

# **Modern Electoral Integrity: How to Hack an Election**

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## **Background Information**

The earliest instances of elections in governmental or administrative structures were recorded in the ancient Greece, in city states referred to as “Polis.” In these states every man, barring those who were slaves or did not own land, could speak openly in a forum at the centre of the city; thereby participating in the management of their government. The decisions in administration were taken by a rudimentary election where votes were counted by a show of hands.

For most of history monarchies or autocracies have been more popular methods of government, as these regimes did not rule by the consent of the people that they governed they mostly refrained from popular votes. Thus, for a long time popular elections remained unpopular; however, the enlightenment movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century popularised the idea of egalitarianism. This called for governments ruled by will of the people, translated into concrete directives thru popular votes. Therefore, especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> century elections became increasingly popular among nations that were experiencing the industrial revolution, which empowered the masses and allowed the emergence of an educated commoner mass which cherished elections.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century came along more and more countries removed their monarchies, either peacefully or violently, and switched to democratic regimes. Thus, elections became popular among many nations; despite this the process of elections had not changed very much from the 1700s. To this day in a vast majority of elections the process remains approximately the same as they were a century or two centuries ago.

Today many countries experience electoral irregularities can be roughly divided into three broad groups based on the extent of their economic development.

## **The Electoral Process**

The electoral process is composed of three rough sections; campaigning, ballot casting and tallying. Campaigning is a process during which the different candidates or political parties become active in order to promote their own political agendas and hope to gain votes that might establish them as winners of an elections.

The ballot casting section of the process is a physical activity. During this period eligible voters arrive at voting centres, mark the ballot sheet to indicate their preference, fold it into an envelope and drop it into a ballot box. This process is then followed by what is called tallying, which is the process during which each and every one of the envelopes are opened in a public place and counted by election officials, monitored by the members of the broader public. After all the envelopes are opened the votes are added up, nowadays mostly on a digital platform, and a winner is declared based on the results of the election.

## **Elections in Different Parts of the World**

The electoral processes in various countries can be generally assessed based on the economic status of the respective country, categorised as Less Developed Countries (LEDCs), Developing Countries and Most Economically Countries (MEDCs).

Starting with the LEDCs their general characteristics include a high level of governmental corruption, underdeveloped infrastructure, poor recordkeeping, limited funds, rural populations, lack of confidence, high rates of crime and violent groups. These factors combined mean that many people have trouble participating in the elections as they cannot cast their ballots. These practices are often times utilised by governments deliberately in order to suppress specific groups of voters that might pose opposition to them. Furthermore, in addition to the lack of logistical

opportunities to facilitate participation, there is also the problem of incomplete voter lists and voting areas that don't create privacy, thereby exerting political pressure on the voters. An example of these irregularities can be observed in the recent presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo. During this election, many voters couldn't access polling stations because they were placed in other towns or villages; furthermore, the roads in the DRC are largely underdeveloped and there is violent activity by armed groups as well. In this case the election, had low voter turnout and combined with other irregularities did not come close to representing the will of the people. Despite these negative remarks, the overall trend in LEDCs is positive; more countries are having elections than ever before, and with external pressure and UN assistance the elections are more representative than ever before as well.

The situation in the developing countries is quite different as developing countries have higher GDPs, their people are more prosperous, their governments are more accountable and they trade internationally. Since the electorates in developing countries are much richer and familiar with their rights problems present and tactics utilised by the LEDCs cannot be applied in these countries; citizens will revolt if the governments blatantly prevent ballot casting. Thus, in this case parties perform election fraud in the tallying case; by manipulating the numbers of votes cast in each polling station slightly governments can create a significantly different result and alter the outcome of the election. An example of this can be seen in Turkey, as during the 2018 presidential elections the results did not match third party accounts and the election was declared by the state news agency before the counting of all the ballots were complete. However, the overall trend in developing countries is positive as well; since their populations are becoming increasingly more prosperous and more educated, the electorates wield more power and external pressure from regional agencies and foreign investors increasingly push for more honest elections.

Lastly looking at MEDCs, these countries possess the resources needed to secure the tallying and ballot casting phases of their elections and any attempts made by the government in these areas to fake the election would be met by popular opposition. Thus, actors seeking to undermine elections in these countries focus on exploiting the campaigning phase of the electoral process. This is because as many people in MEDCs use their electronics to access social media as their primary source of information, malicious actors can focus on altering what people see in their social media feeds, thereby controlling their perception of the news and manipulating them to vote in a certain way. Furthermore, countries cannot take direct action against these fake posts because most MEDCs have very strong free speech laws that prevent governments from being swift and decisive in this regard. An example of this was seen in the 2016 US Presidential and Congressional Elections during which foreign actors, utilised active measures (which is the technical term for referring to a feed of fake political posts) to manipulate the American voters. Although the investigation is still ongoing the Federal Bureau of Investigation estimates that these measures may have actually changed the outcome of polls in some states. In this case, the trend is certainly negative with active measures being seen in elections in UK 2017, France 2018, Italy 2018 and European Union 2019.

### **Conclusion**

Modern elections in LEDCs and developing countries despite experiencing problems are becoming more secure and representative as time goes on because of pressures external and internal. This trend is amplified by Sustainable Development Goal 16, which focuses on building strong institutions that aim to represent the peoples of countries, thereby creating stable and prosperous regimes. Despite this, elections in MEDCs are less secure than ever before because of new technological developments referred to as active measures.



It remains to be seen whether MEDCs' governments will enlist censorship to limit the effect of foreign actors at the expense of free speech.

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