risk of violence, and c) implement operations related to the electoral processes in a conflict sensitive manner, by delivering on the two following project outputs:

- Output 1: Development of an online knowledge hub where implementable programmatic activities related to the prevention of electoral-related violence are listed, informed by research and knowledge development, available in French and English.
- Output 2: The organization of outreach events/workshops to enhance electoral violence prevention capacities at national, regional, and international levels.

The SELECT Project's main objective is to research and develop programmatic options to prevent violence during electoral processes. The project focuses on a number of topics and how they relate to the prevention of electoral violence, including on women's participation, information integrity, youth participation, inclusive governance and parliamentary support. Under the SELECT Project, the Gender Equality and Women's Participation work stream has been formulated with the aim of bringing to light examples of programming that work towards advancing gender equality during electoral processes. This includes both ensuring women's meaningful political participation and preventing and mitigating violence occurring before- during, and after- elections; all intended to be used by practitioners when developing gender-sensitive electoral programming for the context they work in.

> **Topics under the SELECT project**
>
> 1. Promotion of information integrity
>
> 2. Youth participation
>
> 3. Electoral violence monitoring and analysis
>
> 4. Parliamentary support and citizen consultations
>
> 5. Gender equality and women's participation
>
> 6. Programming inclusive governance

Against this background, the SELECT project has developed an inclusive research process to ensure a multi-regional lens that takes into consideration experiences and knowledge from a wide range of stakeholders. The research process will be applied to various research topics included in the SELECT project document whereby the topics identified have the potential to negatively contribute to or positively mitigate the potential for electoral violence. The aim of this topic-specific research process is to understand the main challenges in relation to the nexus between the topic and electoral violence and outline actionable solutions to be implemented in the second phase of the project. Any solutions presented are intended to be informative and not prescriptive, recognizing that each country's context will be unique.

Each research topic under SELECT will be accompanied by a working group comprised of experts in the field and representatives of relevant organizations. The members of the

working group shall share their experience and expertise, as well as support, with their networks. The outputs of this project will not constitute United Nations policy recommendations. This report is dedicated to the SELECT work stream on parliamentary support and citizen consultations.

Chapter 2

Introduction

Framing the subject

The framing of this workstream is guided by the definition of election-related violence put forward by the United Nations Department of Political Affairs, as "a form of political violence, which is often designed to influence an electoral outcome and therefore the distribution of political power" (United Nations Department of Political Affairs, 2016). It may take the form of physical violence or other forms of aggression, including through coercion or intimidation. Incidents of violence can take place prior to and during polling, as its perpetrators may seek to influence electoral authorities, candidates, observers, journalists, or voters and therefore the results; or it may take place during or following counting, aggregation, or publication of results, when the intention may be to influence the future distribution of political power or negate the results (United Nations Department of Political Affairs, 2016). Since electoral processes are methods of managing and determining political competition, with outcomes that decide a multitude of critical issues, they can lead to a highly competitive environment where underlying societal tensions and grievances may be exacerbated, resulting in electoral violence. (United Nations Department of Political Affairs, 2016)

The multidimensional attribute of parliament is particularly important in the prevention of violence, especially in its engagement with and response to social problems as well as in cases of national emergency for example (Achen & Bartel, 2016). Prevention of conflict and building peace seems highly dependent on the parliament's ability to bring together the voters it represents, elected officials and civil society, due to the fact that they can connect and absorb a range of different interests and groups. Parliament is, by nature, a representative institution aimed at enabling dialogue to address conflicting points. An inclusive parliament with a strong institutional setup is a precondition for proper representation and effectiveness in enabling social transition from a conflict to a peaceful society. What makes this specifically challenging today is the fast-growing use of social media as a new arena for hate speech propagation.

This workstream is further guided by an understanding of meaningful public participation in parliamentary work and of the fragility of parliament as an institution. This position allows for all-across-governance programming for inclusive political processes towards prevention of political violence. By reviewing different roles in different contexts this research is framed around seeking solutions for growing public discontent by rethinking approaches.

This workstream does not intend to duplicate what has already been written on the topic of public participation in the work of parliament or on political violence, but rather to complement the existing literature on these topics by providing concrete examples from practice that can enhance understanding of the issue, and identifying innovative interventions for both the prevention of political violence and the enhancement of meaningful public participation.

UN Electoral Assistance Framework UN electoral assistance is provided to Member States at their request or based on mandates from the UN Security Council or General Assembly only. The UN system-wide focal point for electoral assistance matters, the UnderSecretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, decides on the parameters of such assistance, based on needs assessments led by the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). Implementation is guided by UN electoral policies set by the focal point, in consultation with UN entities, including UNDP

FRAMING OF THE ANALYSIS

This research report is amongst the deliverables of the parliamentary support and citizen consultations workstream of the Sustaining Peace during Elections (SELECT) project and was developed to deliver on the content of project output 1 for the development of an online knowledge hub and to be used through the project on output 2 for capacity building and outreach. The research process has been designed to be inclusive and participatory to ensure the content produced in the final product has a multi-regional lens and takes into

consideration experiences and knowledge from a wide range of stakeholders, parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, practitioners, experts, representatives of academia, and civil society.

The consultative research process has drawn on recent guidance material on prevention of political violence, public engagement, digital governance, SDGs, previous UNDP EU SELECT workstreams, electoral and parliamentary programming and other guidance materials related to prevention of violence in the context of elections. The research process has also benefitted from the wealth of academic literature on hate speech and disinformation and how that affects women's political participation; political parties' roles, AI, barriers to meaningful public participation, independent oversight bodies, just transition and similar. Through consultations, discussion groups, desk literature review and scoping interviews, the process has brought together electoral practitioners from UNDP and other UN agencies. The research supports the arguments it makes with a number of case studies throughout the paper, which present flagship initiatives, innovations, multidimensional approaches and country context, aimed at inspiring practitioners and partners alike to design initiatives which will sustain peace during elections.

The aim of the participatory approach has been to truly capture the wealth of expertise amongst practitioners at country and regional levels. The research has benefitted substantively from insights shared in conversations with practitioners working in a variety of fields, some "outside" the traditional electoral assistance field, including peacebuilding, parliamentary development, independent oversight bodies, innovations, open government and other relevant areas.

Essential to the participatory process was the establishment of the Working Group on parliamentary support and the citizen consultation work stream, comprising external partners from across international organizations, IPU, the EU, civil society, the French National Assembly and other actors with relevant practical and policy-related experience on the topics. The Working Group offered overall guidance to the research process by providing inputs to the

knowledge products developed by the SELECT project on supporting outreach and raising awareness of meaningful public participation programming, as well as fostering coherence and synergies in programmatic approaches amongst the community of practitioners working on electoral assistance and parliamentary support. The Working Group also helped the research process and ensured that the themes and best practices put forward are aligned.

The research was further built by three focus groups on digital transformation, public participation, and with parliamentary staff as well as semi-structured interviews with parliamentarians. This has had a profound impact on the final shaping of the research and our understanding of the struggle for enabling public participation under present circumstances. Particularly useful were the scoping interviews and regional consultations that may be found in detail in this report under the section "Regional Analysis".

This workstream will contribute to development of an online resource of best practices, as well as programming options on the identified nexus and corelation between parliamentary support and citizen participation, and electoral violence prevention. It will serve practitioners in the fields of elections, parliamentary support, governance, and peacebuilding. Although it may seem as if the research spans various domains which are tightly related, but also typically approached as separate work streams so far i.e. elections assistance, parliamentary development, political party engagement, or women's political participation, the research is now approaching it through an integrated lensand perhaps the most logical one from the point of view of one democratic process (pre-election, election, post-election/parliament). The following Chapters will shed light on the interconnectedness between the mentioned programmatic areas and how they may serve the present context better and reveal some new entry points. Should the context in particular countries allow for joint programming between electoral assistance and parliamentary development, this research would offer different possibilities and rationale as well as address some of the latest trends and needs collected through global consultations.

In particular, the research looks at the complementarity of programming for aligning parliamentary development and electoral support by creating a frame for building an inclusive democracy.

Limitations

Parliamentary development is a complex and multi-layered segment of democratic governance support. While this research managed to cover different parts of the world looking into various examples from across different context there will always be more examples or cases we have not studied. Hence there is always more need for additional analyses and mapping that would be required to reflect a strong contribution towards trust, enhancement of processes.

One of the main limitations of this paper relates to the lack of existing research on the intersection between parliaments and electoral violence prevention.

Timelines. This research is being conducted during the busiest period of the year but also during parliamentary recess in July/August.

Consultations. Parliamentary and electoral work requires diplomacy as there are confidential and sensitive matters to be discussed. Joint forums such as online focus groups and online interviews may limit some of the findings on specific country contexts, and this is something it may be useful for practitioners to be aware of.

Key Research Questions:

1.   What is the correlation between citizen participation in democratic processes and prevention of violence? Is this relation sufficiently recognized? How does it link with other governance workstreams?

2.   How should the potential of the multidimensional nature of parliamentary development be harnessed to create synergies with electoral and wider governance work for credible elections and prevention of violence?

3.   What are the new conversations and on which principles and values are we engaging with different actors to prevent electoral violence?

4.   What modalities are out there with the potential to break barriers to engagement with parliaments? ? How parliaments may be better supported towards breaking barriers and encouraging citizens to engage more? (see Global Parliamentary Report 2022)

STATE OF RESEARCH

The causes and consequences of electoral violence are increasingly becoming a key topic, given the proliferation of conflicts, uprisings, and online violence. Although violence may occur at different stages of the electoral process, the upsurge of electoral contestations that lead to large-scale violence is an emerging issue of policy concern.

How the entire electoral process is contributing to democratic governance is an area that could see more consultation and research especially in relation to the prevention of violence. Consequently, there is a mayor difference between election-specific violence perpetrated by incumbent governments, and external influence on electoral violence that, as yet seems under-addressed. We take note of the difference between pre-election and post-election violence and how, each in its own way, affect public participation and peace requires further examination. OBJOBJOBJOBJ(Hafner-Burton, Hyde, & Jablonski, 2014)OBJOBJ

From a practitioner's point of view, research on hate speech and disinformation aimed at regulating without limiting freedom of speech would be very useful for parliamentary support. Guidance and recommendations on hate speech are particularly sought after by parliamentarians, one such good example is the UNDP Brief for parliamentarians presenting concrete actions parliaments can take to address and mitigate the prevalence and impact of hate speech on those who are most vulnerable in society, including women, minorities and other underrepresented groups. The effect may be multipronged; it would serve to protect MPs in their work, ease the tensions in society, prevent any possible misuse of freedom of speech by incumbent governments, and hopefully encourage women to return to active political engagement and run for elections. Linguistic and psychological research may potentially also shed light on the spread of hate

speech and populism. Decoding the 'hate narrative' and defining the real threat behind hate speech would help to build social resilience and the establishment of appropriate social policy. Some solutions may be found on the positive side of digital technologies, and AI algorithms could be used to conduct social media analytics, and filter and analyse toxic posts and trends. The possible impacts of AI are in dire need of research predictability to curb potential risks, and this is one area where time is of the essence.

Further on, we take note of young people's lack of interest in institutional participation, due to lack of trust and subsequent disengagement, as noted in Africa in particular. Naturally, the following questions arise: How to counter information pollution? How to motivate young people? What can really be done to counter voter apathy? Are we using fact-checkers sufficiently and to the full extent necessary? Is digital political campaigning more detrimental than media campaigns for example. These fields would greatly benefit from more practical and academic research.

Consideration and analysis of early election phenomenon may reveal some interesting effects and tactics used by governments that are directly linked to proliferation of online and live violence. Particularly, what such tensions and frequent polarisations may do to a society and its economy, and how that is related to violence in parliament.

There seems not to be much research on the phenomenon termed violence in parliaments, and yet we are witness to abuse, harassment and intimidation in parliaments becoming something of a regular occurrence. It remains to be determined how it has become 'normal' over the last 30 years for violence against MPs to be seen as 'part of their job' (Phillips, 2023).

Furthermore, there are mechanisms used to profile citizens, manipulate beliefs and behaviour, and close the political space for democratic dialogue and policy debate. A special form of violence, that still has not been satisfactorily addressed, is ethnic-based stereotyping used against particular ethnic groups. Hence, to move away from simply defining the problem, there is a clear need to create space for the formulation of actionable recommendations in the areas of policy, legislation and practice.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

This research was built on a series of focus groups, consultations, semi-structured interviews with parliamentarians and regional workshops with practitioners from all UNDP Regional Bureaus and experts in electoral assistance and parliamentary engagement. Discussion was divided into several fields of interest such as: citizen participation and engagement for prevention of violence, political parties, the political participation of women, youth parliamentary engagement on peace, digital governance, hate speech and disinformation, just transition, and SDGs. Discussions were focused from global, regional, national to local contexts but also on common themes.

Around 200 persons were engaged in this research process, covering 40 countries, as well as individuals from regional organisations. Most of the participants came form the UNDP working in the field of governance, parliamentary development and electoral assistance. Working and focus groups comprised parliamentarians, academics, international organisations, parliamentary staff and civil society.

The regional consultations provided an overview of the global trends and tendencies that may be of particular interest for future programming and input into further research. Approaches, piloting of different interventions and synergies should assist practitioners globally to understand the causes and consequences of electoral violence better. Some of the key takes from these consultations are highlighted as follows:

• Public participation needs to be inclusive and meaningful. Practitioners suggest that these two parameters may also influence the degree to which people's participation in democratic processes really leads or contributes to prevention of violence during elections, between elections or beyond elections. And maybe another important aspect is how systematic and institutionalized public participation is and should be.

• Practitioners from UNDP Asia stressed the importance of differentiating between citizen and public participation which pertains not exclusively but specifically to their region, given the number of people with no citizenship, in Myanmar for example. They need to have a voice as well, as they have needs. In addition, all regions have refugees who should be able to have a say in the countries in which they reside, even if they are not citizens. Hence, instead of citizen participation, people's participation or public participation may be a more appropriate term.

• Across all regions we are hearing about values: what kind of support do we need to provide? What is the UNDP approach now? Do we maintain our development, non-partisan course or are we becoming political? This may prove highly significant in determining how national partners will accept the much-needed support. In addition, local culture and customs must be clearly respected, as no one solution can fit all contexts. Furthermore, all regions seem to point to the need for better inter UN coordination especially when it comes to parliamentary based support. There is a clear need for interagency and intern-organizational synergies. This is a particularly pertinent matter because parliaments address many issues, primarily the SDGs and gender equality, that should be a connecting thread, but instead we seem to have underestimated the level of dedication and approach required to present One UN. We need to bear in mind that the UN is perceived as one institution, and it is as such that it should approach its national partners.

• With considerable expansion of digitalization and digital tools for participation, and AI, we still have many regions that have a long way to go, and we are not all at the same level of development. We seem to be missing the conversation on poverty and digital illiteracy.

• Despite all the criticism of parliament and the perceived slow delivery and low trust, they are actually very active institutions in enhancing engagement with people. Parliament is so far the only institutional and sustainable platform that may facilitate such extensive debates. Parliament should facilitate broader discussion greater engagement between parliamentarians and the people on different legislative options. This is even more important in so-called fragile states.

• The need for civil society organisations and their positive role are undeniable – they are essential for monitoring government and political parties, raising issues and contributing to effective policy making. An additional layer of consideration should be employed, however, considering a dynamic reported by some interviewees whereby CSOs mechanism propose to bypass or replace the need for broader public participation and civic engagement modalities. The scoping and regional consultations revealed concerns about the relation between public engagement work and civil society engagement. A critical approach to the role and manner of work of civil society organizations was deemed to be lacking. Practitioners point to recent UNDP studies on social inclusion that have detected decline in public trust in both institutions and CSOs . In addition, we need to realize that there are limits to what CSOs can realistically be expected to achieve. They cannot really replace official institutions, and this raises questions of sustainability. In some African contexts the withdrawal of extensive civil society support created a vacuum, and the pressure from the population rose to the point that it created dissatisfaction and protest. This left parliament and government highly cautious of reliance on civil society support which is often limited by the duration of funding. Clearly, there is a difference between civil society organizations and non-state actors but attempts to replace the state with civil society, in some countries, has proved to be inefficient and detrimental. In the interests of sustaining peace, we are duty bound to rethink the engagement of civil society in the process of public participation. This should prompt further consideration of values and sustainability – with whom and with what exit strategy are we to approach such relations?.

• We take note of the leading role taken by Latin America and the Caribbean in opening public participation avenues from digitalization to youth engagement, open governance, open spaces in Chile, online platforms in Mexico where experts were invited to committees to speak on the reform; and in Panama on the Agora website developed as a common space. At the same time, practitioners' share their concern over the diminishing quality of debate in that Region.

• The importance of the parliamentary staff and secretariat is not to be underestimated. They are key non-political actors - part of the public sector innovation agenda and pivotal in organizing public engagement.

Chapter 3

Key Considerations for Preventing Political Violence in a Democratic Processes: types of violence, the spillover effect, and new factors that interplay

POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Politically motivated violence is directed against people that are active in politics, that run for elections, that are preforming political functions. The causes and consequences of political violence may be found in countries and regions affected by warfare, revolution, and other violent acts. Political violence may occur in many forms, but this research focuses on election violence in particular. One of most common perpetrators of political violence seem to be governments (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, & Jablonski, 2014). In order to understand the roots of violence, the exacerbation of violence and how it is to be stopped, it seems logical to start with recurring patterns and to review different segments of political processes through trajectories of escalating political violence.

Where is politically motivated violence most likely to erupt? UNDP argues we should consider the context that harbours the 'root causes' of conflict (across economic (poverty, inequalities, resource competition), political/governance (repression, poor governance record, authoritarian or undemocratic practices, corruption, instability), social and identity-based (ethnic tensions, exclusion, historical grievances), or even environmental (depleting resources), as well as economic, political and environmental triggers), particularly in post-conflict country contexts.

Elections do not cause violence, but the process of competing for political power often exacerbates existing tensions and stimulates the escalation of these tensions into violence. (UNDP , 2009)

Violence may erupt on the election day as well as before and after elections. In particular, the post-election period may bring dissatisfaction with the results, allegations of rigged elections, street protests and similar, all of which indicates the dual nature of elections leading us to wonder whether elections bring peace or incite violence and conflict. (UNDP , 2009)

Elections may also be seen as an opportunity to engage in corruptive activities whether by organizing pre-term elections or calling frequent early elections. This too may bring about political instability.

Defining electoral violence. As a form of political violence, electoral violence is designed to influence an electoral outcome, and consequently distribution of political power. It may be considered a tool to (re)direct the trajectory of the elections by actors who are dissatisfied with the expected outcome or hold issue with the perceived credibility of the process. Electoral violence may take place in pre-election campaigns, on the election day(s) or in post-election periods. It may also be an expression of protest over what is seen as an unfair electoral outcome. Election violence may take the form of physical violence or other forms of aggression, such as coercion or intimidation. Accordingly, certain forms of online abuse and digital repression should be included in the definition. (UNDP , 2009)

Further to the new definition of electoral violence and why it is important to understand that the definition has changed with time - what used to be the so-called common understanding of what electoral violence is, no longer stands. But what causes electoral violence? Hafner-Burton et al. argue that it is government-sponsored violence that seems to be the most common form of electoral violence. They base this position on data available for all the elections held globally from 1981-2004. Furthermore, they believe that electoral violence promoted by government is mainly aimed at the political opposition and voters before, during or after elections, simply to maintain in power. (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, & Jablonski, 2014)

Interestingly the very process of democratisation may also be a trigger for violence in transitional countries departing from authoritarian regimes and one-party systems, or post-conflict countries that remain fragile and where political tensions are high. If we look at parliament as a platform

for debate on curbing electoral violence, where the public participates in different aspects of electoral reform, it calls for a clear understanding of electoral violence and what forms it may take. Experience teaches us that MPs often consider violence to be a punishable offence or even a misdemeanour and do not consider hate speech or inappropriate remarks to be violence, for example. Furthermore, even when particular references are made to this in the parliamentary Rules of Procedure and/or Code of Conduct, Law on Parliament etc., this does, unfortunately practice has shown that this does not guarantee that MPs will always refrain from it. Hence, it seems that the importance of addressing the problem in various different ways cannot be overemphasized.

How do violent contexts impact electoral turn out?

There are many contributing factors that may lead to election violence and conflicts such as transitional democracy, a weak system of checks and balances, an ineffectual institutional system for addressing electoral grievances etc. Direct and deliberate acts that jeopardize fair and transparent elections may also lead the losing party to resort to violence. This may lead to loss of life and destruction of property as well as an overall decline in trust in politicians and democratic process. In post-conflict contexts, elections are particularly sensitive and carry with them a high probability that incidents will occur. Hence the need for international support and presence, prior to elections, which proved to be beneficial in the prevention of electoral violence in Somalia and South Sudan for example. (African Union Panel of the Wise, 2010)

Even in situations where it seems that all conditions to ensure fair elections have been met, from an adequate legislative framework to the necessary institutional set up and even in the presence of monitoring missions on the ground, election violence may still occur. This proves that no matter how well-arranged the process, election violence cannot reliably be predicted. Hafner-Burton et al. believe that foreseeing violence is not an academic exercise alone but rather a joint exercise requiring examination of the causes and mitigation approaches (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, & Jablonski, 2014). Following this

guidance, we will attempt to disaggregate the problem through different phases to better understand what factors may have played a role, depending on when and where the violence occurred. Essentially, this analysis will briefly reflect on pre- and post-electoral violence and then look more closely into the violence related to the post-election period and parliaments for its possible effect on public participation. One of the most striking examples is the Mexican 2024 election that seems to have incorporated all aspects of electoral violence and beyond. Namely, it may be the clearest case of targeted and organized systemic violence before, during and after elections that resulted in a decrease in public participation and in candidates either withdrawing or being murdered.

BOX 1: CASE STUDY MEXICO

The 2024 elections seem to have been the **most violent elections ever held in Mexico** if we look at the perpetration of violence during the entire electoral process. Political disagreements even within parties, economic challenges, territorial control by criminal groups and similar causes seem to have contributed to this type of violence. Interestingly, as Mexican think tanks report, the violence **primarily took place at the local level** in particular areas of the country. However, all political parties reported victims of one type or another of electoral violence. At the same time, political parties seem to have shown little or no interest in addressing the electoral violence that directly impacted their party members running for elections. Seemingly **no complaints were made to the relevant authorities.**

What was the impact of such violence on public participation?
Mexican think tank *Laboratorio Electoral,* recorded 17 municipalities with the highest incidence of violence and as much as a **38% decrease in participation**. **Electoral authorities reported that the electoral violence had no effect on the elections despite 11 candidates being killed** during the electoral process. In addition, many attacks and threats were recorded against candidates and their families.

Questions arise as to the impact on elections and possible escalation of this unaddressed problem. There is a clear plea from the think tanks monitoring the election to all segments of society to hold consultations to address this unprecedented level of electoral violence. Interestingly, monitoring did not report any special incidence of violence towards women or other vulnerable groups but rather a general distribution and perpetration of electoral violence throughout the electoral process.

In summary, murders, attacks, threats and kidnappings, among other incidents, most likely had an impact on the electoral processes and on the competition. It was observed that the electoral violence affected stability in the country, impacting the authorities and electoral bodies amongst others. It seems to have been perpetrated by both state and non-state actors and does not seem to have had any partisan bias. Violence occurred before, during and after the electoral process. Finally, it is evident that more investigation and research must be conducted on electoral violence and its impact on the resources used for campaigns, amongst other issues. (Labooratorio Electoral, 2024)

Prevention and follow-up measures:
Since 2020, a reform for re-defining political violence and violence against women resulted in protocols on how to manage this matter. The electoral tribunal, for example, passed a resolution declaring that the president committed violence against his challenger in the election, and this is something that is not foreseen in law. Hence, the focus on the ongoing judicial reform in Mexico that could alter the balance of power.

Pre-election violence. Having enumerated some of the causes and consequences of violence during elections, it may be useful to see what kind of violence may occur before elections are called. As mentioned above, even before electoral campaigning begins, in the pre-election period, the incumbent government is the actor mostly likely to utilize violence to prevent a loss of power (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, & Jablonski, 2014). Violence employed in this period, up to election day, may have the effect of reducing competition, for example by prompting the opposition to boycott, or simply by increasing the probability of winning the elections by causing fear amongst the population. Another factor related to pre-electoral violence that needs to be born in mind is that it may lead to post-election protests but also, as Hafner *et al.* argue, in the case of post-election protests, the government may use violence to constrain the protesters in the absence of a strong institutional system (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, & Jablonski, 2014).

Post-election violence. Electoral conflicts may also occur after disputed elections, when the loosing side claims electoral irregularities or fraud and resorts to violence. This may lead to protests, violence by government but also to anarchy and

civil war (African Union Panel of the Wise, 2010). Sometimes even threats from the losing side related to challenging election results may lead to public protests. Post-election protests may reveal the level of the citizens' determination to engage and influence the trustworthiness of the incumbent and set the stage for the overthrow of the elected government. (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, & Jablonski, 2014).

The extent to which information pollution may or may not affect electoral violence or rally voters was addressed extensively in the UNDP SELECT workstream on Information Integrity, hence this research will focus on aspects that, based on the feedback from consultations, seem to affect the public participation of parliamentarians and elections the most: hate speech and disinformation campaigns.

Hate Speech

Hate speech is by no means a new topic but rather a fast-growing problem due to technological leapfrogging. Parliamentarians, for example, seem to be predominantly exposed to hate speech that causes damage to their reputation and credibility. If in opposition, they can also be exposed to the hate speech of the ruling majority seeking to prevent them from speaking out. Hate speech in addition to disinformation, mal-information and misinformation are defined as "online and offline verifiably false, misleading and manipulated content, produced and disseminated intentionally and unintentionally with potential to cause harm" (UNDP & EU, 2024). Hate speech is defined as "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence", including "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor. This is often rooted in, and generates, intolerance and hatred, and in certain contexts can be demeaning and divisive." (United Nations, 2020)

Hate speech v. Freedom of Speech. Determining what may be appropriate in certain political rhetoric around elections is a multifaceted matter. On one hand politicians have a tendency to share information, on the other there is such a thing as common decency and protection of personal information. Freedom of expression and human rights protection "are not limited to 'correct' statements, as the right also protects information and ideas that may shock, offend and disturb" (UNDP & EU, 2024). Evidently additional consideration seems necessary on the side of legislators when defining which disinformation should be ruled out, whilst dissemination may not be excused and what is prescribed for offline shall apply for online as well (UNDP & EU, 2024).

What makes this specifically challenging today is the fast-growing use of social media as a new arena for hate speech propagation where the identities of perpetrators of hate speech remain concealed. This leaves legislators with the duty to review the in-house, national but also global aspect of the problem. The online sphere, despite specific electoral policy frameworks, brings even more ambiguity when it comes to censure of inappropriate posting and protection of freedom of expression. However, the major social platforms owners are occasionally called to parliamentary hearings (US Congress, 2023) on the grounds of ethics and accountability. Interestingly, many platforms already have some kind of restrictions but still may cause dissatisfaction as to how their algorithms identify and remove posts. We have seen clashes between the transnational corporations that own social media and national and supranational legislations who are attempting to regulate it. Most recently more and more countries are demanding greater control over the social media platforms (UNDP & EU, 2024). This, in itself, would have been viewed positively had it not been for loss of overall trust in government. Hence, this sphere remains sensitive, and needs to be recognized as such and addressed in highly participatory manner.

The European Parliament, a supranational parliament that has possibly gone furthest in regulating online violence, is seeing MEPs calling for progress with legislation on hate speech

taking into account the new and changing social dynamics. There is significant concern over freedom of expression, but this may also be used as a shield for hate speech as well as growing misuse of social media (European Parliament, 2024).

Can Hate Speech lead to disruption and violence? The European Parliament commissioned a study on hate speech in 2020 indicating that, although hate speech by politicians often goes unpunished, it contributes to the overall hostile atmosphere and spills over to the public at large as "even simple rhetorical actions are very important to society, because these (too) have a constitutive effect: a rhetorical speech by a state leader constitutes social norms" (European Parliament, 2020). MPs often fall victim to hate speech but are also the strongest opponents to passing protection and prevention measures. It seems that parliamentarians may be expected to call to account social media companies to further regulate, pending upcoming dilemmas and the considerable impact of the social media. (Council of Europe, 2023)

Evidently, there is a need to address this issue in a more systematic manner. However, we need to take note of a specific type of hate speech that seems to be spreading equally across the globe;

this is violence against politically active women. Hate speech and harassment together with technology may be reinforcing harmful stereotypes and damaging women's ability to work. "Evidence is emerging that the deluge of online hate speech and abuse – disproportionately and often strategically targeting women leaders – is driving them out of public and political life." (Council of Europe, 2023).

Gendered hate speech - a pervasive problem. It is the sociopolitical context that is shaping the nature of gendered hate speech and allowing it to spread. This replication of global trends has serious consequences (discrediting, leaving politics, loss of career, trauma etc.) on individuals, communities and society. It is a problem that needs a comprehensive approach as it reinforces detrimental stereotypes, perpetuates gender-based discrimination and violence and hinders any progress towards gender equality.

BOX

The issue of online hate speech is very, very important in our electoral process. I can tell you, every time we find ourselves in legislation, especially female, these are things they use to scare us away. People come on the media, they say things about you. You are listening to them, and you are wondering if they are speaking about you. And they go as far as publishing things on Facebook that are not real, using someone else's body, putting your face on it. And at times they say, oh, just leave it.

It's politics. But at times you look at it and say, it no longer is politics. It becomes hate messages that will make people turn against you. It become bullying in election. And one of the things is, you get in an election, the first question someone asks you is your marital status, if you are married, or why are you are single? It becomes a wildfire message that is used against you. That's why it ends up making people to even get into marriages that wouldn't last. But you just want to get married because you feel people are going to perceive you more responsible because you are married. And sometimes the men are not even married, and people don't ask them those questions."

Liberian Member of Parliament

Gendered hate speech appears in various forms on many platforms, including online spaces, social media, traditional media, public spaces, and political discourse. It seems to call for a whole-of-society consensus on how to ensure women have safe spaces – both in-person and online – to fully engage in political debates, institutions and policymaking.

BOX 2: CASE STUDY BANGLADESH

Empowering Parliamentary Action on Gendered Hate Speech and violence online: Lessons Learnt from UNDP's Global Project the Role of Parliaments as Partners in Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (UNDP, 2023)

The Bangladesh example brought new knowledge and identified practical tools and systems to be put in place for national governments to address a significant and growing concern with the impact of gendered hate speech on women's ability to participate in political dialogue and public policy-making. The issue is one that has been amplified by online platforms to spread hatred and promote misogyny.

Bangladesh as a pilot country. The UNDP Bangladesh identified gendered hate speech as a key issue in the broader discussion on policies that promote women's political participation and women's role in peace and security. In 2023, with support from the Project, the Country Office worked with the Parliament of Bangladesh and other stakeholders to develop a national action plan to address gendered hate speech.

UNDP and the Parliament of Bangladesh organized a knowledge exchange session for 35 MPs and 20 Parliamentary staff. Participants emphasized that cyberbullying inflicted serious damage on victims, particularly on women and girls. However, addressing cyberbullying posed a unique set of challenges. Participants emphasized the need for reassessing online behaviours. It was suggested that discussions on this matter should extend beyond the Parliament and knowledge be disseminated and responsible online conduct within communities be cultivated. While a legislative framework is essential, the participants emphasized that addressing this issue requires prioritizing broader cultural and societal changes, and fostering an environment characterized by respect and empathy. Participants recognized the need for schools and educational establishments to facilitate dialogues, engage parents in committees, and promote and teach tolerance.

Finally, what makes hate speech stand out from all other forms of information pollution is that is it is prohibited under international human rights law. As opposed to hate speech, disinformation seems to be manyfold and not so easily recognized or regulated for that matter.

Disinformation Campaigns

We are living in times where powerful influences seem to hide behind online campaigns working towards disrupting and controlling the dialogue. Disinformation campaigns emerge as more prominent during the pre-election phase, however, the impact is felt throughout the entire democratic process as well as through the parliamentary composition. Evidently, much research would be required to determine whether it is media or digital disinformation campaigns that are more harmful.

This research comes out at a momentous time. The year 2024 is unique in the number of elections taking place across the globe; as many as 70. This may provide much needed momentum for raising the issue of disinformation. If we accept that deliberation and decision-making on policies that have a direct impact on our lives and are in fact the foundation for democratic society, then it is disinformation that may obstruct this process. We may say that disinformation is a dissemination of falsehood, the deliberate dissemination of information that is not true in order to score political points or even alter a political outcome. For example, from 2014 to 2024 digital disinformation was identified during the so-called Brexit campaign in the UK, in 2014 in Africa (Nigeria and Kenya) and finally in 2024 it appears to be rife in every election campaign currently underway. (Institute for Development Studies, 2024)

Research conducted in Angola showed that the digital space was discovered by the youth and is

used mostly by the political opposition. Hence, this new space, populated by young people, developed with new challenges and attempts to disrupt information. Evidently, as the digital space evolved, so did the approaches and tactics of disinformation actors. Disinformation campaigns, it seems, are used for power retention, whether it is gender disinformation aimed at preserving the power of patriarchy or election disinformation aimed at influencing the outcome. The state actors' aim is to stay in power, while the opposition mostly aim at discouraging female candidates from participating, running for election or even remaining in politics at all. Moreover, the IDS's analysis suggests that state actors, when they apply the full battery of techniques in their arsenal, can amplify their influence to such an extent that no individual, organized or not, can compete. (Institute for Development Studies, 2024)

Disinformation is also disruptive in the potential it has, further to inflame an already polarized election, increasing the likelihood of election violence. In order to combat disinformation, it is important to detect the landscape of information pollution and develop appropriate strategies. The **role of parliament** is to put forward a legislative framework to secure integrity of information, conduct inquiries, commission research, and engage broader society – academia, independent oversight bodies etc. Examples of how parliaments have acted against disinformation are to be seen in the United Kingdom, where, in 2019, the **House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee** published its [final report on Disinformation and "fake news"](#) (United Kingdom House of Commons, 2019) following 18 months of inquiry. This report showed the extent of parliamentary power to regulate and investigate. It prescribed a mandatory code of ethics for tech companies to be overseen by an independent regulatory body, reforms of electoral communications laws and rules on overseas involvement in elections. We have a further example in the Canadian Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics that, in its 2018 report, 'Democracy under threat: risks and solutions in the era of disinformation and data monopoly" (Parliament of Canada, 2018) identified breaches of personal data protection involving Cambridge Analytica

and Facebook, as well as broader issues concerning the use of personal data by social media companies and the way in which such companies are responsible for spreading misinformation and disinformation.

These examples indicate that parliaments can exercise a degree of power to prevent disinformation, and in a wider sense electoral violence, by calling the big tech companies to account at parliamentary committee inquiries or public hearings. In such cases, the public learn the details directly from the owners of these companies rather than having them obscured in closed-door battles between teams of lawyers where the intent is to cut losses and save face rather than to expose the truth. Moreover, we need to ask who can regulate this as yet unregulated field and provide protection for citizens if not the Parliament? An additional layer of difficulties can be expected from the rapidly developing field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) raising the spectre of hoaxes even more complex and harder to detect. The only voices to demand investigation and regulation of this potentially disruptive technology are indeed coming from parliaments, despite being the least funded and often the most understaffed of all three branches of power.

Why is protection of data so important today? Data feeds into data analytics which may be used in political campaigns to mislead voters and fix elections, but which may also lead to violence. Misuse of voters' personal information via social platforms, political parties and data brokers are some of the most recent matters related to data misuse. In that sense, the Irish Data Protection Commissioner investigated Facebook and published *an interim* Report, noting the monopolies of powerful tech companies. Facebook has been found to be especially unwilling to be accountable to regulators around the world. The Irish Parliament thus invited the Government to consider the impact of such monopolies on the political world and on democracy. (United Kingdom House of Commons, 2019)

> Social media companies cannot hide behind the claim of being merely a 'platform' and maintain that they have no responsibility themselves in

regulating the content of their sites. We repeat the recommendation from our Interim Report that a new category of tech company is formulated, which tightens tech companies' liabilities, and which is not necessarily either a 'platform' or a 'publisher'. This approach would see the tech companies assume legal liability for content identified as harmful after it has been posted by users. We ask the Government to consider this new category of tech company in its forthcoming White Paper. (United Kingdom House of Commons, 2019)

The UK Parliament in its report on the same topic mentioned the need to amend the Electoral Law to reflect the abovementioned changes in campaigns, calling for transparency of online political campaigning and the obligation to make it easy to identify the source, owner and sponsors of particular posts. (United Kingdom House of Commons, 2019)

Finally, it would appear there are **two global trends** when it comes to the online component of election campaigning; one is amplified reach at low cost, the other is information pollution. **Political disinformation** is intensifying with the reach and possibilities allowed by digitalization. What is particularly concerning is the possible misuse of information to ignite and exacerbate conflict. The Global South is particularly sensitive due to the fact that data protection and privacy laws seem to be overlooked in the overall fragility of government systems and sovereignty. (Hansenl & Fejerskov, 2019).

Violence in Parliament

Paradoxically, parliaments or assemblies should be the place where conflict can be resolved by confronting arguments rather that arms but in realty parliaments may well be the place to display or instigate violence. (Schmoll&Ting, 2023)

The phenomenon called violence in parliaments seems to bring forward a degree of normalization as abuse, harassment and intimidation in parliaments become a regular occurrence. It remains to be researched further how it became 'normal', over the last 30 years, for violence against MPs to become 'part of the job' (Phillips, 2023). Only a few studies have attempted to look into the environment under which legislative violence is likely to occur. Polarization, democratic backsliding, the level of democracy and conflict likely have an impact, however, there is another form of violence that is generated with clear political goals through so-called 'tactical' and 'performative acting' (Schmoll&Ting, 2023). Namely, legislators may sometimes choose to organize a public performance wishing to demonstrate to their electorate that they are 'fighting for them' (Schmoll&Ting, 2023). Tactical goals on the other hand are employed by, for example, the opposition, to delay or prevent a law from being passed or by the party in power to move the agenda forward and cut the time for debate.

It is important to note that the likelihood of violence occurring in parliaments depends on the regime. Autocracies, for example, where parliaments are not important platforms for decision-making, have a very low likelihood of violence. However, intermediate or hybrid regimes[1], though they may not have fully regular elections, still produce parliaments representing

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[1] Hybrid regimes are found in most developing countries, especially since the end of the Cold War. They are called hybrid because they combine democratic traits (e.g., frequent and direct elections) with autocratic ones (e.g., political repression). To better understand this vast grey zone of institutional ambiguities, Typologies have been created in order to identify various institutional arrangements of hybrid regimes and how they differ from other types of regimes. The current annotated bibliography of literature on hybrid regime trajectories points to a logical sequence of scientific inquiry in the following three domains:

Causes of Emergence, Conditions of Stability, and Transition from Hybridity. It is supported with proposed key readings for each. Also included are datasets, major journals, and university presses on the subject. The selection was largely driven by the criteria of originality and potential for generalization, leaving aside the question of iterated testing and idiographic research. The crosscutting from literature on authoritarian to democratic regimes is what makes hybrid regimes such a dynamic subject for generating new insights and innovative thinking toward a better understanding of political regimes in developing countries. Source: Oxford Bibliographies.

important differences in political positions in society. (Schmoll & Ting, 2023)

Finally, we cannot but wonder whether violence in parliament is only a symptom of a conflict prone environment. In addition, we observe that violence against MPs seems to be mostly concentrated against women MPs in the context of women in politics (Phillips, 2023). The gender dimensions of this matter are addressed from different angles throughout the report.

Violence against Women in Politics

Violence during elections and against women in politics is always politically motivated and always impedes democratic processes.

> Violence against women in political life is any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression. Such violence can be perpetrated by a family member, community member and or by the State.
> (UNWOMEN & UNDP, 2017)

Violence against women in politics is a violation of human rights that deepens gender inequality. The global consensus reached through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development entrusted the world with achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. One of the main motivations behind this particular type of violence is to prevent women from exercising their rights to participate in public affairs, vote and be elected, assemble or access services. The consequences of a failure to understand and address this problem are clearly negative, and impact institutional to policymaking. (UNWOMEN, 2021)

When it comes to women parliamentarians and women running for elections, various intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations have reported exceptionally egregious violence, perhaps motivated by the fact that they are directed at public figures. These range from comments to sexual abuse and even live threats. Such violence seems to flourish with digitalisation, social media and online anonymity. The role played by political parties in mitigating such abuse is poorly understood, but may well be significant, potentially even more important than what women parliamentarians can do though their cross-party caucuses[2].

Political parties play a dual role in the political process of any given country, depending on the level of development but more importantly on the legislative framework. Political parties on one hand may influence a country's policy agenda and establish procedures for selecting candidates and standards of conduct for their members and on the other they may be a source of violence. In order to ensure that political parties mitigate violence rather than perpetrating it, parliament must assume a leading role though its independent bodies such as anti-corruption agencies, for example, and the legal framework around party funding, policies and standards. Parties can always work more on enhancing women's political participation, explicitly addressing violence against women in parliament and politics overall in their founding documents, rules and regulations, and by publicly condemning any form of gender-based violence (UNWOMEN, 2021).

Following the case of electoral gender-based violence in Kenya in 2007 when a parliamentary candidate almost lost her life after being assaulted by a gang hired by her political opponent, the Commission of Inquiry on Post-Election Violence - established after the elections, identified women and children as the most affected by electoral violence. Further on, the Independent Review Commission found that the conduct during the elections exemplified particular tactics and violence that deterred women from political campaigning which resulted

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[2] Women Parliamentary Networks or SDGs cross-party caucuses in Parliament.

in a reduced number of women running for elections. Subsequently, with the passing of the Elections Act of 2011, a consolidation of electoral laws prohibiting any threatening and abusive language and actions, including those on the grounds of gender, seems to have been efficacious in reducing the risks associated with campaigning and encouraged more women to engage. (Krook, 2019)

Despite several good examples of political parties and parliaments increasing quotas for women, establishing women parliamentary networks introducing legislative packages to prevent domestic violence and similar, we take note of the most recent and concerning tendency towards women withdrawing from politics[3]. Even the IPU during its 148th Assembly in 2024 organized a panel on the topic: "Women in politics: To stay or not to stay?". The speakers reaffirmed the different types of pressure, intimidation and harassment women had to undergo in order to stay in politics and called for peer-to-peer support in building resilience among politicians, solidarity, ensuring better representation of women and adoption of codes of conduct. (Interparliamentary Union, 2024)

In his analysis, Phillips defined the problem of gendered political violence as a unique phenomenon and a policy problem (Phillips, 2023). The core of the problem however seems to be in how men and women react to being exposed to violence. Politicisation of violence against MPs appears to have been adopted as a political strategy and, as Philips further notes, violence such as abuse, harassment and intimidation became a 'new normal', in particular for women, during parliamentary debates in the period 2010-2021. (Phillips, 2023)

Finally, it is important to emphasize that **all violence is linked** and gender-based violence goes hand-in-hand with ethnic, sexual, disability and similar discrimination. In order to demonstrate the cross-developmental nature of this problem the research took note of the fact that violence is not predominately a problem related to the level of development. The European Parliament has found it necessary to issue a note on violence against women in politics indicating that intersectional discrimination is assigned to hate speech since there is no other research to confirm otherwise. (European Parliament, 2024)

Violence against Women in Parliament

Violence against women parliamentarians seems to be both politically motivated and gender based. The main aim is to limit their freedom of expression but also to make the wider environment discouraging for women contemplating running for political office. Another specificity for the parliamentary work is the fact that due to daily joint exchange, heated debates, long political meetings and election campaigns and official travel, female MPs or even parliamentary staff may be more vulnerable to unprofessional behaviour by their colleagues and counterparts. The IPU studies show that the incidence of violence, specificity and aggravating factors are in fact increasing. (Interparliamentary Union, 2018)

Globally, women MPs make 26 per cent of parliamentarians according to IPU research. Violence against women parliamentarians can take many forms but the most wide-spread is psychological and the IPU survey further shows that 67% women MPs surveyed in Africa, 68% in Europe and 66% worldwide have been exposed to gender-based violence. Extreme forms of violence and threats are experienced by MPs in Africa (42%), Europe (47%) and worldwide (44%) [4]. Although women participation in politics has increased, largely due to quotas, plateaued at around 26%, there is a genuine concern of decrease in lieu of powerful deterrents and disenfranchisers like tech-facilitated violence, abuse, and harassment, as well as political violence. It seems that the concern is no longer only how to encourage more women participation in politics, but also how to create conditions for them to stay in politics.

The perpetrators of harassment and violence against women MPs in most cases seem to be political opponents and colleagues from the

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[3] For more information see Women in Politics and Security Agenda: UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions.

[4] https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2022-11/violence-against-women-parliamentarians-causes-effects-solutions-0

women's own party, or even ordinary citizens. Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments have negative effects on the physical and psychological health of the people affected. They also impact the quality and effectiveness of parliamentary work and, consequently, public policies. As such, sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments prevent parliaments from being spaces that are inclusive and representative of society as a whole. (Interparliamentary Union, 2018)

However, we have also observed some positive measures that are aimed at resolving such alarming trends. Namely, the IPU published a case study on Iceland 'Informing a new strategy against sexism and harassment in the Parliament of Iceland' (Interparliamentary Union, 2024) where it was evident that, despite Iceland's well established gender equality policies and practices, violence against women was on the rise. Hence, the Iceland Parliament adopted the Strategy and Action Pan in May 2023. The plan included preventive actions and provided guidelines on handling cases of sexism and harassment, ensuring that the complainant has access to advice and support throughout the procedure. The effects are yet to be assessed; however, this can be taken as an example of how parliament can be instrumental and active in the prevention of violence in an institution and to some extend send a message to the wider public.

Online Violence against Women Parliamentarians

Women politicians are faced with almost constant online threats and abuse that is posing a real threat to democracy. We cannot but ask what can be done to reverse the trend of women leaving politics? How much more online treats, cyberbullying and trolling can women endure? Interestingly enough, this problem is not limited to any particular part of the world but seems rather widespread.

The IPU study on Sexism, Harassment and Violence against women in Parliaments indicated that **85.2 per cent** of female MPs suffered psychological violence during their mandate while **58.2 per cent** had been the target of online

sexist attacks on social networks. This data goes for both women MPs and parliamentary staff from the Council of Europe (COE) member countries to give example of the regions with developed gender equality measures. (Interparliamentary Union, 2018)

If we look at social media, in particular Facebook, X, Instagram etc., women parliamentarians report inappropriate comments and images, with as many as **58.2 %** saying they had seen images or comments about them which were disparaging or had a sexual connotation, and in **66.7 % of** cases, abusive, sexual or violent content. Technology now allows for the swift duplication and dissemination of such content which can then linger indefinitely. The freedom of expression is abused to justify hate speech and stifle women's freedom of expression in politics, as well as threatening their right to live without violence. (Interparliamentary Union, 2018)

While we are addressing violence against women MPs, it is also important to point to the problem of parliamentary staff who are exposed to different types of violence, but without the same voice afforded to MPs to resist. Overall, online gender-based violence establishes a culture where violence may be seen as normal and inevitable. In the absence of regulations and with the silence of those shamed, such behaviours appear to be tolerated and seem almost inevitable (Faith, 2022). The invisible power of the social platforms derives to a degree from the lack of oversight and the possibility to extract data from users' content. Online gender-based violence thrives in visible, hidden, and invisible power tools that proliferate amongst different stakeholders, jurisdictions, and domains. (Faith, 2022)

In addition to being considered the 'new normal', online gender-based violence does not end with the finalisation of elections. Women, once they become public figures in politics, often find that the abuse persists, which is less the case for male candidates running for elections who find that online abuse does not follow them between two elections (UNWOMEN, 2021).

> The present level of representation of women in

parliament is practically and morally unsustainable. Studies have repeatedly shown that diverse and inclusive decision-making processes lead to better outcomes, greater innovation and more sustainable solutions. Gender equality is, therefore, not only a matter of social justice but also a pragmatic imperative.

Tulia Ackson, IPU President

Evidently, there is much need for making parliaments more gender-sensitive and ensuring parity at all levels in order to secure democracy and legitimacy. No one should be exposed to hostile, disrespectful, discriminatory and unsafe behaviours. Parliament should lead on eliminating gender-based violence at the institutional level [5] as there is great potential within the women in parliament and the part of the population they represent. Often women MPs are the driver of change in parliaments and in fragile and post-conflict states as noted by experts consulted in Somalia, the Balkans, and across Asia.

Women Parliamentarians for Women Peacebuilders: Advancing Sustainable Peace

The Forum of Women Parliamentarians in 2024 met to discuss women's role in peace and security given the scale of women MPs affected by armed conflicts and crisis. Hence, it seems that women parliamentarians may bring about an effective contribution to peace and security.Peacebuilding and security matters cannot be conceptualized without taking into account the importance of women MPs contribution, whether through law making, taking part in missions, negotiations, advocating, raising a voice and similar. The effect is multidimensional and a part of a large approach for inclusive processes.

Despite some progress in the national and international diplomatic and security field, much clearly remains to be done to fully integrate women into decision-making processes on peace and security. However, we also need to bear in mind that the concept of security has massively evolved the last few decades and is no longer equated with national or border security (just like peace is no longer equated with the absence of conflict). Risks across environmental, political, economic, health and other domains have forced member states and communities redefine what security means to them. Vulnerability to these risks is largely determined by the quality of governance - its effectiveness, inclusiveness and integrity - which offers an additional perspective on the peacebuilding role of representative institutions. And this really cannot be underestimated because climate change is not going anywhere, is compounding all risks to peace and security, and the ability of governance systems to cushion and absorb shocks is shrinking. We need institutions capable of mediating societal pressures and challenges. Parliamentarians recognize the role of women peacebuilders in negotiating or mediating with armed groups and governments to secure food and medicines for the most vulnerable, and providing support to victims. Increasingly, dialogue is underway on how parliamentarians can amplify the work of women peacebuilders to promote inclusive and gender-sensitive processes for sustainable peace. There are many reasons why their work is not systematically integrated with that of parliaments and MPs. Should parliaments play a peacebuilding role that consideration would need to be followed through. The contexts for more systematic feedback loops may be through parliamentary women's caucuses, with MPs going on field visits and interacting with women peacebuilder for example.

Peace and security decision-making actions by women peacebuilders is a field that needs support and safety to continue, provided their rights are guaranteed. Women peacebuilders are

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[5] IPU 2024, Statement of the IPU President in Celebration of International Women's Day 2024, https://www.ipu.org/news/statements/2024-03/statement-ipu-president-in-celebration-international-womens-day-2024-invest-in-women-accelerate-progress

actively working on prevention of conflict and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls. Their role in the prevention of electoral violence cannot be neglected as they amplify the voices of those that seem to be the most affected by electoral violence. Their role is indispensable in local communities affected by violent conflicts and crisis, and finally they may advocate with governments for the implementation of laws that promote and protect women, girls, men and boys, and gender-equality allies to support women and girls' empowerment, leadership, and rights. (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2024)

> Narrative that we hear way too often nowadays with such an acceptable cost of war and conflict on women and girls and on the most vulnerable your perspectives are more important than ever. Backlash against women's rights and empowerment generations of girls and young women … we need to break the cycle for the good of everyone as our IPU assembly focuses on pathways to peace through parliamentary diplomacy. We can count on this forum to remind all of us that sustainable peace can only be achieved through women's empowerment and gender equality an essential pillar for achieving this is parity between men and women in decision making in all sector starting in politics and in our parliaments… (Interparliamentary Union, 2024)

The **interconnectedness between women in parliament and women peacebuilders** can strengthen the social fibre of protection around any type of violence that seems more important than initially thought. This interconnectedness would in come contexts refer to the MPs taking the role of peacebuilder whilst in other context they would support women peacebuilders.

Given the recent shift in the rise of extremism, conflict and polarisation, a platform for dialogue is highly to be desired. Acknowledgement of all those who are risking their lives to save others cannot be overemphasized, and this is something women peacebuilders do on daily basis (Holmes, Naraghi, & Schember, 2020). They can provide the most direct feedback to legislators that can be trusted, and solidarity between women is highly regarded. We need to note here, however, that the role of parliaments in the oversight of the security sector (ie. State organs we rely on for security, addressing violence, etc) has traditionally been limited? This is important to mention as it is the military and law enforcement that are deployed to respond to pre/post election violence, but also increasingly to peaceful protests amongst other.

Women peacebuilders are in a high-risk calling. In addition to being targeted they also receive threats for their peace work. This is why it may be useful to build a legal and political safety net for women peacebuilders. In post-conflict societies, their role may prove to be crucial in negotiations and being at the right place at the right time to prevent violence or give a voice to the silenced. This is another point of reference when it comes to reducing the risk of possibly violent outcomes.

What else can be done to support women in parliaments and women peacebuilders? Dialogue platforms offered though parliament, inclusive consultative processes in drafting necessary legislation, mapping of relevant laws and policies, awareness raising, regular briefings with parliamentarians, monitoring and reporting.

Post-conflict electoral violence prevention: Transitional Justice and the Role of Parliament.
Post-conflict contexts are particularly sensitive and challenging when it comes to re-establishing the rule of law and governance mechanisms and, perhaps surprisingly, parliaments are often amongst the first pillars of government to start operating. We see such examples in Somalia, Myanmar and Bosnia and Herzegovina amongst others. This results from the fact that people are keen to get out of the state of war and restore normalcy. Hence, parliaments may become significant leaders in consolidating reconciliation efforts. We have seen parliaments leading the

process of transitional justice and setting the path for the judiciary and other branches of government to follow, examples may be seen in the Balkans and Central Asia[6].

Why is transitional justice important in terms of the parliamentary contribution? While transitional justice aims at confronting the legacy of abuse in a broad and holistic manner, encompassing criminal justice, restorative justice, social justice and economic justice, parliaments may start the dialogue for reconciliation but also set the ground for passing packets of transitional justice legislation, contributing to judicial reforms to prevent further conflicts etc. Further, in post-conflict transitions, parliaments play an important role in establishing inquiry committees, or cross-party groups to raise the importance of the topic. Parliament may also work though its independent bodies such as an ombudsperson that may be used to negotiate exchanges of prisoners of war, collecting witness statements etc. This is an area that requires long-term political support. (Interparliamentary Union&IDEA, 2005)

Employing both Parliamentary and Electoral Support for Conflict Resolution

Perhaps one of those extraordinary aspects of parliament's functioning lies in its role to promote national integration leading to conflict resolution and subsequently peaceful elections. Parliament is and should be the place for confrontation though argument and the peaceful resolution of political disagreements. Some outcomes may be achieved though compromise, some are obtained through dialogue. Organizing elections in post-conflict societies is only the starting point for stabilisation of the situation, and parliamentary work and citizen engagement hold long-term potential that may yield more significant fruit than initially anticipated. (Interparliamentary Union, 2006)

In theory, we may say that a parliament is well set up, but problems tend to arise with the approach and stance of party leadership. The case study on Somalia is one of perhaps the best examples we have, drawing on extensive UN and UNDP practice collected during the regional consultations.

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[6] https://www.undp.org/publications/justice-past-peace-and-inclusion-future-development-approach-transitional-justice

BOX 3: CASE STUDY SOMALIA

In **Somalia electoral support, parliamentary support and constitutional support** are all part of one UNDP portfolio under the UN Mission. Further on there are elements of support to federalism, reconciliation, facilitating high-level political decision making, and women's political participation. These are very broad governance areas, reflecting priorities in Somalia as part of the inclusive politics portfolio. This model seems to work well as is evident from the lasting peace and regular elections. **Processes taken in synergy and allowing for compromise with the cultural specificities are crucial for post-conflict settings.**

Portfolio is part of the UN Mission and all programmes are joint programmes providing technical as well as highly political support for facilitating political processes. Since all projects are part of joint programming – they are all interconnected.

But what is so specific for this approach that yields success? The Mission has a specific mandate to support 'one person, one vote' elections. While the electoral project supports one of the key elements of the mission mandate, the Parliament is supported in adopting laws to verify electoral processes through a high-level reconciliation process that provides guidance to other processes happening below. Given the specificity of the post-conflict and cultural environment, civic engagement is quite limited. Importantly enough, parliamentary support is a mixture between political arrangement and technical assistance. This may well be a critical element for the Somalian context. As it proved that technical assistance alone could not overcome **political hindrances and blockages, a utilitarian approach was employed in the interest of peace and stability. Hence, it further secured even stronger inclusivity.** Such an approach seems to have led to a turning point when it comes to **public consultations and engagement of citizens** where it was no longer just the elites that had a say but also the citizens who provided recommendations towards drafting legislation, the constitutional reform process or how elections could be organized.

As a caveat, it should be noted that this approach depends for its success on a strong buy-in from the Government. While civil society activities may be moderate, **women's political participation**
has assumed the role of a driver of change, despite the many cultural sensitivity and threats it has faced. A vote of no-confidence against the Deputy Speaker was passed for her overly active engagement in changing predominant cultural beliefs. However, with adequate support, patience and careful planning, results may be achieved, which proved to be the case subsequently when the Deputy Speaker resumed her duties after a certain period of time had expired. Though a story of success, this also indicated just **how fragile parliament is** and how dependent it may be, in Somali context, on the tribal base.

On another note, but in line with peace and reconciliation, **climate change,** as part of the electoral-parliamentary project support, was identified as an extreme priority from the political point of view. The Council of Senior Leaders, an extra-constitutional body, agreed that climate change was of extreme importance due to the serious dangers of flooding and drought. Given that, when it comes to conflict mapping, the main drivers of conflict are bound up with environmental threats and the management of resources such as land and water, the importance of climate security provided an entry point for reconciliation and stability during elections.

Today, whether it is the case of electoral or parliamentary support in conflict, post-conflict or simply transitional countries, many factors come into play, from violent protest in the streets and intensifying conflict, to climate impacts and depleting resources, showing just how interconnected the world is. Judging from Somalia's reality, there is a need to approach societal dynamics in a more comprehensive manner. Synergetic approaches in programming and implementation need a new impetus to work in this context. A new momentum that will not be reduced to more coordination and endless meetings. A new reality requires new methods that allow for more horizontal approaches harnessing the power of working together for a better future before it may be too late.

Every post-conflict society needs to recover from conflict, needs to feel safe and reassured that conflict will not restart and needs to have trust restored. This is a process that takes time, engagement and support from nonpartisan entities such as the UN. Hence, it is always better to contain confrontations within the parliament and have voices heard in parliament rather than spilling over onto the streets. Informal dialogues, courteous exchanges in committees, approaching

constitutional reform as the widest possible consultative process, all need to take place across and beyond party lines.

Constitutional Review

In order to prevent post-electoral violence and stop it spreading to parliament, a number of constitutional and electoral reforms have been introduced since the 1990s. The aim of these reforms was to establish an institutional framework in the so-called transitional countries but also to balance out polarized systems and introduce more accountability, predictability and transparency to the electoral process.

If we go back to the original sense of the word, constitutional checks and balances refer to the way in which the different branches of government (the legislative, executive and judicial branch), control one another. In a wider sense, the purpose of constitutional checks and balances is to prevent the concentration of government power, which may lead to abuse, and to ensure control over the exercise of power without effective government. In this wide sense of the word, constitutional checks and balances may refer to and those democratic techniques which promote and ensure responsible constitutional government. A number of constitutional checks and balances can be identified. If a government can amend a constitution easily, the constitutional limitation of government power is not effective. The role of parliament is to uphold the constitutional order. But constitution is also set to prescribe the rights of the opposition and maintaining constitutional expertise within parliament.

Constitutional reform is a complex process that may last for several years. Parliament plays the main role in that process, reaffirming the principles of democracy, rule of law, and sovereignty. Its deliberative and legislative functions are essential for ensuring that constitutional changes are made in accordance with legal procedures and democratic norms. Parliament debates and discusses proposed constitutional reform and in some countries parliament has the authority to conduct a comprehensive review of the constitution periodically or in response to specific events or developments. This review process may involve parliamentary committees, public consultations, and input from experts. Even after constitutional reforms have been enacted, parliament continues to play a crucial role in ensuring compliance with the constitution. MPs monitor the implementation of constitutional provisions, scrutinize government actions for constitutionality, and may introduce further reforms as needed.

The **electoral system and constitutional review** are closely intertwined, with the constitution providing the legal framework for democratic governance, including the rules and procedures governing elections. By establishing principles of democratic governance and regulating the electoral process, constitutions help ensure the integrity and legitimacy of electoral systems in democratic societies. However, no matter how well defined an electoral system may be, it cannot guarantee desired outcomes as there are aspects of political culture and politics in general that need to be taken into consideration – not all models work in all contexts (Institute for Government, 2023).

The impact of reforming an electoral system is reflected immediately in parliament after elections, and it may allow for more opportunities for parliament to exert its power (Institute for Government, 2023). However, electoral reform needs to be followed by institutional reform and efforts must be made to prevent violence. Notably, such changes need to be clearly communicated to the general public (Institute for Government, 2023), for as we may see in Africa, constitutional reforms in some countries have led to political violence. (African Union Panel of the Wise, 2010)

What is the correlation between parliamentary reform, constitutional review and election violence? In the post-election period it may be that institutions generate polarisation and non-functioning governments, despite being established initially to preserve peace and prevent violence. This is a very unstable period during which the scales may tip towards violence. As a result, decisive and consultative action is often necessary to set a framework that will pre-empt the resurgence of election violence (African Union Panel of the Wise, 2010). Parliament needs to be set up in such a manner that is it able to absorb the robust

polarisation of pre-election campaigning, election day and post-election disagreements, protests and scuffles, and inaugurate the new parliament smoothly. This requires resilience and strength from the Constitution and other legislative frameworks, something which is often overlooked simply because it is not visible or well-understood by the people. In such situations the parliamentary staff play an important role, negotiation between parties is required and long-serving MPs can act as mediators to ensure the process to unfold.

It is hard to find any driver of conflict that does not have some sort of constitutional resonance. If we look at the most common sources of conflict they are land, natural boundaries, natural resources, power sharing, ethnic or multicultural identifications etc., all of which are set in the constitution. The constitution is central for stable government and conflict prevention but is not self-executed, it needs a parliament to pass the legislation and government to implement the legislation.

Some of the challenges parliament faces are constitutional and structural, some are related to capacity and may be mitigated by simply defining the problem. Structural rule-based mechanisms can strain a legislature's ability to act independently and perform its functions. For example, parliament can be prevented from conducting oversight simply by being out-voted by the majority in parliament. In some countries, if MPs vote against the party direction, this can lead to them losing their seats. Furthermore, party lists and electoral processes have internal rules, and these may also constrain the work of parliament. The example of the Kenyan constitutional reform showed that national and presidential elections were impossible to be divided, leading to a propensity for electoral violence. In order to resolve this, they had to decentralize and empower local government that acted preventively against electoral violence. Then we have the example of South Sudan which is experiencing prolonged transition and continuously delayed elections due to the fact that the two main stakeholders appear to have failed to achieve the constitutional reform that was set as precondition for elections. Constitutional review is additionally supported by a [UNDP specialized unit that provided](#)

[constitutional assistance](#) in the abovementioned examples with full respect for the national context in achieving sustainable peace and human development which is key to restoring trust and moving the reforms forward. Presently, UNDP is supporting South Sudan in its constitutional review process seeking the design of a permanent constitution to be ready for the upcoming elections in 2027. South Sudan has until now been applying a transitional constitution. Extensive consultations and the involvement of parliament are imminent.

The question is clearly how elections in fragile environments should be approached and how to institute constitutional reform where stakes are high in elections and political violence is a real possibility. This may be the main convergence point for synergetic approaches and joint electoral and parliamentary programming of requested support.

Chapter 4

Reflecting on Multiple Dimensions of Public Engagement for Prevention of Electoral Violence: Electoral and Parliamentary Support Convergence Points

Parliamentary Democracy starts with the voters. An ideal system of parliamentary democracy that would meet everyone's needs and expectations is probably an unattainable goal, but a system that aspires to serve its community as well as possible must be established in such manner as to absorb a diversity of opinions and positions. Continuous discussion, adjustment, scrutiny and accountability seem to be the main preconditions for the checks and balances that will ultimately win the trust of the public and thus their participation in electoral processes.

The multidimensional attributes of parliament are particularly evident in its engagement in and response to social problems or in case of a national emergency for example (Achen & Bartel, 2016). Prevention of conflict and peace building seem to be highly dependent on parliament's ability to bring together the voters they represent, elected officials and civil society for the very reason that they can assemble a range of different interests and groups. The value of the space for debate that parliaments provide is immense yet underestimated. Recognizing this makes it crucial to ensure we have strong, well-functioning parliamentary institutions and we may also say that it is partly an active responsibility of citizens to make that happen, not just something to expect or criticize. Here's a quote :

BOX Quote:

In the psychoanalytical world we have no difficulty in giving value to talking and listening, but you will often hear people criticizing parliaments as being „just a talking shop", not fully appreciating that when the representatives of our communities in parliament are talking, they are in a very real sense exercising the alternative to violence.

In stable, peaceful parts of the world it is easy to forget why we have parliaments – places where representatives of the community talk (and also listen) to each other – and in violent communities it is easy to dismiss talking in the face of the threat as an expression of weakness in contrast to decisive action.

In Northern Ireland we lived through thirty years during which political differences were expressed through violent actions rather than words; but while it is most obvious in those places where there are deep divisions, violence is in fact always an alternative to talking in any community. There are important questions about why such deep divisions exist violence is in fact always an alternative to talking in any community.

There are important questions about why such deep divisions exist in any community but this is not the place to explore them. What is beyond doubt is that when such divisions have led to serious, prolonged inter and intra-communal violence there is grave damage to the capacity to think, talk and engage in those group psychological relational processes we call politics.

Politics is not so much the way that we agree across the gulf of our differences, but rather the way in which we can express our disagreements without killing each other.

John Alderdice, Former Speaker of the Parliament of Northern Ireland

The precondition for proper representation and effectiveness in enabling social transition from conflict to a peaceful society is having an inclusive parliament with a strong institutional setup. If we look at the main sources of conflict starting with land disputes, poverty, resources and similar we may notice that this is all within the scope of parliament's activities but what makes a parliament effective is how well it can integrate all relevant sectors of a society. Namely how inclusively its representative role is defined in the constitution and parliamentary rules of procedure but also how it functions in practice. If certain groups are or have the impression that they are denied participation in decision-making or feel that their concerns have not been heard, they may protest or even resort to violence or conflict events (Interparliamentary Union, 2017). Evidently, this will not always be the case, nor can parliament hear everyone. However, there are triggers and it is worth looking into persistent problems and the failure to address them adequately.

Elections are only the beginning of the democratic process in post-conflict and conflict-prone countries where the situation may turn either way, stressing the importance of consolidation of government and separation of powers where parliament is at the apex. Fair and free elections may not be sufficient in themselves for a democracy, and the participation of citizens in policymaking and oversight as part of the electoral framework may go some way towards improving stability and preventing violence. Electoral assistance without parliamentary support for the establishment of meaningful public participation may not close the electoral cycle, making a synergetic approach indispensable.

FRAGILITY AND RESILIENCE OF ELECTORAL AND PARLIAMENTARY PROCESSES

To understand and address the pathways in which an electoral process may lead to violence, we need to examine the context of democratic processes. In that sense, we are looking at election-related violence through long-term engagement and to what extent electoral assistance can contribute to the promotion of reconciliation as well as political and development processes. We also need to reflect on different

levels of government and in particular local government and local elections where the impact on people's lives is direct.

When thinking of the fragility and resilience of parliament, we cannot but address the fragility and resilience of elections and democracy as part of one ecosystem. How fragile a democracy is may be seen during a crisis or a challenging situation and how easily it may slip into authoritarianism. If we take the example of the 2024 Eurobarometer Survey we observe an uneasiness amongst EU citizens regarding the elections due to disinformation, cyberattacks and similar that may alter the electoral process. Based on these findings, the European Commission raised the level of protection for democracy and promotion of free and fair elections through countering disinformation (European Parliament, 2024). In Tunisia, as a different context example, UNDP Country Office noted the growing trend where increasing limitation of free speech led to weakening of the Parliament. This was further exacerbated with the 2021 electoral law amendments and constitutional reflections of presidential interference. Consequently, political parties and CSOs were excluded. Clearly, the new contexts require new programmatic approaches, and we need to rethink how to remedy and prevent negative tendencies.

Early Elections Phenomena

Public consultations may reveal a need to reassess the trust given to a government, in which case, the government may call early elections. Early, snap, pre-term and extra ordinary elections are all terms for elections held ahead of their scheduled date in the electoral calendar. Early elections are a common practice in a parliamentary democracy and are often intended to test the popularity of a sitting government and send a positive signal to the electorate that those in power are ready and willing to be held to account, garnering support for their policies and activities. Such elections may also be called when a decision or change, with profound societal implications is to be made, and the opposition demands elections, to which the incumbent government responds in order to demonstrate its strength and gain a clearer mandate for its policies from the voters.

However, some early elections can be **opportunistic snap elections** (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2023) and take place when the rule of law is not strong, exploiting loopholes that may lead to social unrest and violence when the opposing side is not willing to accept the results under irregular conditions. While there is a need for more research on the topic of early elections, and policy makers and scholars have yet to find common ground concerning the timing and progression of post-conflict elections, they largely agree that **early elections have a higher probability to reignite conflict than regular elections**. When there is only a weak institutional framework, governments are sometimes inclined to cheat in early elections, taking advantage of feeble resistance for the appropriate institutions. (Brancati & Snyder, 2013)

Post-conflict early elections, which should perhaps be understood as a separate category, are believed to be particularly likely to reignite violence, although some research suggests that UN intervention and power sharing may have a powerful effect in repressing this tendency. While elections represent a central plank of post-conflict peacebuilding, often taking place in the immediate aftermath of war, their impact is still the subject of strong disagreement. On the one hand they may indeed serve to help reach a peace agreement, and encourage the establishment of democratic principles and stability, but it can also be argued that they often do not lead to true democracy and may even reawaken the conflict it was hoped they would resolve. (Brancati & Snyder, 2013)

Furthermore, the positive gains from early elections tend to be short-term and often distort the electoral calendar. In addition to the relative strength of institutions in a country, another factor seems to play a key role when calling early elections, and that is whether the country has bicameral or unicameral legislature. Why? Simply put, in bicameral legislatures when elections are to take place for the lower house, the upper house can perform the role of parliament until a new government is formed. However, in unicameral parliaments there is no such possibility, and the country can go as long as six months without a government. Logically, the

question arises whether the election has left the country in a legal vacuum. What happens if we factor weak institutions in a transitional democracy into this equation? Another question that seems often to be underestimated is the frequency with which early elections can be called. This question is principally relevant when we look at the budgeting of such processes and the campaign funds doled out to political parties, which may have the effect of softening resistance to the scheduling of frequent early elections from either side of the political divide, however vociferously they may complain about the results.

Early elections also disrupt the work of parliament and throw off its schedule for scrutinizing and passing laws, as well as its efforts to secure the participation of citizens, pushing the schedule forward from six to 12 months which constitutes a significant derailment when resolving problems such as benefits and other policies with a serious impact on peoples' lives. Moreover, early elections affect development projects set to provide support for a country's separation of powers, leading to the need for agile management and additional risk-monitoring measures. However, this may also offer an opportunity for merging electoral and parliamentary support for a wider approach where it may be much easier to navigate such circumstances.

Finally, do early elections contribute to the prevention or the incitement of electoral violence? Any final pronouncement would be premature, given the limited research available. It is no easy task to assess the correlation between political trust and the timing of elections, as they are set by the system itself. In general, calling early elections seems to build trust to the point of re-establishing communication with an estranged incumbent government (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2023). However, in transitional countries it is likely that they carry far more dangers and possibilities for contributing to electoral violence than benefits. Once citizens become aware of the budgetary implications and weak institutional impact, then this can become a cause of serious concern. It may lead to disillusionment with both sides running in elections and further deplete already low trust in electoral democracy.

Political Parties: Part of the problem or solution?

Political parties are crucial actors in the electoral contest as they pave the way for political power. Given the dynamics of electoral competition, political parties remain under-studied despite the growing literature on electoral violence. Political parties and their movements connect voters and political elites. Understanding how they influence the probability of violence is vital to better regulation and prevention. (Fjelde, 2020)

In a parliamentary democracy, political parties play an extremely important role, making it possible for voters to hold government to account. This is possible only if they are in a position to maintain effective communication with the electorate, hence their privileged position when it comes to access and ability to build databases that cover the entire adult population. (UK Information Commissioner, 2018)

Correlations between Political Parties and Political Violence

Although electoral processes are defined as competitive, allowing all players equal and fair advantage, political party actions and in particular campaigns seem to go beyond politics and in some instances lead to psychological and physical violence aimed against the opponent in order to secure a victory. Most of all, such inappropriate behaviour seems to happen during the election campaign.

According to some research, there is a statistical correlation between strong political parties and a reduced risk of violent political conflict. A strong political party system seems to remove the need for violent manipulation of electoral process in order to rally voters. Also, when a party is strong it is likely to have better accountability and restraint mechanisms. In addition to electoral manipulation, as one form of electoral violence, there can be various other methods such as incumbent government pressure through the

police or organized groups, threats or coercion, and local level pressure is particularly acute. Some go so far as to suggest that electoral violence is often a strategy well-planned by leaders, pointing in support of this theory to the rapidity with which the violence can be curbed. On that note, when the political party organization is strong, there seems to be no need for electoral violence. However, parties that lack an organisational setting and struggle to mobilize voters may resort to coercion or violence. Whether strong or not parties have a so-called 'dark side' whereby they have the predisposition to mobilize organisational resources and members to advance their goals. (Fjelde, 2020)

Strong political party organisations, on the positive side, have the power to limit leaders from opportunism and irregular electoral activities where strengthening political parties may contribute to reducing electoral violence and set standards for their members. International assistance and democracy promotion for political parties should not be limited to electoral projects, given the importance of their role. Examples from progressive democracies in Africa such as **Kenya** and **South Africa** show that their political parties and organisations caused political violence on the basis of internal disagreements manifested through parliamentary debates and street demonstrations. In South Africa, political parties came together and formed a conflict management agenda followed by signing of the 2009 **Electoral Code of Conduct by political parties** pledging to refrain from any party work that may incite violence, and to punish perpetrators. (Ahere, 2018)

Perhaps the most recent positive example of support provided to the work of political parties comes from **Uruguay** when, in 2019, six Uruguayan political parties with parliamentary representation signed an **Ethical Pact against Disinformation**[7]. The pact obliged the parties to refrain from "generating or promoting false news or disinformation campaigns to the detriment of political adversaries**."** The parties further agreed on permanent consultation mechanisms to follow up on the Ethical Pact in order to respond quickly to any situation that

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[7] Part of the *Free Fake News Campaign*, promoted by the Uruguayan Press Association (APU), with support from UNDP, UNESCO, Fundación Astur and FESUR

could affect the fulfilment of their public commitment. (UNDP Uruguay, 2019)

Evidently **political parties play a role in both escalating and de-escalating political violence**. Hence, peacebuilding efforts, that are political in nature, seem in vain without the component aimed at curbing political violence, and political parties need to be included in these processes. The design and implementation of peacebuilding interventions may need to include a political parties component in order to effectively curb political violence. (Ahere, 2018)

Digital Political Campaigning: A Democracy Disrupter?

With the proliferation of technological development and big data, electoral violence spreads to the online work of political parties. Social media advertising, profiling and rapid expansion in users - all within a domain owned by private companies working under obscure rules and with little accountability – have led to a change in *modus operandi* of political parties. Given the propensity of this expansion, the matter spreads over several fields addressed by this research – digital governance, parliamentary oversight, information integrity and online gender-based violence amongst others.

The new approach taken by political parties in communicating with their electorate, and the manner in which they use data have allowed them to use digital advertising techniques to target voters with highly personalised adverts, often free from other competing or opposing messages, based on personal information derived mostly from social media. Clearly, political parties tend to apply all the new available modalities at times when marginal gains count and there are options that are less costly and more far-reaching than regular campaigning methods. Political parties are not restrained by the data protection law in their attempt to use social media for campaigning as they hold a special status allowing them access to the electoral register and processing of political opinion data. They may freely analyse data to determine their chances in winning elections.

The only way to secure institutionally sustainable and participatory approaches to regulating the new and rapidly growing field of online campaigning seems to be with parliament and its independent oversight bodies such as anticorruption agencies and an information commissioner. So, what can an information commissioner do? Depending on the country and the constitution or law governing the independent body, they may investigate the data protection principle of transparency, report to the committee in charge and propose recommendations (UK Information Commissioner, 2018). In some countries they may even impose penalties. Importantly, given the fast pace and wide field that political campaigns cover, there is a clear need to establish a dedicated body that can protect the personal data of the electorate and indirectly contribute to non-violent elections. Political parties should work with information commissioners as well as with the electoral commissions to define and apply cross-party solutions in order to secure data protection (UK Information Commissioner, 2018).

The UK Information Commissioner, for example, conducted an investigation for the United Kingdom House of Commons on the use of data analytics in political campaigns and concluded that *Facebook* specifically failed to inform users on how they may be targeted by a political party campaign. Exceptionally concerning was *Facebook's* advertising model in respect of political campaigning and the level of transparency to the users. In addition, other online platforms such as *Google, Twitter and Snap* were examined, and the Commissioner determined that none of these companies, until very recently, had distinguished the political uses of their online advertising products from their commercial uses. The conclusion was that such lack of transparency and the inability for persons to control their information had led to them becoming easy targets for political parties. (UK Information Commissioner, 2018)

Another approach may be seen with a dedicated government body as was the case in the European Union where the European Data Protection Board, comprising the EU data protection authorities, established a sub-group designed to work on strategic approaches to the

regulation of online platforms. This presented a potent platform for dealing with big tech companies and it may gather all parliamentary commissioners for information globally in the fight to ensure that big tech social media comply with the data protection acts, strengthen and make transparent privacy settings in order to protect people given the transnational nature of such companies that usually go beyond the reach of any one national parliament or commissioner for information for that matter (UK Information Commissioner, 2018).

With advertising and marketing methods developing at a rapid pace with private companies, **elections too are becoming 'datafied'**. Transnational companies, with budgets higher than the state budgets of some countries, are offering cutting-edge methods for audience segmentation and targeting to political parties all over the world. Political campaigns combine their own data on voter behaviour with commercial data from data brokers to profile their voters. There are companies that offer mining and targeting voters, including so-called 'marketing clouds'. DEMOS, a United Kingdom leading cross-party think tank, identified key trends in using data analytics for political campaigning and its possible future unveiling: detailed audience segmentation (seeking the most persuasive models to swing the elections); cross device targeting; growth in use of psychographic analysis (capturing the 'emotion' displayed in their social media presence); use of AI to target, measure and improve campaigns and generate content; and **use of personal data to predict election results**. (DEMOS, 2018)

Digital political campaigning is very poorly regulated and presents an area that can influence elections negatively, and lead to unrests and protest. Such campaigning has a complex structure comprising political parties, campaign groups, social media companies' data brokers and data analytics providers. A wide range of actors can produce a powerful wave of support for a particular party option and the following questions arise: what is the difference between the online and regular campaigning if not the ability to reach even more people if the goal remains the same? How do these different actors interact and are regular campaign data breaches

any better or more tolerable than those committed in an online campaign?

Evidently, big data development, when it comes to social and technological aspects, outpaces the legislative framework and scrutiny required to adequately protect the rights or citizens. Unfortunately, it is those who have the means and skills that make use of this partial legal vacuum and engage in the 'behind the scenes' data processing (including algorithms, analysis, data matching and profiling) that has a profound impact on people's privacy.

The rule of law system is the foundation of democracy and the system may be upheld for as long as there is trust and confidence that those they elected will protect their interests and rights. Ensuring that data protection compliance is effective throughout the system is a whole-of-society endeavour, critical for maintaining democratic processes. Clearly, for online as for the traditional political campaigning, the rules should be the same: Free and fair elections are the foundation of a democracy and are enshrined in human rights law.

Improving transparency and accountability in political campaigning online may be a way to not only protect citizens' rights but also prevent any fraudulent activities or misuse of data for electoral campaigning including disinformation that may subsequently lead to violence. Connecting parliament, commissioner for information and electoral commissions is one possible approach to resolving such complex matters.

Therefore, the political parties and campaigns should be required to operate from an equal position when approaching the electorate. Voters ought to have access to the full spectrum of political messaging and information with clear identification of the authors of the message. The rules should apply both online and offline with full respect of the relevant laws including data a protection law and the constitution amongst others, calling for continuous work on governance of digitalisation.

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE

Digital governance comprises diverse stakeholders, bodies, and regulatory sets.

According to UNECSO, when it comes to elections and data protection, which are already a part of the governance structure, another layer of considerations is to be employed in order to reflect the changes and challenges that come with digitalisation. We are taking note of new governance systems being designed to fill the gap in regulating the new digital platforms (UNESCO, 2023). The idea of new governance systems dates back to the 1990s but it seems amplified now with the precipitous rise of private transnational corporations against which no state by itself can stand alone in the fight to control the risks and protect the rights of citizens (Ruggie, 2014). Rather, it seems that only **platforms can fight platforms**, hence the need for **polycentric governance** to regulate such extraterritorial jurisdictions, as well as the corporate subsidiary companies set up to free partner companies from liability and similar (Ruggie, 2014).

In addition to the need for personal data protection, a new regulatory framework is of importance for freedom of expression and access to information. Hence, policy frameworks for digital governance need to be harmonized, standardized and attained through the widest of societal consultations. In a way this may be regarded as a transitional period toward adaptive, effective and open governance. Essentially, digital governance is set to enhance institutional resilience, rebuild trust in institutions and define inclusive digital governance policies. How digital technologies affect accountable, inclusive and effective governance is defined as **digitalisation for governance** while **governance for digitalisation** presents the governance arrangements required to ensure that digital transformation is rights-based, inclusive, and supports the achievement of SDGs (UNDP Blog, 2024).

Such developments prompt considerations on who will be able to benefit the most, how and when, and what the implications are for the prevention of electoral violence, as well as the lack of proper governance on this matter. Firstly, we need to acknowledge that there are both positive and negative effects to new digital platforms when setting up rights-based support**. The profoundly positive impact** comes from unprecedented access to information, exchange,

making governments accountable etc. **Digital innovations are driving a continuous transformation** of needs and behaviours in economies and societies, increasing transparency, closing the political credibility gap, and reducing scepticism of the integrity of policymakers. The access to and use of data can be a powerful tool to enhance democracy and trustworthy rulemaking in different ways. Digital transformation is important for open elections and parliament data, and access to data on legislative and regulatory processes.

However, there is a **downside to digital technologies** that raises concerns and has led to calls for governance of digitalisation. Disruptions for democracy (hate speech and disinformation for example), leading to poverty (from income inequality and loss of jobs to digital illiteracy that may lead to poverty), unaccountable institutions and similar issues may arise with the misuse of these technological achievements. Outpacing legislative regulation, the fast-moving technologies impact information integrity, allowing hate speech, disinformation and online gender-based violence to spread, as well as cyberattacks and data breaches. There is a role for parliament in addressing these matters and legislating for a strong legislative framework. However, this is also a whole-of-society engagement, calling for social accountability making it essential to fight digital illiteracy. Moreover, big tech platforms need to step up and be willing to remove hate speech and other harmful content that may lead to political as well as any other forms of violence and be accountable to parliament.

> The blurring of boundaries between true and false, the highly-organized denial of scientific facts, the amplification of disinformation and conspiracies – these did not originate on social networks. But, in the absence of regulation, they flourish there much better than the truth. Only by taking the full measure of this technological revolution can we ensure it does not sacrifice human rights, freedom of expression and democracy. For information to remain a common

good, we must reflect and act now, together. (UNESCO, 2023)

Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO

Beyond the evident need to regulate digital platforms at the national level, there is a growing understanding of the need to develop new approaches to the global governance framework (Fay & Innovation, 2019). While platforms may be at the centre of the digital economy, through the search engine, social exchange, knowledge sharing and various services, they are expanding, and the expansion is immense. Although there are concerns with overregulation, calls for global standards when it comes to big data analytics, including big data platforms that concern elections seem more cogent. With digital innovation outpacing legal and regulatory frameworks, governments are responding by developing resolutions on their own, thus creating inconsistencies and incompatibilities between countries. Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is what hinders effective participation in developing global standards when it comes to developing countries, for example. (Girard & Innovation, 2019)

The willingness to build a resilient and sustainable digital economy is unquestionable, but a comprehensive action plan, strategies and an inclusive and participatory legislative framework for the digital industry seems to be critical. We may see that even in the best regulated and fast-paced economies, such as the EU, it may be difficult to follow development of emerging technologies and high-performance infrastructure. The EU is trying to find its path and protection from restrictions on vast amounts of data being transferred to AI. In seeking to solve this new conundrum, the EU, as well as other global economies and intergovernmental entities are facing new ethical questions as to the matter of control, monitoring and profiling of citizens, as may be the case in some autocratic regimes. (Zenner, 2021)

BOX 6: CASE STUDY MALAYSIA

UNDP Malaysia Electoral Project for years tried to build relations with the Parliament. Although there is no electoral violence in terms of street protests in Malaysia, the country context is such that there is a lot of cyberbullying and racial rhetoric originating with politicians, further polarizing the society. In addition, they experienced a quite competitive change of government. Despite investing many efforts in other government bodies, the Parliament proved to have the drive for reform.

It was the Speaker's Cabinet that provided the entry point with digitalisation. Digitalisation of parliamentary proceedings and records. This was an important process that helped strengthen the Malaysian Parliament and the processes necessary to move the reform forward as well as other processes relating to digital capabilities, bridging the gap in communication with the public and electoral regulations and improving turn out.

Finally, **digital transformation** is not only about developing frameworks or high-end digital tools, but also about the possibility for unprecedented participation of people and importantly closing the **feedback loop**. More work needs to be done to see what that feedback loop really means in a scrutiny context as even if these questions are added to the committee reports – citizens seem not really interested in reading them as was the experience in the Scottish Parliament. In the Brazilian Parliament's case, citizens were engaged initially but withdrew from participation in the digital tools due to the lack of feedback on their proposals and grievances.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

There seems to be a general belief that AI systems have some form of intelligence as they keep rapidly evolving, but in fact the intelligence is only during the building phase and not when it is being utilized. The OECD provided a definition of Artificial Intelligence whereby an: "AI *system is a machine-based system that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it*

receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments. Different AI systems vary in their levels of autonomy and adaptiveness after deployment.". This represents an already revised definition followed by the revised OECD AI Principles set to provide a blueprint for global interoperability on AI policy and for policymakers to keep pace with technology. The definition of an AI system further encompasses machine learning and knowledge-based approaches; application areas such as computer vision, natural language processing, speech recognition, intelligent decision support systems, and intelligent robotic systems; and specific applications of these tools in different domains. (OECD, 2024)

AI was introduced with expectation it would boost productivity, accelerate scientific research, promote environmental sustainability, and improve healthcare and education while upholding human rights and democratic values. However, the matter of privacy, security, bias and discrimination, the creation and dissemination of misinformation and disinformation as well as distortion of public discourse and markets seem not yet fully to have been addressed. (OECD, 2024)

The global nature of digital technology is a serious challenge to national systems and may lead to discrepancies in power. The governance of digitalization thus needs to be directed by a global community, sovereign states, citizens and non-traditional actors. Public consultations and parliamentary regulatory and oversight powers need to be employed to secure inclusiveness in the form of perspectives and impacts on the public sphere integrity, potential for manipulation, influencing of political processes such as legislation and elections. UNDP takes note of the complex influence of AI on the present governance system and in particular the political nature of digital transformation and emphasizes the need to support a politically informed digital transformation towards maintained

development goals (UNDP Development Future Series, 2024). Particularly, amidst divergent views on the extent to which is needs to be regulated, the UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly (UN General Assembly, 2016) confirmed that "the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online".

Examples of Parliaments regulating for AI:

1) **European Parliament approved the AI Act**, rules aimed at regulating AI systems according to a risk-based approach. with an overwhelming majority. The law passed with 523 votes in favour, 46 against and 49 abstentions[8].

2) **Danish Parliament passed a new bill on "Digital-ready legislation,"** developed by the governmental Agency of Digitisation in 2018. The **aim of digital-ready legislation is to push for a fundamental transformation of the public sector through digitalization.** Denmark is spearheading in this area, but other countries are inspired. (Plesner & Justensen, 2021)

3) **Japan's Parliament, the Diet**, in 2021 passed three laws to promote a "digital society." The Japanese Cabinet has promoted the integration of government information systems and facilitated cooperation with private systems. The Basic Act stipulated the basic policy regarding the formulation of basic principles and measures for the formation of a digital society; the responsibilities of the national government, local governments and businesses; the establishment of the Digital Agency; and the creation of priority plans.[9]

How does AI affect elections?
Artificial Intelligence seems to be a vehicle for accelerating dissemination of political

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[8] https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/03/13/lawmakers-approve-ai-act-with-overwhelming-majority

[9] https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2021-07-23/japan-diet-passes-three-new-laws-to-promote-a-digital-society/

misinformation online. The UK Hansard Society explored the role of AI when it comes to tackling information in politics and parliament. Evidently, AI has a role in influencing political discourse to the extent that we can see the misleading of voters and distortion of democratic processes. The questions seem to be how and to what extent this may affect the elections? The Hansard Society tried to answer this question with the help of an independent fact checker from the- UK. Given the already lowest level of trust in politicians, can misinformation generated by AI possibly even further impact the public trust in elections and democracy? There seems to be a general consensus that there is a dire need for pre-emptive policy and risk management of AI whilst the overall regulatory framework seems to be outpaced by the rapid development of AI. (Hansard Society, 2024)

There are two aspects of parliamentary engagement in this process: firstly, contributing to the legislative and oversight role as well as policy making; and secondly verification of accuracy and, where appropriate, adequate sanctions against MPs' political campaigns.

Why is trusted and verified information important to be pursued? Primarily it has a direct impact on the electoral process: misinformation, disinformation and hate speech and can lead to political violence and exacerbate social inequalities. UNDP's **iVerify platform**[10] for fact checking was set to combat hate speech and disinformation in the lead up to the Liberian general elections in October 2023. A team of 15 fact-checkers completed training and travelled to all 15 counties of the country to ensure accuracy and reliability in places where misinformation is likely to emerge. Given the tendency of disinformation, we cannot but wonder what happens to a political dialogue when fake facts pour in? Can they turn the voters? Would that be the most precarious possible outcome? So far experience seems to indicate that this is not the worst that is to come, however the 2024 elections seem to be the first generative AI elections in a global election year and the outcome will need to be analysed further.

The biggest danger so far seems to be the overwhelming amount of misinformation and disinformation that is shaking the people's trust in democracy in general. The Full Fact, UK independent fact checkers, in June 2024 published a report on what political parties and politicians should do with fake news and disinformation in campaigns expecting a commitment on behalf of political parties to fair campaigns (Full Fact, 2024).

> And I think, again, transparency is the word I keep coming back to. So people have confidence in the system that if there is an attempt to manipulate it, that there is a system in place whereby that can be dealt with. If there was clear evidence in a particular seat that there had been manipulation, I think-- you know, I want our elected representatives to say this is how we would deal with that. (Hansard Society, 2024)

Chris Morris, CEO - Full Fact

Given the high probability of AI being used to impact elections and not just by political parties in the country but also possible hostile governments, the question arises, is that really possible? To some extent public opinion polls are unlikely to change that drastically but what may be more probable is that it may influence a particular constituency. One way of attempting to approach this issue may be to take some pre-emptive measures such as pre-bunking rather that debunking ensuring the right information comes first, then digital literacy. (UNESCO, 2023)

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[10] UNDP's electoral support team in Sierra Leone and its Chief Digital Office, in partnership with UN Peacebuilding

Fund, the European Union the Governments of Ireland, Canada and Iceland developed the **iVerify platform**

Clearly, integrity of elections and future political campaigns need to be protected against such negligent acting and infringements of law. Passing new or amending existing data protection laws, establishing independent parliamentary bodies such as information commissioner[11] seem inevitable but also society as a whole needs to be engaged and educated of their rights, social medial platform owners need to be called to account and encouraged to self-regulate. There needs to be a global approach and coordination towards resolving this problem.

MEANINGFUL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK OF PARLIAMENT

Parliament represents all citizens, and their voices should be heard equally in order for parliament to become a platform for fair and inclusive policymaking. Public engagement is, although perhaps not emphasized enough, mutually beneficial for the public, parliament and MPs. The feedback loop is equally if not even more important as it is directly related to trust in the institution of parliament, the MPs and the parliamentary democracy as a whole. Allowing for the people's voice to be heard and addressed helps improve laws and decision-making processes (IPU & UNDP, 2023). However, facilitating participation for the participation's sake as well as constantly inviting a particular or even same group of people to participate may not lead to trust building. Moreover, it may negatively impact decision-making and rather than resolving matters through consultations, active listening, confronting different points of view with evidence and a substantiated position, it may leave the public uninterested in engaging in parliamentary work or consultations.

The third Global Parliamentary Report devoted to public engagement in the work of parliament distinguishes between the terms "engagement" and "participation" noting many dimensions and stages of people's engagement. It is important to appreciate public engagement as a two-way

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BOX 7: CASE STUDY NEPAL

UNDP Nepal takes note of digital violence compared to electoral violence, as physical violence seems not to present in Nepal. Electoral violence seems to be shifting towards digital violence now, especially during electoral campaigns. People try to explore or try to create content, tamper with content, or distort the facts in the form of disinformation or misinformation, sometimes deepfakes, etc., to tarnish the image, or to defame a particular person or party.

This is a new phenomenon being witnessed in Nepal as well, although there's a huge gap between users' digital technology and the real voters on the ground. There is a gap between two classes. Another gap is that of digital literacy and poverty essentially. It is not only about the common audience, but also about the political party system, that seems completely unaware of digital illiteracy. Parliamentarians may even have accessed the parliamentary website on their mobile phone but would hardly be using it effectively for the purpose it was designed for.

street, where dialogue between the electors and the elected commences for a peaceful and equitable society. The Report further takes note of many pillars of public engagement such as information, education, communication, consultations and participation, pointing to the representative nature of the institution constituted to meet the public expectation in law-making and overseeing the government. (IPU & UNDP, 2023)

The Global Parliamentary Report further notes that resilient democracies require upholding and encourages parliaments to enable active and effective participation (IPU & UNDP, 2023). In addition to sustaining peace, hearing the electorate and addressing the problems raised and enabling effective participation, the creation of civic space for public debate is not only expected of parliaments but where we need to be

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[11] Given the recently uncovered cases of compromising personal data by a number of actors EU acknowledged digital electoral system reform to the new AI reality and initiating new measures against electoral interference. A Canadian Parliamentary Committee has recommended extending privacy law to political parties and the US was considering introducing its first comprehensive data protection law.

able to go further and create a new vision of parliament.

Barriers to Meaningful Public Participation

There are many barriers to meaningful participation, many of which originate with government. Lack of funding, staff and other means to support the work of parliaments in general but also enabling parliament to exercise effective participation are but a few of the matters that are under direct control of government. This is not something that is well known to the public or much discussed, because parliament is seen as the body in charge of approving the state budget and the general belief is – how can the budget be denied to the body that passes it? Indeed, but in reality, within the system and the bureaucracy, the old ways remain deeply entrenched. Another matter that plagues parliament's efficiency is the proliferation of legislative activity initiated by government without prior debate, and misuse of the parliamentary calendar and schedule by the ruling party to limit the time for preparation and discussion. Finally, public participation requires time, resources and trained staff – none of which seems provided for parliament as a matter of course. So much so that staff often find themselves **needing to weigh whether to first provide support to committees, that is the natural priority, or organize participation activities**. This is all part of the landscape in which a parliament functions that needs to be taken into account when assessing its efficiency and propensity for meaningful participation. This is an area that deserves serious consideration and support.

Here we need to reflect on the nature of parliaments and why the functioning of parliament and its perceived unwillingness or inability to keep up with the pace of change and pressure for engagement is observed negatively. Firstly, parliament, as an institution, a branch of power, was not envisaged to have organized public participation (Leston-Bandeira, Caluwaerts, & Vermassen, 2024) be it on its premises or in decision-making. Parliament's representative function was designed to do exactly that – represent the public and make decisions for them (Leston-Bandeira, Caluwaerts, & Vermassen, 2024). Representation and engagement of the public are closely connected but not the same (Leston-Bandeira, Caluwaerts, & Vermassen, 2024). Secondly, parliament's business is perceived rather abstractly by the general public. Even the 'professional public' would engage only on themes within the purview of that profession. This is not the case with local parliaments hence the higher participation and interest. Thirdly, parliament is a representative institution but due to its collective nature it represents everyone and no one (Leston-Bandeira, Caluwaerts, & Vermassen, 2024) and thus it is almost impossible to reflect all the public interests and have time for more extensive consultation or at least as much as the general population expects. Fourthly, we need to address the parliamentary staff. Whilst we have a strictly determined number of MPs, the number of civil servants is not so strictly prescribed and perhaps offers more flexibility. So why do we not have more staff that could collect and address public engagement and provide feedback for citizens?

Interestingly enough this is connected to funding plans and training of civil servants by the Executive. If we compare a ministry with a parliament we may notice a staggering difference in teams of communication experts, different profiles of expertise and the number of civil servants. How many civil servants service a ministry compared to one parliament? How many of them are crucial for the decision-making and engagement with public? It does not really seem to be a fair fight but still the situation has not really changed much. We may wonder as to whether it is in the interest of government to have a strong parliament, a strong overseer? If we go back to the original intention in creating of a parliament in the UK, for example, that is the closest model to parliament we have today – it was constituted to prevent the arbitrariness of the Executive against the Judicial power and ultimately the people. Finally, even if all the requirements were met – if we imagined a parliament with MPs, staff and means enabled for full participation, the feedback loop closed, would that really improve the public participation or would people simply not be very interested in taking part as is the case in the Scottish Parliament, despite it not being a national parliament and perhaps under less pressure? This is definitely something that would require more analysis, psychological assessment and piloting in

different contexts to understand. It may well be that we are at a critical juncture where we need to reimagine our approaches all together as professors Leston-Bandera and Judge judge. Perhaps it is safest to conclude that parliaments need to be understood in their entirety and supported in the form that we have them today, in order to establish a basis for safe and free elections and sustainable peace while maintaining the commitment to developing new approaches.

We cannot proceed before touching upon certain general trends that may be contributing to declining trust in institutions and the governance system. One is the confrontational parliamentary debates where parties use up time intended for serious discussion of key societal issues to attack each other, be it tactically to filibuster or performatively to show 'how much they care for their electorate' (see Chapter 2 for more on this division). Political parties seem not to give priority to parliament's function to call government to account (IPU & UNDP, 2023). Adequate professional training for MPs on how to perform oversight is lacking and there appears to be an overall absence of a systematic approach in oversight for various reasons, many of which are mentioned above. Overall, the parties must shoulder much of the responsibility for the lack of adequate oversight. No one can miss the difference between independent MPs and those representing a particular political party. The extent to which political parties may be a barrier to meaningful participation is something that requires more research, especially in light of new and rapid technological developments.

Digital technology may enable wider participation and access to information but also may bring forward disinformation, misinformation, hate speech and online gender-based violence. Tensions arise that can undermine direct visits and consultation with constituencies for the fear of attacks. This can be briefly illustrated with a few examples from this research and similar studies: an MEP women candidate in the 2024 elections had a bottle thrown at her, an African MP was humiliated in false social media coverage, US congress people take security details when visiting their constituencies and are reducing visits in the field. Perhaps not all is related to online violence, but as an integral component and in a combination to other factors, it may create a

concerning mixture and lead to growing barriers to participation and peaceful politics.

Effective engagement through digital tools: friend or foe?

The digital transformation of parliaments has been underway for some time, structuring work and efficiency and offering a higher level of transparency and analytics. Digital tools on parliamentary websites, live streaming, e-parliament, mobile applications and monitoring public budget expenditure through special portals are but a few of the examples aimed at opening avenues for people to get more engaged in the work of parliament. With the pandemic and ongoing wars, this trend has spread, and more parliaments now allow for e-sessions and e-voting to continue functioning during the precarious times.

The pace of participation and responsiveness already has the potential to be at an unprecedented level and the potential is growing, however, we are not there yet. Is this due to the funding required for digital tools, the time investment, dedication to the development and training of staff, and the new jobs that need to be created, or is the public failing to see this as a tool that could be of assistance and an expression of an honest invitation to take part in decision-making?

How to measure the impact of digital tools on participation? Primarily, they present an open invitation to the widest number of citizens to engage in the work of parliament, to submit online petitions, to vote, comment on draft laws, participate in public hearings, watch live streams of committee discussions and view calendar and voting information posted to parliamentary websites as part of e-parliament innovation. In short, transparency, accountability accessibility and expanding beyond the parliament building, capital city and region. In some countries all this is now available at this scale for the first time but it was not achieved without disparities stemming from the lack of digital literacy and lack of funds to obtain tools necessary for access (IPU & UNDP, 2023).

Regardless of how developed digital engagement tools may be, what makes the difference for a meaningful and sustained engagement of the public in parliamentary work is whether the feedback loop is closed, trust and the chance of being heard. However, digital tools would clearly not always and not solely succeed at closing the feedback loops for various reasons from the lack of clarity as to how the input is being processed and utilized to the absence of debate and interaction amongst other reasons. In fact, demands from citizens to take part in law-making is growing and we see some very good examples such as Thailand[12] and the Netherlands[13], where laws were proposed by citizens then taken up and shaped by parliament MPs and Staff in what may be described as a truly participatory process

The growing dissatisfaction with being left out of a particular process in pre- legislative or post-legislative scrutiny and having that process solely reserved for experts and civil society creates a widening gap and dissatisfaction amongst the public, as research and public opinion polls show. When it comes to sustainability, would it not be better to have such approaches institutionalized for long-term engagement rather than dependent on any short-term sources of funding. Seeking institutional solutions based on an open platform approach may prove to be the most effective in adjusting to the new society we are living in – a society of digital interconnectedness, multiple communication channels with high expectations from the still slow paced institutional set up (Leston-Bandeira, Caluwaerts, & Vermassen, 2024).

Steps towards Meaningful Public Participation

The Global Parliamentary Report sees the engagement of MPs with their constituents as one way of developing interaction with the electorate as well as to countering distrust. Not only that, as a New Zealand MP states in the Report, we should not neglect the fact that often solutions to some problem, legislation inputs, may be found amongst the people (IPU & UNDP, 2023).

Public participation is something that should be a regular part of parliamentary work across the board, but has yet to be achieved. We are getting there with the tremendous support of inter-governmental organisations and civil society since it would not be realistic to expect this from governments in all countries. In developed parliamentary democracies such support is often pivotal to preserving democracy. As a matter a fact, if we look at the Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada, functioning amidst war thanks to extensive multi-organisational support contributing to maintaining democracy we need to appreciate that the more precarious the situation, the more the need to maintain the support and shield the parliament from autocratic tendencies that often emerge during conflict.

Engagement of citizens is a serious and fragile endeavour that should be approached in a strategic rather than an *ad hoc* manner (IPU & UNDP, 2023). Roles and responsibilities, pathways, steps needed towards closing the feedback loop and ways of engaging participants should be clearly determined and assigned. Participation involves MPs as much as parliamentary staff and parliamentary party groups. Participation means creating platforms for cooperation, multiple access, information sharing, prompt responses, trustworthy and timely information in a rapidly changing work environment under pressure from technological development and growing disinformation.

Parliamentary support today requires a **whole-of-governance approach**. It requires being observed and developed as part of a **democratic process from pre-election, election to post-election phases**. It requires support from intergovernmental organisations in the transitional and post-conflict countries now perhaps more than ever due to the very fragility of democracy where it has not taken roots yet. Parliamentary democracy also needs such approaches in democratic countries due to the growing distrust and rapid spreading of negative implications to technological growth.

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[12] https://ipen-network.org/citizen-initiated-legislation-the-clean-air-act-in-thailand/

[13] https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2021)031-e

Whilst taking note of particular entry points, we cannot but reflect on the 2022 Global Parliamentary Report's pillars for public engagement and point to the following education opportunities such as **orientation sessions for new MPs** as particularly useful, familiarizing them with the tools available, and thus speeding up the process of acclimatization to the work of a parliamentarian, which can typically take up to six months. Also, when MPs have just arrived at parliament, they are more inclined to absorb new practices. Parliaments are best positioned to ensure that **engagement is gender-sensitive, inclusive of marginalized and vulnerable groups, non-partisan.** Particularly helpful is the **SDGs platform** as it may create a pathway for parliaments to equalise their approaches towards protection of human rights globally.

BOX 8: CASE STUDY URUGUAY: Parliamentary support for an inclusive public sphere and non-violent electoral climate.

UNDP Uruguay Country Office considered Parliament a key actor in creating a vibrant and inclusive civic space that leads to a constructive and non-violent electoral climate. This was pursued through multiple dimensions:

1. **Promoting substantive citizen participation:**
   1.1. **Considering Parliament as a forum for inclusive public debate:** contributing to or generating debates of higher quality, density, and sophistication. It leveraged UNDP's role as a coordinator to bring together diverse actors who often operate in isolation, thereby fostering "unlikely conversations."
   1.2. **FW Project (*Systemic engagement for an inclusive public sphere*):** Project to strengthen citizen participation and the link between Parliament and the citizenry, prioritizing a deliberative democracy approach. Planned activities include strengthening existing spaces for citizen participation (e.g., the PROPACI digital platform) and creating new spaces (e.g., implementing an experience of civil society organization participation in a Parliamentary committee).

2. **Promoting inclusion in Parliament and the public sphere in general:**
   2.1. **Gender:** CO developed a digital gender violence monitor using artificial intelligence to provide real-time evidence on aggression aimed at female public figures such as politicians, journalists, communicators, activists, and artists on Twitter (active from March 2022 to March 2023). As a follow-up, this year we are advancing the creation of a network of women with a "public voice" to counteract hate speech against women in the public sphere.
   2.2. **Youth:** Strengthened inter-party youth spaces and promoted the participation of young people from political parties in intergenerational dialogue spaces to address current democratic challenges. Result: young party members are drafting an inter-party agreement document for presentation to presidential candidates in Parliament.

3. **Information integrity/Disinformation:**
   3.1. Promoting an Ethical Pact against Disinformation signed by all political parties in a public event at Parliament during an electoral year.
   3.2. Organizing a workshop on clean political campaigns and disinformation aimed at young people from political parties.

4. **Advancing the anticipatory governance agenda in Parliament:**
   4.1. Providing ongoing UNDP support to Parliament's Futures Commission.
   4.2. Capacity-building on foresight with less traditional actors, including guaranteed participation of civil society organizations and youth from political parties in the II World Summit of Futures Commissions.

5. **Support to institutional strengthening and capacity development:**
   5.1. Conducting a training module for legislators at the beginning of each legislative term.
   5.2. Designing a module on citizen participation and deliberative democracy for the Parliament's School of Government.

6. **Agenda to promote innovation in the public sector.**

7. **Resilience:** Highlighting political parties as essential assets for democratic resilience.

In addition to some of the best practice in public engagement listed in the 2022 Global Parliamentary Report, we observe the Constitution of Zimbabwe prescribing public **engagement in the legislative process and committees**; also the National Assembly of Kenya' petition tracker indicating the committees reviewing petitions and status on the response from the Parliament (Transparency International, 2023).

Finally, it is important to consider public participation in support of the **oversight function** of parliament. Public input into holding government to account may potentially be the most meaningful form of public participation. It may be though public hearings, submissions, consultations or digital means that citizens

engage in parliamentary work and contribute to both pre-legislative and post-legislative scrutiny. Parliamentary oversight is important for enhancing democratic accountability and tackling corruption. This is particularly crucial given the trend of democratic backsliding. Through oversight, parliaments may improve gender equality enquiry into the government's implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Most importantly for engagement in parliamentary oversight may be establishing the groundwork for economic and human development where policies passed should serve the public interest (IPU & UNDP, 2023).

Transparency international, for example, found that parliamentarians could benefit from training in oversight as neither parliament nor political parties seem to invest in equipping parliamentarians with knowledge or skills on how to perform scrutiny. Clearly, this affects the assessment of their work and the possibility to devise any strategic approach in that sense. Importantly, insufficient engagement in oversight may diminish parliament's opportunities to collect information from the population, civil society and marginalized groups. (Transparency International, 2023)

BOX 9: CASE STUDY SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

The Scottish Parliament uses two **digital platforms** called Citizens' Space and Your Priorities that allow for the following improvement when it comes to public participation in oversight amongst other things. Here are some of the lessons learnt from the Scottish Parliament's experience:

- **Citizens Space** – standard consultations platform, used for surveys as well showed the following:
  - Participation is higher when there is a high profile or controversial bill.
  - Fundamentally important – how to manage periods of high intensity in participation of public and low intensity?
  - Submissions process should not be treated as an opinion poll.
  - Submissions to get samples of the reasons why people like or dislike a bill that is used to form a scrutiny is the most important aspect.

- **Your Priorities** platform that is - this is not a The platform is used all the time.
  - Section that broken down into: parts of the explains different can like and Bill and people dislike. Also, submissions to get samples of the reasons on why people like or dislike a bill.
  - On the same platform, the Scottish Parliament can generate questions that committee can ask a minister which proved useful in several situations for COVID and Health. This type of citizens' input it something the Scottish parliament would like to see more of.
  - The platform comprises AI which assesses all the data and gives it a toxicity score. Anything that scores above 50 percent in the toxicity score is flagged, and it can be checked and filtered according to the most toxic of language. This is an example of how technology could be used to diminish hate speech.

Further on oversight, **public engagement may be codified** with other oversight institutions as well, such as audit institution, ombudsperson, anti-corruption agency, commissioner for information, commissioner for equality through parliamentary committees and similar (Transparency International, 2023). Parliamentary committees' work is particularly important for this process as they review reports by the abovementioned bodies and propose further action. This would hold potential for closing the feedback loop and strengthen oversight at the same time.

Effective Participation and Parliamentary Independent Oversight Bodies

Independent oversight bodies, parliamentary watchdogs, regulatory bodies, 'officers of parliament ', parliament's extended hand and similar are some of the names for independent offices or agencies reporting to dedicated parliamentary committees. They are independent from government but also parliament. Parliament reviews their reports that help it perform its oversight function and call government to account on their findings. Some may be constitutional, meaning their foundation is prescribed by the constitution and some may only have a law on which they are established. Amongst the first independent bodies were the institutions of Auditor General and Ombudsperson. The Auditor was most needed to control government spending as parliament alone would not have been able to fulfil this function satisfactorily, while the Ombudsperson institution was established to support Parliament in scrutinizing the government and detecting violations, abuse, and infringement by the administrative system. In recent years we have seen an expansion in the establishment of independent bodies following social changes and the growing need for additional oversight. As a result commissioners for information and data protection, commissioners for equality, commissioners for future generations, commissioners for the environment, anti-corruption agencies and electoral commissions have been established depending on country context.

Although some bodies such as ombudsperson and commissioner for information are recognized and highly appreciated and trusted by the public, the role of most of the independent bodies is not sufficiently well understood. Clearly, not all need to be part of the participatory activities as their role may be to oversee the government, investigate, report and even issue fines and prohibitions, ask for information and similar. Particularly interesting for this research are the commissioner for information and the audit institution due to their remit over political parties and disinformation.

The Commissioner for Information is in charge of setting the landscape for access to the information that is imperative for the parliamentary scrutiny of government. The commissioner for information and data protection seems to be the most sought after, given the importance of information integrity and the huge amount of data being processed by big tech companies. The Commissioner for information helps the parliament to adequately protect the people and perform its scrutiny role by monitoring and prescribing access to information, the reporting and withholding of information amongst other things. The Venice Commission particularity notes the need for the parliament to perform the scrutiny, given that "Withholding information from Parliament on the grounds that it reflects ministers' or civil servants' personal opinions is a flawed argument, since the motives for policies and actions or inactions can be important considerations for accountability" (European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), 2021).

Furthermore, MPs have the right to seek information from government based on fundamental democratic rights, recognised as such in various Council of Europe documents. "In PACE Resolution 1601 (2008), Procedural guidelines on the rights and responsibilities of the opposition in a democratic parliament, the right to information is recognised as an essential element of parliament's scrutiny function vis-à-vis the government and the latter's accountability. As with any parliamentary rights, the right to information should be practical and effective." (European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), 2021). The Commissioner for Information may conduct a formal investigation into the use of data for political purposes (UK Information Commissioner, 2018) and concluded that processing personal data in the context of political campaigning seems complex and would require additional confirmation on the parties' data activities.

Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI), are public oversight institutions which audit a government's use of public funds. They are a critical link in a country's accountability chain. SAIs audit financing of political parties, they may also audit vote counting errors after elections. UNDP parliamentary programmes have been increasingly including support to SAIs, usually as per their direct request, as they are believed to produce better results than when a constituent part of a finance framework in combination with the ministry of finance. The approach to treat public finance within a framework led by the ministry of finance instead of a parliamentary finance committee may be more convenient from programming but essentially would not function as well, given that SAIs are supposed to audit the government. A good example is the UNDP PRO PALOP Multi-country programme with global reach focusing on public finance management working with parliaments, ministries of finance, CSOs, and Tax Authorities. By using an all-of-government approach to strengthen the capacity of state and non-state actors to work on the checks and balances for economic governance the programme worked with SAIs in various correlations where perhaps the main the lesson learnt is that all the partnering institutions are connected through parliamentary development and not the ministry of finance which it particularly significant for a sustainable financial system and peace.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION FOR PREVENTION OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

The importance of youth participation was recognized by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250[14] for all the positive contribution youth can make towards sustaining peace. The Resolution indicated the need for increased youth engagement in decision-making. EU UNDP SELECT Project examined all the aspects of youth participation in sustaining peace during election (UNDP & EU, 2023) processes in the previous workstream hence this report will complement that approach and reflect on some aspects of youth participation in parliamentary processes

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[14] https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm

BOX 10: CASE STUDY PALOP and Timor Leste: Strengthening the Technical and Functional Capacities of the SAIs, National Parliaments and Civil Society for the control of Public Finances

UNDP PRO PALOP is covering Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP) and recently Timor-Leste. This is one of UNDP's multi-country multifaceted projects that combined parliamentary, independent oversight bodies – supreme audit - and electoral assistance and in the broader area of democratic governance. The key stakeholders of the project include a wide variety of governance institutions (e.g. Electoral Management Bodies -EMBs, Parliaments, Judiciary) and civil society organizations (e.g. domestic observation groups, women's groups, media) directly concerned and involved in the project. The PALOP countries and Timor Leste share an historical background, linguistic and cultural familiarities. Nevertheless, we can hardly say that the PALOP-TL constitute a geographical homogenous block.

The specificity of this programme was the focus on political financing. If we take the example whereby illegal political financing plays a major role in fragile democracies and where dangerous interest groups penetrate democracy by funding elected officials, this programme made a modest contribution. Given that such practice has been underway for the last 40 years in that Region there seemed to be no means to control the origin of funds. The main lesson learnt was that, despite amendment to the law on elections, without harmonisation with the penal code and statutory limitation it may not be adequately tackled. Also, context, approach, regional programming and starting from the parliamentary led public finance framework may be the right receipt to tackle such entrenched and sensitive practices.

and its implications on prevention of political violence.

Young people are already in parliament, from young MPs, youth parliaments and programmes

for youth participation. Despite some progress in terms of expansion of youth caucuses and committees in parliaments to a slight increase in youth quotas, there is still room for improvement when it comes to leadership positions in committees, for example (Interparliamentary Union, 2021). We may observe that the discourse on youth participation seems to have evolved and that youth needs to become an integral part of the political process.

How can youth participation in parliament contribute to sustaining peace? Despite some progress, young people continue to be severely under-represented in parliament and it is the young and future generations that will have to find their way in the decisions made today. Thus, it seems only logical for them to be part of the political process and have their say in formulating their future. Exclusion of youth from dialogue is not only discriminatory, but has notable consequences on legislation. If there is no space for the voice of youth to be heard, many aspects of the societal impact on education, employment, climate change and social media may be left unaddressed. Hence, youth participation in parliaments is about equality. Young people constitute a significant proportion of global populations where, according to IPU surveys, only 2.8% of the world's parliamentarians are aged 30 and under with a recorded increase of 0.2 percent since 2021. Effective youth participation can be a significant contributor to promoting dialogue and reconciliation in transitional countries and post-conflict societies. Peace and reconciliation seem to work faster with young people when trust in parliaments and other political institutions is often weak in societies recovering from violence and conflict. At the same time, young people, more than other segments of the population, seem more likely to distrust the very institutions and be prone to insurrection, violent protest and violence in general. By including young people, we may contribute to increasing the legitimacy of institutions and trust-building. (Interparliamentary Union, 2023)

Furthermore, young men and women take part in elections as monitors, educators, candidates and civil society representatives detecting electoral-related violence; promoting peace messages and raising their voices through digital and offline platforms. By including youth in parliamentary and electoral processes a more rapid reaction to managing violence during elections may be secured. Hence the need to include youth in peacebuilding strategies as well as election and parliamentary process.

If we reflect on the most recent youth-led Kenyan violent protests from June 2024, instigated by the parliament passing the government proposed Kenya Finance Bill 2024 we may notice how rapidly the protests spread and intensified reflecting deep-seated discontent amongst the youth toward the political establishment. This attested to the importance of allowing for all voices to be heard and creating spaces for dialogue. (GeoPoll Research, 2024)

On one hand the young people are being seen as a threat to peace and a problem to be solved. On the other hand, young people may be victims or primary perpetrators of violence. (UNDP & EU, 2023). But their distrust of government institutions presents another barrier to their more extensive participation with parliament. Moreover, in terms of youth participation in peace and security matters, IPU observes that young people find these topics too politically sensitive and seem to lack the aptitude to take an official stance (Interparliamentary Union, 2017). Nonetheless, despite many challenges and barriers to meaningful youth participation, young people have pledged to promote quotas, aligning the age for voting, supporting youth channels in parliament, empowering young parliamentarians, mentoring and advocating for youth participation (Interparliamentary Union, 2021). Moreover, youth is spearheading action against climate change and putting pressure on governments as they are likely to be directly affected by population displacement, natural disasters and decreased biodiversity (Interparliamentary Union, 2021). The 2022 Global Parliamentary Report suggests the need for government set institutional reforms towards eliminating barriers for more young parliamentarians; empowering young MPs to effect change; and allowing young MPs to lead the process for shaping the future of governance. Further on, parliament may engage young people to explore new digital platforms or hubs that would allow for more interaction between parliament and youth on issues that matter to them. (IPU & UNDP, 2023)

Another good example of youth participation comes from Uruguay[15] where a UNDP initiative marked the beginning of a process of dialogue between young people from political parties with parliamentary representation to reflect on the current challenges of democracy and promote greater political participation among young people. This important initiative demonstrated the desire of youth to be part of the conversation through an intergenerational dialogue with the generation that lived through that stage (of the dictatorship) to build a better future.

In particular, young women and men may be seen as drivers of change, capable of harnessing the transformative power of technologies to overcome inequalities in our societies. Their energy, commitment and desire to participate are a source of hope for more just and resilient societies. Connecting their ability to innovate and interest in participating in formal decision-making processes is key to addressing the challenges of development and creating new social pacts that revitalize our democracies. The publication, "Signs of Change 2024: Hope for all generations," identified points where the legacy left to future generations is in question. The United Nations' Future Summit gathering 193 governments in 2024 may provide an impetus for institutionalisation of youth participation. Youth should be given an opportunity to play a leading role in the design and construction of our future. There is a call for coherence, opening up spaces and opportunities for their social, labour and political participation, recognizing their voices and contributions to democracy, just transition and sustainable development. [16]

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

The UN Secretary General in the latest Sustainable Development Goals Report for 2024 sent a dire warning regarding the pace of achieving Agenda 2030 and called for urgent action: "Our failure to secure peace, to confront climate change and to boost international finance is undermining development. We must accelerate action for the Sustainable Development Goals — and we don't have a moment to lose."[17]

With only 17 per cent of the SDG target implementation on track and already halfway through, we are in a state of intensifying poly-crisis. Conflicts, climate change, the pandemic, and financial crisis shape our world today and seem to be stalling or even rolling back progress on SDGs. (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023)

There are **three urgent points** of action raised by the UN Secretary General: **peace, just green transition, digital transition and finance**. There is no sustainable development without peace. With conflicts from in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and beyond, protests in many countries, it is urgently necessary to move away from destruction and the displacement of people to joint action toward peace and prosperity. Green and digital transitions may provide a pathway towards just and inclusive transitions. (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024)

Electoral support for sustaining peace and achieving SDGs

Elections support is designed to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development (SDG 16) and gender equality (SDG 5) primarily, but also touches on many other goals of importance to democratic processes and the establishment of long-lasting institutions. Electoral assistance in post-conflict or conflict prone countries calls for a special approach to create an inclusive environment, based on institutionalized dialogues, responsive institutions and respect for democratic processes. The importance of upholding democratic principles and sustainable development are intertwined and particularly relevant in a so-called 'year of elections' like 2024, primarily for the scale of citizen

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https://www.undp.org/es/Juventudes_tomaron_la_palabra

16 https://elpais.com/america-futura/2024-08-12/de-los-clics-al-cambio-como-la-juventud-puede-transformar-la-democracia-y-la-sostenibilidad.html
17 https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22290.doc.htm

participation necessary to achieve inclusive elections.

In order to address more inclusive elections in the world, **UNDP and the European Union** entered into **partnership**[18] set for
ensuring greater citizen participation. This partnership is embodied by the **European Commission- UNDP Joint Task Force (JTF)** on electoral assistance. The focus is on electoral conflict prevention and rapid response to electoral violence. Joint projects were developed in countries including Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia and the Central African Republic. Furthermore, electoral assistance broadened to various actors and institutions beyond the electoral process to reflect the commitment to supporting democratic legitimacy, representation and inclusivity, government accountability, civic engagement and public participation. (UNDP Blog, 2020)

For governments to work on accountability, for public institutions to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, national planning, oversight, budget planning and a robust regulatory framework needs to be in place. There is a global call for a push towards reaching the next level of achieving the SDGs by strengthening civic space and public engagement in policymaking and decision-making (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023).

SDGs and Parliamentary Engagement
Sustainable Development Goals entail a myriad of reformatory processes and actions for governments to achieve Agenda 2030. Parliament, on the other hand, has a constitutional responsibility to be an integral part of this process. The Agenda 2030 Declaration acknowledges the "essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets, and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments." (UNDP, GOPAC & Islamic Development Bank, 2017). Parliamentarians provide the necessary connection between the people and government

that is a power that may be directed at the much-required push for acceleration of the SDGs. Achievement of the SDGs is very unlikely without parliamentarians' contribution to a legislative framework that follows the Agenda. Parliament adopts the budget, decides or purposes SDGs budgeting, and scrutinizes the government on its implementation of SDGs (UNDP, GOPAC & Islamic Development Bank, 2017). Parliamentarians even took part in designing SDGs: "[We] commit to doing our utmost to strengthen national ownership of the goals, particularly by making them known to our constituents. People must understand how the goals are relevant to their lives. As representatives of the people, we are responsible for ensuring that each and every voice is heard in the political process without discrimination and irrespective of social status." [19]

Goal 16, targets 16.6 and 16.7, is particularly relevant for parliaments. Target 16.6 calls for the development of "effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels." Target 16.7 seeks "responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels." Public participation, transparency, outreach, improving the position of women and members of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Parliament's oversight function in particular is relevant for monitoring SDGs implementation and parliamentary oversight institutions such as the Supreme Audit Institution, Equality Commissioner, Environmental Commissioner, Ombudsperson, Anti-corruption Agency and similar are key contributing factors to effective oversight efforts for the achievement of Agenda 2030.

In particular, the **Supreme Audit Institution**, with guidance of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) and UN, conducted audits of government on the SDGs. For example, UNDP' projects with SAIs and Parliaments in Armenia and Serbia led to parliamentary committees on finance producing more monitoring reports and conducting mobile committee sessions. In addition to supporting SDGs **budgets and expenditures oversight**, UNDP has, through its parliamentary support to

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[18] Electoral assistance projects constitute one of the largest areas of cooperation between the EC and UNDP, with almost 200 joint projects carried out since 2003, and more than 185 elections supported, including 20 in post-conflict areas.

[19] https://www.agora-parl.org/resources/library/hanoi-declaration-sustainable-development-goals-turning-words-action

the finance committees, supported parliamentarians to establish cross-party caucuses on SDGs. In addition to budget monitoring**, public engagement** is one of the SDG targets for parliament. Greater constituent input can create greater trust that in turn shows in the voting process as well as passing better laws. Enabling public dialogue is critical for achieving SDGs and generating an understanding on the need for nationalizing and localizing SDGs. Further on, the number of **young parliamentarians** remains low and young MPs hold limited leadership positions, with less than 9 percent serving as speaker and 17.4 percent as committee chairs. To increase the participation of younger parliamentarians, governments need to take reforms and facilitate the ecosystem needed for this to happen (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023). Although the Goal 5 indicator shows on track when it comes to **gender equality,** there are many areas that need engagement and in particular when it comes to online gender-based violence (United Nations, 2023).

All SDGs essentially are set to contribute to peace and prevention of violence and conflict where SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions - is directly calling for significant reduction of "...all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere". Such a definition paved the way for the reduction of all forms of violence, especially following the recent increase in armed conflict and the increase in political violence and displacement of people, making Agenda 2030 the most relevant global platform. (United Nations, 2015)

The 2024 SDGs Report statistics show more than 50 percent increase in conflict-related civilian deaths, largely due to the war in Ukraine; two and a half times more displaced persons than just a decade ago; the highest number of intentional homicides; structural injustices and inequalities (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024). Hence to meet Goal 16 by 2030, action is needed to restore trust and to strengthen the institutional response that needs to be both effective and fair.

Just Transition

One of the solutions for moving countries fast-track out of conflict and towards violence as well as creating a much-needed push for achieving SDGs may be the just green transition[20]. By its very definition, just transition means leaving no one behind in the transition to low-carbon and environmentally sustainable economies and societies. Just transition may set in place ambitious environmental and climate action and can provide drive for implementing twelve to fourteen out of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 13 Climate Action and SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production.

The concept of just transition was developed based on the danger of an unequal approach at the local and national levels, and it has to be observed in complementarity with climate justice having common but distinguished responsibilities in consumption and emissions patterns and productive and financial capacities. Just transition requires fulfilment of climate financing commitments in accordance with the Paris Agreement. (United Nations, 2023)

Clearly, the concept of just transitions goes beyond delivering on changing energy models. An ability of governments to understand and manage the multidimensional dynamics of the just transition seems acute. Through an inclusive dialogue, countries would need to develop respective approaches to a just transition that reflects the needs, priorities and realities of their societies for climate change and environmental degradation. Importantly, this concept requires policy space for developing countries to set their productive capacities, new intellectual property frameworks, co-development of clean technologies, the expansion of ecosystem services to scale-up cooperation and secure funds for infrastructure and resilience-building. (United Nations, 2023)

Just transition offers a potential for compromise and balancing on the path towards sustainability.

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[20] Some examples may be found in:
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877343523001070
https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/sustainable-development-

goals-and-the-impact-of-global-conflict-extreme-poverty-and-climate-related-emergencies/

It should involve not only targeted compensatory measures, but also a process of embracing equity, inclusive participation and respect for human rights. Hence, the **governance of just transition** is about the mechanisms, processes, policies and institutions utilized by government and people. Only an intertwined system of governance, connecting the global to the community, including the regional, transboundary, national and subnational can carry through this transition process.

In particular, we need to review the administrative decision guiding just transition and set inclusive policy-making that requires a platform for dialogue. Parliament with its independent bodies may help with reviewing the programme, implementation and expenditures. A prerequisite for just transition is a systematic setting to achieve climate commitments (environmental demands) as well as generating new employment and sustainable, inclusive growth (social and economic demands) that needs to be embedded in an accountable and inclusive process.

What are Practical Entry Points for Electoral and Parliamentary Support for SDGs and Just Transition?

Parliament is the key institution vested with its constitutional obligation to represent people and thus should be an integral part of the implementation of SDGs by government through the following mechanisms and points of participation:

a) **Internal and inter-parliamentary organisations**
b) **Cooperation with government**

Internally, parliament may form a dedicated **cross-party group on SDGs** that represents the vision and means and takes part in SDGs activities, debates and monitoring. **SDGs budgeting** is another important activity that such caucuses may propose. Also, some parliaments, as was the case with Sri Lanka, established **committees on SDGs**. **Interparliamentary cooperation** as a joint effort for the peer-to-peer exchange provides a drive for exchange and a push for

implementation. Parliaments can take part in contributing to the **SDGs Voluntary National Reports** (VNRs). Finally, parliaments have the **power to request the government and prime minister to put SDGs** high on their agenda. A good example of internal and interparliamentary work may be the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) which developed a **self-assessment toolkit for MPs** (IPU & UNDP, 2016) designed to enable parliamentarians to identify good practices, gaps, opportunities and lessons learned. The toolkit is not prescriptive and was designed to be used in all parliaments. The goal is to support parliaments in assessing the preparedness to engage with SDGs and identify strategies, mechanisms and partnerships needed to support an effective SDGs implementation plan.

Just transition is an impetus for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Just transition is based on principles of effective governance for sustainable development that indicates the need for inclusive policymaking, systematic review of results where the capacity of the existing institutions such as parliament and its independent bodies needs to be in place. A governance that is accountable requires support for curbing corruption in a just transition processes, developing codes of conduct, addressing conflicts of interest, transparency, and independent oversight such as audit and commissioners for information and environment, anticorruption bodies and the electoral commission. But perhaps the most important impact on people seems to be achieved through meaningful public consultation on key policies. (UNDP: Governance Nexus Series 01, 2023).

Just transition, as well as Agenda 2030, may become a relevant topic during electoral campaigns. The understanding politician or political parties may have about just transition and how they present just transition during the election campaign cannot affect voting. Capacity building and awareness raising may be areas in which UNDP could support strengthening both the demand and supply side.

Agenda 2030 is a powerful platform that cannot be implemented in any other way but in its entirety or at least based on a country's priority Goals. Approaching parliament to harness its

power to call government to account requires one approach and coordination amongst intergovernmental organisations as well as sound internal coordination and partnership with CSOs and other partners.

At a moment of great democratic backsliding, amidst conditions of polycrisis, increasingly visible inequalities and growing public dissatisfaction, it is time to make democracy work for the people, and parliament should be at the centre of the response. Extensive mapping and consultation processes conducted with experts and practitioners in the electoral and parliamentary fields suggest the need to take a broader governance approach in order to sustain peace. We are at a critical juncture when no project or programme can work in insolation any longer. Essentially, they are all part of the same democratic cycle, and we take note of the emerging opportunities for rethinking synergies for sustainable development.

The extensive experience in diverse environments that we are bringing together with this research demonstrates the **need to break down silos** and **improve coordination** across programmes as well as amongst different partners, providing support to participatory democracy. Although each region or country has its particular context, all peoples wishes are essentially the same – to live in peace and to have their voice heard, calling for **a more people-centred system approach.**

An election-related programme ecosystem, comprising parliamentary support and meaningful public engagement, information integrity, a gender sensitive approach and youth-led peace efforts amongst other things should address a multi-level (global, national, sub-national) and multi-dimensional perspective on governance. At the dawn of AI and fake news, the push for delivery and change is relentless and we have to have more public consultations to ensure authenticity and sustain electoral democracy.

"**Trust is hard-earned, easily lost, and difficult to re-establish**."[21] People's trust in

public institutions needs to be rebuilt. Fairness and inclusiveness in decision-making may hold the potential to prevent electoral violence. People's demand for accountable, inclusive and **effective democratic processes** with strong transparency and anti-corruption measures are still an ideal for many countries globally. Diverging points of view on public engagement tools and parliament's availability seem to create a rift between the public and parliaments.

Democratic development programming is based on the principle that "democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people"[22]. The most effective and durable solutions to any problem are those that are organically grown and nationally owned. Unless there is a massive disruption like a war or revolution, countries do not choose to undergo revolutionary change unless it is imposed on them from outside, through conflict or some other means. Home-grown solutions are likely to be gradually evolutionary but are probably more likely to reflect a particular nation's own interests and needs.

The following recommendations are suggested for strengthening electoral-related programming on meaningful public participation in parliamentary work:

Recommendations:

1. **Ensure cohesion between electoral assistance and parliamentary support** through strategic programming for a long-term approach and setting the groundwork for future enhancements rather than developing immediate design. Depending on the context, such convergence may be developed via electoral assistance or parliamentary support projects but also in the form of joint programming with other initiatives such as gender equality, information integrity and youth or simply

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[21] Written by Carol Folt, President of the University of Southern California

[22] Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States of America.

mainstreaming. Programming should cover the entire democratic process from pre-elections, elections, to post-elections. Violence prevention and meaningful public participation should be the connecting thread for such interventions. A basis should be sought in flagship project countries where trust has been established. Such a project may be helpful in peer-to-peer exchange for developing trust with new countries/Regions where new projects are to be initiated. These initiatives could constitute the main vehicles leading to a more integrated approach. Good examples are UNDP Electoral Projects in Somalia, Lebanon, Malaysia and Uruguay, mentioned above.

2. **Context is important**. No one frame will fit all country contexts. We need to recognize realities and appreciate cultural contexts. Hence, the UN Somalia phased approach when it to comes to engaging CSOs, quotas, country examples for constitutional reform for example. Unimposing intervention design and implementation along with joint UN advocacy resulted in Somali political leaders finally agreeing to debating inclusivity for women for example.

3. Consider developing initiatives with **global**, **regional and local components,** peer-to-peer exchange between parliamentarians from different countries as well as former parliamentarians and knowledge transfer to connect with other similar initiatives but also possibly including countries that may not be part of the intervention directly. National projects with a regional

component may, for example, allow for more exchange amongst cross-party caucuses such as women parliamentary networks and SDG caucuses. The encouragement of Women's parliamentary networks has shown potential, working with peers in country level and regional contexts exchanging experience and learning from particular countries' good practice but also within single countries where the national parliament women's' parliamentary network transferred knowledge to their peers in local assemblies. Anti-corruption caucuses, due their sensitivity, seem to be most effective in a regional or global setting or when there is support from peers from other countries or regions. Such work does require support as there are no country level organisational possibilities to foster this type of exchange. Regional approaches should consider initial agreement and the willingness of all sides to participate.

4. Consider **mainstreaming agile programming**, just transition/SDGs, gender equality, political/electoral violence prevention as well as the new parliamentary indicators. Certainly not all aspects or all indicators may be relevant for every context. For example, in Armenia amidst the pandemic and after conflict, adaptive programming was introduced and helped save the intervention; in UNDP Pacific and Lao PDR projects already have an adaptive management approach. Also, looking from the perspective of adapting to Somalia's reality for example, quarterly review of objectives and indicators

followed societal dynamics and allowed for results to unfold.

5. Even without dedicated parliamentary support or electoral assistance initiatives in a country, **parliamentary support needs to be managed continuously** by a Country Office or Regional or Global Units to maintain potential entry points through provision of support for the following initiatives: Orientation sessions for new MPs, public hearings, mobile sessions, public participation platforms, cross-party caucuses and similar. Themes may range from climate change, SDG, just transition to gender equality and similar.

6. Technical interventions alone may produce short term fixes, yet not the culture and systems change that's required for building a peaceful and inclusive society. **Systematic programming** that prioritizes **relationship-buildi**ng over transactional approaches is essential for sustainable outcomes.

7. It's crucial to ground interventions in a thorough **political economy analysis**. This ties into the point you made about context sensitivity.

8. As shown throughout this analysis, integrated approaches that span both parliamentary development and public participation are critical. When the democratic supply and demand are out of balance, programming risks becoming overly technical, unsustainable, and low impact.

9. **The Parliamentary Secretariat is a powerful ally** in working on parliamentary reform, electoral reform, digitalization, education and with parliamentarians but also in designing participation tools and avenues. Strong capacitated Secretariats are key for engagement of citizens comprising civil servants relevant for continuity and sustainability or any process or intervention. Parliamentary Staff secure non-partisanship. Public engagement that relies solely on MPs may lead to shrinking space for dialogue. That is why it is very important that secretariats are engaged and active in creating platforms for citizen to engage and this affects legislative processes.

10. Consider connecting with the **European Parliament** to explore possibilities of becoming a part of the Initiatives on Electoral Monitoring for education and training on election processes for parliamentarians (from code of conduct for parliaments, political parties, disinformation, hate speech, monitoring elections in other countries, parliamentary diplomacy and similar).. In particular, several elements of electoral monitoring may be relevant for programming: peer learning, electoral dialogues, 'comprehensive democracy support', mediation and the Young Political Leaders Programme. The European Parliament Members during monitoring missions share their political experience and perspective with their peers and other election actors strengthening technical assessment of elections. The European Parliament sends 10-12 short-term election

observation delegations to countries outside the EU every year as part of their work on support to the entire electoral cycle, beginning with the pre-election period and continuing after the vote. **Parliamentary electoral dialogues** are another niche that can bring together key parliamentary and political leaders in a country as well as electoral commissions, security forces and young leaders. Focus of such dialogue sessions are primarily electoral violence prevention (hate speech, codes of conduct for political parties etc.). Additional support may take the form of **mediation**, facilitation of dialogue support globally to conflict resolution and peacebuilding such as the **Jean Monnet Dialogues for Peace and Democracy** (mediated in Ukraine, Serbia and North Macedonia) and the **Young Political Leaders Programme** focused on the Western Balkans, and engaged with Israel, Palestine, Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 2024, it expanded to Ukraine and beyond.

11. **Partnership and Coordination**. Given the extensive UNDP experience, multi-country projects have proved quite hard to coordinate, and a more systematic approach based on peer-to-peer exchange between countries may be more effective and enabling for knowledge transfer.

An important partnership for Electoral and Parliamentary support is with the **Interparliamentary Union** on Global Parliamentary Reports, Youth Peace and Security, Parliamentary indicators, SDGs Toolkit for MPs, Women in Parliament analysis etc. UN Agencies working together on support for public participation, with electoral and parliamentary support initiatives, such as UNESCO on digitalization, AI, education; UNICEF on children's rights and caucuses; UNEP on SDGs, just transition; and UNWOMEN on gender equality are particularly valuable, expected and appreciated by national partners. There is a window of opportunity for coordination between UN Agencies and IPU, OSCE, on the Agora portal, IDEA International (as was the case with the electoral body in Paraguay), IFES and similar and should be explored in the field of electoral violence prevention.

The European Union and European Parliament are particularly interesting for their [Election Observation and Democracy Support](#) where by participating in election observation missions, Members of the European Parliament bring their political expertise, experience and professional perspective to the task, thereby enhancing the technical assessment of elections.. The European Parliament monitoring of elections globally sets forward entry points for training of MPs, where availing project support for the MEP mission for electoral monitoring may be mutually beneficial.

In terms of **country level partners**, in addition to Electoral Commissions and Parliaments, new partners should be sought from amongst independent oversight bodies, statistical offices, regulatory impact assessment bodies, public policies departments, legislation institutes that may have direct impact on SDGs, legislation and shaping policies.

Regional actors such as the African Union, the African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs; the Pan-African Parliament, the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino) - a regional, permanent organization composed of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean; the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - a political and economic union of 10 states in Southeast

Asia; the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA); and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie - the parliamentary dimension of the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) are but a few examples of the cooperation and wide framework approach. For example, [Forum of Parliamentarians for the Development Assessment in Latin America](#) is a space for voluntary and plural participation of Latin American parliamentarians to promote development of evaluation policies and practices that improve accountability, transparency and institutional learning in the region including on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Regional Projects/Programmes that are within a geographical range call for preliminary understanding of the context and buy in. Hence, regional programmes should carry an intervention logic based on variables that make the intervention work - similar legal frameworks, tradition, bilateral traditional cooperation etc.

National governments. French National Assembly (*Division de la coopération et des questions bilatérales*) has a growing role in the parliamentary development process and had been providing trainings for UNDP practitioners for years. The Brazilian Government provides support for the UNDP/EU Pro PALOP-TL ISC Phase II and partners with institutions like INTOSAI, Electoral Commissions etc. The South-South cooperation's in Brazil could learn from their institutional level scale up of climate scanning, coordinated audits in protected areas as an environmental tool. Importantly, the impact is driven from the leverage UNDP interventions built with supreme audit institutions for example.

Non-governmental sector, civil society and think tanks: Transparency International, *Directorio Legislativo*, NDI, WFD, Apolitical, the Netherlands Institute for Multi-party Democracy, various fact-

checkers, and similar may have a strong role in monitoring political parties and social media.

Internal Coordination and Synergies: The matter of internal coordination may benefit from rethinking the programming approach, avoiding overlap and better coordination within UNDP teams as well as between UN Agencies. Institutions tend to observe the UN as one organization and that calls for more efficient approaches. SDGs and gender equality efforts in particular need to be concerted. A broader governance programme approach may be necessary. Programming for democratic process covering electoral and parliamentary aspects proved in the UNDP Zambia intervention's case to be a decisive element for inclusiveness, otherwise there would not be a possibility to address the fact that elections produced a low number of women.

So far, the UNDP development mandate provided a **unique niche** and specific advantage whereby every country willingly engaged with UNDP. Today a **new conversation may be needed,** according to the practitioners, to determine on what principles and with what values is UNDP engaging with different actors.

12. Consider adding a **parliamentary diplomacy** component to programming. Parliamentary diplomacy may contribute to conflict resolution and prevention of violence, highlighting peer-to-peer exchange effectiveness. Such activity may be facilitated in-house within UN but also with IPU and the European Parliament that have this component developed.

Entry Points:

Entry points for overall governance work derive from the demand for **digitalisation** by both electoral bodies and parliaments. **Youth, public engagement and just transition** create opportunities for building a push for SDGs based on already established good practice such as **cross-party caucuses** and **SDGs budgeting** (examples from UNDP Armenia and Serbia) and SDGs Committees (example from UNDP Sri Lanka).

A particular strategic entry point for **curbing political violence** and tension may be astute regulation of **political parties' online campaigns**, as well as developing **codes for protection of women in politics** and pacts or MOUs on **ethical standards against disinformation**.

Given the plethora of entry points deriving from the elections assistance field, such as training on election process, conflict prevention, consultations, transparency, digitalisation, legislative review and assistance in the field, this research identified potential new entry points such as work with **parliamentary secretariats** on **parliamentary educations** and **parliamentary independent bodies** such as Commissioner for Information, Commissioner for Equality, Supreme Audit, Ombudsperson, Anti-corruption Agency, Future Generations Commissioner and similar.

Perhaps the most impactful entry point for UNDP programming in elections and parliamentary support is its **non-partisan role** and **adaptability to the country and institutional context** towards effective programmes and sustaining peace. In particular, **local level context** whether taking parliamentary committees to mobile sessions (as was the case in Georgia, Armenia and Serbia) or working with local/provincial assemblies (UNDP PDR Lao), helps local leaders feel less marginalized and provides a unique opportunity for dialogue. There should always be a strong understanding that for development programming local level events mean more participation sometimes for the sheer fact that many people cannot afford to go to the capital, and that is often neglected. Such platforms provide potent entry points for ordinary people to take part in sustaining peace (UNDP, 2007).

Public participation in Latin America and Caribbean countries is a distinct example of the best practice that may be used as an entry point for work with global platforms such as Open Governance Partnership (OGP) and civil society organisations such as *Directorio Legislativo*. The Congress of Chile has developed public participation mechanisms and open plenaries for public with the OGP. In Mexico we take note of online platforms for live streaming of parliament sessions and developing parliamentary initiatives to establish a dialogue with experts and CSOs. Mexico is also interesting for the **local parliament dynamics** with civic spaces opportunities, whilst Brazilian Parliament for its achievements in **digitalisation for public participation** and **public finance monitoring**.

Programming for Democratic Processes and Peace Sustainability:

- **Breaking barriers to meaningful public participation:** For a public participation to have an impact on people, change perceptions and reinstate trust in institutions and electoral democracy, it should not only develop tools and avenues but also ensure that the feedback loop is closed. Political and technical support through electoral assistance and parliamentary support may help empower MPs and Parliamentary Staff to organize effective participative activities. With empowered institutions representatives, people are more likely to contribute to change in an inclusive public sphere. Empowered people can contribute to better shaped policies, demand accountability and contribute to sustaining peace. Public participation supports democratic processes from pre-election, election to post election phases meaning parliamentary work. Today, when the trust in election process, political parties and parliament is at its lowest,

accountability, transparency and inclusion are a required minimum to mobilize the population in driving an effective action for peace and sustainable development.

- **Closing the Feedback Loop:** is paramount for building trust. Regardless of how well developed and functional participation digital tools, people will only engage if there is some kind of feedback such as parliament taking note of their input and accumulating it into a case for questioning government or building it in or modifying a law. For example, the Brazilian Parliament is perhaps one of the most digitally developed parliaments from an accessibility to scrutinization tools point of view. Hence, by processing large amounts of citizens' inputs[23], the parliamentary administration has learnt that the initially heightened public interest to take part in online tools such and [e-democracy](#) and [SIGA Brazil](#) diminished due to the lack of a feedback loop. There is a particular complexity with the feedback loop and how that can be communicated with people but at the same time not all public inputs may be relevant or can be adopted. However, means and avenues for people to participate (in consultations, providing input, decision-making etc.) need to be enabled. People need to feel that they are heard, and feedback needs to be timely. Also, public perception polls may be particularly beneficial for understanding the pace and substance of

change towards effective political participation.

- **Fostering women's political participation**: When understanding but also seeking to address seemingly reverse gains in gender equality we need to look at the political parties. Although there are diverse problems, such as gender-based violence, according to IPU research, it is women that seem to be most affected by political violence throughout the electoral cycle. There are two questions that immediately arise - how to prevent it and why has it intensified? Political parties seem to be one of the immediate solutions so in order to harness the power of political parties for prevention, we need to look at what are they doing to protect their women members. Are there any Codes of Ethics, prescribed guidelines, measures, activities, trainings – both in and out of parliament? However, rapid digital development, social media and unregulated hate speech seem to have brought about a proliferation of online gender-based violence. We see that public participation in decision-making, legislative inputs and raising digital literacy would need to be strengthened. Measures, monitoring, analysis, accountability and the legislative framework need to be in place.

Women Parliamentary Networks may be the first point of reference in parliaments but also cross-party caucuses on SDGs for example. As any other work with women parliamentarians needs to be observed though the all-party approach.

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[23] https://www.ipu.org/event/processing-high-volumes-inputs-citizen-engagement-in-parliamentary-business-case-study-brazil

Women parliamentarians have proved to be the most engaged and often drivers of change in all contexts including post-conflict. Support in terms of seeking approaches to curb violence against women in politics is the predominant request we are hearing from parliamentarians.

Despite several good examples of political parties and parliaments increasing quotas for women, women parliamentary networks seeing through legislative packages to prevent domestic violence and similar, we observe the most recent concerning tendency whereby women seem to be quitting politics. Hence, the IPU during its 147th Assembly organized a panel on the topic: "Women in politics: To stay or not to stay?" that reaffirmed the different types of pressure, intimidation and harassment women had to undergo in order to stay in politics and calling for a peer-to-peer support for building resilience among politicians, solidarity, ensuring better representation of women and adopting codes of conduct. (Interparliamentary Union, 2024)

Internal parliamentary policies and procedures prohibiting gender-based violence, as well as competent and independent grievance mechanisms are only a minimum. It is essential to actively involve men to increase their awareness of the scale of the problem[24]. Certainly, we are already seeing the effects of gender-based violence not being addressed sufficiently and in a timely manner. Due to the lack of an adequate response fewer and fewer women are running for election let alone a political position. The decline of women parliamentarians runs the risk of building into a continued setback. So far experience and results come from flagship parliamentary projects as MPs are more inclined to work with and trust those that work with and within

parliaments and that makes all the difference in what may be achieved.

- **Engaging with Political Parties to regulate online campaigns and violence:** Although there is a specific risk to working with political parties, they are an essential part of political communication. The Uruguay Parliament case demonstrated how careful consideration and strategic action by UNDP may lead to highly polarized political parties' relations being brought together to adopt an ethical pact on disinformation in elections. Although making such pact is an important milestone it requires additional elements for the monitoring of impact and indicators. Namely, a three-pronged approach in combining a) self-regulation, b) regulating online campaigning and gender-based violence with c) an independent monitoring, possibly performed by civil society, may be the most effective.

Digital political campaigning is very poorly regulated and presents an area that can influence elections and lead to unrests and protest. A way to regulate the new and rapidly growing field of online campaigning may be with parliamentary parties and particularly useful here could be Anticorruption Agencies and Information Commissioners. Furthermore, these parliamentary oversight bodies may be further strengthened towards enhanced monitoring of political party financing amongst other. Trainings on the rights and obligations for the political parties may be useful. Work with political parties may not be possible in all country contexts and should be developed

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[24] https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2022-11/violence-against-women-parliamentarians-causes-effects-solutions-0

cautiously as working with political parties may raise concerns over the non-partisan position of UN. Hence, civil society organizations, institutes and academia may be most effective for research and monitoring of political parties and media as was the case with the UNDP Georgia. The UNDP Liberia example demonstrates an effective partnership with the Netherlands Institute for Multi-party Democracy while in Ecuador with UNDP worked with the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

Facilitated political debates during election campaigns may help develop methodologies on SDGs and gender equality. However, an all-party approach and engagement should be a precondition for any engagement with political parties.

- **Harnessing the potential of parliamentary independent oversight bodies for accountability and transparency:** When financing for electoral campaigns and political parties is not regulated sufficiently, it may lead to undue influence and favouring one group over another. Strengthening the transparency of political parties and electoral campaigns is paramount for enhancing public integrity. Regulatory implementation and enhancement may be most effectively performed with support to independent oversight bodies reporting to parliament such as Supreme Audit and Commissioner for Information. (OECD, 2023)

The Commissioner for Information may be instrumental in supporting governments to develop data governance strategies embedding continuous evaluation of the quality of training AI data systems including the adequacy of the data collection and selection processes, data security and protection measures, as well as feedback

mechanisms share best practices among all AI actors (UK Information Commissioner, 2018). Developing and facilitating international cooperation platforms for dialogue on AI for development, including by contributing expertise, data, knowledge and facilitating multi-stakeholder collaboration to tackle challenging development problems seems indispensable. Moreover, research and innovation on AI may promote wider participation and set the basis for ethical use of AI. Anticorruption Agencies are another independent body vested with controlling financial transparency and asset declaration for political parties. In general, similar regulatory bodies should be able to take enforcement action against digital platforms on grounds of freedom of expression and access to information (UNESCO, 2023). The Ombudsperson and Commissioner for Equality may have special role in curbing gender-based violence. Also, E-Safety Commissioner's Office (Australia's independent regulator for online safety) is another good example of independent body that helps educate people about online safety risks and how to remove harmful content such as cyberbullying of children, adult cyber abuse and intimate images or videos shared without consent. The e-safety commissioner developed an entire curriculum on this topic for women in public institutions and administrations and is making it internationally available,

- **Governance of Digitalization for Electoral Integrity**: Digital platforms governance needs to be based in respecting the right to freedom of expression, access to information and respective standards making it open and safe for everyone. Arrangements to enable rights-based and inclusive digital transformations where parliaments present an important platform may secure the right participation. With growing danger of disinformation, hate

speech and cyberspace risks to electoral integrity and public discontent, there is an evident need to facilitate participatory consultations for developing regulatory frameworks on personal data processing and digital platforms accountability. Measures considering the transnational environment, interoperability and compatibility seem key in order to reach the full effect. (United Nations, 2023)

Monitoring AI data processing requires an agile governance approach to alleviate siloed public policy and legislation processes otherwise there may be a dangerous governance gap affecting the sustenance of people and directly impacting peace and security (United Nations, 2023). According to UNESCO, misinformation and disinformation are having a profound impact on democracy, weakening trust and inhibiting participation. In addition to marginalized and vulnerable groups, women candidates, voters, electoral officials, journalists and civil society representatives are distinctively targeted. Trust needs to be restored for electoral integrity. People feel trust when their voice is heard, when accountability, transparency and institutional protection are installed and effective.

Digital platforms are in fact one of the modalities giving people hope and amplified voices (United Nations, 2023) at times of crisis. In order to curb the darker side of this digital ecosystem, frameworks for impact assessments, ethical aspects, benefits, concerns and risks of AI need to be considered. Certainly, values based on which we shape such policies are an underlying factor for inclusive, peaceful, organic and interconnected relations in this process (UNESCO, 2023). The integrity of an electoral cycle is in direct correlation with digital platforms. Hence, the need for independent fact-checking, public alerts, and other measures (UNESCO, 2023).

Electoral Commissions and Commissioner for Information cooperation would need to be established throughout the electoral cycle.

- **Strengthening the Institutional Inclusiveness and Accountability for an Effective and Fair Just Transition within the Agenda 2030:** Electoral support is in direct correlation with just transition process through social dialogue. It is about employment security, re-skilling, pension funds and re-deployment measures. All those affected by the just transition need to be heard in support of transition towards a low-carbon economy. The scale of this transition is unprecedented, and it requires all parts of the society to be involved. Political parties need to be educated and equipped with guidelines on how to promote just transition, decent work and quality jobs. Political parties in their programmes need to demonstrate their commitment to just transition through policies mitigation, adaptation and implementation. Promoting just transition needs to clearly complement the SDGs work in an inclusive process of embracing equity, meaningful participation, and respect for human rights. The present understanding that politicians or political parties may have on just transition and how they present it during election campaigns could affect the voting. Thus, the unique positioning for the electoral support to work with political leadership on a nonpartisan commitment to technologically sound and ecologically just climate action to

accommodate voters' demands to bridge party gaps[25].

Furthermore, SDGs as a wider framework, provide a myriad of avenues for strengthening parliament's responsiveness and inclusiveness allowing people to be part of law-making, scrutiny and budget analysis. Through a dedicated committee, cross-party caucus, in cooperation with State Audit Institution, Environmental Commissioner and similar, MPs may provide inputs into SDGs Voluntary National Reports (VNRs). Civil society may also be an important contributor for their monitoring and input into the process and presence in the field. Finally, just transition offers a potential for compromise and balancing on the path towards sustainability. Governance of just transition requires developing mechanisms, processes, policies and accountable and responsive institutions that allow for effective social and public consultations.

- **Strengthening Dialogue Spaces for Political Violence Prevention**: Democratic process should be based on lasting dialogue between the electorate and its representatives. Civil society should be enabled to fully play its role. Citizens need to be consulted in an open and inclusive manner. Elections are about changes and noting social divergence that may lead to sensitivities and finally conflicts. Electoral processes may either contribute to creating legitimate governments or be the catalysts of conflict. Electoral violence is a form of political violence, designed to influence an electoral outcome, and thus the distribution of political power. In order to effectively work on prevention of

electoral violence, it is important to start with education and awareness raising as well as opening spaces for creating an effective and quality public participation.

Building public knowledge about electoral democracy through **parliamentary education centres** and services may strengthen trust in electoral democracy. Parliamentary education is a non-formal education, performed in a flexible interactive manner with positive feedback. Parliamentary Education Centres, in terms of prevention of electoral violence, may also sensitize parliamentarians on what is violence as they often consider it to be only a physical matter, regulated by either misdemeanour law or the penal code and fail to see their role in it. They need to be aware of their own role – what they say, do and their leading position in society as they may instigate violence in their speeches, relationships and working with their electorate. Further on, MPs may be instructed on how to monitor elections. **Peer-to-peer trainings** for MPs, Staff, independent bodies on early warning, prevention of violence, with some technical people allowing for context, may, based on UNDP practice to date, be the quite effective. Education for youth at an early stage may also be called for, given that youth too may be a catalyst of violence. For example, the UNDP Pakistan Office launched a youth conversation on their take on how to handle hate speech online.

In the post-electoral period, parliament plays a critical role in review of election related legislation to further improve the environment in which elections are held including countering political violence. **Creating spaces where dialogue can be conducted** may be the most effective when institutionalized. It is important to explore how parliament could develop institutional

[25] https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/how-the-european-parliament-elections-could-affect-eu-climate-policies/

communication in a more strategic way to approach the population. How people may better comprehend the decisions that are taken, what is the role of parliament, what are the new changes in legislation? - are some of the questions that need to be addressed. **Oversight** is another opportunity where input obtained through dialogue space could be used to hold the executive accountable for different actions that may or may not create conditions for electoral violence. **Youth leadership** in parliaments and political parties puts emphasis on an empowerment approach to inclusion in public decision making (both formal and informal), including interventions that promote gender equal political participation and women's political empowerment. Further initiatives may go along with support to youth-led organizations, and their opportunities to engage in dialogue and to influence public decision making. Sri Lanka is an excellent example of involving youth in the parliamentary sectoral committees work after days of violent outbreaks in the country following elections. A systematic approach to such engagement is required primarily for prevention of electoral violence and it deserves a thorough analysis and a space to discuss in which manner it may be defined and institutionalized.

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