GA3: Special Political and Decolonization Committee

Student Officer: Bartu Köksal

Issue: Ensuring peaceful post-election transfer of power

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Committee:	Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA3)
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I. Introduction

Revolutions, coup d'etats and civil wars have been common archetypes of transfer of power in global politics in the 21st century. Until the 2020 Elections in the United States of America, *Biden v Trump,* questions about the peaceful conduct of elections have not been seriously discussed in mainstream media, and its importance was not conveyed to the consciousness of the society.

The collapse of third wave democracies in Latin America and other regions have once again demonstrated the importance of institutionalized democracy, where power is shared and the stakes in elections are not vital for the health of a state. However, when democracies fail to form institutions that ensure robustness of democracy against crisis, problems arise which hinder the resilience of a democratic governance, with the inability to ensure post-election transfer of power being one of the biggest problems.

Peaceful post-election transfer of power is one of the key metrics that indicate the resilience of countries against undemocratic conduct. Those that fail to ensure it frequently face authoritarian regimes and civil unrest, where many human rights violations occur and governmental structures become fragile and susceptible to crisis, whether that may be economic or security.

The aim of this report is to show the sociological, psychological and political reasons behind the problems that occur during post-election transfer of power, with specific examples from countries that are located in South and North America. Furthermore, this report will present possible solutions and methods that are employed in strong democracies that have succeeded in ensuring peaceful post-election transfer of power, as one of the key components of peaceful transfer of power is to build resilience against crisis which correlates with the main theme of TIMUN '21.

II. Involved Countries and Organizations

United States of America

The United States has a long history of peaceful ceremonial transfer of power since the departure of President John Adams (1735-1826) from the White House after the loss of a heated election in 1800 between himself and President Thomas Jefferson (Pruitt). On a number of occasions, after the term of a president ends or the incumbent president does not get re-elected for a second term, the incumbent and elected president get together as the incumbent hands over the White House and both share their thoughts on certain affairs of state and agree upon state policies. After the election results are officially declared and the elected President is announced, a bureaucratic organ called General Services Administration (GSA) takes the lead, coordinates with federal agencies and prepares the transition process for the newly elected President. The President is updated on state affairs, and conducts high-level meetings with intelligence organizations such as The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which enables the newly-elected president to set his/her priorities (Segers). The transition process is one of the robust building blocks of United States' democracy.

After the 2020 election between the incumbent President, Donald Trump, and the incoming President, Joe Biden, the process of transition was delayed due to Trump's claim of victory and accusations of fraudulent ballots, similar to that of former President George Bush and Democratic Presidential candidate Al Gore in 2000. However, despite all the negative events, such as the raiding of the White House by supporters of the incumbent President Donald Trump during the electoral college voting, shared power structures of the state have proven resilient and eventually enabled the transition of power between Presidents.

To further scrutinize the importance of peaceful post-election transfer of power for the functioning of the United States, one should also mention that "the 9/11 Commission Report found that the shortened transition process after the 2000 election contributed to the nation's lack of preparedness for the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001" (Segers).

Furthermore, the United States has been one of the countries most often associated with foreign interventions. Such examples are valid: Chile- Auguste Pinochet- and Nicaragua - Contra guerillas against Sardinistas. Throughout the 20st century and even today, the USA continues to actively influence the politics of the Americas.

Bolivia

Bolivia is currently far from being an institutionalized democracy. Having entertained its first elections after 25 years in 1989, Bolivia still struggles with corruption and lack of public trust. Former Bolivian president Evo Morales, then incumbent, intended to run for presidency for a fourth consecutive term in October elections, despite the fact that a referendum in 21 February 2016 closed off the possibility of his running again; however, "with the help of the Constitutional Tribunal and the Electoral Tribunal (both under his influence), he succeeded in qualifying to seek a new term" ("Latin America"). However, opposition parties and protesters created pressure on Evo Morales, so "Mr Morales fled the country and Jeanine Añez, a right-wing senator, took over on an interim basis and called for new elections in March 2020" (the Economist). Instead the elections went ahead in October 2020, initially postponed due to the threat of Covid-19, and Luis Arca of Movimento al Socialismo, the same party from which Morales was also elected, won a free and fair election ("Democracy Index 2020").

El Salvador

In 2019, as a result of the years of incompetence, corruption, and mismanagement under the previous government, a young politician called Nayib Bukele was elected President of El Salvador ("Democracy Index 2020"). "As a political outsider, he has railed against the country's tarnished traditional political class", while exploiting his popularity (with approval ratings' being above %85), he tries to concentrate power in his position ("Democracy Index 2020"). Mr. Bukele's disregard for the power of institutions is apparent; one of the examples being the legislative assembly on February 9, where "President Nayib Bukele called the country's legislators to an emergency session to approve a $109 million loan for the third phase of his security plan, called the Territorial Control Plan. After legislators rejected the plan, the president called military officers into the chamber. The president of the assembly called the show of force an "attempted coup" that threatened the separation of powers in the country and disregarded core democratic institutions'' (Zovatto).

Nicaragua

Nicaragua is one of the countries in which democratic standards are worsening. Its national assembly has "approved a modification to the electoral law" in order to hamper the opposition from participating in the 2021 general election ("Democracy Index 2020"). "The bill prohibits anyone arbitrarily labelled as disloyal or a threat to the country by the regime of the president, Daniel Ortega, from seeking public office" ("Democracy Index 2020"). All these developments are pending, while the country is moving towards an election in November 2021. Also, one of the bills passed encapsulates the restriction of media and social

organizations to have concerned government bodies to censor or target them. Nicaragua had also been a subject of foreign intervention in the 20th century.

Until 1979, Nicaragua was governed under the oppressive Somoza dynasty - backed by the U.S for some time- which has proven itself to be a corrupt government, with no regards for human rights. In 1979, Sardinastas, a Marxist-Leninist political faction, came to power. Although at the beginning the U.S, under President Jimmy Carter, tried to protect its non-interventionist policies, with Nicaragua seeking Soviet aid and Reagan Doctrine, the U.S. has begun to provide weaponry, training, and logistics necessary for other political/military activities of a group called Contras against Sardinistas. Even though the U.S. Congress attempted to bar the government from supporting Contras, the U.S. government under President Reagan continued to provide the necessary support in order to fight any threat of socialism ("The Iran-Contra Affair").

III. Focused Overview of the Issue

The safe transfer of power after the elections depends on several factors ranging from political institutions - that are both lawful and effective- to creation of public trust by facilitation of political environments that are secure and healthy with the aim of making the public believe in the electoral integrity.

At its root electoral integrity is a political problem, depending on the political processes. Inclusiveness, transparency and accountability are all fundamental to building confidence (Kofi Annan Foundation). While these principles can be achieved through the creation of electoral laws that prevent any socio-political group from alienation or give equal resources to both candidates regardless of the incumbency of a candidate, psychological effects come into play, as well.

The stakes in election, the level of risk, weaken the trust in electoral integrity and makes the transfer of power dangerous. If a country's key policies such as economic policies, or socio-political role of a certain group- an ethnic group or a political party- depends on the outcome of the elections, the stakes in that election would be high. Possibility of a peaceful transfer of power would be low.

Maintenance or supervision of a safe transfer of power requires multiple measures that are both direct and indirect. While creation of administrative bodies that manage the smooth transition of power, like GSA in the U.S., is quintessential, distribution of power, creation of effective political institutions, and maintaining public trust both on politicians and electoral integrity are key factors in this process, helping us to differentiate between a safe post-election transfer of power and a dangerous one.

1. Arguments for Dictators: Idea of Stake in elections and how it affects the transfer of power

Democracy depends on the willingness of politicians to leave the office when they lose an election (Kofi Annan Foundation). Transfer of power is a habit that should be acquired by the political institutions of countries, meaning that transfer of power should be deeply embedded within the institutional memory of governments. "Incumbents expose themselves to the possibility of defeat and would yield office if they believe that their opponents would do the same if they become the rulers, but how is one to know what might happen if one loses an election when nothing of the sort has ever happened before?.. do they risk death, imprisonment, or exile – personal as well as political annihilation?" (Przeworski). Therefore, democratic and peaceful transfer of power should be embedded as a culture into the political institutions of countries, even though it might seem controversial to acquit someone who has ruled with a grip of tyranny over a country. After losing an election, the powers of incumbents are taken away, and if imprisonment or other actions are something that happened regularly in the history of that specific country, the transfer of power is not something an incumbent would uphold as a natural survival instinct. Here the idea of 'stakes' in elections resonates again. If the stake is high, in this case, a leader's life or the future existence of a political party, it is highly unlikely that a peaceful transition will occur. The global community is currently unsuccessful: "As of 2008, sixty-eight countries, including the two elephants, China and Russia, have never experienced a peaceful transfer of power between parties as a result of an election" (Przeworski). One such example can also be given by referring to Latin American politics, the focus of our discussion in this chair report, and the figure of Auguste Pinochet of Chile. Once out of office, he maintained control of the armed forces for a further eight years. Equally, he was granted immunity as a former president of Chile. Though he was finally stripped of his immunity in 2000, the old dictator avoided conviction for crimes against humanity until his death in 2006 ("Violence and Votes"). However, it should be also noted for the sake of staying positive about the future of politics that once the habit of transferring power is acquired, it sticks, as it is easy to sustain when the past incumbent has already yielded office after losing an election (Przeworski).

2. Building public trust through socio-political environments that are conducive to democracy

Although the creation of the administrative bodies, such as GSA in the U.S, the process of post-election is vital, the transfer of power requires long-term thinking and prerequisites- creation of public trust being the first and foremost goal- as it is the essential process that keeps governmental structures intact. Measures for creation of public trust are varied and abundant- allocating equal resources to candidates, including all socio-political groups, avoiding any electoral fraud in ballots, adhering to the principles of transparency and accountability, sharing trusted news and existence of legal reprimands for corrupt political groups. Starting with allocation of equal resources, it is highly likely that incumbent candidates will have an upper hand against their opponents as they will have governmental resources behind them. This gap between the

incumbent and other candidates might be seen as an unfair advantage; therefore, it could shadow the integrity of elections and this could induce some groups to take actions that are undemocratic and violent. One way to overcome this is via the healthy and effective working of legal structures pertaining to the electoral process. If the incumbent's presidential, or governmental, resources are minimized legally, the public can agree on the integrity of candidates and the general process of elections.

Furthermore, inclusivity, transparency, and accountability should be the main principles behind electoral laws and judicial structures that are relevant to elections. Electoral laws should be framed, or re-framed, in a way that no socio-political group is alienated via subtle electoral laws that actually bear some form of electoral fraud. One such example can be given when one of the U.S. federal laws put literacy as a prerequisite for voting, which was deliberately done to alienate voters who are economically disadvantaged, therefore lacking education, like black and hispanic people. Also, on the day of election, electoral ballots must be secured and all representatives from each competing party must be present to agree on the results of ballots, while the ballot is managed by apolitical organizations.

Speaking of security, maintenance of political process is also beyond the conduct of elections, but is also about the social, economic and political atmosphere present in countries. Insecurity, corruption, and disbelief can lead society to abandon democracy. "Weak political institutions with low levels of credibility and legitimacy, especially political parties and legislatures, increase the possibility of the emergence of candidates with a populist and anti-traditional elites discourse, highly personalized, a sort of "messiahs" or "saviors'. In many countries, traditional parties are quite depleted and worn down" ("Latin America"). Examples from Latin America might be expanded.

For instance, the data from the 2018 Latinobarómetro survey shed light on the midlife crisis Latin American democracy is experiencing: support for democracy fell to 48% (the lowest since 2001), indifference between democracy and authoritarianism rose from 16% to 28%, and dissatisfaction with democracy climbed from 51% to 71%, while satisfaction dropped from 44% to 24% ("Latin America"). The elimination of democracy would hamper the process of post-election transfer of power as it paves the way for violations of human rights and corruption.

Not only political events, but also the economic situation of countries, especially their middle and low-class parts of society, greatly affects the safe transfer of power, so it is a process that the public must insist on being conducted peacefully with the socio-political power that the public holds. Latin America still has the highest levels of income inequality in the world: Of the 26 most unequal countries in the world, 15 (58%) are

Latin American, which allows us to draw parallels between impoverishment and the failure of political institutions (Zovatto).

Increments in social public policies and spending could reduce the vulnerability of lower classes. Thus, the aim should be to strive to build a modern and strategic state, better governance, and political leadership committed to democratic values, transparency, a connection to the people, empathy, and the ability to govern the complex societies of the 21st century. (Zovatto).

3. Distribution of Power and Political Institutions' Importance in Securing Safe Transfer of Power

One of the important aspects of the safe transfer of power is the lowering of the stakes in an election. If the political power is concentrated, stakes would stay high. Centralized governments raise the stakes in an election that increases the disparity and disputes between each party, as it is a "winner-takes-all" situation (Kofi Annan Foundation).

There is a parallelism between safe transfer of power after elections and countries where the power is distributed, thus distribution of power and strengthening political institutions would lower the stakes- making conditions favorable for a peaceful transfer of power.

Inclusion of all sorts of parties, despite losing the election, and the existence of federal structures within countries governing system - the term federal or federalism does not necessarily have to be about land- could secure the post-election power transfer process, as political parties and partisan groups would still be included in political system and country's key policies would not be drastically changed by the upcoming government.

Weak political institutions with low levels of credibility and legitimacy, especially political parties and legislatures, increase the possibility for the emergence of candidates with a populist and anti-traditional elites discourse, highly personalized, a sort of "messiahs" or "saviors" who would supposedly come to fight against "old politics and its vices." In many countries, traditional parties are quite depleted and worn down ("Latin America"). Existence of highly personalized and anti-establishment leaders is dangerous in terms of transfer of power (recall that democracy depends on the willingness of politicians to leave the office when they lose an election) to the continuation of the bureaucratic organs of governments, despite leaders' charisma and the malfunctioning of such organs.

Chart 1. Democracy Index 2020, global map by regime type
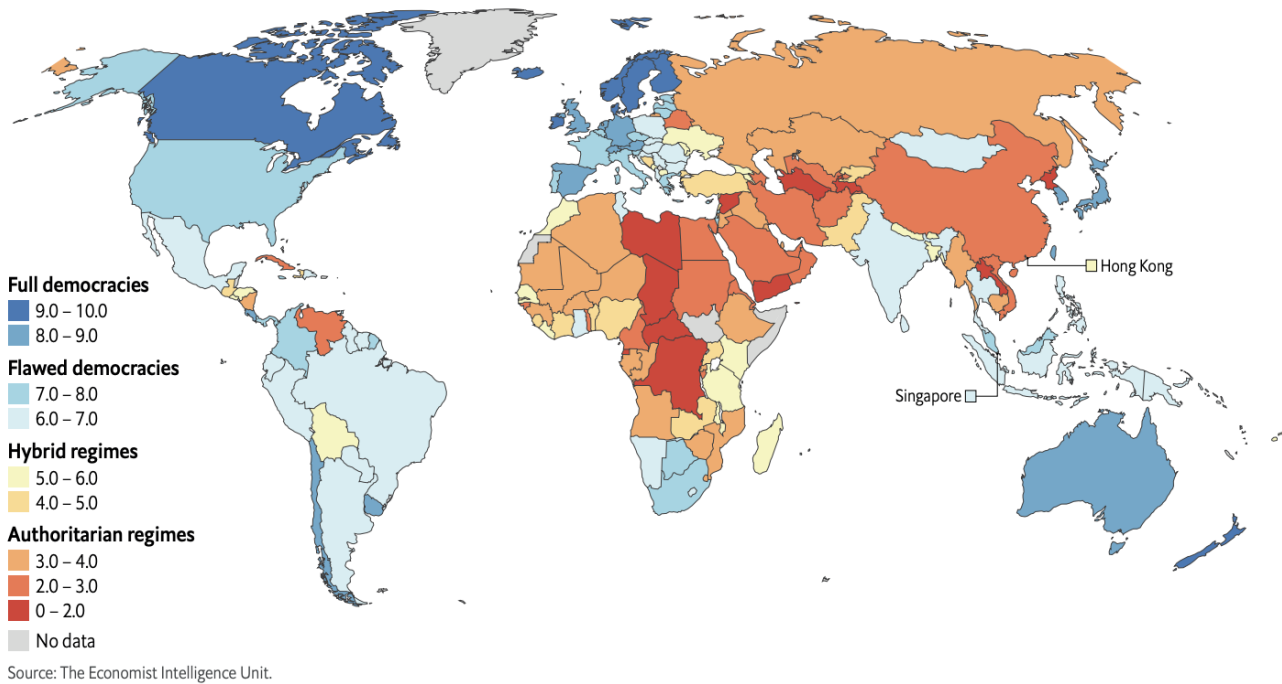
"Figure 1: *"Democracy Index 2020." Economist Intelligence Unit, www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/"*

IV. Key Vocabulary

Coup'd Etat: Coup d'état, also called coup, the sudden, violent overthrow of an existing government by a small group. The chief prerequisite for a coup is control of all or part of the armed forces, the police, and other military elements. Unlike a revolution, which is usually achieved by large numbers of people working for basic social, economic, and political change, a coup is a change in power from the top that merely results in the abrupt replacement of leading government personnel" ("*Coup d'état"*). Famous example from history is 18 Brumaire, when Napoleon Bonaparte rose to power as the First Consul of France. Even though allegedly Napoleon was praised for this action, coups are one of the worst things that could happen to any democratic society.

Alternation: When government changes and different parties or groups rule interchangeably. For example, from 2008 to 2016 the United States had a Democrat president while from 2016-2020 had a Republican president and so forth. "Note that alternations need not coincide with transitions to democracy; indeed, they rarely do coincide. While alternations are a sine qua non of democracy, transitions to democracy need not entail alternations: Most transitions occurred when authoritarian rulers were overthrown by force. Conversely, most alternations took place when previous elections were already competitive" ("Przeworski'').

Transfer of power: Transfer of power is when a paradigm shift in state or change of governing structure occurs, which means that transfer of power doesn't necessarily have to mean change of government in elections, but civil wars and revolutions are also included in the definition of transfer of power.

V. Important Events & Chronology

Please write a timeline concerning the agenda item. Make sure that it is detailed and includes all of the essential dates.

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
1 January 1959	Cuban Revolution
11 September 1973	1973 Chilean coup d'etat
24 March 1976	1976 Argentine coup d'etat
19 July 1979	The Sardinistas in Nicaragua take power.
18 October 2019	Bolivian general election, subsequent protests following controversies.
3 November 2020	2020 United States Presidential Elections

VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

- 1963 Presidential Act- the United States of America
- Confidence in Elections and Acceptance of Results: A policy brief of the Electoral Integrity Initiative. https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/supporting-democracy-and-elections-with-integrity/election-publications/attachment/confidence-in-elections-and-the-acceptance-of-results/
- Security Council, Meetings Coverage SC/13573. https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13573.doc.htm
- United Nations Security Council S/2018/975
- UNDP: Elections and Conflict Prevention: A Guide to Analysis, Planning, and Programming. http://content-ext.undp.org/aplaws_publications/2431678/Elections-Conflict-Prevention.pdf

VII. Failed Solution Attempts

The United Nations Department of Political Affairs (UNDDPA) used to provide electoral assistance not just in technical aspects, but also in the way it is conducted ranging from the laws to safety; however, in the past year, it mostly consists of just providing technical assistance and training on election day without producing any long-term results for the country. Also, as this assistance depends on the appeal of countries, the

number has significantly dropped, which makes sense as the coup d'etats and civil wars are ubiquitous in 21st century politics and the UN fails to provide any meaningful guidance.

VIII. Possible Solutions

The creation of an international framework for peaceful and democratic transfer of power, inspired by the success of processes of a country, is recommended. To supervise it and ensure safe implementation, the UNDDPA and NGOs that are especially concerned with the safe conduct of elections can be placed in regions. Several NGOs, like ACE Project can provide electoral assistance by means of education, data, and expertise in the conduct of elections to prevent any electoral fraud. UNDDPA can provide judicial assistance to promote the implementation of inclusive and transparent electoral processes, where inclusion of all socio-political groups, regardless of their ethnicity, and transparency in the ballots would be the guiding principles.

Parliamentary systems and effectiveness of legislative organs should be strengthened by prioritizing the attendance of all parties and making judicial decisions apolitical. Such organs must actively oversee the safe conduct of government's policies and play an active role in reducing corruption within the government.

Social spending can be increased in all regions to ensure the general welfare of the state, which can increase the trust in government.

Immunity to past political parties can be given in some aspects, although it might seem as controversial, to ensure the peaceful transfer of power.

IX. Useful Links

Georgetown University Latin America Electoral Database:
https://pdba.georgetown.edu/Elecdata/systems.html

Latinobarometro Database: https://www.latinobarometro.org/latNewsShow.jsp

The Economist Democracy Index Report-2020: https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/

On the habit of transfer of power:
https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2014/11/26/peaceful-transitions-of-power-have-been-rare-in-modern-states-but-once-the-habit-has-been-acquired-it-sticks/

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights- emphasis on the "will of people" :

https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

Presidential Transition Act (1963): https://www.congress.gov/111/bills/s3196/BILLS-111s3196enr.pdf

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