Building Democratic Capacity: An Analysis of the Effectiveness of UN Electoral Assistance in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore the effects of United Nations (UN) efforts to establish and support free and fair elections through technical assistance in African states. It provides a brief history of the development of electoral assistance and then discusses five key principles for successful elections: accuracy, equality, accountability, credibility, and peacefulness, as well as how UN interventions target those five principles. Ultimately, the goal of technical assistance is to facilitate the establishment of successful elections that continue even after support has concluded with the key principles remaining strong. This article utilizes two case studies: Sierra Leone, where electoral assistance has been a relative success, and Somalia, where similar efforts have led to opposite results. Through an in-depth examination of the background, specific interventions, and data surrounding elections in those two respective countries, this study determines what aspects of the UN's work in African states are more effective. It concludes that national ownership in the entire process, as well as the development of a strong electoral framework as a foundation are vital to ensuring democratic elections continue for the long-term.

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Introduction

> The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights established by the United Nations sets forth the fundamental right of all people to participate in their government and express their wishes through elections. A government based on the desires of the public is more responsive and effective in providing for its citizens, and elections are a vital component in ensuring that governments are held accountable to their people.

However, without a prior foundation for democratic elections, the concept and framework are daunting to establish, especially in developing nations that are simultaneously struggling with numerous other challenges. The international community plays an integral role in supporting democracy around the world, particularly when it comes to elections, and the United Nations (UN) has been and continues to be a key player in promoting democratic elections, whether it be in broad strokes such as integrating the right into international law or in specific efforts such as training poll workers in African nations. The following section will explore the development of the UN's electoral work, as well as the most important principles governing universally free and fair elections.

History and Development of Electoral Assistance

The concept of electoral assistance encompasses a wide variety of actions intended to support the development of free and fair elections with the ultimate goal of enabling national governments to sustainably conduct democratic elections for the long-term. Early ideas on internationally provided electoral support were pioneered in the late

1980s by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like Amnesty International and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) (Norris, 2017). Following the slowly emerging trends of electoral assistance, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly passed a resolution in 1991 that explicitly stated the organization's goals in relation to promoting and facilitating free and fair elections (Chand, 1997). In conjunction with the resolution, the UN created the Electoral Assistance Division to serve as a focal point in coordinating the assistance provided by numerous UN divisions and programs, such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women, to name a few (Ludwig, 1995).

The first formal involvement of the UN in a sovereign nation's elections was the 1990 elections in Nicaragua, and this initial foray occurred even before the UN had officially acknowledged that electoral assistance fell under the scope of its charter (Ludwig, 1995). At this time, the international community was struggling, and continues to struggle today, with the often-competing values of respecting sovereignty and promoting democracy. As part of rectifying the contradiction, Dr. Vikram Chand argues that electoral assistance strengthens the social contract between the people and their government as trust and legitimacy are built through more free and fair elections. As a result of higher domestic legitimacy, international recognition of a country's sovereignty is also strengthened (Chand, 1997). However, regardless of the links between empowerment of the people through elections and increased respect for sovereignty, electoral assistance can still be an object of national suspicion, both from the perspective of the public and the leaders in power.

Despite the continued debate in relation to sovereignty, electoral assistance only increased in scope and usage throughout the 1990s and beyond. Prior to 1992, there had been five total requests for UN electoral support from member states. However, by the beginning of 1995, the UN had received 65 appeals for assistance, and demand for such services has only continued to grow (Ludwig, 1995). Along with the rise in frequency, electoral assistance has also shifted over time

to encompass a broader array of activities and address the entire electoral cycle rather than just support on election day (Schroeder, 2011). As defined by Pippa Norris, the electoral cycle begins with institutionalized laws and procedures governing elections. Once the standards have been implemented, voting districts are established, and voters are registered. Campaigning and all the accompanying steps, including candidate and party registration, media involvement, and campaign finance regulations follow. Lastly, the actual voting process as well as the publication and acceptance of the results are the final aspects of the electoral cycle (Norris, 2017).

Because electoral assistance refers to such diverse categories of intervention, it is important to define what exactly the term encompasses. For the purposes of this study, technical assistance will be the main aspect addressed. Based on the UN definition, technical electoral assistance emphasizes working with local and national actors to build their capacity for conducting democratic elections. This form of electoral assistance can be authorized by the Secretary-General without General Assembly or Security Council involvement, and it is primarily carried out by the UNDP (Schroeder, 2011). Election monitoring and certification are not included in technical assistance, which limits the possibility for politicization and threats to the UN's legitimacy, and thus makes it the most commonly requested type of assistance (Schroeder, 2011; Borzyskowski, 2015). When the UN is involved in verifying the outcome of an election, it often is supporting one of two outcomes: democratization or validation of autocratic regimes (Luhrmann, 2019). Technical assistance avoids the possibility of illiberal regime legitimization by purely providing support rather than publicly making a final determination on the integrity of the outcomes. The next section will discuss the specific interventions encompassed by technical assistance.

Technical Assistance and Assessing Electoral Success
Based on the synthesizing of previous studies on the concept, there appear to be five core principles of successful democratic elections.

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The activities encompassed by technical assistance each address one or more of these principles, and such a framework provides a systematic method for assessing the effectiveness of UN electoral intervention. The five principles are accuracy, equality, accountability, credibility, and peacefulness, and each will be discussed in further depth, including the specific support actions taken by the UN to further each value. The first core principle of democratic elections is accuracy. This concept refers to the idea that the results of the election represent the true will of the people. An important component of accuracy is the absence of fraud, regardless of whether the source is the citizens, outside actors, or the government itself. Fraud is most likely to occur and significantly impact the results when the election is closely competitive, or the election commission is weak and ineffective (Yukawa, 2018). In order to deter election fraud, UN technical assistance targets specific points in the electoral system. One of the integral points of intervention is poll worker and election official training. The UN provides education on process management and compliance with institutional regulations in order to standardize voting procedures and limit the margin of error with respect to potential fraud (Luhrmann, 2019). Such education applies to national election management bodies, as well as individual citizens working as poll workers during the election. In conjunction with training, the UN also works to improve vote counting and tabulation to advance the accuracy of results (Ludwig, 1995; Chand, 1997). For example, if assisting with the procurement of new voting and ballot counting technology, the UN will train poll workers on how to use that technology and minimize complications and potential problems when citizens are voting (Schroeder, 2011).

The second core principle of free and fair elections is equality. Equality in the context of democratic elections refers to two primary concepts: all adults are able to safely and freely participate in elections, and all candidates and parties are on institutionally equal footing. The right to vote in elections goes beyond just the enumerated language from the legislature and also encompasses an absence of voter

intimidation and discrimination, whether it be de jure or de facto. To accomplish this goal, the UN supplies significant support in the area of voter registration. In this particular facet of elections, a value debate between convenience and security impacts what the UN and individual countries prioritize (Norris, 2017). Security in the context of voter registration refers to ensuring that identities are verified to prevent fraud and unwanted interference, while convenience describes the ease of voting and eliminating unnecessary barriers for citizens in exercising their right to vote. Practically, that assistance may range from providing help in registering legally capable voters to overhauling and creating voter registration databases (Luhrmann, 2019). Along with ensuring that voting is accessible, the UN places special emphasis on the involvement of women and minorities, including in voting, in office, and in election administration (Norris, 2017). Beyond voter registration, the principle of equality also applies to campaign finance. The UN works with national governments to develop regulations that will even the financial playing field between established incumbents and opposition candidates. In practice, such regulations could look like contribution limits and spending caps, as well as public subsidies (Norris, 2017). The management of campaign finance not only directly improves the fairness of elections, but it also ameliorates public perception of electoral integrity (Norris, 2017). When citizens are aware that there are safeguards in place to limit candidates' ability to fund their campaigns through corrupt methods, public confidence increases, ideally leading to an increase in voter turnout.

  The third vital principle in free and fair elections is accountability, primarily for current and prospective leaders of the country. This concept is heavily focused on the strength of the rule of law in society and the willingness of the public and the government to hold their leaders responsible for their actions and require them to submit to the law. In regard to elections, all the procedures and regulations should be correctly followed, and the government should ultimately accept and carry out the results of the election, whether or

not the outcome mandates a transfer of power. The level of fraud committed by a government is dependent on how a government believes it can reasonably act without widespread resistance from its citizens, its institutions, and the international community (Yukawa, 2018). The UN employs several methods to create safeguards against the abuse of power and to strengthen the rule of law. A significant component of technical assistance is helping countries develop effective and efficient electoral laws and standards (Norris, 2017). Without an established, functioning framework, governments cannot be expected to follow democratic norms when it comes to elections. Beyond laws, the UN often facilitates the creation of an independent electoral body within a country to administer and execute the electoral process in accordance with the law (Schroeder, 2011). Although the creation and improvement of institutional aspects is important, the need to train local actors on how to hold those institutions accountable is just as vital. The UN provides training for a wide array of stakeholders, but when it comes to accountability, the judiciary and the media hold high priority. An independent, legitimate judiciary is an integral component within the rule of law, so the UN gives seminars to judiciary members in various countries to educate them about the potentially new electoral laws and what can and cannot be done by their government (Schroeder, 2011; Luhrmann, 2019). In addition to judicial training, the strengthening of an independent media is another important aspect of technical assistance when it comes to increasing accountability. The UN approaches that goal from several different angles, including the reform of freedom of expression laws, capacity building and training of journalists, and encouraging the use of social media. The UN emphasizes local ownership in this area of assistance in particular, and the organization actively supports domestic civil society organizations and NGOs that advocate for freedom and integrity in the press (Chand, 1997; Norris, 2017).

The fourth principle of successful democratic elections is credibility, specifically referring to public trust in and acceptance of the eventual outcome. The government, its institutions, and the elections

themselves have to be respected by the people in order for any actions to be effective, especially transfers of power. Credibility has to be considered and supported at all points in the electoral cycle, and it begins before elections are even on the horizon with civic education for voters (Luhrmann, 2019; Schroeder, 2011). Civic education in this case encompasses building knowledge about the reasoning behind voting as well as what the process itself looks like and raising awareness of the candidates, party platforms, and ideals at stake in the election. Furthermore, many of the countries receiving electoral assistance do not have a previously established foundation of democratic values, so civic education provided by the UN includes building understanding of how a democracy works and why the system is beneficial for the people. One of the common misconceptions, as a result of repetitive history, is the idea that once an individual wins an election, they will hold office for the foreseeable future (Borzyskowski, 2015; Chand, 1997). Therefore, part of the education process is deconstructing the prejudice towards elections developed by decades of big man rule. With the public's increased willingness to accept the outcome of elections and the belief that they represent an opportunity for regular change, credibility increases. On the policy side of the issue, the UN also assists in developing processes for political parties and individual candidates to be officially certified in each election (Luhrmann, 2019). The certification process ensures that each candidate is following the legal standards in order to participate and is fully aware of the electoral system and potential outcomes. The regulation of this aspect of campaigning provides a sense of establishment and legitimacy and allows the government, and especially a potential independent electoral commission, to have a level of control over the election. Without the requirement to officially qualify, candidates may lack legitimacy with the public, and the elections themselves could lose their credibility. At the end of the electoral cycle, credibility is directly impacted by the degree of transparency within the government. As part of its technical assistance missions, the UN supports countries in building their capacity to publicize election results and ensure they are immediately

available to the public (Luhrmann, 2019). This component includes making sure that the media is aware of the results, as well as following the norms of immediately posting election results at each individual polling place for citizens to be informed. When governments delay making those results publicly available, the perception of potential corruption increases, accompanied by a decrease in credibility.

The fifth and final principle of free and fair elections is peacefulness, referring to an absence of violence throughout the entire election cycle, from campaigning to inauguration. Violence can be sparked at any point in the process, and the ability of a country to control and limit the outbreaks of politically motivated violence is an important indicator of the success and public respect of elections. Even if members of the public are unhappy with the outcome, a peaceful reaction and a peaceful transfer of power indicates overall acceptance of democratic norms and trust that the other principles were present in the election. The UN intervenes in several aspects to prevent and address the potential for conflict and dissent. On the surface level, the UN is often involved in election security efforts on election day as part of technical assistance programs (Luhrmann, 2019; Schroeder, 2011). Such intervention may take the form of UN peacekeepers who are present at each polling place to deter violence and voter intimidation or UN officials who work to improve the capacity of existing endeavors, for example by training police officers to provide security on election day. Beyond security itself, much work is done prior to election day to reduce tensions in order to mediate the potential for violence later on. Significant disagreements between political parties and candidates cause friction between segments of the population, which can lead to violence during campaigning and post-election if people believe their way of life is being directly threatened. To lessen the tension of such disagreements, an important aspect of technical assistance is dispute resolution facilitated by the UN. Practically, UN officials serve as a neutral means of communication between two parties, sharing information between each side and resolving potential misunderstandings. The UN also can take a more

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active role in solving conflict by negotiating guarantees from individual parties and facilitating compromises on salient issues (Chand, 1997). Another tool of the UN in limiting the potential for violence once the election results are released is obtaining official assurances from all parties and candidates involved that they will accept and follow the outcome of the election, win or lose (Borzyskowski, 2015). This safeguard increases accountability for political parties and ideally reduces the likelihood that party leaders will incite their followers to violence if they lose power in the election.

On the whole, the five key principles of democratic elections – accuracy, equality, accountability, credibility, and peacefulness – are each addressed by actions the UN takes as part of its technical electoral assistance programs. Each principle is ultimately interrelated and dependent on the others, so it is important that international interventions address all of the components in one way or another. However, even when technical assistance is thoroughly optimized, the success of attempts to establish free and fair elections is also dependent on the economic, cultural, and environmental conditions within the country itself. Ideal environments for the development of democracy, and elections by association, include low poverty rates, a strong middle class, a vibrant civil society, and freedom from violence (Norris, 2015). Pippa Norris outlines the structural limitations that are faced by many developing nations and institutional organizations when implementing electoral systems:

> Explanations based on deep drivers in each society highlight the dangers of attempting to organize elections under a wide range of challenging conditions, including in poor and illiterate societies with scattered rural populations lacking access to modern communications and transportation, in deeply divided states emerging from years of conflict, and in countries with a long legacy of authoritarian rule and little, if any experience of democratic practices (Norris, 2015, p. 63).

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Many countries receiving electoral assistance experience most, if not all, of those challenges in conjunction, especially following colonial independence movements, foreign exploitation, and both past and present civil and political violence. As a result, UN technical assistance programs are not only attempting to facilitate democratic elections but also to establish, often for the first time, the ideal conditions in which democracy can flourish while combatting systemic development issues.

When determining the effectiveness of UN electoral assistance, it is important to take into account the structural conditions impacting the development of democracy within each country, along with the quality of the elections themselves. Following an election, the process and outcome can be assessed through the lens of each principle to determine its level of success. The following portion of the study will examine two case studies in Sub-Saharan Africa for the purpose of evaluating the ability of UN technical assistance to build countries' capacities to maintain those principles in elections long-term.

Case Studies
Sierra Leone
Historical Context
Sierra Leone, a relatively small country on the southwest coast of Africa, was a British colony for much of the 20th century. Following the outlawing of slavery in Great Britain, the British began relocating freed slaves to Sierra Leone, creating what was essentially a British settlement for former slaves (UNIPSL, n.d.a). The country quickly became the seat of government for Great Britain's empire that was dispersed throughout the rest of Africa (UNIPSL, n.d.a). During the colonization period, Sierra Leone experienced several attempted independence movements as indigenous people rebelled against foreign control. Eventually, in 1961, a constitution was written in Sierra Leone that established a foundation for future decolonization through a parliamentary government system under the British Commonwealth (UNIPSL, n.d.a). A few years following the constitution's ratification,

the British relinquished some local authority back to Sierra Leone, although the crown still remained heavily involved in governance.

Between 1961 and 1971, when the country was declared an independent republic, Sierra Leone underwent waves of civil unrest and political instability. Following outbreaks of violence in several regions, the government declared a state of emergency and eventually suspended the constitution (UNIPSL, n.d.a). Government leaders in the past had attempted to modify the constitution to allow for one-party rule instead of a multi-party system, and the change was ultimately successful in 1982 (UNIPSL, n.d.a). The president in power argued that removing the political competition of parties would reinstate stability during a period of widespread unrest. In contrast, the change served as a spark for a war perpetuated by a rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in the early 1990s. The RUF led several unsuccessful coups, resulting in repeated transfers of power between the military and a civilian administration (U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone, n.d.). President Kabbah, the leader of Sierra Leone at the time, created a commission to determine the past path forward for the country with the goal of improving political stability and human development. In 1996, the commission's report indicated the necessity of returning to a multi-party system, so Kabbah held elections based on a proportional representation system that included thirteen different political parties (U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone, n.d.). Following this election, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) overthrew the president out of disagreement with the new constitutional modifications and took control of the country for almost a year. At that point, the Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deposed the AFRC and returned Kabbah to power in 1998 (U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone, n.d.).

At the same time, the UN authorized the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL), which is often the precursor for a peacekeeping mission, to assess the situation and determine whether or not UN involvement would be effective in

restoring political stability (UNIPSIL, n.d.b). Violence only increased following ECOMOG's involvement, prompting the government to push for the Lome Peace Agreement in 1999. The Lome Agreement established disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs to facilitate reentry into society for combatants on both sides as well as allowing for the RUF to legitimately participate in the political system as a formal political party. Lome also called for the creation of a joint peacekeeping force between the UN and ECOMOG, which led to the establishment of a UN peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) (U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone, n.d.; UNIPSIL, n.d.b). At the time of UNAMSIL's establishment, the RUF had been integrated into the existing political power structure, and the group used its newfound legitimacy to hold UNAMSIL troops hostage and steal their weapons, thus violating the Lome Agreement. Furthermore, the RUF began attacking and killing people that were peacefully protesting, and the RUF's actions resulted in the group being stripped of its power and political party status (U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone, n.d.). A new ceasefire, called the Abuja Agreement, was signed in 2000, but fighting continued partly because DDR was not part of the action plan. The government tried again with a second Abuja Agreement in 2001, which was much more effective and allowed the government to regain territory and implement more effective DDR programs (U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone, n.d.). The reduction of fighting facilitated by the peace agreements and UNAMSIL set the stage for the development of democracy and UN electoral assistance efforts (UNAMSIL, 2005).

Technical Assistance
During the conflict, the terms of both the president and the prime minster of Sierra Leone had been extended by six months twice to avoid holding elections during an ongoing conflict. The country held its first post-war election in May of 2002, consisting of both presidential and parliamentary candidates. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) requested UN electoral assistance almost a year

prior to the election in June 2001, and the Secretary-General of UNAMSIL responded by sending an assessment mission to determine the current state of election procedures, laws, and institutions and develop a report of recommendations for technical assistance efforts (UN S/2001/857). The electoral assistance division of UNAMSIL was then structured based off of the high-level assessment report. One of the primary concerns was the limited capacity of the NEC itself, so technical and logistical assistance was provided to improve the NEC's ability to prepare for and administer elections (S/2001/1195). Especially in regard to voter registration, UNAMSIL played a key role in the facilitating the development of a detailed plan by the NEC, as well as defining voting districts and determining a timeline for the electoral cycle as a whole (S/2001/1195). The UN assisted with the dissemination of information and communication leading up to and during voter registration to ensure that the people were aware of both the process itself as well as their role in the elections more broadly. UNAMSIL facilitated the transportation of equipment, materials, and personnel throughout the electoral cycle but especially during voter registration and on election day (S/2002/267). The mission also established electoral offices in each of the three electoral regions of Sierra Leone to provide accessible focal points for communication and assistance throughout the process (S/2001/1195). Following the NEC's drawing of voting districts, the UN redefined its security regions to match the voting districts to ensure maximum coordination and effectiveness on election day to preempt and address any issues. Furthermore, UNAMSIL had a mandate of 17,500 troops, so the mission was able to provide training and extensive security on election day, specifically by deploying troops to specific high-risk areas throughout the country (S/2001/857; S/2002/679). The UNDP provided the ballot boxes for each polling place in Sierra Leone and supplied the NEC with the communication equipment it needed to successfully run the election (S/2002/679). Electoral observers from ECOWAS and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) were also funded by the UNDP, and UNAMSIL officials travelled from polling

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place to polling place on election day to provide guidance and support on any problems that arose (S/2002/679).

Ultimately, the 2002 election, the first to take place post-civil war with the help of the UN, was successful. The campaign season, beginning approximately a month before the election, was peaceful overall. Even when events on the last day of campaigning led to violence between two of the parties, UNAMSIL forces were able to disperse the crowd quickly and reestablish the peace (S/2002/679). The election was multi-party, with eleven total parties participating, and President Kabbah was reelected with a strong majority (S/2002/679). The results were accepted peacefully by all opposition parties, regardless of whether or not they won seats in the parliament. without resistance. The turnout rate of all registered voters was 81%, and the only issues encountered were small errors in voter registration for some individuals and a lack of voter education (S/2002/679). Throughout election day itself, no incidents of violence were ever reported. On the whole, the first election facilitated by UNAMSIL was a promising indication for the future of democracy in Sierra Leone.

The subsequent elections in 2007 were held with no peacekeepers on the ground, and the National Electoral Commission administered the elections on its own with only advisory support from various UN entities. The 2007 election was the first peaceful transfer of power between two political parties since the conclusion of the 2002 election, and the event was even more of an accomplishment considering the high tensions surrounding the competitive run-off election for the presidential candidates (UNDP, 2017). The primary focus of UN technical assistance for the 2007 election was continuing to strengthen the NEC and build its capacity and legitimacy. The mission developed the UN Electoral Reform Project to focus on optimizing the legal electoral framework implemented by the NEC and employed a technical advisor to be working with the NEC in Sierra Leone for the eight months leading up to the election (UNDP, 2017). International Stakeholders Meetings were also held in Sierra Leone to maintain pressure on all actors to adhere to election regulations and

provide a forum for resolving disputes. One of the primary accomplishments of this election cycle was the development of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties, which was created following a multi-stakeholder conference (UNDP, 2017). Following several rounds of negotiations, the Code was agreed to and signed by all registered political parties in Sierra Leone and was viewed as a major development in the realm of electoral accountability. Another important area of improvement in the 2007 elections was security, especially with the absence of peacekeepers. The UN electoral assistance program prioritized the strengthening of the Sierra Leone Police, and despite their limited resources and personnel, the police were able to maintain a monopoly on the use of force throughout the election cycle and quell any potential violence (UNDP, 2017). The development of the Peace Consolidation Strategy, a framework for dispute resolution and conflict response, was an integral component to the peacefulness of the 2007 elections.

Following the 2007 election, UNAMSIL ended, and the new UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) was created in 2008. Continued capacity building efforts across numerous sectors of development led to the successful completion of UNIPSIL's mandate in 2014. Therefore, the most recent elections in Sierra Leone were held in 2018 and took place without the presence of a UN peacekeeping or peacebuilding mission. With a relatively strong foundation supported by UN electoral assistance programs over the past several years, the 2018 election was an important indicator of the effectiveness of the capacity building done by the UN in Sierra Leone. The incumbent president was not eligible to run again, as he had already served the maximum two terms enumerated in the constitution, so the playing field was open between all new presidential candidates. Candidates from the two primary parties in the country were major players in the election, but there were many others challenging them for power as well. (Alfa Shaban, 2018).

Following the electoral success framework developed earlier in this study, the effectiveness of UN electoral assistance in Sierra Leone

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can be determined by looking at the 2018 elections through the lens of the five key principles. Beginning with accuracy, the NEC's strong foundation allowed it to effectively handle any potential procedural violations. The NEC found that there were methodological flaws at several polling locations, so it declared the ballots cast at those locations to be void and invalid, resulting in 1.24% of the total votes not contributing to the count (NEC, 2018). Furthermore, the NEC facilitated recounts for 154 ballot stations that were requested by various political parties (Alfa Shaban, 2018). In regard to the equality principle, ethnic and religious minorities in Sierra Leone generally have full political rights and were equally able to vote in the election (Freedom House, 2022a). The parliament recently passed the Provinces Act in 2017 to improve representation through the restructuring of voting districts, thus distributing electoral power more equally (Freedom House, 2018a). However, women still only make up a very small proportion of parliament, holding only 18 of the 146 seats (Freedom House, 2022a). Furthermore, only Sierra Leoneans that have been citizens since birth are able to run for office, and that constitutional stipulation also excluded dual citizens until a 2021 Supreme Court ruling gave those with dual citizenship the right to be political candidates (Freedom House, 2022a). When it comes to accountability, the judicial branch of the government in Sierra Leone took a more active role in ensuring adherence to electoral laws throughout the 2018 election cycle. The court overturned some of the parliamentary election results due to procedure errors, and it also successfully handled and struck down the formal challenge to the results initiated by the losing candidate in the presidential runoff (Alfa Shaban, 2018). The 2018 election was widely regarded as credible both internally and by international organizations who sent election observers to observe the campaigning season and election day (Freedom House, 2022a). The strength and legitimacy of the NEC and its independent administration of the election despite limited resources and logistical challenges provided an important foundation for the credibility of the election itself. Lastly, the 2018 election was relatively

peaceful, especially considering the tense presidential runoff and lack of an incumbent. The results constituted the second peaceful transfer of power between opposition parties since Sierra Leone's civil war, and the first following the conclusion of all UN missions mandated by the Security Council (Alfa Shaban, 2018). On the whole, the 2018 election in Sierra Leone meets the key principles of democratic elections. While areas for improvement certainly still remain, UN electoral assistance effectively built the country's capacity to conduct elections on its own.

Somalia
Historical Context

Somalia, a country whose borders trace the coast of the horn of Africa, has had a divisive colonial history. With ownership and control transferred between Great Britain, Italy, and even Ethiopia at one point, the various cultural influences fractured the nation early on. Following repeated movements for independence in the 1940s, a plan was developed for Somalia's transition to full autonomy. In 1949, Italy was given trusteeship for a period of ten years, at the end of which Somalia would become fully independent (Permanent Mission, n.d.) During that time, Somalia was able to develop political parties and a political culture, so the country was ready for democracy by 1959 when Italy relinquished control. Upon independence, the southern portion of Somalia, controlled by Italy, and the northern region, controlled by the British, reunited to form a single, independent state (Somalia Country Profile, 2023). Early on in its statehood, Somalia enjoyed strong international support, especially from the U.S., despite early signs of the divisive legacy of colonialism. By the late 1960s, the cultural, linguistic, and economic divides between north and south Somalia were becoming apparent and causing democracy to dwindle. Continued dissatisfaction with the government in place and allegations of favoritism towards the south led to a coup in 1969, resulting in Major General Siad Barre taking power (Permanent Mission, n.d.). He quickly established a new government under what was called the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) and took quick steps to

disassemble the democratic institutions, including banning political parties, disbanding the National Assembly, and suspending the Constitution (Permanent Mission, n.d.). Over the next decade, Siad Barre instituted heavily socialist policies and maintained an oppressive authoritarian regime.

In 1977, under the direction of Siad Barre, Somalia invaded Ethiopia to recapture the Ogaden, a territory along the border of the two countries that has long been a source of dispute between Somalia, a primarily Muslim country, and Ethiopia, a primarily Christian country. Throughout the conflict, which Somalia and Siad Barre ultimately lost, international aid decreased, especially from the U.S. In response to the lack of support, Siad Barre held parliamentary elections as a way of signaling democratic intentions. However, the elections were held only within the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP), the party that Siad Barre created to govern, and he quickly passed changes to the constitution that would give him greater authority over the rubber-stamp legislature (Permanent Mission, n.d.). Following the Ogaden War, minorities within Somalia grew increasingly discontent with Siad Barre's rule and banded together to form rebel groups with the goal of removing him from power. Assassination attempts led the government to crackdown on dissidents, attacking and executing civilians. Beginning in 1991, various regions of Somalia began to secede, resulting in the creation of Somaliland, Puntland, and Jubaland (Permanent Mission, n.d.). Siad Barre fled the country as soon as the capital, Mogadishu, was overtaken by rebel troops. Seeing the chaos erupting throughout the nation, the UN Security Council authorized the creation of the Unified Task Force (UNITAF) to begin peacekeeping efforts in Somalia, particularly focusing on the delivery of humanitarian aid. However, widespread resistance to foreign intervention resulted in the deaths of dozens of peacekeepers and a swift end to the mission (Permanent Mission, n.d.). Three years after UNITAF, the UN established the UN Political Office in Somalia (UNPOS) to build the capacity of the existing institutions and ideally facilitate democracy. The mandate of the organization ended in 2013

following several attempts at political agreements to reduce violence (UNPOS, 2009).

In 2003, a transitional government began to form in exile in the neighboring country of Kenya with the goal of reuniting all of the Somali territories (Hogg, 2008). When the transitional government came back to Somalia two years later, their return sparked widespread violence and years of governance shifts between official rule and Islamic militant groups, particularly AlShabaab. In 2007, the UN Security Council approved the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) as a peacekeeping mission to address the effects of the fighting, as the number of Somali refugees had just reached one million. Over the next few years, Al-Shabaab's power continued to grow along with its territorial control, and the group declared its allegiance to AlQaeda in 2012 (International Crisis Group, 2022b). Simultaneously, the African Union (AU), partnered with Somalia's government, recaptured the last major city held by Al-Shabaab, thus turning the tide of the war away from terrorist control. In the same year, the first formal parliament in two decades was sworn in, and Somalia's government was subsequently recognized by the U.S. for the first time since 1991 (Somalia Profile, 2018). The relatively increased political stability set the stage for further UN assistance.

Technical Assistance
In 2014, the UN Integrated Electoral Support Group (IESG) was created to combine the efforts of the ongoing United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) with the resources of the UNDP to provide electoral assistance to Somalia. Preparations quickly began for the first elections to be held since the transitional government, which were initially set to take place in 2016. At the beginning, the IESG focused on a legal and institutional foundation for upcoming elections. UNSOM and the UNDP, along with several constitutional experts, collaborated to assist the government with a constitutional review process that would assess the current strength of the constitution and provide recommendations for potential changes

(S/2016/430). The IESG also facilitated the development of the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) from the ground up, beginning with creating a lexicon of terminology related to elections in the Somali language to make the concept accessible and relevant to the culture (S/2016/763). Without the available language for elections, it would have been impossible to educate officials and the public about the procedures. Furthermore, IESG provided training for the officials within the NIEC on a variety of topics related to the electoral process, including voter registration, the inclusion of women, and dispute resolution (S/2016/430). In addition to training for the NIEC, the UN also focused on education for civil society groups and the relevant ministries of the federal government, including the Ministry of Women and the

Ministry of Human Rights Development, through direct trainings as well as meetings with

Security Council representatives. (S/2016/763).

Another important aspect of UN electoral assistance in this election was building the capacity of the Federal Indirect Electoral Implementation Team (FEIT) in the country. At the time, Somalia's elections were held indirectly through a clan-based system. The House of the People, the lower house of the legislature, was to be elected by 13,000 delegates appointed from the various clans recognized in Somalia rather than direct universal suffrage (S/2017/408). The Upper House would be elected by each of the individual state's assemblies, which was based on geographic distribution rather than clan representation (S/2017/21; S/2017/408). The FEIT was charged with overseeing the conduct of each state-level indirect electoral implementation team and ensuring that the electoral laws were being implemented cohesively and consistently. The UN's IESG provided training for the FEIT to accomplish those goals and supplied the election materials and equipment needed to facilitate the elections (S/2016/763; S/2017/21). In addition, the IESG assisted the NEIC in developing a foundational electoral model over a period of eighteen months of negotiations that would improve the country's capacity for

peaceful transfers of power. The model included codes of conduct for election officials, political parties, and candidates; mechanisms for dispute resolution; and provisions to expand the electorate and utilize secret ballots (S/2017/21). Ultimately, the election was delayed from 2016 until February of 2017, and Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" became president of Somalia following his election by the members of parliament, who had been elected through the indirect clan-based system (International Crisis Group, 2022). He had been the previous prime minister of Somalia, and his election unfortunately worsened a new wave of resistance and violence propagated by Al-Shabaab, which continued throughout his presidency.

The UN IESG had been preparing for the 2017 Somali elections with the goal of holding universal elections in the next election cycle, and that goal was even written into the NIEC's mandate. In 2017, the NIEC began preparations to register political parties in advance of the direct elections in 2021; however, UN officials and the NIEC itself quickly realized that such a leap from indirect clan-based elections would not be possible in just four short years, especially considering that the 2017 election was the first election held since the civil war began (S/2017/21). In 2021, as the election was approaching, negotiations between the federal government and the individual states on electoral procedures fell apart, resulting in the House of the People voting to reject the previously agreed upon electoral model (UN Security Council, 2021). Following their abandonment of the model, the lower house then voted to extend the terms of the current leaders in office for two years, thus delaying elections. The move created immediate violent backlash between militia groups as well as the Somali security forces themselves until the House of the People reversed their decision and recommitted to holding elections (UN Security Council, 2021). Despite coming within moments of a renewed civil war, elections were able to take place in May of 2022, albeit fifteen months later than originally desired (Ali, 2022). The UN IESG remained involved through similar efforts as it had before, resulting the election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as president after a

contentious three rounds of voting following the parliamentary elections that concluded merely a week before (Ali, 2022).

Yet again, the electoral procedures and results can be assessed utilizing the five primary principles governing democratic elections. Beginning with accuracy, widespread manipulation of the parliamentary election results is well-known; however, it is unclear the extent to which the manipulation impacted the official vote counts (Mahmood, 2022). Regardless, the known existence of such fraud is enough to determine that the results were not likely to have met international standards for tabulation accuracy. In regard to equality, Somalia, in principle, adheres to the quota requiring 30% of parliament members to be women, but the country only reached 20% in the 2022 elections (UNESP, 2022b). Furthermore, electoral laws stipulate that presidential candidates must be Muslim, restricting religious minorities from involvement in the political system (Freedom House, 2022b). In addition, the current framework reserves eight out of every nine government positions to members of the four largest clans in Somalia, resulting in further marginalization of smaller cultural and ethnic groups (Freedom House, 2022b). When it comes to accountability, Somalia, with the support of the UN IESG, has the institutions in place to hold candidates and the government itself accountable. For example, the Election Dispute Resolution Committee and the judicial system have the legal authority to maintain authority over the process, but the organizations lack capacity in practice (UNESP, 2022a). The credibility of the 2022 elections is also limited, as the federal government relies on the international community and donor governments for its own credibility and legitimacy. Frequent vote-buying and corruption allegations contribute a lack of public trust in the outcome of the elections; although, overall credibility has somewhat improved since the establishment of the current political system (Mahmood, 2022; Freedom House, 2022b). Lastly, the peacefulness of the 2022 election, especially in relation to the current and past political atmosphere in Somalia, was relatively strong. Despite short-lived outbreaks of violence following the temporary extension of

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presidential and parliamentary terms in office, the actual transfer of power was executed smoothly and peacefully without sparking additional backlash (Mahmood, 2022). Overall, despite some improvements in the conducting of elections in Somalia, the elections remain indirect and restricted, and electoral institutions continue to struggle with limited credibility and accountability from all stakeholders and actors involved.

Analysis and Conclusions

After examining the technical electoral assistance provided by the UN and its subsidiaries in both Sierra Leone and Somalia and comparing the results and effects of that assistance, there are a few conclusions that can be drawn. However, before concluding that certain aspects of technical assistance are the only factor determining the success of the elections, it is important to note the structural differences in the two countries, as emphasized by Pippa Norris. In Sierra Leone, the civil war was based on political disagreements and had a clear end in 2002, resulting in limited occurrences of political violence before electoral assistance even began. Alternatively, in Somalia, the civil war was ideologically based, and the continued presence of extremist groups in the country triggers repeated armed insurgencies. Therefore, political instability and human insecurity remain persistent systemic challenges, limiting the potential effectiveness of assistance. In summation, before comparing the two case studies, it is necessary to recognize that there are numerous historical, cultural, and economic factors that play a role in a country's ability to conduct free and fair elections. While UN technical assistance can and does make a significant difference, it is not a quick fix for systemic issues, and the conditions and predispositions for democracy are not the same in every country, especially within Sub-Saharan Africa.

That being said, there are several base-level similarities between the two countries. Both experienced a civil war prior to the onset of UN electoral assistance, and both were the beneficiaries of multiple UN peacekeeping and/or peacebuilding missions with

various mandates. However, following the analysis through the lens of the five principles of democratic elections, it is clear that Sierra Leone is able to conduct more accurate, equal, accountable, credible, and peaceful elections than Somalia. UN electoral assistance was extensive in both countries, so the question becomes what aspects of the assistance were most important and which of those should be focused on in the future. In Sierra Leone, the primary focus was on building the capacity of the National Electoral Commission to conduct elections in such a way that fulfills all five core principles. The UN invested heavily in strategic planning and formal agreements on electoral conduct and policy, including employing a dedicated long-term technical advisor specifically for the NEC. The strengthening of the NEC allowed it to facilitate its second round of elections on its own and effectively address issues like procedural violations and opposition candidates challenging results, as well as deter violence through systematic security measures. In addition, the electoral assistance mission began over two years prior to the first election, allowing for adequate time to plan, prepare, and educate. In contrast to Sierra Leone, the process of developing a legal electoral framework was only begun a year before the first election in Somalia, resulting in limited time to build national consensus and establish effective processes, let alone improve the capacity of the National Independent Electoral Commission that was only inaugurated in the same year that the election took place. While the ongoing violence in Somalia complicated the possibility of providing technical assistance early, Somalia's elections may have looked much more democratic than they are today if capacity-building interventions for institutions had been provided earlier.

On the whole, the case studies of Somalia and Sierra Leone provide a window into the development of democratic elections in Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the role that the UN plays in facilitating adherence to the five core principles of accuracy, equality, accountability, credibility, and peacefulness. Early intervention and a focus on institutional and legal capacity are both vital, but it is

important to not disregard the impact of existing structural conditions on countries' immediate capacity for democracy, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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