<u>Background:</u>

With the rise of Social Media and the Internet in the late 20th and 21st centuries, disinformation and fraud have increasingly become larger threats to the integrity of elections worldwide. In 2016 and 2020 in the United States, voter fraud and disinformation played a key role in questioning the election process and certification of the election winner. Websites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (Now X), and Snapchat became hotbeds for discussing disinformation spread by their users. Some social media platforms received more views of their election coverage than legacy media outlets such as CNN, MSNBC, FOX, or other large-scale media titans.

This poses a unique challenge for the UN and its commitment to free and fair elections. The sheer scale of the Internet and its users can provide a magnitude of avenues for disinformation and fraud to take place. However, the UN has been battling election fraud and working to secure free elections for decades.

Since 1991, the UN has provided electoral assistance to over 115 countries and helped them turn their elections into publicly trusted and fair institutions. They have worked closely with the European Union and European Commission in their shared efforts to uphold electoral integrity. In 2024, the UN lended aid to 20 countries which were holding elections, whether through technical assistance, or promoting free and fair elections and electoral behavior in those countries. The UN's technical assistance however is their largest contribution. It involves rewriting electoral laws, processes, or institutions. It is provided through a mandate by the UN's Security Council or by request of a UN member state. This technical assistance can last either one electoral cycle or can, sometimes, be a longstanding commitment to the country's electoral system.

In May of 2022, the Action Coalition of Information Integrity in Elections met to identify and promote ways to correct disinformation about elections on social media and the web. Since then, election specialists and experts in information integrity have met with the coalition to come up with ideas on how to stop disinformation and fraud from spreading, and how to educate social media users on how to identify and discredit disinformation sources. As of 2025, the UN has had to grapple with the fact that social media has continued to play a role in global politics. With over 5 billion users worldwide, the sanctity of elections globally is under the social media microscope. Thus, the UN has continued to respond to claims in their fight against disinformation and fraud.

Past Actions of the UN:

The United Nations has supported elections for many countries throughout the world in the last few decades. Stretching back to the 1990's they were able to supervise elections in countries such as South Africa, Mozambique, El Savador, Timor-Leste, and Cambodia. This topic continues to be at the forefront of discussion for the UN. In more recent years, the UN has been able to provide technical assistance for 20 country's elections including countries like Afghanistan, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Nepal, Sierra Leone, and Sudan. One specific instance of this was the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). This program provided support with voting materials, training people to work with the National Elections Commission, and reconditioning roads. In addition to the logistical support, the National Elections Commission was able to give media training for journalists. These structures were able to provide three successful elections in 2005, 2011, and 2017.

Not only has the UN worked to support free elections for member states, it aids in protecting countries from disinformation. In August of 2022, the Secretary-General of the UN released his Countering Disinformation report. This report contained details for member states and tech enterprises on how to counter disinformation across the globe. It entails policies that would protect people across the world from violations of free speech.

Possible Solutions:

Because most of the world's population uses social media every day, there has to be an agreement for all countries on what information should be presented. Regulating social media posts about election coverage could be a potential way for the UN to monitor the misinformation being spread regarding elections and election practices. As well as provide media training for journalists covering the election in countries around the world. Another solution is restricting the use of AI in elections. AI and other technology has become more prevalent in elections around the world. Preventing possible interference could ensure free elections for all member states.

Questions to Consider:
- What are ways the UN can implement free and fair elections in all countries?
- How can the UN continue to certify integrity in elections while maintaining national sovereignty?
- What role does disinformation play in the spread of election information for member states?
- How can social media affect the spread of information during elections?
- Does AI play a role in election fraud globally?
- How do foreign entities play a role in a country's election?
- Are underdeveloped countries more susceptible to election misinformation and fraud?

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