

# ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN CONTEXT

A GUIDANCE DOCUMENT  
FOR CITIZEN ORGANIZATIONS  
MONITORING VIOLENCE IN ELECTIONS

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY . . . . .	5
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	7
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE . . . . .	11
PART I: CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITIONS . . . . .	13
Do No Harm and Conflict Sensitivity . . . . .	13
Electoral Violence and Electoral Integrity . . . . .	14
Intersectional Analysis . . . . .	20
Electoral Violence and Violence Against Women in Elections . . . . .	23
Young People and Electoral Violence . . . . .	25
PART II: TYPOLOGY OF ELECTION VIOLENCE . . . . .	27
Elections Held During Active Conflict . . . . .	28
Elections Taking Place in the Context of a Formally Negotiated Peace Agreement . . . . .	29
Elections Taking Place in a Context of Potentially Moving from Peace to Conflict or Instability . . . . .	32
Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Elections . . . . .	33
Violence Perpetrated by Actors Outside of the Formal Political Process . . . . .	35
Post-Election Violence . . . . .	38
PART III: GETTING STARTED: CONDUCTING A POLITICAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS . . . . .	41
Internal Political Context Analysis . . . . .	45
Sample Internal Political Context Discussion Guide: Internal Lines of Inquiry . . . . .	57
Dividers and Connectors Analysis . . . . .	61
External Political Context Analysis . . . . .	69
Sample Key Informant Interview Guide — Political Context Assessment for Electoral Violence Programming: External Lines of Inquiry . . . . .	73

<b>PART IV: ELECTION OBSERVATION METHODOLOGY AND PROGRAM DESIGN:</b>	
<b>DESIGNING TO FIT THE CONTEXT</b> . . . . .	88
What is an Observation Methodology? . . . . .	89
Prioritization Matrix Tool . . . . .	105
Sample Questions for Long-Term Data Collection . . . . .	106
Sample Code of Conduct . . . . .	111
Post-Election Violence . . . . .	140
Violence Perpetrated by Actors	
Outside of the Formal Political Process . . . . .	148
Social Media Monitoring:	
A Cross-Cutting Observation Methodology . . . . .	153
<b>PART V: RESPONSE MECHANISMS</b> . . . . .	163
<b>PART VI: COMMUNICATING FINDINGS USING</b>	
<b>A CONFLICT-SENSITIVE APPROACH</b> . . . . .	173
<b>PART VII: INTEGRATING PERSPECTIVES OF MARGINALIZED</b>	
<b>AND UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS</b> . . . . .	177
Inclusive Responsive Facilitation . . . . .	179
<b>PART VIII: SAFETY AND SECURITY PLANNING FOR ELECTION</b>	
<b>VIOLENCE MONITORING</b> . . . . .	181
<b>CONCLUSION</b> . . . . .	184
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SELECTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES</b> . . . . .	185
NDI Guidance Materials Referenced in this Guide . . . . .	185
Bibliography . . . . .	185

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was authored in 2022 by NDI staff Sarah Cooper, Lexi Merrick Boiro and Anis Samaali, with input from Anika Borachi and Amanda Domingues.

Special thanks to Tamara Branković of the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA) in Serbia and to Najjiba Katesi of the First African Bicycle Information Organization (FABIO) in Uganda for their feedback as peer expert reviewers. Many thanks as well to NDI staff Johandra Delgado, Lauren Van Metre, Mario Mitre, Pat Merloe, and Sandra Pepera for providing valuable feedback on the guide, and to Jake Schwartz, Kion Bordbar, Mistire Kifle and Pilar Roig Minguell for copy editing. The guide's layout and style were designed by Dmytro Podolyanchuk.

Materials in this guide were also refined through a series of two intensive five-day virtual academies held in January and February 2022 with the participation of 29 citizen observer groups representing 27 countries. Through their active engagement and contributions, this cohort provided invaluable support to ensure that this guidance reflects practical experiences and challenges with electoral violence monitoring from around the world. NDI is indebted to these participants for generously sharing both their time and experience.

This guide complements additional resources available on citizen election observation including: *[The Quick Count and Election Observation](#)* (on parallel vote tabulations), *[Building Confidence in the Voter Registration Process](#)*, *[Media Monitoring to Promote Democratic Elections](#)*, *[Promoting Legal Frameworks for Democratic Elections](#)*, *[Unleashing the Potential of Election Data](#)*, *[Raising Voices in Closing Spaces](#)* (on strategic communications for citizen election observers), *[Disinformation and Electoral Integrity: A Guidance Document for NDI Election Programs](#)* and *[How Citizen Observers Can Monitor Abuse of State Resources in Elections](#)*. These guides, among others, are available for download at: [www.ndi.org/elections](http://www.ndi.org/elections), and full URLs for each link are included in this guide's **Bibliography and Selected Additional Resources** section. We hope that those who use this and other NDI resources will contact NDI with any comments, suggestions or requests.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that works in partnership around the world to strengthen and safeguard democratic institutions, processes, norms and values to secure a better quality of life for all. NDI envisions a world where democracy and freedom prevail, with dignity for all. Over the past 38 years, NDI has partnered with civic organizations in 70 countries to promote and protect the integrity of more than 250 elections. For more information, visit [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Election-related violence fundamentally undermines the rights of citizens to freely engage in electoral processes as voters, candidates, election officials, and activists. Political violence in elections subverts the core democratic principles of inclusion and accountability, and can reinforce harmful power structures, causing increased harm to groups who are already marginalized.

While violence can occur in many different types of electoral contexts, it does not appear in a vacuum. Electoral violence is rooted in a country's broader political and security context: pre-existing conflicts, power dynamics, and systems of structural violence are integral to how election-related violence may manifest, who it most impacts, and how it can affect the outcomes of the election. This guide provides citizen organizations with a framework for analyzing types of electoral violence, how they are likely to manifest in a given context, and ways to monitor, mitigate, and respond to such risks. The guide puts an emphasis on intersectional analysis throughout, with particular attention paid to violence against women in elections, directing readers to consider how electoral violence can often have its strongest impacts on marginalized groups and reinforce existing harmful power structures.

Given their unique expertise in understanding the intricacies of electoral processes at local and national levels — and their connections to other types of political stakeholders, including those who can respond to risks and incidents of violence — citizen election observers and other civic organizations are uniquely placed to analyze risks of electoral violence, design and implement a plan to monitor and mitigate these risks, and identify appropriate actors who can respond if violence occurs.

While violent elections pose threats to electoral integrity, it does not follow that all elections experiencing violence lack credibility nor that all peaceful elections are automatically more credible than violent ones. Rather, election observers must seek to understand the scope and scale of any violence, as well as its ramifications on norms for credible elections. This delicate balancing act can be achieved while still recognizing that all violence is, from a human rights perspective, unacceptable. As with any act of electoral fraud or manipulation, individual instances of violence should be documented and the perpetrators should be held accountable in the court of public opinion and, where warranted, through official judicial proceedings.

The guide provides a typology of electoral violence organized around three contextual factors for an electoral process: 1) conflict status (is the conflict ongoing,

has a formal peace process been negotiated, or is there a clear risk of moving from peace to violent conflict); 2) the primary perpetrators of election violence (whether it is formal parties to the political process seeking to use violence to gain an electoral advantage, non-state actors who view the elections as a critical moment to increase their influence or advance their policy agendas, or both); and 3) the phase of the electoral cycle wherein violence is most likely to occur.

After establishing a set of core principles and definitions for understanding electoral violence, and outlining a typology of electoral violence, the guide provides observers with guidance for conducting a comprehensive political context analysis. The guide then provides recommendations on designing appropriate monitoring methodologies for each broad type of electoral violence, with a cross-cutting focus on social media monitoring, as well as guidance for identifying appropriate response mechanisms.

The guide then turns its focus to external communications and the importance of communicating electoral violence monitoring findings using a conflict sensitive approach. The guide recognizes all of the sensitive, difficult and time consuming work needed to develop an effective monitoring and mitigating system, and points out that the purposes of all of those efforts are to assess the impact of violence on the integrity of the electoral process, to effectively communicate findings to appropriate actors, and to connect victims who so desire with appropriate support resources. While the guide places a focus on inclusion throughout the text, it pays particular attention to integrating perspectives of women and other marginalized populations. The guide concludes with recommendations for designing an appropriate safety and security strategy for a monitoring effort.

This guidance document builds upon and serves as a complement to previous NDI guidance materials on electoral violence observation, including *Monitoring and Mitigating Electoral Violence through Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observation* and *Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections*.

# INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, political power is predominantly contested through periodic elections, which are viewed as a means of conferring legitimacy on those who seek to govern. For elections to fulfill their intended functions of legitimizing political leadership and peacefully settling the competition for governmental power, the electoral process must be broadly viewed as credible and the results of the process should be trusted by the vast majority of citizens. Elections do not take place in a vacuum, of course, as pre-existing institutions, processes, and power dynamics, including systems of structural violence, all play a significant role in determining how elections will be organized and which members of society are most likely to have the resources needed to mount a successful electoral campaign. Electoral violence negates genuine participation, subverts public trust and can materially affect election outcomes.

International election practitioners have coalesced around and documented numerous standards, norms and best practices to organize credible elections. There is broad-based agreement that credible elections must be inclusive, transparent and accountable as well as competitive. A credible election should allow for the regular renewal of governmental leadership and for the introduction of new ideas and policy proposals. All eligible citizens should have equal opportunities to participate in elections, including as candidates, and should be able to freely exercise a meaningful choice between competing political visions when they cast their ballots. Credible democratic elections allow citizens to vote for the leaders or policies that most closely reflect their individual priorities, thereby giving citizens a personal stake in the trajectory of their country.

Electoral violence undermines the credibility of the electoral process by subverting democratic principles of inclusion and accountability. If violence can be deployed to prevent certain types of candidates from running, certain segments of the population from voting in accordance with their consciences, certain types of policies from being put forth or — even — can prevent elections from taking place altogether, this weakens the relationship between citizens and their government and risks entrenching dominant systems of political power. When election campaigns rely on intimidation and coercion rather than on previous performance or the strength of new policy proposals to succeed at the ballot box, officeholders no longer have strong incentives to govern in the interests of the voters. They are free to ignore the popular will, knowing that — come election time — they have coercive tools at their disposal to compel the election outcome they desire.

Violence is most likely to occur, therefore, when there is a political power imperative on the part of one or more actors to manipulate the electoral process.<sup>[1]</sup> As we will see through the following case studies and modules, election violence rarely “breaks out” spontaneously. Instead, violence is a tool that may at times be strategically employed by incumbents, opposition forces and/or non-state actors, with the intent of influencing how and whether elections take place, who can participate in elections, and what kinds of policy proposals will succeed. In most instances, electoral violence exists on a continuum of electoral manipulation where physical violence is often a strategy of last resort<sup>[2]</sup>, though once used it is more likely to be used again, and again. That is especially true where there is a perception that electoral-related violence can be used with impunity.

While violence can be an effective means of tilting the electoral playing field, it is also particularly risky. Compared to other forms of electoral manipulation, violence — particularly physical violence — is often highly visible,<sup>[3]</sup> which means that it is more likely to attract the attention of domestic and international actors who may try to hold the perpetrators accountable. Violence, once unleashed, is notoriously hard to control and tensions may escalate with deadly, undesired consequences. Violence also tends to beget violence, meaning that if a party or candidate maintains or gains power through force of arms today, it may set a dangerous precedent that they could be overthrown through force of arms tomorrow.

Because electoral violence is typically premeditated and strategic, election practitioners often speak of **early warning signs** of electoral violence. Just as time and planning must go into the organization of a successful issue-based election campaign, actors that are considering the use of violence generally engage in preparatory activities. They may build or strengthen relationships with thugs, paramilitary forces or other armed groups. They may seek to influence electoral actors with money or goods before resorting to threats. They may form alliances or enter into negotiations with local authorities in the communities that they wish to target. They may commit acts of violence against historically marginalized communities who have less visibility in society — including women, ethno-

---

<sup>[1]</sup> One exception to this rule of thumb is violence that takes place when elections are held during ongoing conflict or as part of a post-conflict transition. We will address the unique aspects of this particular type of violence at length under **Typology of Violence**.

<sup>[2]</sup> As discussed under **Violence Carried Out by Actors Outside of the Formal Political Process**, this assumption may not hold for categories of violence non-state actors that are intent on overthrowing the state.

<sup>[3]</sup> This is less true of violence that is psychological or economic in nature, a point that we will return to in **Cross-Cutting Principles and Definitions**.

linguistic minorities, religious minorities, persons living with disabilities or LGBTQ+ populations — before engaging in more widespread acts of violence. They may muddy the information environment through use of dangerous speech and inciteful language, the seeding of disinformation, or restrictive media regulations. They may also seek to gain influence over or altogether discredit key institutions that are involved in electoral administration or electoral justice.

All societies rely on pre-existing systems of power, which may include violence (structural violence, cultural violence, political violence, gender-based violence, etc.) to maintain social control. The exact form that preparatory activities take will be embedded in these systems, which can be activated or mobilized in different ways around elections. Understanding the root causes of violent conflict in any society is therefore key to understanding likely patterns of electoral violence. Moreover, many of these activities could independently be classified as attempts to manipulate the electoral process. When election violence takes place, it is likely to be in conjunction with other efforts at electoral manipulation or influence; when electoral manipulation occurs, regardless of the form it takes, electoral violence is more likely.<sup>[4]</sup>

Any act of electoral manipulation merits scrutiny by trained nonpartisan and independent election observers. Election observers can evaluate the likely impact of manipulation on the electoral process and can provide credible, impartial assessments as to whether the election continues to meet reasonable standards of inclusion, transparency and accountability. Because the negative consequences of electoral violence can be so severe — not only undermining the legitimacy of the democratic process but also posing significant risks to the safety and security of citizens — election observers have an especially important role to play by monitoring and helping to mitigate against potential violence.

Although instances of election violence are generally preceded by early warning signs, specific signs tend to be country and context-dependent. Citizen election observers in particular have the nuanced knowledge of local contexts needed to identify the appropriate early warning signs for their election environments. They are actively engaged in documenting and assessing acts of electoral manipulation around the election cycle, and best understand how evolving electoral and political dynamics may enhance risks for violence. Citizen election observers are often able to tap into vast networks of volunteers, allowing for broad-based and comprehensive

---

<sup>[4]</sup> Both as a reaction against the manipulation and as a potential escalation of the manipulation. The authors are indebted to Sarah Birch for this point. Birch, Sarah. *Electoral Violence, Corruption and Political Order*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020.

assessments of key issues. Finally, by the very nature of their work, citizen election observers understand the importance of transparency and accountability to safeguard against electoral fraud. If potentials for election violence can be identified and brought to light at an early stage in the electoral process, public opinion can be mobilized and electoral stakeholders can coordinate efforts to deter violence before it takes place.

Nonpartisan citizen activists have been at the forefront of election observation activities around the world for more than thirty years and they have made great strides in monitoring and mitigating election violence. This manual builds upon their collective efforts as well as upon pre-existing resources compiled by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) to better understand and systematize the practice of electoral violence monitoring. In particular, this guide draws upon *Monitoring and Mitigating Electoral Violence through Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observation*, which first sought to document best practices in the field of electoral violence monitoring by citizen observers, as well as *Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections*, which identified the unique ways that electoral violence can manifest against women and provided a framework for conceptualizing and addressing it.

The following guidance expands upon each of these resources by providing additional case studies, practical examples, perspectives and resource materials that reflect new and emerging best practices for violence monitoring by citizen organizations. Materials in this guide were refined through a series of two intensive five-day virtual academies held in January and February 2022 with the participation of 29 citizen observer groups representing 27 countries. The guide follows the structure of these academies and is intended to be used either as a stand-alone document to support program planning and implementation or as a training resource to complement the developed training materials and modules.<sup>[5]</sup>

---

<sup>[5]</sup> For training materials and support in planning a training on electoral violence monitoring and mitigation, please contact NDI's Elections team: <https://www.ndi.org/contact-us>.

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide opens by exploring **cross-cutting principles and definitions**, including: electoral integrity, electoral violence, do no harm and conflict sensitivity, intersectionality, violence against women in elections, as well as young people and electoral violence. This conceptual framing will provide a foundation for understanding how the rest of the material in the manual is explained.

The guide then delves into a **typology of election violence** as an organizing framework and explores how to conduct a political context assessment to determine which types of violence are most likely in a given country context. This includes understanding how dynamics of electoral violence might differ based on a country's conflict status, who the primary perpetrators of violence are likely to be, and the phase of the electoral cycle when violence is most likely to take place. Observers who seek to implement an electoral violence monitoring effort will need to identify how the dynamics of conflict — whether the election is taking place in the context of active conflict, a negotiated peace agreement, or potentially moving from peace to conflict or instability — will impact their monitoring effort and the ways in which violence is most likely to manifest itself. Similarly, observers will need to identify the likely primary perpetrators of violence to know where to focus their efforts, which might include looking at violence perpetrated by actors contesting the elections or by actors outside of the formal political process. Lastly, the phase of the electoral cycle in which violence is most likely to take place will change how violence develops and where the greatest risks lie. In particular, the guide considers how violence that takes place in the post-election period will require unique approaches for monitoring.

This organizing framework will lead observers to consider what dynamics they should focus on in their in-depth **political context analysis**. The next section of the guide provides practical guidance for how organizations can use internal resources and knowledge to analyze the political and electoral context, using a Dividers and Connectors exercise to identify early warning signs of violence and factors that lead to community resilience. It also gives guidance on how to gather diverse perspectives from external stakeholders. This section is accompanied by **model interview guides and worksheets**.

Next, the guide provides a common framework for understanding what is meant by an **electoral violence observation methodology** and proposes different types of methodologies that may be appropriate for each of the four main contexts in which election violence is likely to take place. Particular attention is paid to social media monitoring as a cross-cutting methodology that may be appropriate in all contexts. This section includes guidance for prioritizing which issues to observe and designing indicators to measure the presence of early warning signs of violence or factors for resilience or peace building. It is accompanied by a **prioritization matrix tool and sample questions for long-term observation data collection**.

The guide then considers **response mechanisms** for mitigating the potential for election violence under each of these four contexts, and shares general best practices for **external communications**. Finally, for focus groups, in-depth interviews, and other facilitated discussions with key stakeholders, as well as a **sample observer code of conduct**.



# PART I

## CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITIONS

As we move through the content of this training manual, we will be guided by certain cross-cutting principles that are important to consider in each of the interventions that we outline. Although we will refer back to these fundamental principles at appropriate moments in each module, they are very important and merit a few words now before we dive more deeply into our understanding of electoral violence.

### **Do No Harm and Conflict Sensitivity**

---

The “Do No Harm” framework emerged from communities of practice working on humanitarian aid and development, who became aware that their work was prolonging, exacerbating, or feeding into conflict dynamics. It simply states that, when implementing projects in potentially conflictual environments, it is important to avoid exposing program participants and beneficiaries to additional risks as well as to avoid negatively impacting the broader context. An essential corollary is that program interventions should make every effort not to reinforce barriers to the rights and political participation of historically marginalized groups (or anyone else). This means that project implementers in conflict-prone environments need to undertake regular analysis of the context, with a particular eye to how the context affects political space for historically marginalized groups. Based on this analysis, project implementers should understand how planned interventions may reasonably be expected to influence conflict dynamics *before* implementers take action.

Operating in sensitive, potentially conflictual environments is inherently risky. It is important to be aware that when historically marginalized communities mobilize and become politically active, they may sometimes become subject to reprisals and other new risks. The Do No Harm framework is not meant to eliminate risk, and does not mean that project implementers should never take risky decisions. Rather, it is about avoiding unintended negative consequences. It seeks to heighten awareness of the potentials for risk, so that project decisions can be taken with full knowledge of potential consequences and with conscious intent to maximize possibilities for

peace and inclusive democracy wherever possible. Conflict sensitivity approaches take Do No Harm one step further, seeking to positively contribute to the operating environment.

NDI has developed an online training course on Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity that is geared towards NDI staff, though it is open to any interested member of the public. It is available online<sup>[6]</sup> and includes five modules: key concepts and definitions, introduction to conflict analysis, integrating gender into Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity, inclusion practice, and program planning and design. This is a good point of departure for individuals looking for additional guided practice on using a conflict sensitivity framework in program design and implementation.

## Electoral Violence and Electoral Integrity

Electoral violence monitoring straddles multiple sub-disciplines of democracy and governance support, including: conflict mitigation or peacebuilding, electoral integrity, and violence prevention — including prevention of gender-based violence. Because this manual is designed for citizen election observers and those who support them, it takes as its point of departure that electoral violence primarily poses a challenge to electoral integrity. Elections provide a credible foundation for governance insofar as the public, candidates and major electoral stakeholders trust the process. Generally speaking, this occurs when electoral stakeholders believe that elections accurately reflected the will of the voters, that all eligible voters were provided reasonable opportunities to cast a ballot, and that candidates from across the political spectrum had equitable chances to compete.

Electoral violence is of concern because it disrupts political competition that should be about ideas and policy proposals and transforms it into a contest about who can potentially mobilize the greater force. It is also intimately linked to electoral participation. When violence enters the picture, there is a risk that certain candidates will not be able to safely contest elections, that voters will not feel free to vote or will not be willing to vote in accordance with their real preferences, that electoral actors will not fulfill their roles as established by law, or that policy proposals will be adjusted to reflect the interests of armed groups rather than of constituents.

Electoral violence can therefore be defined as **any act of violence occurring at any point during an election cycle that is aimed to or can reasonably be expected to**

---

<sup>[6]</sup> To sign up for the course and view the modules, visit <https://ed.ndi.org/courses/course-v1:NDI+CS+2021/course/>.

**affect the outcome or the credibility of an election.** The definition is intentionally vague to accommodate a range of divergent academic perspectives on how best to differentiate electoral violence from political violence, structural violence, gender-based violence, incidental violence that just happens to take place during an election, and other types of violence. In practical terms, these definitional debates should not have much of an effect on how citizen election observers approach their work. However, we will take a few minutes now to understand these debates and their ramifications.

The most narrowly accepted definition of electoral violence centers the intent of the perpetrators and argues that violence is only properly considered electoral violence if it involves a clear and direct attack on electoral infrastructure or stakeholders. A death threat mailed to a poll worker would constitute election violence, as would the looting of a voter registration center or the assassination of a candidate. A communal clash between nomadic pastoralists and settled farmers several weeks before an election would not be considered election violence under this definition, because it would not necessarily be clear that either community was being targeted in its capacity as an election stakeholder. While nomadic pastoralists and settled farmers may both vote in elections, unless they are being targeted for violence specifically *because* they intend to vote, this most narrow definition of electoral violence would argue that such violence should be considered as distinctive from electoral violence.

A broader definition of electoral violence argues that all violent attacks occurring in the lead-up to an election can be considered as election violence. As we shall see later on in the guide, it is often difficult to determine who is ultimately responsible for violence or what their motivations were when they carried out the violence. Is an armed protest several weeks before an election really a spontaneous uprising or is it covertly financed and organized by political loyalists to suppress or turn out the vote in certain areas? If a woman candidate is mugged by an anonymous perpetrator, was it because she was recognized and signaled out for her political role, was it because she was a woman and therefore perceived as a vulnerable target, or was it a combination of both factors? As citizen observers, we may never know the true intent of the perpetrators of violence, so this second definition assumes for practical purposes that any violent attacks occurring around an election could be caused by electoral dynamics and should be taken into consideration as potential manifestations of election violence.

A third, even broader, definition of electoral violence argues that it is not sufficient to consider only public violent physical attacks. As mentioned above, electoral violence matters because violence of any sort can negatively influence public perceptions of an election (even if the reasons the violence occurred ultimately have nothing to do with elections or politics) and — most importantly — can affect the willingness and

ability of all eligible citizens to participate equally in elections as voters, candidates, election officials and observers. This definition contends that violence takes place along a **continuum** that includes psychological violence, threats and coercion, economic violence, sexual violence and physical violence. By considering only physical violence, our analysis may ignore other equally important ways in which political participation is restricted, such as through online hate speech or through practices like family voting in which the head of the household (traditionally a man) coerces all other family members to vote for the candidate of his choosing.

As election observers, we have the luxury — to an extent — to sidestep these definitional debates, because our ultimate aim is not to provide an exact accounting of how much electoral violence took place during a given period of time. Instead, our goal is to assess whether the elections can be trusted, if they are credible, and if they provide an opportunity for citizens to participate in the political life of their communities. Although understanding the intent of perpetrators is important, because it can help us to develop recommendations to deter them from committing further acts of violence, we are more interested in the effects of their actions. Now that violence has taken place, how do people view the elections? Will the violence make it harder or easier for certain categories of citizens to participate and have the choices they would freely make?

As in the third definition, the idea of a continuum of violence or a continuum of strategies for manipulation is central to the way that citizen observers should approach their work. Most electoral violence is perpetrated as part of a deliberate strategy to influence elections. The goal of the perpetrators as rational actors is to manipulate the election to the greatest extent possible without being punished or facing a backlash for their actions. Thus, physical violence may often be the strategy of last resort because it carries the greatest risk of retribution.

Let us say that a perpetrator's goal is to influence the election in favor of Candidate X by preventing women, who are more likely to vote for Candidate Y, from participating. The perpetrator is likely to first try strategies of psychological violence — such as sharing negative stereotypes about politically active women — or economic coercion — perhaps providing small cash incentives to women who promise to vote for Candidate X. Strategies such as spreading negative stereotypes online are less risky to perpetrators than physical attacks, because the online space is largely anonymous and can shield the perpetrator from consequences. Similarly, vote buying is less risky than a physical attack because the 'victims' of vote buying often have an incentive to keep quiet about what has occurred.

However, if these strategies fail and the perpetrator still fears that women voters could cause Candidate X to lose the election, he or she may decide to escalate the

manipulation and engage in sexual assault or physical attacks against prominent politically active women. In this example, whether we consider vote buying and hate speech to be forms of electoral violence in and of themselves is somewhat beside the point. As election observers, we will in any event be interested to monitor and comment on these occurrences due to their damaging effects on women's political participation, which undermines the integrity and inclusivity of the election. We may also be interested in these phenomena as risk factors for, or potential early warning signs of, physical electoral violence.

To return to our original working definition, therefore, this guide will consider election violence as any act of violence — physical, psychological, economic, sexual, or otherwise — occurring at any point during an election cycle that is aimed to or can reasonably be expected to affect the outcome or the credibility of an election. It will be important for observers to monitor the continuum of violence or the continuum of manipulation, noting that when actors are engaged in other forms of electoral manipulation or violence at an early stage in the electoral process they are more likely to resort to physical electoral violence later.

This of course begs a question regarding what constitutes a credible election. No election is perfect and all elections fall short in some respects of the ideals of equal participation for all candidates and eligible voters. The monumental task facing citizen election observers is to assess these shortcomings and determine, on behalf of the citizens, whether the electoral process can nevertheless be viewed as sufficiently legitimate. This framing means that electoral violence cannot be evaluated in a vacuum but must always be placed within a broader understanding of the overall integrity or legitimacy of a given election.

Although a wealth of documentation exists on specific international norms and standards for credible elections,<sup>[7]</sup> when we speak about electoral integrity in the context of this guide, we can break our understanding down into three basic principles:

- **INCLUSION:** Universal and equal suffrage is a cornerstone of all democratic systems. Credible elections not only avoid active restrictions aimed at hindering or preventing certain populations from taking part; they also embrace proactive measures to facilitate universal and equal electoral participation. This means that the unique needs of all population groups — including women, youth, persons with disabilities, pastoralists,

---

<sup>[7]</sup> See, for example, EOS: The Carter Center's searchable database of public international law on human rights and elections <https://eos.cartercenter.org/>

internally displaced persons, illiterate voters, and other groups — have been considered in the design of the electoral system and its procedures and that electoral management bodies have taken reasonable steps to ensure that they may all participate in the electoral process. Inclusion applies not only to the right to vote, but also to the right and opportunity to be elected. Inclusive elections therefore also provide sufficient opportunities to candidates representing a spectrum of political tendencies and from all backgrounds to contest, provided they are willing to adhere to the legal framework. While most electoral systems include certain criteria for voting eligibility and to stand for office, these criteria should not be overly restrictive and should not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, religion, age, political belief, or other status noted in human rights norms.

- **TRANSPARENCY:** Credible elections ensure the freedom of all electoral actors to seek, receive and impart information, which undergirds the right to freedom of expression. In practice, transparency means that all major steps in the electoral process are sufficiently open to scrutiny, so that political parties, candidates, the media, civil society, and the public can get information and independently assess that the process was conducted honestly and accurately. Voters should also be able to obtain information about the platforms and funding sources of all major candidates to then make informed decisions at the polls.



Voters in line for the 2007 elections in Sierra Leone / NDI Photo



- **ACCOUNTABILITY:** Electoral accountability operates on two levels. First, credible elections strengthen the social contract between the electorate and their elected representatives. They provide citizens with the necessary means to hold officeholders accountable and ensure that elected officials take the needs and priorities of their constituents into consideration when making policy decisions. Second, credible elections themselves include mechanisms for accountability within the process. If any part of the election is thought to have been conducted improperly or dishonestly, there must be a well-defined procedure for raising concerns and mechanisms to make corrections if needed. This is also sometimes referred to as a system of electoral oversight and effective redress.

In light of these standards, any violence that undermines the inclusivity, transparency or accountability of an election can be considered as electoral violence. At the end of the day, however, election observation is an art as well as a science. Citizen observers are encouraged to adopt cutting edge practices and use systematized techniques to ensure that they are gathering robust, verifiable and



comprehensive data on an election process. This manual will accordingly provide guidance on new and emerging best practices for monitoring electoral violence. Nevertheless, there is no hard and fast rule for “how much electoral violence tips the scales of legitimacy” or for evaluating whether elections sufficiently meet standards of inclusion, transparency and accountability. It is the role and awesome responsibility of citizen observers to make impartial, evidence-based assessments, both as informed citizens of the countries where elections are taking place and as the ultimate experts in their own electoral contexts.

## Intersectional Analysis

Elections determine who will be able to exercise governmental power; electoral violence seeks to prejudice the outcome of elections by influencing participation. It tilts the electoral playing field by seeking to ensure that certain kinds of voters, candidates and electoral officials take part in elections while others do not. If certain groups are unable to safely take part in elections or do not feel secure to freely vote their conscience, the outcome will be affected and can even be predetermined.

Electoral violence is, however, a high-stakes form of electoral manipulation. As mentioned before, physical violence is often distinctly visible, and the perpetrators may be more likely to face consequences — either from actors at home or from the international community — than if they were to engage in more subtle forms of manipulation. As a result, perpetrators have some incentive to first target those historically marginalized groups that could constitute a credible threat to incumbent power structures, but that may lack visibility and power to draw attention to the violence and spark a public outcry or backlash. Moreover, pre-existing norms or negative beliefs about historically marginalized groups may make it more socially acceptable for certain groups to be victimized, and these norms and power imbalances may be intentionally weaponized around elections. For example, if ethnic or religious minorities are considered “second-class” or if sexual and gender minorities are viewed as deviant members of society undeserving of rights even before elections take place, there is likely to be less of a public outcry if their ability to participate in elections is restricted.

Before designing your monitoring methodology, you therefore need to understand power dynamics in the context that you will be monitoring. Who holds power and who could disrupt those claims to power? Who is at greater risk for victimization based on pre-existing power dynamics? Who do you believe could be the intended victims of any anticipated acts of electoral violence? Acts of violence designed to exclude female candidates from standing for office will look different from acts of



violence designed to prevent rural voters from turning out to vote. Moreover, acts of violence targeting rural voters may either manifest differently or have differential effects based on the voter's sexual and gender identity, age, religious affiliation, ethnicity, disability status, etc. Gender identities and notions of masculinity and femininity can have profound impacts on how individuals experience violence, and on how this experience shapes their participation in the electoral process.<sup>[8]</sup>

Such nuanced understandings of the potential victims of electoral violence and the forms of violence-targeting that these potential victims are most likely to take is critical. For example, if your monitoring methodology is designed to capture violence against journalists who provide objective coverage of the campaign environment, but most electoral violence in your context is instead directed against minority ethno-linguistic groups to prevent them from voting, you will miss critical information about how violence is influencing the electoral environment.

**Intersectional analysis** provides a framework grounded in gender studies, critical race analysis, disability rights and equality jurisprudence for thinking about marginalization and for answering some of the questions posed above. Intersectionality is the idea that every individual's experience is based on multiple overlapping identities (such as gender, socio-economic class and ethnicity) and that the interplay of these identities create unique experiences of structural discrimination and marginalization.

According to Mirjana Najcevska, the chair of the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, **structural discrimination** "...refers to rules, norms, routines, patterns of attitudes and behavior in institutions and other societal structures that represent obstacles to groups or individuals in achieving the same rights and opportunities that are available to the majority of the population. It is also important to recognize that the consequences of rules, norms and behaviors are that some are affected negatively and others positively. Such discrimination may be either open or hidden, and it could occur intentionally or unintentionally. Structural discrimination is about "them" and "us". It is our action as individuals, the intentional as well as the unintentional action, which create and maintain structures."<sup>[9]</sup>

<sup>[8]</sup> Safer World's *Gender Analysis of Conflict Toolkit* provides additional resources for deepening intersectional analysis of the impact of gender identities on and in conflict settings.  
<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1076-gender-analysis-of-conflict>

<sup>[9]</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/IWG/Session8/MirjanaNajcevska.doc>

**Marginalized populations** are groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.<sup>[10]</sup>

As you are designing your program, it is important to think about the identities that place individuals at risk for marginalization in your context as well as how you can adequately capture information about the experiences of these historically marginalized communities in the design and implementation of your program. For example, no one individual can fully represent the views of all members of a particular group. If, for example, you identify gender and internal displacement as two identities that may place a population at risk for marginalization in your context, it will be important to talk to multiple representatives of these communities — to women, as well as to internally displaced women and to internally displaced men — about their historic experiences of electoral violence and electoral participation. It may be that internally displaced women experience different forms of electoral violence than urban women or that men in general are subject to different forms of electoral violence than women. Gathering detailed information about experiences of violence — using an intersectional lens where possible — will help to ensure that your monitoring methodology is adapted to the most important forms of electoral violence in your context and that you are not excluding the experiences of less powerful or less visible communities through poor program design. As you design your approach, you should also keep in mind that individuals within marginalized groups face differing opportunities and barriers to engage in the electoral process based in their overlapping and intersecting identities and experiences.

The sample resources provided throughout this guidance document will make use of intersectional analysis in their design. In particular, intersectional analysis is an especially important component of political context analysis, which we will discuss in more detail below. To put the concept into practice, however, it may be useful to do a stand-alone brainstorming exercise at the outset of the program to identify the important identities for intersectional analysis in your country or region's context. Below are a few sample questions to get you started.<sup>[11]</sup>

---

<sup>[10]</sup> <https://nccdh.ca/glossary/entry/marginalized-populations>

<sup>[11]</sup> These questions borrow heavily from Alison Symington's 2004 toolkit on intersectionality <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/intersectionality-a-tool-for-gender-and-economic-justice-facts-and-issues/>

- What are the forms of identity that are critical organizing principles for your community (for example, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship, age, disability status, sexuality, geographic location, language group)?
- Within your community, which women, girls, men and boys are the most marginalized? Why is this? How are characteristics of masculinity and femininity understood in your community?
- Which identity groups are most/least likely to have access to education in your community?
- Which identity groups are most/least likely to exercise control over economic resources in your community (including land and access to water)?
- Which identity groups have the highest/lowest levels of political representation?
- Which identity groups are the most/least likely to vote in elections and why?
- Which identity groups are the most/least likely to hold reliable and/or well-paying jobs?
- What laws, policies and/or organizational or cultural practices limit opportunities for advancement for particular identity groups?
- Does violence at different levels in society — including at the household level and the community level — affect certain identity groups in particular? If yes, how so?

## Electoral Violence and Violence Against Women in Elections

Around the world, women are targeted by violence because of their commitment to vote, their jobs as electoral officials, their political activism, and their aspirations to hold political office. NDI categorizes this kind of violence as “violence against women in elections” (VAW-E), and defines it as any act of violence — threats, hate speech, blackmail, assault or assassination — that is unduly directed at someone because of her gender, and that seeks to determine, delay or otherwise influence her engagement in an electoral process.

Election-related violence against women is a related but distinct issue from general electoral violence because it is specifically aimed at preventing women from exercising their voice and agency. Women are targeted specifically because they are women. They encounter structural barriers that keep them from gaining equal

stature or access to power, even within processes intended to empower. They can also be more vulnerable than men to widespread violence, and experience disproportionate impacts in tense electoral situations, often because they occupy a subordinate status in society. These effects can be especially high in a post-conflict context or during political transitions that follow conflicts, when social inequalities — including the social inequality between men and women — are already exacerbated. However, violence against women in elections has not been tracked or measured separately from general violence during elections — a major concern. As long as the majority of data on electoral violence remains gender-blind, it is impossible to properly address the problem and bridge the gender gap in political participation. This has implications for the integrity of the electoral process and, ultimately, undermines democracy.<sup>[12]</sup>

As noted at the outset, electoral violence is intimately linked to inclusion in electoral processes. Women comprise approximately fifty percent of the population in most countries, yet have faced many historic barriers to full and equal political participation. Moreover, violence against women — particularly violence that is perpetrated behind closed doors — is normalized and accepted in many country contexts. Because women are a numerically large but historically marginalized community, they may be particularly vulnerable to less readily visible forms of electoral violence such as coerced family voting or to psychological violence, including hate speech and intimidation online. Such tactics to restrict the franchise and tilt the electoral playing field are harder to monitor than when there is a direct attack on a candidate or on a polling station, but nevertheless dissuade women from taking part in elections as candidates, voters, polling officials, or engaged members of the public. A robust strategy to monitor risks of election violence will take these forms of violence into account and identify appropriate methods to identify and mitigate the risks.

Gender should therefore also be a primary focus of any intersectional analysis that groups conduct of the political environment. Although violence against women takes many common forms, not all women have equal access to political power and social capital; not all women are equally at risk for electoral violence and, in some instances, women may even be perpetrators of electoral violence. Although a wealthy urban woman running for elected office and a potential rural woman voter from a minority ethnic group may each experience forms of violence during an election cycle, the way in which violence manifests against each is likely not the same. For example, the woman running for elected office may face harassment in the

---

<sup>[12]</sup> The above paragraphs are taken from <https://www.ndi.org/VAW-E>.

media while the rural voter may be intimidated to vote for the preferred candidate of her village leader. When identifying important categories for organizing identities in your context as part of the initial context analysis, you should always consider how gender intersects with other identities. For example, if English speakers and French speakers are identified as two important organizing identities in a given country, it is crucial to further subdivide that identity and to consider the unique experiences of English speaking women, English speaking men, French speaking women and French speaking men.

NDI has produced several guidance documents specifically designed to help programs consider and draw a particular focus to women as victims of electoral violence, including *Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections*<sup>[13]</sup> and *Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool*<sup>[14]</sup>. You may find these to be helpful additional resources as you begin to apply an intersectional lens to your program design and implementation.

## Young People and Electoral Violence

In many contexts, parties or political leaders have mobilized young people to initiate or escalate incidents of physical violence to support their political aims. Both ruling and opposition parties can mobilize their official party youth wings, and in some cases independent youth groups form relationships with parties and mobilize their members to further party aims. In these instances, political leaders often capitalize on youth disillusionment with the status quo. Leaders may also provide financial incentives to participate in such activities that mobilize young people, especially in areas where youth unemployment is a major issue, or use vote buying tactics with young people more broadly. Civic organizations — including observers, faith-based groups, youth groups, sports associations, and others — can play an impactful role in building support among young people to counter risks of electoral violence through public communications campaigns and advocacy. Involving young political party members in the design of the party's strategic direction and platform to respond to youth issues can reduce the risks of marginalization and violence.

Organizations should use an intersectional approach for incorporating the perspectives of young people into their political context analysis and monitoring,

---

<sup>[13]</sup> <https://www.ndi.org/votes-without-violence-guide>

<sup>[14]</sup> <https://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections-online-social-media-analysis-tool>



▲ Executive Director of Participation Initiative for Behavioural Change In Development (PIBCID), an NDI partner in Kogi, presents youth position paper to Commissioner of Police on peaceful governorship elections. NDI Photo 2018

recognizing that the experiences of young people differ greatly based on their overlapping and intersecting identities. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the impact political disenfranchisement and disillusionment among young people may have on their participation in the electoral process, and risks of them being subject to or manipulated to participate in electoral violence. Involving youth organizations in context analysis exercises allows groups to capture the specificities of what impacts youth participation in politics and elections, as well as the drivers of youth involvement in election related violence.



# PART II

## TYPOLGY OF ELECTION VIOLENCE

Although we sometimes have a tendency to think of electoral violence as a random occurrence, it is, as noted above, more often deployed strategically in order to influence an electoral process. This means that it takes certain common forms that we can recognize in advance. For the purposes of this guide, we will consider three major attributes — which are further subdivided into five major contexts — in which election violence is likely to take place. This typology is not intended to be exhaustive and you may have personally encountered instances of electoral violence that do not fit neatly into one of these five categories or contexts. However, the typology covers the most common forms of electoral violence and provides a useful framework for identifying the way or ways in which electoral violence is most likely to manifest in the context where you are operating. This becomes helpful because, as we will see later on in the guide, certain interventions that could successfully serve to understand and mitigate electoral violence of one type will not be appropriate and may actually increase risks for electoral violence if the expected form of violence is of another type.

In general, when it comes to designing an electoral violence monitoring program you will want to consider: **the conflict status** (is the conflict ongoing or has a formal peace process been negotiated); **the primary perpetrators of election violence** (whether it is formal parties to the political process seeking to use violence to gain an electoral advantage, non-state actors who view the elections as a critical moment to increase their influence or advance their policy agendas or both); and **the phase of the electoral cycle** wherein violence is most likely to occur. The typology is accordingly organized around these considerations. This typology is intended to help observer groups expand the range of violence monitoring and mitigation tools and tactics at their disposal. In practice, you may find that your elections experience elements of some or even all of the different violence types described below. There is no “one size fits all” approach to violence monitoring, and you will need to prioritize your interventions based on considerations of time, resources, the internal capacity of your organization, and your own assessment of which methodologies are likely to be most impactful in your country context.

## CONFLICT STATUS

Conflict status is a critical consideration in determining how to design an effective electoral violence monitoring methodology. Elections taking place while part or parts of the country are experiencing active conflict present unique challenges to election administrators and observers alike. Observers must not only take special precautions to ensure their own safety and security, but they should also strive to assess how the ongoing conflict affects issues of election credibility, especially in scenarios where elections can only be held in select parts of the country. Elections organized during ongoing conflict may also be increasingly common in future years, and therefore merit particular treatment.<sup>[15]</sup> Elections that are organized as a result of a negotiated peace process present slightly different opportunities for nonpartisan election observation and so will be treated as a separate case. Citizen election observers may have an important role to play by decreasing information asymmetry between parties to the peace process who are often keenly attuned to any potentials for their former opponents to renege on the negotiated settlement, and by increasing transparency of the election administration. In both of the conflict scenarios presented, the most likely vector for election violence will be an escalation or a reignition of ongoing or previous armed conflict dynamics. In some ways, this simplifies your political context analysis; it is easier to determine who the perpetrators and victims of electoral violence are likely to be by referring back to these conflict dynamics. However, elections in both instances are likely to be extremely polarized and it may be challenging for observer groups to position themselves as truly nonpartisan and objective sources of information. We will treat each of these two context categories and these considerations in turn.

## Elections Held During Active Conflict

Elections may be organized in conditions of ongoing conflict, particularly if conflict predominantly affects only part or parts of a country. In such a scenario, partial elections may be held to demonstrate, consolidate or legitimate power in those regions of the country that allow for secure voting. Elections may also be organized while conflict is ongoing in an attempt to de-escalate violent conflict by providing

---

<sup>[15]</sup> Recent analysis of armed conflict trends by ReliefWeb suggest that the number of global armed conflicts has trended upwards between 1989 and 2020, although the number of casualties from conflict over the same time period has slightly decreased. Håvard Strand and Håvard Hegre, "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2020," *Peace Institute Oslo (PRIO) Conflict Trends*, (March 2021): 1, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Strand%20and%20Hegre%20-%20Trends%20in%20Armed%20Conflict%2C%201946-2020%20-%20Conflict%20Trends%203-2021.pdf>



combatants with an alternate means of contesting power. Finally, elections may be held during active conflict because they are prescribed by law and legally must go forward even if the state does not exercise a complete monopoly on the use of force at the time when elections should be called.

When elections are held under active conflict conditions, citizen observers must first weigh the relative merits of deploying to observe. Potential security risks to observers are likely to be high. Observer groups may wish to closely monitor and/or, where appropriate and safe, coordinate with electoral security actors. Groups will need to first assess whether reasonable precautions are feasible, then determine which precautions to take.

Observer groups may also be of the opinion that the security situation does not allow for an inclusive election and that the act of deploying could therefore lend credibility to an electoral exercise that is inherently not legitimate. In determining what constitutes an inclusive election when elections are held during active conflict, it may help to apply a reasonable person standard and to consider the broader political context. If a country is organizing its first democratic elections following years of civil war, elections may be an important step forward in the country's democratic trajectory even if they are not perfectly inclusive. They may be substantively **more** inclusive, transparent and accountable than previous means of determining who governs. In some instances, however, it can still be helpful to engage in electoral violence monitoring even when there are serious questions about the underlying credibility of elections.

#### EXAMPLES:



Afghanistan (2014)



Ethiopia (2021)



Libya (2019–2021)



Sudan (1986)

## Elections Taking Place in the Context of a Formally Negotiated Peace Agreement

Elections held under conditions of recently concluded conflict present a unique set of considerations for citizen observers. Post-conflict elections are thought to play a role in transforming the contest for power from a violent, zero-sum challenge into a more peaceful competition of ideas that allows for the possibility of power-sharing

as well as for regular alterations in the distribution of power. The transition period, however, is often characterized by considerable uncertainty. Political institutions that have developed to support protracted conflict — including militias, black market or informal economies, camps for refugees and internally displaced persons, and the humanitarian aid sector — must give way to institutions that instead support peace and democratic norms — such as political parties, electoral management bodies, and nonpartisan civil society organizations.<sup>[16]</sup> This transformation cannot occur overnight and, in the interim, trust between actors is typically extremely low. Only recently, opposing factions were willing to kill to stake their claims to power. Now, each must trust that the others will abide by the terms of a new and different game. If institutions that developed to support conflict fail to fully demilitarize and/or perceive that their interests are no longer well served by participating in an electoral process, a resumption of conflict may occur. In this type of violence, elections are not themselves a direct cause of or trigger for conflict per se, but elements of the election administration and/or of the implementation of any concurrent peace processes may serve to reignite long standing grievances. In some instances, partial implementation of a peace process means that elections will take place in a context where parts of the country are at peace while other parts continue to experience active conflict.

Because this type of electoral violence is characterized by low levels of trust between election stakeholders, independent and nonpartisan citizen election observers can be well-positioned to address challenges of information asymmetry. If parties to the peace process have low levels of trust in the administration of elections, citizen observers can provide timely, independent and accurate information to all parties to the process, enhancing trust in the work of the formal election management body (EMB). Similarly, if political parties commit to codes of conduct that all must abide by as a pre-condition to peacefully participating in elections, citizen observers may be trusted to help monitor the code and to draw attention to any violations. If there is an ongoing demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process, citizen observers deployed across the country may be able to gather reliable information about whether the process is underway or if former combatants continue to stockpile arms in certain parts of the country.

Similarly, citizen observers may be able to provide trusted information about whether local-level peace and reconciliation efforts are taking place in accordance with formal timelines. They may also assess whether civic and voter education campaigns and political party campaigns are occurring in all areas of the country. This information may assist citizen observers in making recommendations around

---

<sup>[16]</sup> Terrence Lyons, *Demilitarizing Politics: Elections on the Uncertain Road to Peace* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2005), 3–5.

the timing and sequencing of elections. The aim is to help ensure that elections are not organized prematurely before former combatants have time to disarm, nascent political parties have had time to develop external outreach and communications strategies around their party platforms, and citizens have had time to properly understand the new electoral system. If general elections are being held, there may also be some advantages to organizing lower stakes local elections that are likely to allow for a more diverse pool of winning candidates before national elections, where the higher stakes of losing may cause parties to revert to armed conflict if the results of the election are not favorable.

Communicating around election violence is always sensitive. A particular challenge for citizen observers in this election scenario is that sharing credible information about deviations from agreed-upon party codes of conduct, delays to the peace process, or acts of localized violence committed by some actors may actually cause parties to the peace process to **lose** confidence in the credibility of the elections or may incentivize all parties to respond to reported acts of violence by one party with violence of their own. Such a race to the bottom could ultimately even reignite conflict. It is therefore critical that citizen observers operating in this context foster close connections with international, regional, and local actors that are supporting the formal peace process and seek to ensure that there is a transparent mechanism in place that is accepted by all major stakeholders. This is necessary so that any reported incidents of violence or challenges to the peace and electoral processes can be addressed. We will develop this idea further under **Response Mechanisms**.

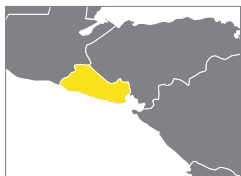
It is also important to note that when elections are held under post-conflict conditions, there is often a perception, because society has been divided along conflicting lines for so long, that civil society organizations represent particular political, ethno-linguistic or regional interests. Even if your organization maintains high standards of independence in its work, you may have to take active steps to counter some of these perceptions, so that your findings can be accepted by the actors they most need to influence. This may involve entering into a coalition with organizations from other parts of the country, recruiting new staff members of diverse backgrounds, developing partnerships with community development associations or other grassroots actors that may have a more neutral reputation, or sharing your observation findings with another actor or body such as an ombudsman's office that can convey them to political parties on your behalf. You will need to be sensitive to your organizational reputation and must also take care that your communications and actions on other projects do not give the major political actors cause to doubt your independence and credibility when it comes to reporting on electoral violence.

**EXAMPLES:**

Angola (1992)

Bosnia-Herzegovina  
(1996)

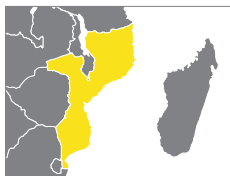
Cambodia (1993)

Central African Republic  
(2015–2016)

El Salvador (1994)



Liberia (1997)



Mozambique (1994)



Tajikistan (1999–2000)

## Elections Taking Place in a Context of Potentially Moving from Peace to Conflict or Instability

Though not a major focus of this guide, it is important to note the dangers of electoral violence and its consequences in countries where relative peace and stability in politics is increasingly threatened by hyper-polarization and potential for political violence. Such conditions can develop in places experiencing relatively new transitions to democracy as well as in countries with long-standing democratic traditions that are being challenged by democratic erosion. The election monitoring and violence mitigation factors discussed below are relevant in such countries. In those places traditional political actors, party officials and candidates, may enable, foment or even instigate political and electoral violence. Actors outside of the formal electoral process typically play key roles. They may be ideologically motivated by extreme political beliefs, various forms of chauvinism and bigotry, or opportunist thuggery.

## PRIMARY PERPETRATORS

### Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Elections

This is the broadest category of election violence presented under this typology: election violence that is committed as part of a strategy for actors contesting the elections to manipulate or unduly influence the electoral process to gain an advantage. In this scenario, violence is committed by either incumbent political actors and their supporters, by opposition political actors and their supporters, or by both with the ultimate objective of tilting the electoral playing field and winning the election. Both sides will seek to influence the election to the greatest extent possible while trying to avoid exposure of their actions, which could result in penalties, prosecution or a public backlash at the polls. As discussed in the section **Electoral Violence and Electoral Integrity**, the idea of a continuum of violence or a continuum of manipulation is central to understanding this type; physical violence is often the strategy of last resort for actors on both sides because it is the most easily visible form of violence or manipulation and therefore the form most likely to result in negative consequences for the perpetrators.

Most evidence that has been gathered in comprehensive studies of pre-election violence to-date suggests that incumbent state actors are the most likely perpetrators of pre-electoral violence and have overall greater influence over the conditions in which elections take place.<sup>[17]</sup> Incumbents control political appointments, have greater leverage to set policy agendas and can influence funding priorities in the national budget. As a result, particularly in political systems that lack a strong system of checks and balances with a clear separation of powers, incumbents may be better able to shield themselves from negative consequences of electoral manipulation and can act with greater impunity. By contrast, if opposition actors engage in electoral manipulation, the state may be able to more easily influence the judiciary or other oversight actors to hold opposition forces to account for attempted violations. This has important implications, which we will discuss in more detail under **Response Mechanisms**. Traditionally in election violence monitoring, state actors such as national security forces or police, media oversight bodies or human rights commissions, the courts and others are relied on to assist with mitigating and responding to documented instances of electoral violence. However, it is important to evaluate whether these actors can be expected to respond impartially in a given

---

<sup>[17]</sup> Birch 3

country context; in a worst case scenario, there is a risk that these actors (security forces in particular) may be complicit in or actively supporting the very same violence that they are being asked to address.

Economic violence and physical violence often occur in tandem under this violence type. For actors seeking to influence the election by limiting the electoral participation of some groups or encouraging the electoral participation of others, vote buying may be a more effective means of incentivizing behavior change without attracting undue attention than physical violence or threats of physical violence. Vote buying, a form of coercion to negate free political choice, often takes place covertly, and the individuals who agree to exchange their votes for goods or services may not realize that this practice undermines electoral integrity (for example, if this is simply seen as “business as usual” around elections) or may have strong incentives not to report what has taken place for fear of also being implicated. In addition, vote buying is most effective when it is used in a carrot and stick manner, where the threat of retaliatory violence can be held out as a means of enforcing the implicit agreement. Without the threat of violence, there is nothing to prevent voters from “selling” their votes to all comers and voting in accordance with their consciences.

Vote buying is an expensive but often effective strategy for a perpetrator seeking to influence voter choice. For this reason, incumbent state actors are also the most likely to be able to engage in widespread vote buying. They have access to greater resources through their control of the state, and they can more credibly threaten to commit retaliatory violence with impunity thanks to their control of the national security apparatus. This is not to say that only incumbent actors engage in vote buying and accompanying threats of retaliatory violence. NDI’s publication *How Citizen Organizations Can Monitor Abuse of State Resources in Elections: An NDI Guidance Document*<sup>[18]</sup> provides more insight into the dynamics around vote buying and abuse of state resources in elections. For our purposes it is important to note that a strategy of vote buying can be considered a form of economic violence in its own right, and it is often correlated with a higher risk of outbreaks of physical violence.

Organizations seeking to monitor and mitigate electoral violence by electoral contestants may be particularly interested in the risks posed by election boycotts. Where the opposition unites to oppose the electoral process, the risks of violence are more likely to be high if the opposition threatens to prevent the elections from taking place by force, in which case large-scale clashes between opposition factions and electoral security (such as those witnessed during Côte d’Ivoire’s 2020 presidential

---

[18] <https://www.ndi.org/publications/how-citizen-organizations-can-monitor-abuse-states-resources-elections-ndi-guidance>

elections) may be of concern. It should be noted, however, that the majority of election boycotts more closely follow the Bangladesh model, where elections are routinely boycotted and at times accompanied by localized physical violence that nevertheless does not become widespread.<sup>[19]</sup>

#### EXAMPLES:



Côte d'Ivoire  
(2010, 2020)



Guinea (2015, 2020)



United States (2020)



Ethiopia (2020)

## Violence Perpetrated by Actors Outside of the Formal Political Process

In many parts of the world, election violence is not only perpetrated by candidates, politicians and others with a direct stake in the election process. Actors who are outside of the formal political process — such as organized criminal groups, terrorist cells or other violent non-state actors — may also deploy strategic use of violence around an election period to advance their political goals and interests.

For organized criminal groups, the objective is often to ensure that elected officials will turn a blind eye to their operations or will continue to provide them with access to needed infrastructure and markets to conduct their business. In some instances, this may mean forging a permanent alliance with a particular political party and utilizing revenue earned from criminal activities to support the party's political outreach; such an arrangement has historically existed, for example, between the Christian Democratic Party and the Sicilian Mafia in Italy. In other instances, this may mean developing local-level alliances with whichever party or candidate in a particular community seems most likely to represent the interests of the criminal group. This, for example, is the approach that has been taken by drug cartels in Mexico, which have no permanent allegiances to any single political party but will provide support, including — in some instances — financial backing, to any candidate that seems favorably inclined to their operations while using high-profile acts of violence, assassination and intimidation to discourage any candidates who wish to

<sup>[19]</sup> Beaulieu, Emily. *Electoral Protest and Democracy in the Developing World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), at 23–24 and 90.

run on a reformist or anti-corruption platform from standing. In this way, organized criminal groups seek to influence the types of policy proposals on offer during the election or actions taken by elected officials once in office.

Terrorist organizations or violent non-state actors may view elections as a high-profile moment to demonstrate their power and influence. Although they may commit acts of violence to bolster support for preferred parties or candidates, they may also act as spoilers to the electoral process altogether, as was the case of the Taliban before their takeover of Afghanistan.

Such actors may also threaten that elections can not be held safely in territories under their control unless certain concessions are made. In Northern Mali for example, warlords have historically refused to allow elections to take place in territories they control until certain pre-conditions are met in their favor. Similarly, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has at times threatened to attack electoral infrastructure in other countries, and carried out a high-profile attack against the election commission in Libya in 2018. Violent extremist actors may also use hyperbolic political discourse that arises during elections to further discredit the state and bolster recruitment, or may encourage adherents to boycott the elections as a symbol of their opposition to the state.

In circumstances where non-state actors pose the greatest risk of electoral violence, citizen observers may be able to partner productively with certain elements of the state that are not connected to criminal or violent groups. However, this will merit careful assessment as chains of patronage may not always be immediately visible and may extend further than is first suspected. While citizen observers are always advised to take safety seriously and take reasonable precautions not to endanger themselves or others for the sake of the observation effort, it is important to note that observers operating under a scenario where violence is perpetrated by actors outside the formal political process may be particularly at risk for violent reprisal. Whereas political actors may use violence primarily as a strategy of last resort due to the risk of damaging their image with the public ahead of an electoral contest, non-state actors are unlikely to share such concerns. They may even have an incentive to engage in high profile acts of violence against observers in order to deter any other actors that may wish to shine a spotlight on their activities.

A final sub-type of electoral violence worth noting here is that of violence that is orchestrated or supported by international actors seeking to influence the electoral outcome. In some instances, international actors may deploy militias to lend support to particular political factions, such as ongoing Russian mercenary deployments in Sudan, which are suspected to serve as reinforcements to the military junta that came to power in October 2021. In other instances, international actors — much like



non-state actors — may use covert financing to disproportionately advantage the candidacies of some candidates over others, or may pay for political advertising (particularly online where there are often legal and technical gaps in campaign finance regimes) that promotes certain policies or spreads disinformation. Successfully countering the actions of international actors may require coordination with the state and with policymakers who are mandated to define the terms of diplomatic relations or who can take other actions against the perpetrators to decrease risks. In instances where incumbent actors are the primary beneficiaries of international interventions, however, publicly exposing those ties may be the only option available in the hopes that they may be held accountable in the court of public opinion.

#### EXAMPLES:



Colombia (2018)



Jamaica (2018)



Libya (2018)



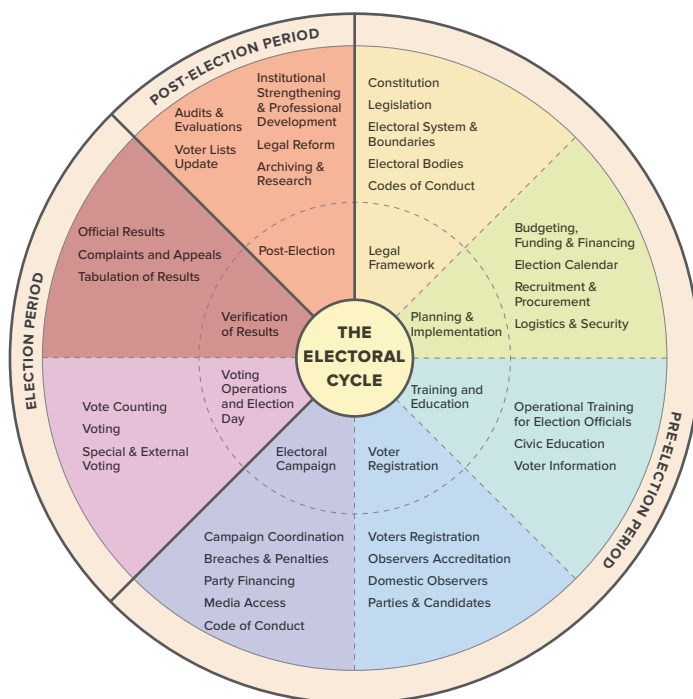
Mali (2018)



Mexico (2018, 2021)

## PHASE OF THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

Different phases of the electoral cycle may be associated with an uptick in electoral violence or an increased risk of electoral violence. The candidate nomination phase, for instance, may be a time for parties to exercise intimidation tactics against their own members to box out candidates perceived as unlikely to be competitive in a general election (which may include women, youth or representatives of marginalized communities). Voters may experience harassment or intimidation during the voter registration period, either to compel them to register or to discourage them from registering depending on the perpetrators' objectives. For the purposes of this guide, we will focus on strategies and tactics that observer groups can use to prevent post-election violence in particular. Guidance in the above sections regarding ***Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Elections*** and by ***Actors Outside the Formal Political Process*** applies to violence monitoring during the broad pre-



The Electoral Cycle

election phase and on election day. Widespread post-election violence is often of special concern for citizen election observers, as it can be a strong indication that certain parties or subsets of the population do not accept the election as credible. Other methodologies presented in the framework are also more focused on the pre-election or election day period, so the focus on post-election violence here will serve to further expand the range of methodologies at an observer group's disposal.

## Post-Election Violence

In the post-election period, violence is most often — but not exclusively — orchestrated by the losing party or parties to an election, either in response to genuine concerns of fraud or to cast doubt on the credibility of an otherwise legitimate electoral process. In the latter case, post-election protest becomes an effective strategy for registering discontent. Protest is more likely if the election was close, meaning that there is a real or perceived possibility that the electoral losers could have won were it not for electoral manipulation.

Post-election protest, provided it is peaceful, is an important form of free speech. Countries such as Kenya, where post-election protests in 2017 resulted in at least

24 deaths,<sup>[20]</sup> or Côte d'Ivoire, where contestation over the 2010 presidential election resulted in a deadly civil war and more than 3,000 casualties,<sup>[21]</sup> loom large whenever we talk about risks associated with post-election protest. However, recent academic research concluded — based on a review of 765 elections conducted in 118 countries between 1975 and 2006 — that the majority of post-election protests resulted in electoral winners and losers finding peaceful solutions to accommodate one another. This may include accommodations such as political appointments, the formation of new political coalitions or a judicial review of the elections resulting in a recount or a rerun.<sup>[22]</sup> Nevertheless, there is always a risk that post-election protest escalates and turns violent, typically because of either a crack-down by security forces or because actors wishing to retaliate against the electoral victors may take advantage of the anonymity provided by a collective action like a protest to commit acts of violence for which they would otherwise fear retribution.

Under these circumstances, citizen observers have an important role to play in helping to disseminate credible information about the electoral process, including any formal or informal electoral complaint and dispute resolution mechanisms that exist. If protestors have taken to the streets on the basis of claims about electoral fraud that are not supported by the observations of citizen observer networks, observers have a responsibility to share their findings broadly with the public.<sup>[23]</sup> Similarly, if protestors take to the streets on the basis of claims about electoral fraud that are supported by the findings of citizen election observers, election observers have a responsibility to provide timely and transparent information about actions that they will undertake to seek redress for the documented instances of fraud. This

---

[20] Mutahi, Patrick, and Mutuma Ruteere. "Violence, Security and the Policing of Kenya's 2017 Elections." *Journal of Eastern African studies* 13, no. 2 (2019): 253–271.

[21] Van Baalen, Sebastian. "Polls of fear? Electoral violence, incumbent strength, and voter turnout in Côte d'Ivoire." *Journal of Peace Research*, (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433221147938>.

[22] "Thus, although post-election demonstrations are associated with an increased probability of incumbent turnover through legitimate institutional means, opposition-initiated post-election demonstrations do not increase the level of violence and do not frequently lead to violent overthrow or regime collapse," (Beaulieu, 92)

[23] For this reason it is important for citizen observers to engage in holistic observation of the entire election cycle, including the pre-election period and election day, as well as focusing on the announcement of results and the use of electoral complaint and dispute mechanisms in the post-election period. Only such comprehensive election observation will enable observers to make informed claims about the overall credibility of the election if the election is contested or disputed following the announcement of results. Observers should, of course, also share their findings with different key stakeholders — including political parties — regularly rather than waiting to comment for the first time after the election has taken place. We will return to this point under **External Communications**.

should include communicating publicly about whether they will be filing any formal electoral complaints, if this is a legal avenue available to them.

To the extent possible, citizen observers should advocate for and utilize peaceful processes for resolving electoral grievances, including in scenarios where the observer group has determined that electoral manipulation was of a scope and scale to warrant a complete rejection of the election results. Citizen observers can also work closely with actors identified as potential connectors or forces for resiliency (see **Conducting a Political Context Analysis**) to reinforce bonds between citizens and help ensure that local communities do not take advantage of proximal political differences to settle scores against one another over other, long-standing grievances. In extreme cases, post-election violence may result in a coup or a coup attempt under the guise of maintaining order. For this reason, too, it is recommended that, even while raising concerns about the legitimacy of a particular election, citizen observers also use their platforms to vocally support the democratic process and respect for the rule of law in general.

#### EXAMPLES:



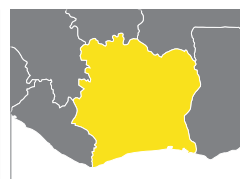
Armenia (2003)



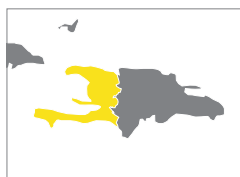
Bangladesh (1996)



Cambodia (1998)



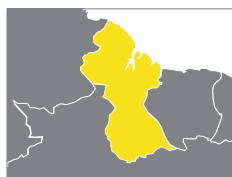
Côte d'Ivoire (2000)



Haiti (2006)



Gabon (1993)



Guyana (1997)



Iran (2009)



Kenya (2017)



Kyrgyzstan (2005)



Madagascar (1989)



Ukraine (2004)



Mali (2020)



Myanmar (2020)

# PART III

## GETTING STARTED: CONDUCTING A POLITICAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS

A political context analysis surveys the many factors associated with power structures and sociocultural norms that may influence the conditions under which an election may take place. A political context analysis is an essential first step to gather information about how election violence is likely to manifest in the area that you will be monitoring and against different identity groups. It helps you to answer important questions, including:

- What does electoral violence look like in my context?
- Who is likely to perpetrate electoral violence and why?
- Who is likely to be victimized by electoral violence?
- Where is electoral violence likely to occur?
- When is electoral violence likely to be carried out?
- How is electoral violence likely to be carried out?
- What resources already exist to address electoral violence?

Note that if you are monitoring an entire country, electoral violence will likely look different in different regions of the country. The actors involved in perpetrating the violence may vary as may their motivations for intervening in the electoral process, which means that they may make use of different strategies that target a variety of different victims. Because violence can take so many different shapes, it is not possible to have a one size fits all approach to electoral violence monitoring. You will want to select from among the tools and approaches outlined in this manual based on your understanding of which ones are most appropriate for your underlying context.

In instances where multiple different types of electoral violence are present and important, your organization will need to determine how it will address these different manifestations of violence. This may involve prioritizing those manifestations of violence that seem likely to have the most negative effect on the integrity of the electoral process; it may entail focusing only on certain geographic

regions of the country or hot spots where violence has either occurred before or seems particularly likely to occur in this election cycle; it may mean partnering with other organizations that have a particular expertise in other forms of violence (such as social media monitoring or monitoring gender-based violence); or it may entail a combination of all three approaches. Conducting a comprehensive political context analysis will allow you to identify these variances, and later, to prioritize needs and design a monitoring methodology that aligns with those priorities.

## CASE STUDY: MALI



### A Complex Electoral Context with Multiple Patterns of Violence

In Mali, different dynamics of violence persist in varied regions of the country. A 2015 peace agreement between the rebel Touareg groups and the government aimed to put an end to armed conflict that had developed over years of socioeconomic and secessionist movements, in order to build an inclusive political system that would contribute to the country's unity. However, the implementation of the peace agreement was slow and failed to meet citizen expectations, according to many independent observers. Throughout the 2016 local elections, 2018 presidential elections, and 2020 legislative elections, the security situation in different parts of the country had a tangibly negative impact

A woman casts her vote at a polling station in Gao, Mali. / UN Photo/Marco Dormino / 12 August 2018





on the electoral process. A significant protest movement emerged after the legislative elections and ultimately resulted in a military coup in August 2020.

Elections in Mali are also often accompanied by significant resource distribution. Parties distribute financial resources, food, and material goods and, in so doing, signal to local populations that elections are taking place and that the party or candidate in question wishes to secure their votes. It is not uncommon for such vote buying practices to generate conflicts in local communities as certain groups of people seek control over resource management and distribution. At times, tensions over control of these resources have reactivated historic conflict dynamics and grievances. These practices represent a form of violence perpetrated by actors contesting the elections.

Another component of this type violence is presented in certain parts of the country where traditional authorities have significant influence over voters' choices. In such communities, elections are no longer about individual voters exercising their right to choose, but the vote is devolved to a small group of leaders who decide how to vote on behalf of the entire community. In some instances, it is sufficient for traditional authorities to use their influence and prestige to turn out community votes for a particular candidate. In other instances, leaders compel voters through community patronage, promising resources or advantages. In other instances, authorities may use threats of violence or, in extreme cases, threats of banishment or exclusion to compel voters to comply with their choices.

Terrorist groups in Mali have pledged allegiance to transnational groups controlling wide areas of the Sahel region, manifesting in types of violence perpetrated by non-state actors around the electoral process. These groups do not recognize the existence of the states and seek to destabilize all countries in the region. Elections are often directly targeted by such groups, who have been known to carry out attacks on election infrastructure, materials and officials.

During the 2018 presidential election, citizen observer group the Coalition for Citizen Election Observation in Mali (COCÉM) reported attacks targeting polling station materials and/or staff the night before the election. On election day, terrorist groups attacked a number of polling stations destroying the material, intimidating the staff and voters, and creating a generally unsafe and tense atmosphere to prevent a credible electoral process. Such groups also used kidnapping as a way to target political figures and exercise control over their policy proposals. Presidential candidate Soumeïla Cissé, leader of the opposition party *Union pour la République et la Démocratie* (Union for

the Republic and Democracy — URD) was kidnapped by unidentified gunmen during the 2020 legislative elections while he was campaigning in his home region Niafunké. He was held captive for over six months and was only freed after agreeing to a deal to release a number of detainees from the terrorist organization. The resulting atmosphere of fear affected almost all candidates, who refrained from campaigning in certain parts of the country even after receiving guarantees of safety by both the national security forces and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (*Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali* — MINUSMA). Populations in these areas did not have access to the candidates and their platforms, which prevented voters from making an informed choice in the elections.

The historically marginalized albino community also experienced increased marginalization around the elections. In certain parts of the country, there is a longstanding belief that ritual crimes against albinos can help candidates to attract power and luck before elections, another manifestation of violence perpetrated by actors contesting the elections. In a high profile instance of such violence, a young albino girl named Ramata Diara was kidnapped, mutilated, and murdered in the village of Fana, 130 kilometers east of the capital Bamako, during the 2018 campaign period. Such horrific acts provoke violent reactions from the victims' families and their communities, which can lead to a general escalation of tensions and create a continuous cycle of revenge between communities.

Election-related violence can manifest in different forms even within the same country and within the same electoral cycle. The Mali case study demonstrates why observer groups should conduct a deep context analysis in order to design monitoring methods that are responsive to the security situation and long-term patterns of violence. Violence can also take different forms depending on where in a given country it is happening; certain types of violence can be very localized to specific zones or to small localities. For this reason, it is important to work collaboratively with local organizations, including traditional authorities, civic associations and actors in the local peace and security space to better understand the local contexts and be better placed to identify potential early warning signs of violence.

A good political context analysis consists of both internal analysis that you will conduct with other members of your organization and external analysis where you will expand upon your knowledge of the context by gathering information from other critical stakeholders. The mapping exercise that you conduct centrally will help you



to identify the appropriate stakeholders, but generally these should include: members of the international community, election observation networks, representatives of major political parties, peacebuilding organizations, representatives of the security sector, members of media, human rights defenders, members of groups representing historically marginalized communities, and members of the communities in which you think violence is likely to occur.

This mapping exercise is not only a method of systematically assessing the overall context and core electoral violence drivers, but can also be a starting point for establishing and nurturing connections, promoting the exchange of information, and building trust with different interlocutors and partners that you will return to throughout your electoral violence monitoring and mitigation effort. During the political context analysis, it will be important not only to identify factors that may divide civic space and pose a heightened risk for violence but also those factors that could connect civic space and make it more resilient to violence. Sample resources for conducting both the internal assessment and the external mapping exercise, including guidance on inclusive facilitation tactics, are included as appendices to the manual. Additional guidance is provided below.

## Internal Political Context Analysis

Before conducting an internal political context analysis, you will need to organize a preliminary training session with members of your organization to familiarize them with the key concepts that we have covered thus far in the manual, including electoral violence and electoral integrity, Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity, intersectionality, and violence against women in elections. This will help to ensure that all individuals participating in the internal analysis have the same understanding of the objectives of the exercise and have a nuanced understanding of electoral violence. To carry out the internal analysis, you are advised to convene a group of 10–15 individuals within your organization who have knowledge and experience with elections and/or violence programming. The group should be diverse — including not only organizational leadership, but also program and project managers as well as staff involved in implementing activities. The perspectives of men and women as well as of young persons and more senior staff should be incorporated. To the extent possible, your group should reflect the regional, ethnic, racial, linguistic, or religious diversity within your organization. If certain populations within the country are not represented among your organization's core staff, it may be useful to include volunteers or other members of your network who may be able to offer more diverse perspectives.

The **Sample Internal Political Context Discussion Guide: *Internal Lines of Inquiry***, included at the end of this section, provides guidance around a potential structure for this exercise and divides your political context analysis into five components. Each component serves an essential function, which we will discuss in additional detail.

## Part One: Dividers and Connectors

A common framework used for assessing potential conflict dynamics is the dividers and connectors framework<sup>[24]</sup>. All situations of conflict are characterized by two driving forces: dividers and connectors. Dividers are elements in societies that divide people from each other and serve as sources of tension. Connectors are elements which connect people and can serve as local capacities for peace. In all conflict environments, there are elements that connect people. Dividers and connectors can be individual behaviors or actions, actions taken by those acting on behalf of institutions, or even cultural or legal norms.

DIVIDERS	CONNECTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase tension, divisions, or capacities for violence between groups of people.</li><li>• Increase suspicion, mistrust, or inequality in a society.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bring people together across conflict lines despite their differences.</li><li>• Decrease suspicion, mistrust, and inequality in a society.</li></ul>

Understanding what forces divide and connect people is critical to understanding how external interventions might feed into or lessen these forces. When any intervention enters a context, it becomes part of that context. As such, interventions always interact with both dividers and connectors. Different aspects of an intervention might have a negative impact on the context by exacerbating or worsening dividers and undermining or delegitimizing connectors. Alternatively, an intervention can have a positive impact by strengthening connectors and weakening or minimizing dividers.

Pinpointing connectors can help organizations think through the factors that contribute to resilience to electoral violence, and how groups might be able to elevate or reinforce these connectors through response mechanisms designed to prevent or respond to instances of violence. A first step in your process therefore will simply be to brainstorm dividers and connectors for your country. As a part of this

[24] <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Using-Dividers-and-Connectors.pdf>

brainstorming exercise, participants should consider all available sources of data, qualitative and quantitative, that may offer information on potential dividers and connectors. This exercise can be easily repeated for local communities or regions that are of particular interest to your organization when it comes time to conduct the *External Political Analysis*.

The typology of electoral violence types that we introduced in the previous section may serve as a helpful organizing framework as you think through your Dividers and Connectors. The table below provides some initial suggestions about how Dividers and Connectors may vary by violence type; your organization will certainly be able to think of more examples that are relevant for your particular context!

### ELECTORAL VIOLENCE TYPOLOGY AND EXAMPLES OF DIVIDERS AND CONNECTORS

	DIVIDERS	CONNECTORS
<b>Elections Held During Active Conflict</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peace spoilers</li> <li>• Potential for elections to be held in one area of the country but not another</li> <li>• Public reluctance to participate due to fear or lack of confidence in election administration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire among the general public to emerge from conflict through peaceful elections</li> <li>• Attention on the election and support from the international community</li> <li>• Friendships across ethnic lines, mutual assistance and protection during periods of violence</li> </ul>
<b>Elections Taking Place in the Context of a Formally Negotiated Peace Agreement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incomplete or failed disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs</li> <li>• Peace spoilers</li> <li>• Potentially weak infrastructure to conduct elections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared desire to leave the war behind</li> <li>• Willingness to integrate ex-combatants into the community</li> <li>• Memories of war and trauma</li> <li>• Public and international commitment to peace processes</li> </ul>
<b>Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Elections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Horizontal inequalities in the distribution of wealth, power, or access to social benefits</li> <li>• Patron-client systems of favoritism/exclusion</li> <li>• Intense competition for government posts that carry access to resources and state largesse</li> <li>• Polarized political culture of personalized/factional rivalries and outbidding</li> <li>• Perceptions of unresolved historical injustice, trauma, and historical grievances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friendships across ethnic lines, mutual assistance and protection during periods of violence</li> <li>• History of peaceful, mutually beneficial relations, intermarriage, living side-by-side</li> <li>• Joint, cooperative community projects</li> <li>• Traditional or inter-group mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms</li> <li>• Women's groups collaborating across conflict lines</li> <li>• Constructive relationships through political party/election authorities liaison committees</li> </ul>

	DIVIDERS	CONNECTORS
Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Elections (continuation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media bias and hate speech</li> <li>• Disinformation about pre-election processes and incidents in the electoral environment</li> <li>• Political entrepreneurs who mobilize ethnic and religious divisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Back-channel communications between opposing parties</li> <li>• Effective communications by election authorities and trusted independent monitors/observers</li> </ul>
Post-Election Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of “winners and losers” in which losers will be excluded from political system that brings access to power and resources</li> <li>• Media bias and hate speech</li> <li>• Disinformation about the election process and results tabulation</li> <li>• Political entrepreneurs who mobilize ethnic and religious divisions</li> <li>• Inability of the judicial system to resolve disputes in fair and timely manner</li> <li>• Politicization of security sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and constitutional provisions for representation</li> <li>• Traditional or inter-group mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms</li> <li>• Women’s groups collaborating across conflict lines</li> <li>• Collaboration of officials and political parties through liaison committees</li> <li>• Back-channel communications between opposing parties</li> <li>• Equitable and consensus based power-sharing arrangements</li> <li>• Systematic, independent verification of election results timely communicated</li> <li>• Civil society commitment to peace</li> </ul>
Violence Perpetrated by Actors Outside of the Formal Political Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criminal groups have links to or sponsor political candidates</li> <li>• Weak governance and lack of service delivery</li> <li>• Criminal groups compete for access and control over illicit economies and resources</li> <li>• Failure of security forces to protect communities or commitment of human rights abuses</li> <li>• Cross-border vulnerabilities and violence</li> <li>• Culture of violence in which small arms are readily available</li> <li>• Hyper-polatization and enabling behavior of candidates gives license to political extremists to turn to violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised/enforced military code of conduct</li> <li>• Support for anti-corruption political reform initiatives across parties</li> <li>• Civil society monitoring and accountability mechanisms</li> <li>• Community policing/security networks</li> </ul>

Additional guidance on dividers and connectors can be found in the **Dividers and Connectors Handout** included at the end of this section (see page 61).

## Part Two: Politics of Exclusion/Inclusion

As discussed under electoral integrity, electoral violence primarily affects elections through the principle of inclusion. In many instances, the ultimate aim of electoral violence is to ensure that only certain kinds of candidates stand for office, only certain kinds of voters vote, and only certain types of policy proposals are put forward. It is therefore important to understand how the underlying political context facilitates the inclusion of certain identity groups in political decision-making and generally excludes other identity groups. The suggested lines of inquiry should assist your organization to articulate the main identity groups in your country, understand how these identities may be politicized (for example, if voters of a particular ethno-linguistic background always tend to vote for the same party), and understand which identity groups are most likely and least likely to have access to power.

The primary objective of this exercise is to identify potential blindspots in your organization's internal analysis. If you don't have much experience working with identity groups that have historically been excluded from political decision-making, it is important that as part of the external analysis you reach out to organizations or individuals that do have this knowledge and expertise. Especially when it comes to violence against historically marginalized communities, you should never assume that violence isn't taking place that targets these communities just because your organization has never heard of it. Violence may very well be occurring, but may not be systematically reported or well-understood due to the same factors that already contribute to these groups' marginalization. Violence may also be such a longstanding part of these communities' experience that it has, in some sense, become normalized and is viewed even from within the communities as simply the routine cost of political engagement. In addition, some forms of structural or economic violence may be more subtle and not easily detected by someone from outside the community. Only through in-depth conversations and building trust with members of the communities in question or organizations with experience working in these communities can you begin to unpack such dynamics.

## Part Three: Patterns of Electoral Violence

The strongest known predictor of where electoral violence is likely to take place in the future is understanding where electoral violence has broken out in the past. The suggested lines of inquiry included under this section of the internal analysis tool are designed to help your organization better understand previous patterns of electoral violence in your country, including — to the extent possible — violence affecting historically marginalized communities. Such analysis may help you to narrow down the scope of what you are seeking to observe. Violence is incredibly complex, but if you try to observe everything you will wind up in a state of information overwhelm

that is just as ineffective as observing nothing. If violence is known to always break out in certain **hot spots** or localized regions of the country, you may choose to focus aspects of your observation methodology on these regions rather than trying to cover the entire country. The selection and size of chosen areas to observe should reflect expected patterns of violence; some areas or sites may be prone to one type of violence, while observers would need to focus on other zones or sites to observe another type. Your organization may not be able to answer every question that is included in the internal lines of inquiry around previous patterns of electoral violence given the complex nature of violence and conflict dynamics. This is normal, and can help you pinpoint additional questions that should be addressed to external actors who may be able to complement your understanding.

The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project provides data on historic incidents of conflict as reported by media sources and — in some countries — local partner organizations. This data is free to download and analyze for users who sign up for an account. As such, it may provide an important external source of information about patterns of conflict that may better help your organization to understand what conflict has looked like during previous election cycles. Additional information about how to access and download ACLED data for your country is available as **on ACLED's website**.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Part Four: Factors for Resilience

### Identifying and Leveraging Factors for Resiliency: Introduction

In conducting a political context analysis, citizen observers should not only look at potential warning signs for violence, but should also include an analysis of incentives and contextual factors that promote peace and peacebuilding. When combined with an assessment of risk factors for violence, understanding what areas have certain **resilience factors** and what areas don't — as well as assessing, where possible, how factors for resilience change over time — can help in identifying potential hot spots. If you have done a Dividers and Connectors Analysis, resilience factors will often align with the connectors you have identified. Resilience factors can be defined as characteristics, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, or considerations that lead a community to counter the escalation of violence despite factors that might otherwise lead to conflict. Your analysis of these factors can also support recommendations to stakeholders about how to allocate prevention resources and what structures to focus on to build resilience to violence around elections.

---

<sup>[25]</sup> <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>

Observer groups are often uniquely positioned to aggregate information and understand both local and national conflict and peace dynamics. At the national level, this analysis can help observer groups to make structural recommendations to key stakeholders and institutions responsible for mitigating and preventing electoral violence. At the local level, understanding what resilience factors encourage peaceful resolution of political conflict can help observer groups to identify practices that may be replicable in another community experiencing similar issues. An analysis of resilience factors can help observer groups to identify those actors who have the capacity to mobilize citizens towards peace, allowing them to build partnerships with these champions who can act as a part of a response mechanism in preventing and mitigating electoral violence.

Identifying resilience factors will be an integral part of an observer group's context analysis used to design an electoral violence monitoring and mitigation program. The political context analysis geared towards identifying factors for resilience to election-related violence should largely focus on the community level, due to the localized nature of many resilience factors themselves. However, not only will national politics impact local level dynamics, but citizen observation organizations may want to engage in national-level analysis in order to formulate short- and long-term recommendations for national stakeholders, and to assess their complexity and the level of political will required for their implementation. This is key to understanding the broader context in which localized violence and resiliency take place. Moreover, it is unlikely that your organization will have a detailed understanding of resilience factors in all communities at the outset of the program. The internal context analysis can help you to prioritize potential hotspot communities where follow-on external analysis can help you to better hone in on local resilience factors.

Although most organizations that have engaged in previous electoral violence monitoring may be very familiar with early warning signs of violence, studying factors for resilience is a less common practice. The following sections will therefore provide more background on some of the common local and national-level connecting factors that can allow communities to resist violence and resolve political conflict through peaceful means, as well as how those factors can be leveraged to prevent and mitigate electoral violence. It may be helpful to return to your analysis under Part One: Dividers and Connectors. There is often significant overlap between the connectors that you identified at the outset and the factors for resilience that you may choose to focus on as part of your more detailed political context assessment and, ultimately, observation effort.

## Resilience Factors

As noted above, resilience factors are often very localized and may differ from one community to the next. In some communities, certain resilience factors may not exist at all. For your internal analysis, try to identify any national and local

resilience factors of which your organization is already aware, but realize that more detailed external analysis will likely be needed to fill in the gaps, particularly around resilience factors in particular local communities.

**Platforms for inter-communal dialogue and dispute resolution:** Dialogue platforms can take many forms, and their effectiveness in mitigating potentials for violence can depend on the degree to which they actively engage a cross-section of the community, bringing citizens together across ethnic or linguistic divisions, political divisions, or faith groups. Formal mechanisms for dialogue might include representative local governance structures that engage citizens in debate. Informal platforms where different leaders or groups of citizens come together might include inter-faith groups, youth or women's groups, businesses and markets, or professional associations.

When these types of dialogue platforms are sustained and active over time, they can act as effective dispute resolution mechanisms when differences arise. Where effective local dispute resolution mechanisms exist, they can serve to address attempted elite capture of the community through vote buying or violence and intimidation. *To understand the local dialogue and dispute resolution context, key informant interviews, surveys, or focus groups might focus on questions such as:*

- What platforms for local inter-communal dialogue exist? Are they sustained over time and trusted by all parties?
- Are all major local social groups (ethno-linguistic groups, religious groups, sexual and gender minorities, etc.) represented in formal local governance structures? If not, what types of informal governance structures exist, and are they representative?
- Are there local structures that bring citizens together across group divisions on a regular basis, such as youth groups, women's groups, groups representing persons with disabilities, LGBTI+ groups, unions, cooperative associations, market or professional associations? Who are the leaders of these groups and what kind of dispute resolution mechanisms do they employ?
- Are there local structures that bring political party representatives together with election officials, law enforcement or others for information dissemination and interaction?
- What types of actors or efforts are not viewed as credible in the eyes of the population at the local level?

**Economic factors:** Whereas economic disparities between social groups often create grievances that can create the conditions in which individuals could be motivated





▲ Blaan youth in the Philippines present citizen survey. / NDI Photo

by elite capture and mobilization towards electoral violence, access to sustained employment and livelihoods, as well as social safety nets, can provide alternative sources of income that would allow youth and other individuals to instead act as agents of peace. *To understand the local economic context, key informant interviews, surveys, or focus groups might focus on questions such as:*

- What are the levels of local unemployment and access to sustained employment? What social safety nets exist at the local level, and do all groups have access to them?
- Are there particular groups who are economically disadvantaged? How does this align with local politics?

**Resolution of past instances of electoral violence:** One key factor influencing the likelihood of electoral violence is whether it has happened before. Countries that have experienced electoral violence in the past are more likely to have repeat instances in future electoral cycles. However, even in circumstances where a locality has experienced past electoral violence, the manner in which it was resolved can impact how a community views the past. If groups believe there was accountability or justice for perpetrators of violence, this could serve as a deterrent factor, and may reduce perceptions of unresolved grievances. *To understand the conditions for*

*resolution of past instances of electoral violence, key informant interviews, surveys, or focus groups might focus on questions such as:*

- When did instances of electoral violence last occur at the local level?
- If it occurred, are there perceptions that accountability or justice was served?
- What processes were followed to address instances of violence? Were they effective? (formal and informal justice mechanisms)
- Are those who were involved in the violence as perpetrators or victims, directly or indirectly, still active in the community? Similarly, are leaders who participated in dispute resolution still active in the community?
- Do community leaders perceive or expect that it is likely that electoral violence could repeat for the next election? If yes, do they expect it would repeat in the same manner, or would something change (for better or for worse)?

**Literacy, media freedom, and civic education:** High levels of literacy and media freedom allow for citizens to understand and consume accurate information about candidates, the electoral process and policy platforms. There are strong negative correlations between levels of literacy and media openness and likelihood of post-election protest.<sup>[26]</sup> In addition, while advancing change through short-term peace messaging campaigns can be difficult, long-term, iterative, and sustained civic education can change attitudes towards violence as a means to gain power. Information about literacy levels and internet penetration levels may be available from existing datasets, though they may be more difficult to disaggregate at a local level. *In addition, to understand the local media, literacy, and civic education landscape, key informant interviews, surveys, or focus groups might focus on questions such as:*

- What media sources are most widely read or listened to, and which are the media sources that citizens trust?
- Do citizens feel they have access to up-to-date and accurate information about the electoral process? Do independent actors consider these same sources to be providing accurate information?
- What types of formal or informal civic education programs exist? Are they sustained over time and offered to all citizens? To what extent do historically

---

<sup>[26]</sup> Beaulieu 2014

marginalized communities have access to the civic education programs that exist? To what extent do citizens partake in them and believe in their teachings?

- Is there manipulation, propaganda, or disinformation? Who is responsible for spreading these types of misleading information? Do citizens consider disinformation to have an impact on the election environment?

**Peace promoters:** When potentials for violence arise, respected community leaders can be some of the most effective mediators and peace promoters who can mobilize community members away from violence. To respond to and mitigate potential instances of violence, it is essential for groups to identify who these leaders are and form relationships with them. *To identify these individuals and their networks, key informant interviews, surveys, or focus groups might focus on questions such as:*

- Who are trusted and respected community leaders and role models, and what messages do they carry?
- Do certain leaders have a major following among young people, older individuals, or citizens from a particular social group?

## National Level Resilience Factors

If there are high levels of independence and nonpartisanship among the executive branch, the security sector, the EMB, and the judiciary, political actors and citizens more broadly will have more trust that election-related disputes can be solved peacefully and fairly. In addition, citizen trust in independent, nonpartisan civil society organizations working in the elections space can serve as a connecting factor for resilience to electoral violence. Political context analysis may consider if groups who will implement voter education and other elections-related activities include representation of all major social groups in the country. If groups who will implement major elections activities might be perceived as representing one social group or another, response mechanisms to risks of electoral violence might include a joint, inclusive and representative coordinating platform to allow civic groups perceived as representing different constituencies to speak with a common voice.

## Part Five: Mapping the Peace and Security Space

Effective violence prevention requires working with many different actors to understand risks and take actions to respond to them. While election observers are well-positioned to gather credible information on risks, you will need to engage with other actors in the peace and security sector to address them and, potentially, to

complement your understanding with information about indicators or risk factors that your organization is not resourced or prepared to observe. A mapping exercise is similar to a stakeholder analysis and should help you to identify key organizations and/or individuals that make up the peace and security ecosystem in your country. However, mapping goes a step further than stakeholder analysis and also seeks to assess the relationships and connections among actors. A basic approach to peace and security actor mapping is outlined below:

## PEACE AND SECURITY ACTOR MAPPING



Actor mapping should ideally happen at the national level as well as the regional and community level. Sector type, capacity levels, mandates, and citizen trust will likely differ at each one these levels providing insight into gaps and opportunities. For the purposes of the internal lines of inquiry, you should start by identifying the actors with whom your organization is already familiar. You can then use your external political context analysis to grow the list of actors, perhaps focusing on particular regions that you identified as likely hotspots but in which you may not currently have significant contacts or connections. A good technique to grow your list is **snowballing**. After every meeting that you take with an external actor working in the peace and security space, you should ask them if there are other individuals or organizations with whom they recommend you speak based on their understanding of your project. In this way, starting from a small list of initial contacts, you can slowly expand your network.

## Sample Internal Political Context Discussion Guide: Internal Lines of Inquiry

Convene a group of 10–15 individuals within your organization who have knowledge and experience with elections and/or violence programming. The group should be diverse — including not only organizational leadership, but also program and project managers as well as staff involved in implementing activities. The perspectives of men and women as well as of young persons and more senior staff should be incorporated. To the extent possible, your group should reflect the regional, ethnic, racial, linguistic, or religious diversity within your organization. For more information on *Internal Political Context Analysis*, see page 45.

You should begin the session with a training presentation on definitions and key concepts of election violence, intersectionality and marginalization, violence against women and elections, the typology (four major types) of election violence identified in the guide, and the importance of dividers and connectors for peacebuilding. You can also offer participants existing and available information on electoral violence, and point out gaps. After the training, you should invite participants to take part in a brainstorming discussion. You should plan to dedicate **at least three hours** to discussing the following questions. The discussion moderator should use gender-sensitive facilitation techniques and should create an environment where all discussants feel comfortable voicing their opinions.

### PART ONE — Brainstorm Dividers and Connectors in <COUNTRY>

Before beginning the more detailed facilitated discussion, ask participants — working as a group — to develop a list of dividers in <COUNTRY> as well as a list of connectors. Remember that:

DIVIDERS	CONNECTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase tension, divisions, or capacities for violence between groups of people.</li> <li>• Increase suspicion, mistrust, or inequality in a society.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring people together across conflict lines and despite their differences.</li> <li>• Decrease suspicion, mistrust, and inequality in a society.</li> </ul>

## PART TWO — Politics of Exclusion/Inclusion

Questions	
1	What are the important social identity groups in <COUNTRY>? <i>For example: Ethnicity, geography, age, level of education, disability status, socioeconomic status, sexual and gender minority status, religion, profession</i>
2	How do these identities map on to the political parties in <COUNTRY>? Are any parties primarily comprised of or known to promote the interests of individuals holding any of these identities?
3	Have any of these identities ever become a focal point in an armed conflict in <COUNTRY>?
4	Which of these identity groups are most likely to have access to economic resources? Which of these identity groups are least likely to have access to economic resources?
5	Which of these identities are likely to be connected to the internet and influenced by content shared in online spaces? Which of these identity groups are least likely to be connected to the internet or least likely to be influenced by content shared in online spaces?
6	Think about the individuals who exercise formal political power in <COUNTRY>. Which identities do they hold? Are any of the identities listed in Question 1 absent from or under-represented in formal decision-making processes? Are any of the identities listed in Question 1 over-represented in formal decision-making processes?
7	Now think about voter turnout in <COUNTRY>. Which of the identity groups listed in Question 1 do you think are most likely to vote and why? Which of the identity groups listed in Question 1 do you think are least likely to vote and why?
8	Do any of the identity groups listed in Question 1 tend to consistently vote for certain parties or candidates?
9	Is there any official data on voter turnout and/or voter registration available in <COUNTRY>? Is this data disaggregated in any way? Can your organization access this data?
10	Is there any official, publicly available data in your country on electoral complaints and who is filing them? Can your organization access this data?
11	Has <COUNTRY> ever experienced a post-election protest? If so, which of the identity groups listed in Question 1 participated in the protest? Which of the identity groups listed in Question 1 opposed or remained neutral during the protest?

## PART THREE — Patterns of Election Violence

QUESTIONS	
1	Which of the four major typologies of election violence is <COUNTRY> likely to experience in the upcoming election cycle?  <i>Remember that it is possible for a country to experience more than one type of violence in a given election.</i>



2	<p>Has &lt;COUNTRY&gt; experienced election violence in the past?</p> <p>If yes, what were the root causes that triggered this violence? Who were the victims and who were the perpetrators? How did this violence manifest, or what tactics were used (for example, protest crackdowns, online violence, intimidation tactics, withholding social services or direct aid, etc.)?</p> <p>If not, what has changed to lead us to believe that violence is likely in this election cycle? Who are the likely perpetrators and who are the likely victims?</p>
3	<p>Are there certain geographic regions of &lt;COUNTRY&gt; that have been especially prone to violence in the past? Are there certain regions of the country where violence seems especially likely this time? Where is the election likely to be closely contested?</p>
4	<p>Think about the identity groups that you identified in Part Two of this exercise, including women. Which political parties will try to mobilize the vote amongst the identity groups that you identified? Will any political parties want to suppress the vote among the identity groups that you identified?</p>
5	<p>Are any of the identity groups that you identified in Part Two — including women — experiencing ongoing violence now? What has been the reaction of the government, domestic actors and the international community to that violence?</p>
6	<p>Are any of the identity groups that you identified in Part Two — including women — subject to ongoing derogatory language and hate speech on radio, TV or in newspapers or have they experienced derogatory language and hate speech on these platforms in the past?</p>
7	<p>Are any of the identity groups that you identified in Part Two — including women — experiencing derogatory language and hate speech online or have they experienced derogatory language and hate speech on these platforms in the past?</p>
8	<p>Has vote buying been a problem in &lt;COUNTRY&gt; in the past? Where geographically in &lt;COUNTRY&gt; has the vote buying taken place? Who has perpetrated it and who has participated in it? How does vote buying typically manifest (i.e. what forms of vote buying usually take place)?</p>
9	<p>If the incumbent political powers were to perpetrate acts of violence, what other actors in &lt;COUNTRY&gt; might be likely to condemn the violence? What actors are likely to remain silent? What actors are likely to support — either openly or behind the scenes — the violence?</p> <p><i>Note: Actors may include leaders in the security forces, religious leaders, human rights monitoring bodies, media oversight bodies, traditional authorities, members of parliament, business leaders, union leaders, women's organizations, and others.</i></p>
10	<p>If the opposition political powers were to perpetrate acts of violence, what other actors in &lt;COUNTRY&gt; might be likely to condemn the violence? What actors are likely to remain silent? What actors are likely to support — either openly or behind the scenes — the violence?</p>
11	<p>If actors outside of the political space (organized criminal groups, terrorist cells, etc.) were to perpetrate acts of violence, what other actors in &lt;COUNTRY&gt; might be likely to condemn the violence? What actors are likely to remain silent? What actors are likely to support — either openly or behind the scenes — the violence?</p>

12	Have any of the major political actors or civil society expressed concerns about electoral fraud or manipulation in <COUNTRY> in the past? If so, what was the basis for these concerns?
13	What factors are likely to contribute to violence against women in elections in <COUNTRY>?

## PART FOUR — Factors for Resilience

Questions	
1	What platforms for inter-communal dialogue exist? Are they sustained over time and trusted by all parties?
2	Are there structures that bring citizens together across group divisions on a regular basis, such as youth groups, women's groups, markets, or professional associations? Who are the leaders of these groups and what kind of dispute resolution mechanisms do they employ?
3	What media sources are most widely read or listened to, and who are the media sources that citizens trust?
4	Are citizens able to gain access to up-to-date, credible and accurate information about the electoral process?
5	What types of formal or informal civic education programs exist? Are they sustained over time and offered to all citizens? To what extent do citizens partake in them and believe in their teachings?
6	Who are trusted and respected community leaders, and what messages do they carry?
7	How were previous instances of electoral violence (either nationally or in particular communities) addressed either formally or informally? Are there perceptions that accountability or justice was served? Are those who were involved in the violence still active in the community? Are the leaders who facilitated a dispute resolution still active in the community?
8	Do certain leaders have a major following among young people, older individuals, or citizens from a particular social group? ‘
9	Do major civil society organizations who are active in the elections space include representation from all major social groups in the country identified in Part Two?
10	What mechanisms exist to coordinate and share information between major civil society organizations that are active in the elections space?
11	Is there a high degree of independence between the executive branch, the security sector, the election management body, and the judiciary? Are these actors widely viewed as nonpartisan?



## PART FIVE — Mapping the Peace, Conflict and Electoral Space

*Remember: This is a preliminary list — if your organization is not able to respond completely at this time, you can use the **snowballing technique** (asking each individual you interview to recommend additional contacts that are working in this space) to generate more information to add to your map.*

QUESTIONS	
1	Which organizations have actively observed elections in <COUNTRY> in the past?
2	Which organizations are involved in monitoring and/or responding to gender-based violence?
3	Which organizations are promoting the rights of women and other marginalized populations identified in Part One?
4	What organizations are involved in peacebuilding?
5	Are any members of the international community involved in peace and/or security efforts in <COUNTRY>?
6	Are there any platforms for sharing information between the security sector and the peacebuilding sector? Who manages these platforms? How are they perceived?
7	Which media outlets have provided coverage of violence in previous elections or have provided coverage of risks for violence in current elections?
8	What organizations are involved in traditional media monitoring?
9	What organizations are involved in social media monitoring?
10	Were any election monitoring or other organizations and civic groups exposed to threats and attempts to discredit their findings? If so, by whom?
11	Are civic election observers' and other civic groups' findings covered in the media? If yes, in which media? Are there any restrictions to access public space?

## Dividers and Connectors Analysis

The Dividers and Connectors framework guides you in analyzing the factors that damage or build relationships between groups within the communities you are engaging. This analysis can form part of your internal political context analysis, and should be conducted with a group of individuals with diverse perspectives. Every society has groups with different interests and identities that interact with each other. While most of these interactions do not erupt into violence, this framework helps to analyze how your project interacts with these sources of division and connection in society to better understand when it is reinforcing or exacerbating conflict or strengthening capacities for peace.

This analysis is at the core of Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity. You can apply the Dividers and Connectors analysis when designing, implementing, and monitoring your project to ensure that it is conflict sensitive. For more information on **Dividers and Connectors**, see page 46.

## What are Dividers and Connectors?

All contexts are characterized by two driving forces of social dynamics: **Dividers** and **Connectors**. Dividers are elements in societies that *divide* people from each other and serve as *sources of tension*. Connectors are elements that *connect* people and can serve as *local capacities for peace*. In even the most hostile and conflictual environments, there are always elements that connect people.

**Dividers** are factors that:

- Increase tension, divisions, or capacities for violence between groups of people.
- Increase suspicion, mistrust, or inequality in a society.

**Connectors** are factors that:

- Bring people together across conflict lines despite their differences.
- Decrease suspicion, mistrust, and inequality in a society.

When any intervention enters a context, it becomes part of that context. As such, interventions always interact with both Dividers and Connectors. Aspects of an intervention could have a negative impact on the context by sparking or worsening Dividers and undermining or delegitimizing Connectors. Alternatively, an intervention could have a positive impact by strengthening Connectors and weakening or minimizing Dividers.

## How to Analyze Dividers and Connectors

### STEP ONE: Brainstorm the Dividers and Connectors

Generate a list of Dividers and Connectors. It is best to brainstorm with a team to capture diverse perspectives and experiences. You can share and collect ideas as a team, in small groups, or individually. Write down 3–5 of the most

important Dividers and Connectors, note why it is important, and think of how to tell if it is getting better or worse.

You can ask key questions to help brainstorm Dividers and Connectors. Some examples of guiding questions include:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the dividing factors in this situation?</li> <li>• How do these divide people?</li> <li>• Why are they important?</li> <li>• What factors, issues, or elements are causing conflict and dividing people? And how?</li> <li>• What are the current threats to peace and stability?</li> <li>• What are the most dangerous factors in this situation? How dangerous is this divider?</li> <li>• What can cause tension to rise in this situation?</li> <li>• Do gender norms reinforce the Divider? If yes, how?</li> <li>• Are certain groups suffering more than others in the situation — and what are the effects of this on dividers?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the connecting factors in this situation?</li> <li>• How do these connect people?</li> <li>• Why are they important?</li> <li>• What brings people together in this situation/across conflict lines? How strong is this connector?</li> <li>• What are the current supports to peace and stability?</li> <li>• Where do people meet? What do people do together? How do people cooperate?</li> <li>• Do gender norms reinforce the Connector? If yes, how?</li> <li>• Are certain groups suffering more than others in the situation — and what are the effects of this on connectors?</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

You can also use categories to help the brainstorming process. Select the categories that are most relevant to your project and will capture the experiences in your operating context. Think about the most important Dividers and Connectors in each category.

Example categories:

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systems &amp; institutions</li> <li>• Attitudes &amp; actions</li> <li>• Values &amp; interests</li> <li>• Experiences</li> <li>• Symbols &amp; occasions</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political</li> <li>• Economic</li> <li>• Social</li> <li>• Technological</li> <li>• Legal</li> <li>• Environmental</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geography:</li> <li>• Village</li> <li>• District</li> <li>• Province</li> <li>• National</li> </ul> |
|---|--|---|

## STEP TWO: Discuss

Discuss and validate your list of Dividers and Connectors before you begin to prioritize which ones you will focus on in your program.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are these the right <b>Dividers</b>?</li> <li>• How do you know these are dividers?</li> <li>• Why is it important?</li> <li>• How does the Divider affect gender groups and other marginalized groups differently?</li> <li>• How would you know if it changed? (indicators)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are these the right <b>Connectors</b>?</li> <li>• How do you know this is a connector?</li> <li>• Why is it important?</li> <li>• How does the Connector affect gender groups and other marginalized groups differently?</li> <li>• How would you know if it changed? (indicators)</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

It is important to be specific and to challenge your assumptions.

For example, “religion” is often named as a Divider. However, “religion” itself is not a source of tension or division between groups. Rather, it is how the issue of religion is *used by people* that divides.

Similarly, be careful not to generalize or rely on assumptions. “Women” are often identified as Connectors. However, this does not capture the diverse roles women play in society as peace and conflict actors. While in some instances, women reach across conflict lines, in others, women may pressure men or boys to join armed groups.

Consider gender and intersectionality in the discussion and validation of Dividers and Connectors.

### Apply a gender lens to your analysis:

**Gender Lens #1:** Do gender norms reinforce the Divider and Connector? If yes, how?

- What roles do men, women, and sexual and gender minorities (SGM) play in the Dividers and Connectors?
- How do norms of masculinity and femininity fuel the Dividers or support the Connectors?
- How do gender norms and behaviors shape how different types of violence are used by whom and against whom?

**Gender Lens #2:** How do the Dividers and Connectors affect gender groups differently?

- How are men, women, and SGMs affected by a particular Divider or Connector?

- In what ways does the effect of a particular Divider or Connectors depend on gender and other variables, such as ethnicity, social class, age, race, disability, etc.?

**Gender Lens #3:** Do identity groups have different norms and perspectives when it comes to the roles of women, men, and SGMs? What are these differences? Do some groups view the conflict and peacemaking roles of women, men, and SGMs differently?

### STEP THREE: Prioritize

Prioritize the Dividers and Connectors. There are no general criteria for prioritization. Instead, you should prioritize based on the stakeholders' perspectives and based on what they *believe* to be true on the ground.

- Which dividers are the most important or dangerous in this situation?
- Which are the most important, strongest, or best potential connectors in this situation?

### STEP FOUR: Identify Options and Opportunities

Analyze the two-way interaction between your project and the Dividers and Connectors, including the potential role your project may play in driving any changes in those Dividers and Connectors.

This level of analysis is critical to ensure Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity in the implementation of your program. Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity are not simply about understanding the conflict context more completely. They demand action.

Unpack the specific details of your project — objectives, partners, activities, etc. — in order to understand its impact on Dividers and Connectors. When conducting this analysis, it is critical to think about the details of the project. There are different ways to unpack the details. One way is to break the details into six key areas:

You can also ask guiding questions, such as:

- **Targeting** (Who are the program participants? How did we select them? Why? Who is excluded from being a recipient? Why?)
- **Resources** (What are the specific resources we are bringing? Why? What resources are we not bringing that could achieve the same objectives? Why?)

- **Staffing** (Who are our staff? How did we hire them? Why? Who was not hired? Why?)
- **Partners** (Who are our partners? How did we select them? Why? Why did we choose to partner with these specific organizations? Why? Which organizations or groups did we not partner with? Why?)
- **Working with Authorities** (How are we interacting and engaging with authorities? Why? Are there authorities we are not engaged with? Why?)
- **Intervention** (How did we design the intervention? Why? How are we implementing the work? Why are we doing it that way? What ways of implementing the program that we don't do? Why?)

You can also unpack the critical details of an intervention by asking guiding questions, such as:

- **Why?** (What are the needs we perceive that lead to this intervention? Do people in the community agree with this perception? What do we hope to change or stop? Why us? What is the value we bring to this situation? Are we the right people?)
- **Where?** (Why did we choose this location? What criteria was used? Who was left out and why? What other locations are involved in this work and will they have an impact?)
- **When?** (Why have we chosen to implement the intervention now? How will we know when the intervention is finished? What will have changed and how will we know? Have we communicated this to the community? Do we have an exit strategy? What criteria do we use to trigger it?)
- **What?** (What specific resources are we bringing? Where did we source the resources from?)
- **With Whom?** (How did we choose the participants? What was the selection criteria? Who did we leave out and why? Who else benefits or is impacted by our presence?)
- **By Whom?** (Who are our staff? How were they selected? Who do the criteria leave out and why?)
- **How?** (How is the intervention being implemented? Is training through external facilitators or participatory methods? How exactly do we do our work?)

When analyzing your project and the Dividers and Connectors, recognize that the details of your project impact people of different genders and social identity groups differently. Apply a gender and inclusion lens when unpacking the details of your project.

After unpacking the details of your project, examine where and how your project intersects with the Dividers and Connectors and how this interaction might be affecting them.

- Where and how is your project interacting with Dividers and Connectors?
- How is this interaction affecting them?
- After the Dividers and Connectors getting worse or better? Why?
- What are you currently doing that is reinforcing or exacerbating negative trends? What are you doing that is weakening or delegitimizing Connectors? Why is this happening?

Changes to Dividers and Connectors might be experienced differently by people of different genders and social identity groups. Consider gender and inclusion when thinking about how the details of your project intersect with Dividers and Connectors.

After identifying any impacts on Dividers and Connectors, brainstorm ways to adapt or change your project to avoid or minimize negative effects and to amplify any positive effects to promote peace. These are known as **Options** and **Opportunities**. “Options” refers to ways to change your project when you identify a negative effect on Dividers and Connectors. “Opportunities” refers to ways to promote or amplify positive effects on Connectors. There are always Options and Opportunities to change the impact of your project.

It is best to work with a team to brainstorm program Options and Opportunities. The more people involved, the more ideas you will have from different perspectives, and the more likely you will find the right options for your context. Teamwork also helps to prioritize the options, especially if local staff are involved in the discussion. Local staff are best suited to identify which options would work and which would not in a specific context. This process may also highlight areas where there is inadequate information and offer ideas about what information still needs to be gathered. Note: Do not try to create Connectors. Instead, you should aim to support and strengthen *existing* Connectors.

## Brainstorm Options and Opportunities

- Which changes to Dividers and Connectors are the most significant at this moment?
- What can you change to minimize or amplify these changes?
- What project modifications or changes can you make to address these changes?
- How can you modify the project to minimize or mitigate intra- and inter-group divisions that promote tensions and divisions that increase the risk for violence?
- How can you modify the project to reinforce intra- and inter-group connections that can promote social cohesion and strengthen local capacities for peace?
- How will you monitor the impact of the Options and Opportunities you select?
- If these Options and Opportunities do not have the effect you anticipated, do you have alternatives?



## External Political Context Analysis

After completing your internal political context analysis, you should now have a good understanding of what your organization already knows and where you may still have knowledge gaps (which is to be expected and is why it is important to start the political context analysis process early!). You should now complement your own understanding of the context with external analysis, which — ideally — should take place at both the national and subnational levels. As discussed in detail above, manifestations of electoral violence, early warning signs of violence and factors for resilience are likely to have significant regional differences. If you don't have resources to conduct significant subnational analysis, it would be advisable to focus first and foremost on regions of the country that have been identified as likely hotspots based on your internal analysis and subsequent external context assessment at the national level. In selecting areas to analyze, you may also consider using criteria representative of geographic and demographic diversity in your country, such as urban and rural areas; population size; availability of particular social services; average income; and/or level of development. Narrowing the scope of your analysis can not only conserve resources, but can also allow for a more focused and detailed assessment of the context in the selected areas.

Your external political context analysis may take the form of key informant interviews, surveys, focus groups or a combination depending on the time and resources available to your organization. In some instances, you may be able to consult pre-existing public opinion data conducted by credible organizations to complement your organization's own analysis. Whatever method or combination of methods you choose, it will be important to gather opinions and perspectives from:

- Election observation networks
- Peacebuilding organizations
- Faith-based organizations, as applicable
- Human rights defenders
- Historically marginalized communities (including women)
- Community leaders (including traditional authorities)
- Trade union, cooperative association, legal and business association leaders
- Electoral management body
- Political parties

- Security forces
- Media
- International and regional organizations (including donors)

The **Illustrative Key Informant Interview Guide: *External Lines of Inquiry*** included at the end of this section (see page 73) provides a sample list of questions that you can use as a starting point to design your external political context analysis. However, you will want to adapt these questions to address any gaps in knowledge identified through your internal assessment as well as any particular issues and challenges that are unique to your country context.

**Conducting the external political context analysis is likely to be highly time consuming.** You should plan for a minimum of a month if you are largely proceeding through the use of key informant interviews. If you plan to work with an external organization to conduct public opinion research, such as representative surveys, you will need to plan for three months to go through a transparent procurement process, jointly develop the research instrument(s), complete the research and analyze the findings. Some factors in the context analysis might change as the election date approaches. However, it is still recommended that you begin your context assessment as early as possible. It is generally not too challenging to conduct a few follow-on key informant interviews with contacts you have already identified or to gather additional information from project staff or long-term observers so that you can understand changes. If you instead wait for the context to crystallize nearer to election day, there is a significant risk that you will have insufficient time to carry out a thorough analysis and complete all of the preparations needed to observe. Conducting your political context analysis early can help to identify potential unexpected manifestations of electoral violence, which will strengthen your monitoring efforts later on.

## CASE STUDY: GEORGIA

### Using Public Opinion Research to Inform Citizen Election Observation



In the lead up to Georgia's 2021 local elections, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) partnered with the Caucasus Research Resource Center to carry out a nationally representative public opinion survey on public attitudes toward the electoral process, including issues of intimidation and vote buying. The survey was complemented by focus group research and key informant interviews, which allowed the researchers to better



ISFED staff during an internal meeting / Photo Credit: ISFED 2024

understand the reasoning behind voter concerns. For example, survey results showed that 48 percent of the population believed that it is possible that social assistance could be taken away from families if members of the family did not vote. Further, perceptions of this type of intimidation were stronger among supporters of opposition parties than those who supported the ruling party. Prior to the elections, some media reports and opposition parties reported that *dzveli bitchi* (roughly translated in English as hooligans, gangsters, or members of the criminal underworld) were present outside of polling stations, potentially intimidating voters to influence their vote. When surveyed, 87% of respondents reported that they found this presence unacceptable or completely unacceptable, but only 11% noted that they had seen them at polling stations in the past year.

This type of public opinion research can be used to inform observation strategies and prioritize which issues are most salient for voters. ISFED incorporated similar indicators those addressed in the survey research into their pre-election and election day observation tools for the local elections, which allowed for further analysis of how these issues played out during the electoral process. On election day, ISFED used an innovative approach to deploy observers to monitor the environment outside of a nationally representative sample of polling stations, which allowed the organization to systematically monitor potential indicators of voter intimidation outside of polling stations. While this survey took place just prior to elections, groups could also use research findings to inform voter education campaigns if similar research is carried out further in advance of elections.

After completing both the internal and external political context analysis you should:

- Have a nuanced understanding of how electoral violence is likely to manifest in different regions of the country as well as against different identity groups, and where election-related violence may already be occurring.
- Have a strong list of contacts with organizations that support historically marginalized groups that are likely to be victims of electoral violence in your country context. Ideally, these organizations are willing to either directly support or advise on the appropriateness of your observation methodologies and proposed response mechanisms.
- Have a comprehensive map of actors working in the peace and security space who may be able to assist the program — either with complementary information or through a formal response mechanism — both nationally and subnationally in key hot spots
- Have a strong understanding of factors for resilience nationally and subnationally
- Have a strong understanding of potential risks factors for electoral violence both nationally and subnationally

If any of these objectives have not been met after a first round of analysis, you should continue the external assessment process with a particular focus on persistent knowledge gaps.

## Sample Key Informant Interview Guide — Political Context Assessment for Electoral Violence Programming: External Lines of Inquiry

To use this tool, your organization should identify a team of individuals who can conduct key informant interviews with important election stakeholders, including those identified through the *Internal Lines of Inquiry*. Note that many of the stakeholder groups listed in the interview guide below exist at both a national and subnational level. This means that you will need to identify individuals from your organization who can conduct interviews with subnational stakeholders as well. It is important to include a mixture of responses, as views about risks of violence may vary in different parts of the country or at different levels of government.

This interview guide includes sample interview questions for:

- Election Observation Networks
- Peacebuilding Organizations / Human Rights Defenders
- Historically Marginalized Communities (Including Women)
- Community Leaders (Including Traditional Authorities)
- Business, Labor, Cooperative Associations
- Electoral Management Body
- Political Parties
- Security Forces
- Media
- International and Regional Organizations (Including Donors)

Your organization should use this tool as a set of sample guiding questions for key informant interviews, but you should adapt this stakeholder list as well as the specific questions to ensure that you are talking to the right actors and asking the right questions for your context. In the interview, you should focus on collecting information around the overarching objectives without necessarily asking each question verbatim. Some questions may be adapted or omitted as needed, as long as the team collects data towards each answer.

A conversational interview style using open ended questions — as opposed to reading questions word for word from a guide — will better encourage interviewees to share their experiences.

ELECTION OBSERVATION NETWORKS
<p><b>Objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand major threats to electoral integrity from previous election cycles (<i>if applicable</i>) and any emerging threats to electoral integrity in the current electoral cycle</li> <li>• Learn about the observation methodologies that election observation networks plan to use, including information about specific violations or acts of violence that they may collect and plans for communicating about these violations</li> <li>• Assess — to the extent possible — whether election observation networks include representation from groups that are likely to be marginalized or victimized through the electoral process</li> <li>• Understand potential threats to the ability of the observation network or observers in certain regions to document and communicate freely about the conduct of the election process</li> <li>• Identify any pre-existing platforms for election observation networks to coordinate on issues of electoral integrity and electoral security</li> <li>• Determine which local governmental and non-governmental actors are trusted by election observers to support transparent, inclusive and accountable elections, including a peaceful election environment</li> </ul>
<p><i>Illustrative Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you view the upcoming elections? Do you have concerns about any issues that have emerged in the pre-election period and that could undermine the transparency, credibility and/or accountability of Election Day?</li> <li>• Are you concerned about possibilities of election violence, including online violence?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ If so, in your view, how is election violence likely to manifest? Is electoral violence likely to advantage particular candidates or political tendencies?</li> <li>▶ Which actors might be perpetrators and which communities or individuals might be targeted? Is violence likely to have gendered dimensions or to manifest differently against other historically marginalized communities?</li> <li>▶ What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place? What information would help you and your organization to better respond to potential risks of election violence?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Are there any geographic regions of the country (hot spots) that you think are particularly at risk for electoral violence? If so, where and why?</li> <li>• (<i>If applicable</i>) If you have observed previous election cycles, what were the major challenges to electoral integrity that your organization noted in the past? Did electoral violence occur in past elections? Were problems localized to particular geographic regions? Were certain types of voters, candidates or electoral officials (for example women, minority ethno-linguistic groups, minority religious groups, etc.) uniquely affected by threats to electoral integrity?</li> <li>• How do you plan to observe the upcoming election process? How many observers will your organization deploy? Will they be deployed in any kind of systematic way (e.g. quotas by region, using statistical sampling, etc.)?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Will your organization have election day observers only or will you also conduct long-term election observation? If you will conduct long-term election observation, what issues do you plan to focus on? How frequently will you gather information about these issues?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- ▶ Does your organization include representatives of all major identity groups, including historically marginalized groups in your leadership, management and observation structures? Are there any groups that you have faced challenges to engage?
- Are you concerned about any potential threats to your ability to safely deploy election observers to all regions of the country and to comment freely on the conduct of the electoral process?
- If your observers witness election violations, acts of violence or potential early warning signs of violence in the pre-election period, how do you plan to communicate about these incidents?
  - ▶ Do you plan to file complaints through any formal electoral complaint and dispute mechanisms (such as with the electoral management body or with the courts)? Do you believe these mechanisms are capable of accurately and impartially addressing any election violations in accordance with the legal framework and international best practices? Would this view be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
  - ▶ Are you aware of or participating in any coordination mechanisms to share information between actors in the peace and security space, the human rights monitoring space and the elections space around potential threats of electoral violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to monitor and mitigate threats of electoral violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to violence, including gender-based violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to human rights abuses against historically marginalized communities?
- How should civil society, the media, political parties, international and regional actors, or government institutions encourage a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors would you trust to promote a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors, if any, might be implicated in any potential outbreaks of violence?
- In your view, is the electoral management body independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- In your view, are the security forces independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- Should a political crisis or instances of electoral violence arise, who do you see as trusted domestic or international figures who may serve as effective mediators?
- What other actors or individuals would you recommend that we speak to in conducting this preliminary political context assessment of the election violence landscape?
- Are there any other questions or issues that we should have asked about but did not?



## PEACEBUILDING ORGANIZATIONS / HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

### Objectives

- Understand how organizations engaged in peacebuilding and/or defense of human rights plan to engage in the upcoming electoral cycle and whether they are adapting their work to proactively monitor or mitigate threats of electoral violence
- Identify any pre-existing platforms for coordination around threats to electoral security
- Identify potential factors for resilience that may prevent against electoral violence
- Determine which local governmental and non-governmental actors are trusted by the peacebuilding and human rights defense communities to respond to incidents of violence, conflict and to promote a peaceful election environment

### Illustrative Questions

- How do you view the upcoming elections? Do you have concerns about any issues that have emerged in the pre-election period and that could undermine the transparency, credibility and/or accountability of Election Day?
- How is the overall security and human rights situation in the country right now? What are the major pre-existing tensions or sources of conflict that your organization is concerned with?
- Are you concerned about possibilities of election violence, including online violence? (**NB:** Online violence is the use of social media or other online platforms to harass or threaten others, engage in hate speech and inciteful language, facilitate offline violence, or spread content that is discriminatory or prejudiced).
  - ▶ If so, in your view, how is election violence likely to manifest? Is electoral violence likely to advantage particular candidates or political tendencies?
  - ▶ Which actors might be perpetrators and which communities or individuals might be targeted? Is violence likely to have gendered dimensions or to manifest differently against other historically marginalized communities?
  - ▶ What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place? What information would help you and your organization to better respond to potential risks of election violence should you wish to do so?
- Are there any geographic regions of the country (hot spots) that you think are particularly at risk for electoral violence? If so, where and why?
- Are you currently undertaking or do you plan to undertake any activities specifically to promote a peaceful election environment, such as activities to monitor or mitigate election violence? Will your organization be adapting your work in any way in the lead-up to, during or after the elections?
- Are there any pre-existing mechanisms in the communities where you work that are particularly effective at promoting peace or respect for human rights?
- What kinds of information does your organization typically gather on local conflicts or human rights violations? How does your organization gather this information? Is this information shared with the public or with any other actors?
- Are you aware of or participating in any coordination mechanisms to share information between actors in the peace and security space, the human rights monitoring space and the elections space around potential threats of electoral violence? Do these mechanisms include international actors, domestic actors, or both?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to monitor and mitigate threats of electoral violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to violence, including gender-based violence?

- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to human rights abuses against historically marginalized communities?
- How should civil society, the media, political parties, international and regional actors, or government institutions encourage a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors would you trust to promote a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors, if any, might be implicated in any potential outbreaks of violence? Which actors does your organization rely on to promote peace and/or respect for human rights?
- In your view, is the electoral management body independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- In your view, are the security forces independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- Should a political crisis or instances of electoral violence arise, who do you see as trusted domestic or international figures who may serve as effective mediators?
- What other actors or individuals would you recommend that we speak to in conducting this preliminary political context assessment of the election violence landscape?
- Are there any other questions or issues that we should have asked about but did not?

### HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES (INCLUDING WOMEN)

#### Objectives

- Understand how historically marginalized communities have experienced previous election cycles (*if applicable*) and what concerns they may have about their ability to safely and equally participate in the current electoral process
- Appreciate how marginalized communities view trends and emerging threats around electoral violence, particularly with respect to perpetrators, tactics, targets, and dominant narratives
- Identify any other concerns that marginalized communities may have around major threats to electoral integrity in the upcoming electoral process
- Determine which local governmental and non-governmental actors are trusted by marginalized communities to support transparent, inclusive and accountable elections, including an election environment that facilitates peaceful participation by members of their communities

#### Illustrative Questions

- How do you view the upcoming elections? Do you have concerns about any issues that have emerged in the pre-election period and that could undermine the transparency, credibility and/or accountability of Election Day?
- Are you concerned about possibilities of election violence, including online violence?
  - ▶ If so, in your view, how is election violence likely to manifest? Is electoral violence likely to advantage particular candidates or political tendencies?
  - ▶ Which actors might be perpetrators and which communities or individuals might be targeted? Is violence likely to have gendered dimensions or to manifest differently against other historically marginalized communities?

- ▶ What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place? What information would help you and your organization to better respond to potential risks of election violence should you wish to do so?
- Are there any geographic regions of the country (hot spots) that you think are particularly at risk for electoral violence? If so, where and why?
- *(If applicable)* In previous election cycles, do you believe that members of your community (e.g. women, youth, rural voters, etc.) had equal opportunities to vote, stand as candidates or serve as election officials when compared to members of other communities? If not, what barriers did members of your community face?
  - ▶ Were members of your community ever pressured to vote in a particular way?
  - ▶ Were members of your community ever given money or goods (such as food or clothing) in relation to the elections?
  - ▶ Were members of your community ever harassed, intimidated, threatened or harmed in relation to the electoral process, including the voter registration process?
  - ▶ Did members of your community receive adequate information about how and when to register to vote?
- Do you have any concerns that in this election cycle it will be harder for members of your community to vote, stand as candidates or serve as election officials when compared to members of other communities?
  - ▶ Do you believe that members of your community feel safe exercising their rights to vote, to run for office or to otherwise participate in the election process? Why or why not?
  - ▶ Do you believe that members of your community will receive adequate information about how and when to register to vote?
  - ▶ Do you believe that members of your community will receive adequate information about how to stand for elected office?
- Are you concerned about possibilities of election violence, including online violence?
  - ▶ If so, in your view, how is election violence likely to manifest? Is electoral violence likely to advantage particular candidates or political tendencies?
  - ▶ Which actors might be perpetrators and which communities or individuals might be targeted? Is violence likely to have gendered dimensions or to manifest differently against other historically marginalized communities?
  - ▶ What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place?
  - ▶ What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place and that members of your community in particular may be at risk?
- Are there any geographic regions of the country (hot spots) that you think are particularly at risk for electoral violence? If so, where and why?
- Are you aware of or participating in any coordination mechanisms to share information between actors in the peace and security space, the human rights monitoring space and the elections space around potential threats of electoral violence? Do these mechanisms include international actors, domestic actors, or both?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to monitor and mitigate threats of electoral violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to violence, including gender-based violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to human rights abuses against members of your community? Are these actions effective and do you trust them?

- How should civil society, the media, political parties, international and regional actors, or government institutions encourage a peaceful and inclusive electoral environment? Which of these actors would you trust to promote a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors, if any, might be implicated in any potential outbreaks of violence? Which of these actors, if any, might be implicated in preventing members of your community from participating fully and equally in the election process?
- How should civil society, the media, political parties, international and regional actors, or government institutions encourage a peaceful and inclusive electoral environment? Which of these actors would you trust to promote a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors, if any, might be implicated in any potential outbreaks of violence? Which of these actors, if any, might be implicated in preventing members of your community from participating fully and equally in the election process?
- In your view, is the electoral management body independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- In your view, are the security forces independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- If you or a member of your community were a victim of election violence, are there any actors that you would trust to respond to this incident? Are there any actors that you would not trust to respond to this incident?
- If you or a member of your community was a victim of election violence, what support services or resources would you want to receive?
- What other actors or individuals would you recommend that we speak to in conducting this preliminary political context assessment of the election violence landscape?
- Are there any other questions or issues that we should have asked about but did not?

### COMMUNITY LEADERS (INCLUDING TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES, BUSINESS, LABOR AND COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION LEADERS)

#### Objectives

- Understand major threats to electoral integrity from previous election cycles (*if applicable*) and any emerging threats to electoral integrity in the current electoral cycle
- Determine whether community leaders are undertaking any activities to proactively monitor or mitigate threats of electoral violence
- Appreciate potential factors for community-level resilience that may prevent against electoral violence
- Identify any pre-existing platforms for coordination around threats to electoral security in which community leaders may be taking part

#### *Illustrative Questions*

- How do you view the upcoming elections? Are there any issues that have emerged in the pre-election period that cause you to worry about how credible or fair the elections will be?
- Are you concerned about possibilities of election violence, including online violence, in your community?
  - ▶ If so, in your view, how is election violence likely to manifest in your community? Is electoral violence likely to advantage particular candidates or political tendencies?

- ▶ Which actors might be perpetrators and which groups or individuals in your community might be targeted? Is violence likely to have gendered dimensions or to manifest differently against other historically marginalized communities?
  - ▶ What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place in your community? What information would help you to better respond to potential risks of election violence?
- (If applicable) Did your community face any major challenges during previous election cycles?
  - ▶ Did any election-related violence occur in your community in past elections? If so, who were the victims and who were the perpetrators? What actions — if any — did the community take to address the violence?
  - ▶ Did vote buying or attempted vote buying take place in your community? If so, what were the circumstances?
- How are you planning to prepare members of your community for the upcoming elections?
  - ▶ Are you undertaking any activities to proactively monitor and mitigate electoral violence?
  - ▶ Are you undertaking any activities to facilitate the safe participation of historically marginalized communities in particular?
- If you hear about election violations, acts of violence or potential early warning signs of violence in your community in the pre-election period, do you have mechanisms in place to handle these incidents?
  - ▶ Do you plan to file complaints through any formal electoral complaint and dispute mechanisms (such as with the electoral management body or with the courts)? Do you believe these mechanisms are capable of accurately and impartially addressing any election violations in accordance with the legal framework and international best practices? Would this view be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
  - ▶ Are you aware of or participating in any coordination mechanisms to share information between actors in the peace and security space, the human rights monitoring space and the elections space around potential threats of electoral violence?
- When conflicts or human rights violations occur in your community, how are these issues typically addressed? Are there effective mechanisms for peacebuilding and conflict resolution in your community? In your view, does the public trust these mechanisms?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to monitor and mitigate threats of electoral violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to violence, including gender-based violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to human rights abuses against historically marginalized communities?
- How should civil society, the media, political parties, international and regional actors, or government institutions encourage a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors would you trust to promote a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors, if any, might be implicated in any potential outbreaks of violence?
- In your view, is the electoral management body independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and electoral stakeholders (including members of marginalized communities) groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- In your view, are the security forces independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?

- Should a political crisis or instances of electoral violence arise, who do you see as trusted domestic or international figures who may serve as effective mediators?
- What other actors or individuals would you recommend that we speak to in conducting this preliminary political context assessment of the election violence landscape?
- Are there any other questions or issues that we should have asked about but did not?

### ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY (EMB)

#### Objectives

- Appreciate any major concerns or challenges that the electoral management body (EMB) faces to the successful conduct of its work as well as any innovations that the EMB is introducing to promote credible elections
- Determine whether the EMB is taking any actions to proactively monitor and/or mitigate electoral violence
- Understand what role the EMB might play in electoral complaints and disputes and how mechanisms for adjudicating disputes are anticipated to function
- Identify any pre-existing platforms for the EMB to coordinate with other governmental and non-governmental actors on issues of electoral integrity and electoral security

#### *Illustrative Questions*

- How do you view the upcoming elections? Is the EMB receiving adequate financial and logistical support to plan and prepare for the process? What procedures and policies will the EMB put in place to ensure that upcoming elections are inclusive, transparent and accountable? Are any of these procedures and policies innovations for this election cycle?
  - ▶ Are you concerned about any potential threats to your ability to safely deploy election officials to all regions of the country and to organize a credible process?
- Are you concerned about possibilities of election violence, including online violence, in this election cycle?
  - ▶ If so, in your view, how is election violence likely to manifest? Is electoral violence likely to advantage particular candidates or political tendencies?
  - ▶ Which actors might be perpetrators and which communities or individuals might be targeted? Is violence likely to have gendered dimensions or to manifest differently against other historically marginalized communities?
  - ▶ What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place? What information would help the EMB to better respond to potential risks of election violence?
- Are there any geographic regions of the country (hot spots) that you think are particularly at risk for electoral violence? If so, where and why?
- Is the EMB taking any proactive measures to plan for and mitigate violence in the lead-up to, during and after election day?
  - ▶ Are any of these measures specific to marginalized communities — such as women, internally displaced persons, ethno-linguistic minorities, etc. — and the unique forms of violence that they may face?
- What mechanisms will be in place for the adjudication of electoral complaints and disputes? Are there any informal mechanisms as well as formal mechanisms? How can the EMB ensure that these mechanisms are accessible to and trusted by all major election stakeholders?
- Are you participating in any coordination platforms with other government agencies, civil society organizations, political parties, or international/regional actors to share information about potential threats to electoral security?

- ▶ If so, do these platforms currently have adequate information to make timely decisions about election security? What other information would it be useful for these platforms to have?
- ▶ Do any of these platforms consider particular risks of gender-based election violence or of election violence that targets other historically marginalized communities?
- Will election day security be provided? If so, what measures will be taken to ensure that the presence of security officials near the polling stations is reassuring to voters as opposed to intimidating? Will security officials be provided with any specific training on risks of gender-based violence or violence targeting other historically marginalized communities?
- What other actors or individuals would you recommend that we speak to in conducting this preliminary political context assessment of the election violence landscape?
- Are there any other questions or issues that we should have asked about but did not?

## POLITICAL PARTIES

### Objectives

- Appreciate how major political parties view trends and emerging threats around electoral violence, particularly with respect to perpetrators, tactics, targets, and dominant narratives
- Identify any pre-existing platforms or initiatives that promote coordination and accountability across political parties with respect to campaign finance and electoral security
- Assess — to the extent possible — whether major political parties include representation from groups that are likely to be marginalized or victimized through the electoral process
- Determine which local governmental and non-governmental actors are trusted by major political parties to support transparent, inclusive and accountable elections, including a peaceful election environment

### *Illustrative Questions*

- How do you view the upcoming elections? Do you have concerns about any issues that have emerged in the pre-election period and that could undermine the transparency, credibility and/or accountability of Election Day?
- Are you concerned about possibilities of election violence, including online violence?
  - ▶ If so, in your view, how is election violence likely to manifest? Is electoral violence likely to advantage particular candidates or political tendencies?
  - ▶ Which actors might be perpetrators and which communities or individuals might be targeted? Is violence likely to have gendered dimensions or to manifest differently against other historically marginalized communities?
  - ▶ What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place?
- Are there any geographic regions of the country (hot spots) that you think are particularly at risk for electoral violence? If so, where and why?
- Is your party participating in any initiatives to promote accountability with respect to campaign finance and electoral security, such as a Code of Conduct? Are such initiatives legally binding or voluntary?
  - ▶ If members of the party fail to adhere to these standards, how will the party address the violation?
- Does your party plan to deploy political party poll watchers for the upcoming election? If so, will they be deployed in any kind of systematic way (e.g. quotas by region, using statistical sampling, etc.)?



- If your party witnesses election violations, acts of violence or potential early warning signs of violence in the pre-election period, how do you plan to communicate about these incidents?
  - Do you plan to file complaints through any formal electoral complaint and dispute mechanisms (such as with the electoral management body or with the courts)? Do you believe these mechanisms are capable of accurately and impartially addressing any election violations in accordance with the legal framework and international best practices?
- Are you concerned about any potential threats to your party's ability to safely and openly campaign? Are there particular regions of the country where these threats are particularly concerning?
- How does your political party conduct outreach to women, youth and other historically marginalized communities?
- Is your political party able to routinely nominate women, youth and members of other historically marginalized communities to stand as candidates for office?
- Are you aware of or participating in any coordination mechanisms to share information across political parties around electoral security?
- Are you aware of or participating in any coordination mechanisms to share information between actors in the peace and security space, the human rights monitoring space and the elections space around potential threats of electoral violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to monitor and mitigate threats of electoral violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to violence, including gender-based violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to human rights abuses against historically marginalized communities?
- How should civil society, the media, political parties, international and regional actors, or government institutions encourage a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors would you trust to promote a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors, if any, might be implicated in any potential outbreaks of violence?
- In your view, is the electoral management body independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- In your view, are the security forces independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- Should a political crisis or instances of electoral violence arise, who do you see as trusted domestic or international figures who may serve as effective mediators?
- What other actors or individuals would you recommend that we speak to in conducting this preliminary political context assessment of the election violence landscape?
- Are there any other questions or issues that we should have asked about but did not?

## SECURITY FORCES

### Objectives

- Appreciate how the security forces view trends and emerging threats around electoral violence, particularly with respect to perpetrators, tactics, targets, and dominant narratives

- Understand how security forces may be preparing to provide election day security, including any efforts to proactively monitor and mitigate electoral violence
- Identify any pre-existing platforms for coordination between security forces and other actors around threats to electoral security
- Determine what mechanisms exist to hold security forces accountable should they perpetrate incidents of violence

#### *Illustrative Questions*

- How do you view the upcoming elections? Are you concerned about possibilities of election violence, including online violence?
  - ▶ If so, in your view, how is election violence likely to manifest? Is electoral violence likely to advantage particular candidates or political tendencies?
  - ▶ Which actors might be perpetrators and which communities or individuals might be targeted? Is violence likely to have gendered dimensions or to manifest differently against other historically marginalized communities?
  - ▶ What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place? What information would help you and your organization to better respond to potential risks of election violence?
- Are there any geographic regions of the country (hot spots) that you think are particularly at risk for electoral violence? If so, where and why?
- Will your organization play a role in providing security to the election process? Will this include any efforts to proactively monitor and mitigate election violence?
  - ▶ If so, what kind of training will individuals involved in election day security or early warning initiatives receive? Is it likely to include training on gender-based violence and other forms of violence that may specifically or uniquely target historically marginalized communities?
- Are you aware of or participating in any coordination mechanisms to share information between actors in the peace and security space, the human rights monitoring space and the elections space around potential threats of electoral violence? Do these mechanisms include international actors, domestic actors, or both?
- Are you aware of or participating in any mechanisms to coordinate an international or regional response should election violence occur?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to monitor and mitigate threats of electoral violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to violence, including gender-based violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to human rights abuses against historically marginalized communities?
- How should civil society, the media, political parties, international and regional actors, or government institutions encourage a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors would you trust to promote a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors, if any, might be implicated in any potential outbreaks of violence?
- If members of your organization are themselves implicated in perpetrating acts of election violence are there mechanisms to hold them accountable?
- What other actors or individuals would you recommend that we speak to in conducting this preliminary political context assessment of the election violence landscape?
- Are there any other questions or issues that we should have asked about but did not?

## MEDIA

### Objectives

- Appreciate how members of the media view trends and emerging threats around electoral violence, particularly with respect to perpetrators, tactics, targets, and dominant narratives
- Assess whether members of the media are undertaking any initiatives to safeguard against hate speech, disinformation or the publication of incendiary content
- Assess—to the extent possible—whether major media outlets include representation from groups that are likely to be marginalized or victimized through the electoral process
- Understand potential threats to the ability of journalists to document and communicate freely about the conduct of the election process

### *Illustrative Questions*

- How do you view the upcoming elections? Are you concerned about possibilities of election violence, including online violence and hate speech?
  - ▶ If so, in your view, how is election violence likely to manifest? Is electoral violence likely to advantage particular candidates or political tendencies?
  - ▶ Which actors might be perpetrators and which communities or individuals might be targeted? Is violence likely to have gendered dimensions or to manifest differently against other historically marginalized communities?
  - ▶ What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place? What information would help you and your organization to better respond to potential risks of election violence?
- Are there any geographic regions of the country (hot spots) that you think are particularly at risk for electoral violence? If so, where and why?
- From what medium(s) do most citizens in the country get their political and electoral related information? Person-to-person? Printed media? Radio? Television? Online?
  - ▶ Who owns or controls them, and what are the political implications of this ownership?
  - ▶ Which of the mediums is/are most influential? Are they domestic or foreign?
  - ▶ What is the level of Internet penetration? If people receive election information online, what sources are influential? E.g., Social media? Blogs? Online news?
  - ▶ What are the most common digital communications or information-sharing platforms? E.g., Facebook? Facebook groups? WhatsApp? Twitter? Are these popular just among one segment of the population or many? If one segment (e.g., youth), how influential is it in the electoral context?
  - ▶ Do certain media outlets cover the stories and viewpoints of historically marginalized communities in particular?
- Will disinformation likely increase around elections? Are disinformation campaigns focused around an electoral outcome? Do you have any specific concerns regarding disinformation around the upcoming elections (probe: if so, what will it look like? Can you provide examples?)
  - ▶ What are some of the major themes promoted by disinformation?
  - ▶ Do disinformation campaigns clearly disadvantage certain issue campaigns, candidates, parties, demographic groups, and/or individuals — e.g. women?
- To what extent has social media and traditional media been utilized to negatively target and perpetuate hate against women or different marginalized groups? What is the likelihood that political leaders or others (probe: if others, who?) will utilize these methods to instigate violence and hate during elections? What is the goal of these tactics?
  - ▶ Which types of citizens are most vulnerable and likely to be persuaded by these campaigns?
- What role do political leaders, the government, or religious/traditional leaders play in mitigating or exacerbating disinformation and hate speech around the elections?

- To what extent are traditional media groups, such as mainstream broadcasters, contributing to or mitigating disinformation?
- Are there press unions or journalists collectives involved in this issue? Is there a Media or Journalist Code of Conduct that addresses this issue? If so, how is it enforced? Does it specifically cover women and marginalized groups?
- How effective are the relevant regulatory bodies in ensuring peaceful and accurate content around elections?
- To what extent do voters easily discern between credible and non-credible media sources? What is the level of media literacy of the population (i.e., ability to access, analyze and evaluate media)?
- What other actors or individuals would you recommend that we speak to in conducting this preliminary political context assessment of the election violence landscape?
- Are there any other questions or issues that we should have asked about but did not?

### INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (INCLUDING INTERNATIONAL DONORS)

#### Objectives

- Understand current UN, regional body, donor and INGO initiatives to promote peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts, provide support to the security sector, monitor incidents of violence, assess the electoral process and increase political space for historically marginalized communities
- Identify any pre-existing platforms for international, regional or donor coordination around threats to electoral security
- Appreciate how the international community and relevant regional bodies view trends and emerging threats around electoral violence, particularly with respect to perpetrators, tactics, targets, and dominant narratives
- Identify any other concerns that international and regional actors may have around major threats to electoral integrity in the upcoming electoral process
- Determine which local governmental and non-governmental actors are trusted by international and regional bodies to support transparent, inclusive and accountable elections, including a peaceful election environment

#### *Illustrative Questions*

- How do you view the upcoming elections? Do you have concerns about any issues that have emerged in the pre-election period and that could undermine the transparency, credibility and/or accountability of Election Day?
- Are you currently providing or do you plan to provide any support to the electoral process, peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts, the security sector, human rights monitoring or the rights of historically marginalized communities? Do any of these efforts specifically seek to promote a peaceful election environment?
- Are you concerned about possibilities of election violence, including online violence?
  - If so, in your view, how is election violence likely to manifest? Is electoral violence likely to advantage particular candidates or political tendencies?
  - Which actors might be perpetrators and which communities or individuals might be targeted? Is violence likely to have gendered dimensions or to manifest differently against other historically marginalized communities?

- What signs would signal to you that electoral violence is likely to increase or take place? What information would help you and your organization to better respond to potential risks of election violence?
- Are there any geographic regions of the country (hot spots) that you think are particularly at risk for electoral violence? If so, where and why?
- Are you aware of or participating in any coordination mechanisms to share information between actors in the peace and security space, the human rights monitoring space and the elections space around potential threats of electoral violence? Do these mechanisms include international actors, domestic actors, or both?
- Are you aware of or participating in any mechanisms to coordinate an international or regional response should election violence occur?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to monitor and mitigate threats of electoral violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to violence, including gender-based violence?
- Are you aware of any actions on the part of domestic governmental and non-governmental actors to investigate and respond to human rights abuses against historically marginalized communities?
- How should civil society, the media, political parties, international and regional actors, or government institutions encourage a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors would you trust to promote a peaceful electoral environment? Which of these actors, if any, might be implicated in any potential outbreaks of violence?
- In your view, is the electoral management body independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- In your view, are the security forces independent and capable of responding to concerns of election violence in a nonpartisan and professional manner? Do you believe this view would be shared by all major political parties and groups of citizens or are there some exceptions?
- Should a political crisis or instances of electoral violence arise, who do you see as trusted domestic or international figures who may serve as effective mediators?
- What other actors or individuals would you recommend that we speak to in conducting this preliminary political context assessment of the election violence landscape?
- Are there any other questions or issues that we should have asked about but did not?

# PART IV

## ELECTION OBSERVATION METHODOLOGY AND PROGRAM DESIGN: DESIGNING TO FIT THE CONTEXT

After you have completed your political context analysis, you will need to select an observation methodology or set of methodologies that will allow you to hone in on the most likely or significant risks of electoral violence in your country's context. Broadly speaking, an **observation methodology** can be thought of as a plan for how to gather information on incidents of violence and early warning signs of electoral violence. As discussed under political context analysis, election violence is complex and the prevailing characteristics will likely differ depending on which part of the country you consider as well as on the victims. Violence against women, for instance, will likely take different forms than violence against men. For these reasons, you will need to prioritize what to observe as well as how and where you observe it. To produce findings that are as accurate, timely, impartial, and actionable as possible, your chosen observation methodology should be as systematic as practicable and appropriate, given local circumstances.<sup>[27]</sup> You may choose to enter into partnerships with other organizations that can undertake a nuanced assessment of important issues or indicators that your organization does not have bandwidth or the necessary expertise to observe directly. NDI's guide *Monitoring and Mitigating Electoral Violence through Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observation*<sup>[28]</sup> provides additional complementary information on how to design an observation methodology; however, the main points are summarized below for ease of reference.

---

<sup>[27]</sup> Adapted from the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Groups (DoGP): <https://www.ndi.org/DoGP>

<sup>[28]</sup> <https://www.ndi.org/monitoring-and-mitigating-electoral-violence>

## What is an Observation Methodology?

Every monitoring methodology is unique, but there are common elements that every monitoring methodology should include:

- Indicators that you plan to monitor, including early warning signs, incidents, and resilience factors
- An approach to data collection
- Tools for collecting the data
- A plan to aggregate and analyze the data
- A plan to recruit and train and deploy (as necessary) observers to gather data
- An external communications protocol to share findings from your data, that includes:
  - A plan to coordinate with response actors to support victims of violence
  - A plan for raising concerns about risks for potential violence with actors that can respond to and mitigate the violence



- A plan for rapid public communications to inoculate against disinformation and timely inform about the nature of the threat of electoral violence

- Iterative assessment

We will briefly define and discuss each of these elements in turn.

**Indicators of Electoral Violence:** As election observers, you have two primary objectives: (1) to prevent electoral violence from taking place — when possible; and (2) to document violence and its effects on the electoral process when prevention is not possible. Strategic communications with key actors and the public is crucial for both objectives. It is important to forecast or predict where violence is most likely, so that actions can be taken to address the potential causes of violence before outbreaks of violence occur. **Indicators** are the observable signs or data points that you will track so that you can make accurate predictions. Considered in more scientific terms, by designing your observation methodology you are building a model to forecast where election violence is likely to occur. Indicators are the variables in your predictive model. Indicators also answer the question: *What will you observe?*

You will need to use your political context assessment and follow-up conversations with key stakeholders to identify potential indicators in the regions where you plan to observe, but a few common indicators are included below as examples:

- **Large-scale movements of people** out of communities may indicate that the local population has sensed significant tension and has chosen to relocate for a short period of time
- **Restrictions on freedom of assembly** can be an early warning sign of violence, particularly if the government is limiting the ability of certain political parties to access or campaign in public spaces while allowing others to hold rallies or events without restrictions
- **Incitements to violence** on social media or in traditional media can often be a precursor to physical violence
- **Vote buying** is a form of economic violence, but also — often — an indicator that physical violence or threats of physical violence are likely to follow as a means of enforcing the implied contract between the individual buying and the individual selling their vote

Indicators can be divided into **Early Warning Signs** of electoral violence, **Incidents** of electoral violence and **Resilience Factors** that can mitigate electoral violence. Early warning signs of violence are factors that suggest that physical violence is



likely to occur. An incident is a verified violent event that has already taken place. Traditionally in election violence observation, incidents are thought of purely as verified outbreaks of *physical* violence. They are urgent events that require immediate follow-on and the victims should be connected to psychosocial and/or physical healthcare services where needed and possible. For this reason, it is generally considered a good practice to have separate observation tools and separate communication protocols for incidents and for early warning signs of violence. Incidents require immediate action and a response by victim support services, while early warning signs of violence should be analyzed holistically so that you can better understand — based on all observed early warning signs of violence — where violence is most likely, and this information should be communicated to response actors who can play a role to mitigate risks of violence.

Resilience factors are factors that contribute to peace and stability in a given community. By monitoring resilience factors, you can further refine your understanding of electoral risk. If citizen observer groups are engaging in a long-term observation initiative, understanding how existing resilience factors mitigate or play into incidents that occur can be useful for predicting potentials for violence or resilience to it in the future or in other geographic areas. Communities where early warning signs indicate that tensions are rising **and** where resilience factors are becoming weaker may be more prone to violence than communities where tensions are rising but where resilience factors remain strong. When observers report incidents, they should also seek to understand which local leaders responded to the incident, if this response was effective in preventing or mitigating violence, and how key stakeholders reacted to the incident. There should be follow-up in the weeks or months following the incident to gather additional information on response and mitigation tactics. Observer groups can use their analysis of local and national connectors and resilience factors to understand what areas are more/less resilient to violence and to make recommendations to authorities on where to allocate resources for violence prevention in the short term, as well as actions to take to build resilience over the medium-long term.

**Data Collection Approaches:** Once you have developed a list of potential indicators for your context, you will need to prioritize this list (in most instances, the initial list will be quite long!) and determine how best to gather data on each indicator. You may find it helpful to create a matrix or table with all of your potential indicators, and for each one seek to respond to the following questions. A prioritization matrix tool is included at the end of this section.

- **How big of an impact is this indicator likely to have on overall risks for electoral violence?** Violence is complex and many factors may contribute to increasing overall risks of violence. You may know, for example, that in a particular community violence is generally more likely in drought years where well water becomes scarce and community members either have to limit their use of water or compete against their neighbors for access to a limited resource. However, this may be a much smaller overall risk factor for electoral violence in your country than inflation, which affects everyone across the country and causes tensions to rise nearly universally. In this instance, you may choose to prioritize observation of inflation (through centralized desk research) over observation of well water levels in a particular small community.
- **How frequently would I need to observe this indicator?** The electoral system may be an important indicator or risk factor for electoral violence in your context. Some research indicates, for example, that in presidential systems where the executive branch faces few checks on its power, elections will be more prone to violence because of the “winner take all” nature of the system. This is an important indicator to note, but the electoral system is not likely to change during the course of your observation effort. You would only need to observe the indicator one time to understand its impact on the electoral process. For this reason, this is probably not a good indicator to put on a pre-election observation checklist for observers who will be collecting data once every two weeks, but it would be a good indicator to “observe” through centralized desk research at the beginning of the project. Most election observation efforts will consider data that is:
  - **Static:** Static data does not change, but can provide important underlying context to understand risks of violence. For example, you might conduct an analysis of the electoral legal framework or look at factors such as the percentage of women currently holding elected office, which (if the percentage is low) could suggest that women face unique forms of violence that prevent them from standing for office. Many resilience factors will also be static. For example, whether a particular community has traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution is unlikely to change or change significantly during the course of your observation. For this reason, you may want to consider one-time data collection approaches to understand these factors, but may determine that they are not a priority for inclusion in a dynamic data collection approach such as a checklist for long-term observers to use. Investigative reporting can also be an important practice to gain deep understanding into structural issues that are unlikely to change significantly during the course of the observation effort, such as a long-

standing practice of heads of household (traditionally men) persuading other family members to cast their ballots for their preferred candidate.

- **Snapshot or Cross-Sectional:** This type of data looks at key factors or variables in a single short moment in time. For example, you may choose to conduct a single round of public opinion research into perceptions of risks to voters or you may conduct in-depth observation that focuses on a particular moment in the electoral cycle that is likely to be violent, such as the candidate nomination process or the voter registration process.
- **Longitudinal:** Longitudinal data captures change over time and is best for indicators that are likely to change frequently. For example, you may want to conduct key informant interviews with local security forces over time to see how the types of incidents they are being asked to respond to might be changing in the lead-up to the election, you may ask long-term observers to report on the same set of indicators within their communities over time, or you may develop a media monitoring strategy to look at how use of inciteful language or hate speech changes on a fixed set of pages or platforms over time.
- **How can this indicator be observed?** This is your opportunity to begin identifying data collection strategies. Generally speaking, static indicators can be observed through one-time desk research that is conducted centrally or through the initial context assessment. A list of common **static indicators** and suggestions for how to observe them is included in the table below:

## COMMON STATIC INDICATORS OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND HOW TO OBSERVE THEM

01	<b>**PREVIOUS HISTORY OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE **</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context assessment</li> <li>• Remember to include perspectives of women and other marginalized communities — may have experienced violence that is not widely reported</li> </ul>
02	<b>CLOSELY CONTESTED ELECTION — VIOLENCE COULD TIP THE SCALES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context assessment</li> <li>• Monitoring of campaign activities</li> <li>• Key informant interviews with campaigns</li> </ul>
03	<b>ELECTORAL SYSTEM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context assessment</li> <li>• Focus groups, surveys, key informant interviews</li> </ul>
04	<b>VOTING BASED ON GROUP IDENTITIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of previous election results and exit polls</li> <li>• Focus groups, surveys, key informant interviews</li> </ul>
05	<b>AVAILABILITY OF ARMS AND INSTIGATORS OF VIOLENCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context assessment</li> <li>• Employment rates — youth unemployment</li> <li>• Attitudes of security and military, including ex-combatants</li> </ul>
06	<b>CLIENTELISM/CORRUPTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context assessment</li> <li>• Legal framework analysis — campaign finance</li> <li>• Focus groups, key informant interviews, surveys</li> <li>• Investigatory reporting</li> </ul>
07	<b>WEAK ELECTORAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal framework analysis</li> <li>• Monitoring of pre-election claims and disputes</li> <li>• Opinion analysis — electoral stakeholders</li> </ul>
08	<b>INFORMATION DISORDER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context assessment</li> <li>• Legal framework analysis</li> <li>• Focus groups, surveys, key informant interviews</li> <li>• Media monitoring</li> </ul>
09	<b>UNDERLYING GRIEVANCES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of previous election results and exit polls</li> <li>• Focus groups, surveys, key informant interviews</li> </ul>
10	<b>DIVIDERS ARE STRONGER THAN CONNECTORS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context assessment</li> <li>• Note that this factor in particular is likely to show regional variance</li> </ul>

**Snapshot or cross-sectional indicators** may require a specific short-term observation methodology, especially to hone in on particular stages of the electoral process. We will return to this topic when we discuss pre-election observation later on in the guide, but some common phases of the electoral process that merit detailed short-term observation include:

- Candidate nomination/political party primaries
- Ballot qualification
- Voter registration
- Adjudication of electoral claims and disputes
- Tabulation of results

Most of the data that you will capture through your observation effort will likely be **longitudinal**. Electoral violence observation aims to predict how risks for violence change over time, which necessarily entails looking at different indicators over time. Specific data collection strategies for particular election violence types will be outlined in the next four sections of the guide, but a few common examples of how to collect longitudinal data include:

- Repeated focus groups or key informant interviews with the same participants to see how responses change
  - Surveys of the same population over time
  - Tracking reports of specific incident types (such as harassment of poll workers) to see if they increase or decrease
  - Regular reporting from trained conflict monitors/long-term observers deployed across the country
  - Tracking select media outlets or social media platforms over time
  - Monitoring campaign events or speeches
- **How easy is it to observe this indicator?** Some indicators may be important, but very challenging to observe. For example, illicit campaign contributions may be an early indication that these actors are prepared to use violence if their preferred candidates do not seem likely to win the election. However, in many contexts, it may be extremely hard to determine who is providing funds to candidates, particularly if the funds are passed through a third party first or if there is not a strong legal framework regulating campaign

finance in place. In such instances, you may decide to deprioritize this indicator in favor of something that your organization can more reasonably expect to observe in the time remaining before elections.

It is important to note that some instances of electoral violence — as well as some early warning signs of electoral violence — do not occur in the public space. For example vote buying is sometimes conducted in public, but is more commonly negotiated behind closed doors with community leaders (in instances of so-called community collusion where an agreement is reached that the leader will persuade the entire community to vote the same way) or with individual voters. Some forms of violence against women in elections, such as when family members discourage women from voting, are similarly not public. Negotiations between state officials and clientelistic non-state actors that may have control of some or all parts of the territory in a country are also often private. Techniques from investigative journalism may help to shed light on these issues, though making use of these techniques may be time consuming or require building new partnerships with those who have experience in this area. Focus groups or key informant interviews can also be sources of information. In addition, many organizations concerned with vote buying choose to focus on rumors of vote buying as even rumors that widespread vote buying is taking place can be an indicator that there is likely to be low public confidence in the ultimate election result.

- **Who are the likely perpetrators associated with this indicator?** By identifying the likely perpetrators, you can begin to identify potential risks to the observation effort at an early stage. If incumbent politicians are the most likely perpetrators of electoral violence, what are the risks to the project or to your organization — such as potential increased scrutiny from registration or tax authorities — around sharing information about the violence, and how can these risks be mitigated? Similarly, early identification of likely perpetrators can help you to prioritize response actors to engage from the beginning of the project. If the most likely perpetrators are rebel groups that have failed to fully disarm after a peace process, who can assist you to mitigate risks that they take action against your organization or its observers? Does this entail working with state security forces or with an international or regional body such as the United Nations?
- **Who are the likely victims associated with this indicator?** This is an important question to consider for two reasons. First, you should ensure in your final indicator selection that you are giving ample weight to indicators that are particularly likely to affect marginalized communities. As discussed above, pre-election violence primarily occurs to influence electoral participation and inclusion. It is a strategy used to make sure that only certain kinds of people turn out to vote, run for office and have a voice in influencing policy platforms. If your indicators focus on limited categories of

potential victims (say, urban youth or political candidates) your observation methodology is not going to provide an accurate picture of the true breadth of risks for electoral violence. Perhaps urban youth are likely to experience electoral violence, but rural women face violence that excludes them from participating and is rarely covered by media outlets or discussed publicly. If you don't ensure that your indicators address a broad range of potential experiences of victimization, you will miss significant dimensions of the election violence.

It is often hardest to gather information about the experiences of the most marginalized communities in a country. In this instance, your organization may want to think about strategies for indirect observation. If you and your observer network are unlikely to be able to gather particularly good information about violence facing nomadic pastoralists, for example, can you identify another organization that has connections to this community and ask them to share information with you? Successful electoral violence mitigation hinges on partnerships and strong communication. Second, as noted above, you will want to plan to refer victims to appropriate support services to anyone who is victimized by electoral violence. It is important to ensure that services offered are sensitive to the needs of the likely victims and do not risk re-traumatization (we will return to this point under **Response Mechanisms**).

It is important to think about likely victims at an early stage in the planning process so that you can gather buy-in and input from organizations that have experience in effectively supporting victims, particularly victims from marginalized communities. That will help to ensure that your proposed observation methodology and your proposed response mechanisms **do not risk causing additional harm** to communities that are already structurally disadvantaged. It is also important to understand the level to which institutions are implicated in violence against these groups and the level of trust in law enforcement and social services. If the trust in local and national institutions is low, you may consider confidential consultations with international institutions or domestic nongovernmental organizations dealing with human rights and humanitarian matters, or advocate for the presence of international observers.

- **Who else might already be monitoring this indicator?** Here you should refer back to your mapping of the peace and security space conducted as part of the political context assessment. If another credible organization already has systems in place to gather information about certain indicators — for example, perhaps the EMB has plans to track any attacks on poll workers — there is less value for your observation effort to gather the same information. You should instead think about how you can partner with the other organizations to share information so that you can benefit from their observation efforts and vice-versa.

Based on the responses to these questions, you should be able to **prioritize** your indicators to focus on a few critical ones that your organization can plan to observe given the inevitable limitations of time, funding, and human resources, ahead of the elections. If you realize that nearly all of your indicators can be captured by deploying long-term observers to communities across the country, you may only need one data collection approach that is focused on gathering reports from long-term observers. If you realize that many different data collection approaches would be needed to gather information on the indicators that you have identified, you should pick one or two approaches that seem realistic for your organization to take on and seek to build partnerships with organizations that may already be collecting information on some of the indicators that it will be harder for your organization to address.

**Data Collection Tools and Protocol:** Based on your identified data collection plan, you will need to develop tools and a protocol to capture information on the indicators that your organization wishes to directly observe. Whether you are gathering information on dynamic or static indicators, it is important for your observers to have a standardized approach or **protocol** to collecting data. This protocol should consider:

- What should the observers observe and how?
- What sources of information should observers use to make and verify their observations?
- How and how often observers should approach different actors in their communities — from citizens, to potential informants, political party members or members of institutions — in their communities and what kind of information they seek from them?
- How often should they make their observations? Clear deadlines for reporting are essential and must be determined before observers are recruited and trained.
- How and when should they communicate their observation findings back to the data analysis team?

Clearly defining tools and the data collection protocol will help to ensure that you can rapidly aggregate or compile all of the information from your observers, understand what that data is trying to tell you about the election context, and communicate about the most important findings quickly so that mitigating actions can be taken before violence occurs. Standardized tools help to speed up the process of understanding your data. If you deploy 100 observers and every observer sends you a detailed ten-page report on conflict dynamics in the area that he or she is assigned to observe,



it is highly likely that you will not be able to timely read all of the reports, let alone come to a consensus on how to weigh relative risks in one community as opposed to another. By contrast, if every observer has to send in a simple Yes or No response to the question *Did you witness or hear of any clashes at campaign events during the past two weeks in your community?*, it is very easy to rapidly compare responses across all 100 communities and direct mitigating actors to focus their limited time and resources on the more limited number of communities where such clashes were reported. Specific, significant examples could be communicated separately, for example, as critical incident reports. Examples of standardized data collection tools include:

- Observer checklists
- Interview or focus group guides
- Scripts for call-in centers if you are establishing a hotline for members of the community to report incidents
- Surveys

Data collection protocols should also include clear instructions for observers about when to report their findings. Groups may choose to have observers report monthly, bi-weekly, weekly, daily, or somewhere in between. You may also have observers report certain types of information, such as critical incidents, as they happen or as they are observed. In choosing a reporting frequency, you will need to balance how much data your team is able to analyze and act upon, and how often, with how quickly you would like to be able to activate alert and response mechanisms.

In addition to developing tools and protocols for collecting the data, you will need to consider protocols for communicating with your observers. **Two-way communication** is critical so that you can remind observers of deadlines for reporting, communicate any changes to the reporting plan or follow-up for additional information or validating details on issues communicated in their observation reports. Depending on infrastructure, you might want to use one of the following methods or a combination (e.g. primary method and back-up):


- Telephone calls
- Text messages
- Instant messaging platforms — WhatsApp, Signal, etc.
- Email
- Courier service

## CASE STUDY: NIGERIA



### Systematized Data Collection Tools

Ahead of presidential and general elections in Nigeria in 2015, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) leveraged the presence of one locally recruited TMG election observer in each of the 774 local government areas (LGAs) of the country to gather systematic information about the pre-electoral environment, including early warning signs of electoral violence. The observers gathered regular data on developments in their LGAs, including during such critical electoral events as the conclusion of voter registration and the collection of permanent voters cards, the conduct of political party primaries, and the campaign period. Below is an excerpt of TMG's checklist, which observers sent to a centralized data management system using coded text messages. The coded responses facilitated automatic data analysis for rapid identification of trends. Sample checklist questions are also included below.

 **Answer Questions BA to BZ. Complete Texting Formatting Sheet. Send Text Message to 33073**

TPC	Observer ACID			<<OCID>>	
BA	Have you witnessed or heard of any attacks on any rallies?	No Rallies (1)	Yes, witnessed (2)	Yes, heard of (3)	No Attacks (4)
BB	Have you witnessed or heard of any political party or candidate using government vehicles to conduct rallies?	No Rallies (1)	Yes, witnessed (2)	Yes, heard of (3)	No Attacks (4)
BC	Have you witnessed or heard of the vandalism or the destruction of property belonging to a candidate or his/her supporters?		Yes, witnessed (1)	Yes, heard of (2)	No (3)
BD	Have you witnessed or heard of any candidate encouraging his/her supporters to commit acts of violence?		Yes, witnessed (1)	Yes, heard of (2)	No (3)
BE	Have you witnessed or heard of non-resident or non-indigenous persons (100 or more) coming to your LGA to take up residence?		Yes, witnessed (1)	Yes, heard of (2)	No (3)
BF	Have you witnessed or heard of residents (100 or more) leaving your LGA to take up residence elsewhere?		Yes, witnessed (1)	Yes, heard of (2)	No (3)
BG	Did the price of fuel increase or did fuel become harder to purchase?			Yes (1)	No (2)
BH	Have you witnessed or heard reports of the buying of voter cards?		Yes, witnessed (1)	Yes, heard of (2)	No (3)

Although back-up systems are important, particularly on election day when time is of the essence for gathering data, it is essential that you use the same primary method for collecting data from every observer. If you allow observers to use multiple means of communication, it will make the process of data collection and analysis more complex and challenging when it comes time for the observers to share their observation findings. Similarly, if an emergency arises and the primary data collection method fails, it will be important to ensure that all observers understand they need to switch to the same secondary method.

**Plan to Aggregate and Analyze the Data:** Once you have decided on your data collection tools, you should make a plan to quickly aggregate (compile) and analyze your data. Accurate and rapid communication around the findings is critical to preventing violence. Your data collection tools should be designed to facilitate the data analysis process, so it is important to develop a clear plan for data analysis at the same time you are developing your observation tools. **Databases** can help to store all of your information in a single location. Remember that a database doesn't need to be a sophisticated program. It can be as simple as an analyzable spreadsheet or series of spreadsheets that allows you to compile and analyze your data in one place.

- Many online survey tools like Google Forms and SurveyMonkey will automatically generate a database for you.
- You can also work with a database developer to create a database specific to your project and communication tools, but you should note that this is often an extremely time-consuming and expensive option, so early planning will be critical to its success.

**Trained data analysts** can help you to make sense of the data that you receive and to identify trends. They should coordinate closely with your communications team to ensure that findings are accurate, but presented in a way that will inspire action. NDI's resource *Raising Voices in Closing Spaces: Strategic Communications Planning for Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observer Groups* provides additional guidance on how to use data-driven storytelling for advocacy.

A common pitfall in planning for election violence observation is to prioritize planning for observer recruitment and training at the expense of planning for a robust data analysis and communications team. However, both are equally important. If your observers communicate important data that sits in a database until after the election day, it is of no use to anyone. As a general rule of thumb, the more information you plan to gather, the more frequently you wish to report, and the more

external stakeholders you wish to engage; the greater your need will be for data analysts and communications staff.

You should ensure that there are clear lines of communication between team members and protocols for clearing external reports so that your organization is consistent in its messaging and approach. However, expecting a single data analyst or a single media focal point to carry out all of the necessary analysis and communications for even a modest electoral violence observation effort is extremely unrealistic. This will create unwanted bottlenecks between the time your observers report and the time your organization communicates — which can have significant negative consequences if the information you communicated might have prevented an escalation of tensions or an outbreak of violence.

Raw Data is Aggregated  
by Database

Trained Analysts  
Identify Trends

Communications Team  
Shares Findings

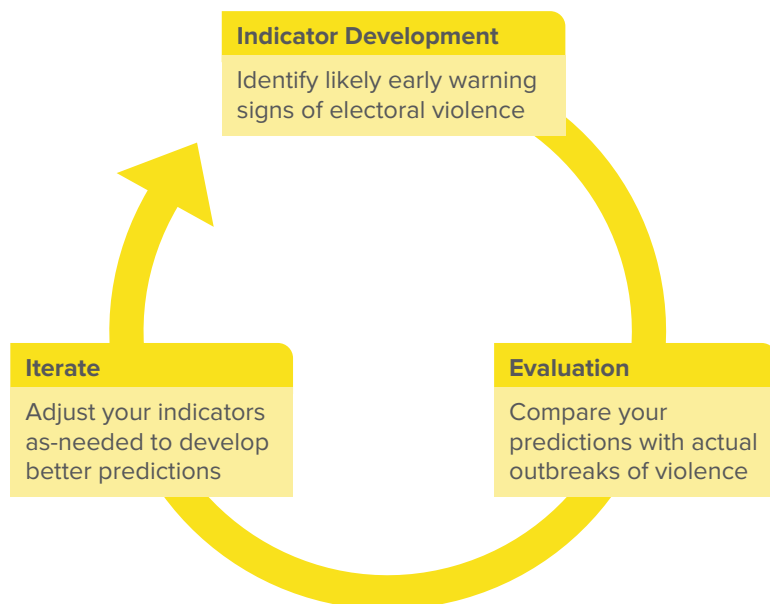
**Plan to Recruit, Train and Deploy (If Necessary) Observers:** Gathering data about electoral violence is a big job and whatever observation methodology you choose you will need observers or monitors who have been trained to gather the necessary data. To ensure consistent and high quality data, it is important not only to use standardized data collection tools, but also to ensure that all observers meet necessary criteria to participate in the project and attend a standardized training to ensure that they have the same understanding of what the observation tools are asking them to monitor. To avoid overlapping and potentially contradictory reporting, if you are deploying long-term observers throughout the country or another territory, it is important to ensure that each observer has a unique and clearly defined geographic area of focus for his or her observation efforts. This will assist, for example, with accurate tracking of incident numbers over time rather than risking double counting because multiple observers report on the same event. Some considerations to bear in mind as you are recruiting your observers include:

- If you are deploying monitors to communities where violence is likely — will they be more effective and safer if they are from the community (local recruitment) or from a different part of the country? Locally recruited observers may have a better understanding of local languages and contexts. However, particularly if you are seeking to gather data on regions of a country where community collusion is common (e.g. the entire community tends to turn out to vote for a single party or candidate) you may gather more accurate information about these dynamics from someone such as an ombudsperson, an educator, or a healthcare worker who is not originally from the region but has spent time living and working in the area.

- If you are asking monitors to use specific tools for data collection, do they have the skills and understanding to use them appropriately after training?
- If monitors are gathering data on historically marginalized communities, are there steps you can take to ensure the monitors represent or will be trusted by the communities they are being asked to observe?
- Representation matters! Your findings will be more accurate and will also be trusted by a broader array of stakeholders if the composition of your observers reflects the full diversity of the population. How can you ensure a diverse pool of monitors, including women, youth and representatives of other marginalized groups?
- Pending available resources, the size and characteristics of the geographical area should determine the number of observers, so that you ensure observers are able to cover all relevant events in this area in a reasonable time with the same level of attention and access. If a zone is remote or has a large population, you may consider deploying more than one observer and dividing the area into smaller zones, if resources allow for additional observers.

It is also extremely important that your observers be perceived to be politically impartial and professionally responsible. All observers must also understand how to handle highly sensitive information, including information about potential victims of violence, sensitively and with due respect for the privacy of the individuals concerned. **Observer codes of conduct** are important for any election observation effort, but are especially important for election violence monitoring. It is a good practice to provide every observer with two copies of the code of conduct to sign when they come for observer training: one copy for the observer to keep and one for your organization to store centrally. The code should clearly state your expectations for the observer as well as the ramifications for violating the code. A **sample code of conduct** is included at the end of this section (see page 111)

**Iterative Assessment:** You should plan for what is known as iterative learning or assessment to improve your early warning system (your predictive model to forecast where election violence is most likely to occur) and your response mechanisms. By comparing where incidents of violence actually occur against the information gathered from the indicators that you used to predict an outbreak of violence, you can determine which indicators have the most predictive power. It is likely that the findings from some of the indicators you identified will correlate well with actual outbreaks of violence, but that some of the indicators will have failed to identify potential risks for violence. As with any good scientific model of prediction, you can change assumptions or adjust your observation tools, if needed, over time. It is



especially important to update your observation tools from one election to the next based on a review of what did and didn't work well after the election cycle concludes.

It is also important to assess the effectiveness of your response mechanisms. If, at the outset of the project, you identified a particular actor as likely to play a helpful role in mitigating tensions — say, local ombudspeople — it is important to follow-up part way through the program to understand how the response actor is using the information that you have shared. You should also strive to understand whether the actions they have taken in response are well-perceived by the local community and seem to have been effective at mitigating violence. If you learn that a particular actor initially tapped to be part of your response network is not responding, or is responding in counterproductive ways that are harmful to the victims of violence, you should adjust your response protocol to include new actors where needed and to remove actors whose actions fail to respect Do No Harm principles.



## Sample Questions for Long-Term Data Collection

The below questions are designed to serve as a jumping off point for designing a long-term observer checklist, focus group discussion or key informant interview protocol, or survey as a part of a broader data collection and analysis effort focused on monitoring electoral violence. The questions will require specification and contextualization to the specific electoral process underway. Some elections will include elements of multiple types of electoral violence. In this case, questions from more than one category listed below may be useful for an observer group's data collection and analysis.

### General Questions (Applicable for all types of electoral violence)

ISSUE	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Instances of Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of attacks on any political rallies or campaign events?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of vandalism or destruction of property belonging to a candidate or his/her supporters?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of any attacks on women candidates or other politically active women in your locality?</li> </ul>
Rhetoric inciting violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of any candidate encouraging their supporters to commit acts of violence?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard any religious or traditional leaders using rhetoric that may incite violence against other groups with different political interests?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed any other group inciting violence against certain candidates?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard that some political actors are anticipating electoral fraud?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard about false representation in the name of political parties, civil society actors or state institutions (e.g. false information published on counterfeit ministry letterhead, or in the name of a political party)?</li> </ul>
Political and Economic conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you witnessed an increase in the price of [fuel, key food items, other essential goods]?</li> <li>• Have you heard about candidates who face institutional, resource or media restrictions on their campaign activities?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard about cases where election observers, civil society groups or journalists are facing restrictions to access and collect information about elections or other political processes?</li> </ul>



## Elections Taking Place in the Context of a Formally Negotiated Peace Agreement or Elections in Active Conflict

ISSUE	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Inclusion of marginalized groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do election management authorities in your area (local, district, or regional election commissions) include members of communities on all sides of the conflict?</li> <li>Have you witnessed or heard of voter education campaigns targeting internally displaced persons for voter registration?</li> </ul>
Rhetoric inciting violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you heard of political candidates invoking grievances that drove the conflict during their campaign speeches or advertisements?</li> </ul>
Peace process (if appropriate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are local authorities and parties to the conflict adhering to agreed upon disarmament protocols? (<i>Note: this question should be specified as to what those protocols are</i>)</li> <li>Have you witnessed or heard of local dialogue initiatives focused on the peace process in your area?</li> <li>Are reintegration efforts for ex-combatants active in your locality?</li> <li>Have you witnessed or heard of mobilization efforts in your locality by armed groups or political groups who were not included in the peace process?</li> </ul>

## Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Electoral Process

ISSUE	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Vote buying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you witnessed or heard reports of vote buying? If so, what form did it take?</li> <li>Have you witnessed or heard that public institutions are being used as channels for vote buying? If so, in what form?</li> <li>Have you witnessed or heard candidates or their supporters invoking accusations of vote buying against opposing parties or candidates in political speeches or at campaign events?</li> <li>Have you witnessed or heard of candidates or their supporters threatening prospective voters that there will be retribution if they don't accept the vote-buying offer or don't deliver on the agreement to sell their vote?</li> </ul>
Voter registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have candidates in your locality made any public accusations of fraud in the voter registration process (e.g. non-residents or minors registering to vote)?</li> </ul>
Candidate nomination/Ballot qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have any protests occurred in your locality following the rejection of party or candidate lists by the electoral management body?</li> <li>Did any candidates face restrictions during the candidate nomination process (signature collection, submission or announcement of candidacy)? If so, what kind of restrictions did they face?</li> </ul>

Intimidation or violence against voters, activists, or candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you heard of or witnessed instances of physical violence by police or security forces against supporters of a political candidate during campaign events?</li> <li>• Have you heard of or witnessed instances of intimidation, threats or coercion of voters by police or security forces?</li> <li>• Have you heard of or witnessed instances of intimidation, threats, or coercion of voters by a political party or candidate?</li> <li>• Have you heard of or witnessed instances of police searches of the home or office of any political candidate, party, or civil society group in your locality?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard about institutional pressures on state employees, identity or marginalized groups or other categories of population to comply with political party demands?</li> <li>• Have you read, heard or observed statements from a local leader (community, political, administrative authority) that discourage women or young people from full political participation?</li> <li>• Have you read, observed or heard hate speech on ethnic or religious grounds by community or political actors?</li> <li>• Have you observed, read or heard of cases where women have been banned from attending civic events, such as those where the electoral process, the actions of political parties, community dialogue or other matters of common interest are discussed?</li> <li>• Have you observed, read or heard any civic or voter education activities or messages where gender stereotypes or language were used?</li> <li>• Have you observed, read or heard of cases where one or more women have been intimidated, harassed, sexually assaulted or otherwise attacked because of their political stance or affiliation?</li> <li>• How does the local community cope with intimidation and violence?</li> <li>• Is there readiness and trust to report incidents that occur to government institutions?</li> </ul>
Regulatory abuses that may trigger grievances or mobilization towards violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you heard of instances of rejection of permits for campaign events?</li> <li>• Have you heard of instances of rejection of posting campaign materials as permitted by the law?</li> </ul>

## Post-Election Violence

ISSUE	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Fraud accusations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have candidates or political leaders in your locality made public accusations of fraud in the electoral process?</li> </ul>
Protests and clashes between supporters of various candidates or parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have post-election protests occurred in your locality?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of signage or verbal rhetoric inciting violence against opponents or their supporters during a post-election protest?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of security forces using non-lethal weapons (e.g. tasers, tear gas or other chemicals, or police dogs) for crowd control during post-election protests?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of security focus using lethal weapons (e.g. firearms) during post-election protests?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of supporters of one political party or candidate intimidating or committing acts of violence against supporters of another party or candidate?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed any other groups inciting violence against a candidate or party?</li> <li>• How does the local community cope with protests?</li> </ul>
Politically-motivated arrests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you observed any arrests of citizens in your community that may be related to political positions they have taken?</li> </ul>

## Violence by Actors Outside the Formal Political Process

ISSUE	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Vote Buying and Community Collusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard reports of vote buying and related threats? If so, what form did it take?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard that public institutions are being used as channels for vote buying? If so, in what form?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard candidates or their supporters invoking accusations of vote buying against opposing parties or candidates in political speeches or at campaign events?</li> <li>• Have candidates in your locality made any public accusations of fraud in the voter registration process (e.g. non-residents or minors registering to vote)?</li> </ul>
Incidents of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have post-election protests occurred in your locality?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of signage or verbal rhetoric inciting violence against opponents or their supporters during a post-election protest?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of security forces using non-lethal weapons (e.g. tasers, tear gas or other chemicals, or police dogs) for crowd control during post-election protests?</li> <li>• Have you witnessed or heard of security focus using lethal weapons (e.g. firearms) during post-election protests?</li> </ul>

Control of community resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have there been cases of conflict in your area related to land, protected areas, illegal mining, between neighboring communities, between populations and public forces, or between herders and farmers?</li> <li>• Do you have information that some of the members of certain communities in your area have been evicted from their land or homes or dispossessed of any property?</li> </ul>
Influx or outflow of residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you observed, read or heard about more people than usual moving into your community?</li> <li>• Have you observed, read or heard about more people than usual leaving your community?</li> <li>• In your community, have you observed any suspicious movements of people along the borders with neighboring countries?</li> </ul>
Interruptions to the electoral process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you heard of or witnessed any acts of violence targeting election officials?</li> <li>• Have you heard of or witnessed any acts of violence or destruction targeting election materials or property of electoral management bodies?</li> <li>• Have you observed, read or heard about rumors of boycott or disruption of the electoral process in the name of religious beliefs or any other beliefs?</li> </ul>

## Sample Code of Conduct

### Sample Code of Conduct for Long-Term Observers

By signing this code of conduct observers agree to be bound by the provisions of this code. [Organization name] reserves the right to dismiss any individual who fails to uphold this code of conduct.

1. All observers shall undergo training on observation skills and methodology, electoral laws, and frequently observed issues to ensure a common understanding of the election environment observed.
2. Observers will attend any briefings, meetings and training workshops and any other activities called to coordinate their activities.
3. All observers should ensure that at all times their conduct conforms to the legal framework for elections.
4. All observers shall maintain strict impartiality in the conduct of their duties. They shall at no time publicly indicate or express bias or preference with regards to any political party or nominated candidate(s).
5. Observers shall not display any party insignia at any time. They shall refrain from carrying, wearing and displaying electoral material or any article of clothing, emblem, colors, badges or any other items denoting support for or opposition to any party or candidate or any of the issues in contention in the election.
6. Observers shall refrain from giving any form of assistance to any party in connection with the elections. They will refrain from communicating with voters with a view of influencing how they will vote.
7. All observers will recognize the authority of the electoral management body and other applicable authorities, but will remain accountable to [Organization name].
8. Apart from the normal reporting to [Organization name] observers shall maintain secrecy with reference to the electoral process and any incidents that they may observe in the conduct of their work.
9. Observers shall refrain from carrying or displaying arms or weapons of any kind during the conduct of their duties.
10. Observers shall not behave in any manner that is likely to bring the name of [Organization name] or that of their organization into disrepute.
11. Observers will not abuse funds or any other resources provided to them for the purposes of observation by [Organization name].
12. Individual observers who violate any provisions of this code of conduct will be immediately withdrawn and their organization will be notified.



## SAFETY TIPS AND PROCEDURES

The following are recommended safety tips and procedures that LTOs should keep in mind in their conduct of their duties:

1. Always be conscious of everything happening around you;
2. Immediately remove yourself from a potentially dangerous environment;
3. If you are subjected to any threats, intimidation or violence you should immediately report to your emergency contact with the organization.
4. You should remain neutral in all disputes;
5. Do not expose yourself to unnecessary danger and do not endanger the lives of others;
6. You should use photographic, audio or video recording equipment with caution;
7. Take every threat seriously; and
8. If you suspect that you are being followed immediately inform a family member, the emergency contact and/or [Organization name].

## Matching Methodologies to Violence Types

As noted earlier, monitoring methodologies and response mechanisms that are appropriate for particular violence contexts may be less effective in others and — in some instances — may risk to cause harm. In considering how to match methodologies to underlying contexts, we will return to the organizational framework of the five main violence types introduced earlier in the manual, and will examine some suggested observation methodologies that may make sense in each of these four contexts. Each proposed methodology will be presented in snapshot form. Where additional NDI guidance materials exist with further information on how to plan for and execute a given observation methodology, those will be cited in the text.

## METHODOLOGIES BASED ON CONFLICT STATUS

### Elections Held during Active Conflict

Elections may occur in conflict-prone contexts where peace processes either have not been negotiated or fail to hold in all parts of the country. Also, states may attempt to hold elections when they do not exercise a monopoly of control over their territory.

Elections occurring in such situations of persistent conflict may pose unique challenges for voter access or — in extreme cases — may hold in only those parts of the country where election personnel are able to safely deploy. The first consideration for observer groups in such scenarios is whether to deploy. Observer safety and security is paramount and observer groups have a duty of care to their volunteers not to place them in situations where they are likely to face significant threats to their personal safety. If security conditions do not allow for the safe deployment of observers, this in and of itself is a powerful statement to make about the quality of the elections. Elections where observers are unable to deploy safely are also likely to be elections where voters are unable to safely vote and otherwise meaningfully engage in the electoral process. Where possible in such cases, reporting on the factors or forces that are responsible for the insecurity would be important.

In contexts where elections can only take place in part of the country, observers should also consider the implications for overall electoral credibility. Depending on the circumstances, there is a risk that partial elections may fall significantly short of meeting reasonable standards for inclusivity. It is, however, possible for observers to play an important role on election day even when an election fails to meet reasonable expectations of inclusion, transparency and accountability. If an observer group decides to observe an election that is already known to be highly flawed, you will want to carefully communicate your objectives to ensure that the presence of your observers cannot be leveraged to try to legitimate the process. In public statements to announce the observation effort, it may be helpful to note that electoral integrity has already been seriously undermined, but that observers will nevertheless deploy to provide public information about the quality of the process in those locations where elections do hold and to offer targeted recommendations for improving the quality of the voting process.

At the same time it is important not to delegitimize an election where credible processes can be held in some parts of a country but not others. Foreign, separatist or anti-state forces could control or prevent voting in certain regions, or other forms of conflict could block voting, as has been the case in Ukraine, Georgia, Ethiopia and elsewhere. While it is important to impartially assess the impact of such factors, the importance of holding elections as part of national sovereignty should not be negated by them.

The below suggested observation methodologies are particular to this type of violence. If you decide to observe an election that is only taking place in certain areas of the country, it may be useful to consider using additional methods to monitor violence in those areas, including violence carried out by those contesting the elections and/or those acting outside of the formal political process, and in the pre- and/or post-election periods, as outlined in the following sections.



## Suggested observation methodologies:

- Focus on election security
- Assessing spillover effects from conflict

### Focus on Election Security

Observers may wish to pay particular attention to the deployment of security personnel on election day. There is some debate over whether the presence of security forces at the polls increases voters' abilities to safely participate in elections or deters voters from turning out. The answer likely varies depending on the underlying election and country context. If security is widely trusted by voters, their presence may enable voters to participate safely even in volatile environments. If security forces are not trusted by all populations, are perceived to be overly close to the incumbent government or have not received appropriate training on how to provide gender-sensitive and civilian-sensitive security, their presence could actually depress voter turnout.





Public opinion research may provide insights into citizen perceptions of electoral security forces and their political allegiances. In conducting such research, it is important to refer back to the initial analysis into marginalization that your organization will have conducted as part of its political context analysis to ensure that the perspectives of groups on all sides of all important social cleavages will be included in your research design. Historically marginalized communities may be more likely to hold negative views about security forces than the general population; so it is important to ensure that your research design sufficiently integrates their perspectives.

Where it is permitted to do so, observers may also wish to observe any training that is provided to security forces about their roles on election day. In contexts where this training is viewed as too sensitive to be open to public scrutiny, observer groups may nevertheless conduct key informant interviews with the electoral management body or with other institutions in charge of providing such training to gain insights into its content. In this way, it may be possible to assess whether the training includes modules on responding to intimidation or harassment that is gendered or discriminatory of other particular marginalized communities and whether it includes information on topics such as de-escalation and excessive use of force that can help to ensure that minor incidents at the polling stations do not ignite a confrontation between security forces and potential voters. Observer groups may also wish to include questions on election day checklists and critical incident forms focused on the conduct of security forces at the polling stations. Such information will position your organization to provide recommendations for improving the conduct of security forces where necessary.

## **Assessing Spillover Effects from Conflict**

If elections are held in just part of a country, observers will only deploy to those areas of the country where elections are taking place. Nevertheless, it may be valuable to assess whether and how conflict in other parts of the country affects the willingness of voters to turn out in those parts of the country where elections are moving forward as well as their views on the credibility of the electoral process. Public opinion research could be a valuable tool in this scenario and could focus on potential voters, their continued interest to participate in the electoral process, any safety and security concerns that they may have related to their electoral participation, as well as on their perceptions of the conflict and its impact on the electoral process. It will be important here to understand the conflict dynamics elsewhere in the country well to ensure that you are capturing the right cross-section of public opinion and can disaggregate your research findings in a way that will allow you to speak particularly to any concerns voiced by members of the same identity groups that have been victimized due to the conflict dynamics elsewhere in the country.

## **Elections Taking Place in the Context of a Formally Negotiated Peace Agreement**

In some senses, monitoring and mitigating risks of electoral violence when elections are taking place under conditions of recently concluded conflict is the most straightforward of the four violence types presented, as the fault lines along which violence is likely to break out are already well-known. The most likely scenario for election violence would be if one or more parties to the conflict decide that their interests are no longer well served by the electoral process and/or peace process and take up arms to prevent either process from going forward.

Levels of mistrust between actors is likely to be high given the recent history of conflict, and citizen election observers can play an important role by providing credible information about electoral preparations and about party behavior around elections to the public and critical electoral stakeholders. However, citizen election observers must take particular care when elections are held in the context of a formally negotiated peace agreement to ensure that their findings can be trusted by all parties to the electoral process and the conflict. Nonpartisanship (i.e., political impartiality) is always a core value for citizen election observation, but in post-conflict elections society has often been sharply divided for so long that there may be widespread perceptions that civil society organizations are also aligned with particular political elements or factions.

Reputation management under such conditions becomes highly sensitive and challenging. Citizen observer groups may need to consider: entering into coalitions with other organizations that are perceived to have different political affiliations to create confidence in their overall balance and neutrality; recruiting new staff members of diverse backgrounds that bridge conflict divides and population groups; developing partnerships with community development associations or other grassroots actors that may have a more neutral reputation; and/or sharing observation findings with a trusted third party that can convey them to political parties on your behalf.

A particular challenge for citizen observers in post-conflict scenarios is that sharing credible information about deviations from agreed-upon party codes of conduct, delays to the peace process, or acts of localized violence committed by some actors may actually cause parties to lose confidence in the credibility of the elections or may incentivize all parties to respond to reported acts of violence with violence of their own. It is therefore critical that citizen observers operating in a context of a formally negotiated peace agreement foster close connections with international, regional and local actors that are supporting the formal peace process, and coordinate with these actors around any negative findings to ensure that proactive response

measures can be taken to prevent a breakdown in the peace process in response to negative observer findings.

**Suggested observation methodologies:**

- Monitoring election preparations
- Monitoring official peace processes
- Monitoring political party codes of conduct
- Monitoring activities by potential spoilers
- Inclusion-focused observation

**Monitoring Election Preparations**

If elections are being held in a transitional environment where there is potentially low trust in the electoral management body and/or other electoral stakeholders to organize a credible process, citizen observers can help to share and amplify information about the status of electoral preparations. Through centrally conducted desk research, for example, citizen observers might comment on the electoral legal framework as well as the composition of the electoral management body to assess whether a solid foundation for credible and impartial election has been laid. Through deployment of long-term election observers across the country, observation efforts can monitor and speak to issues such as whether civic and voter education activities are taking place throughout the entire country or whether certain geographic regions risk to be left out of the electoral process. Long-term observers may also assess in their assigned regions whether political campaigns for particular parties are taking place, which will help observer groups determine whether political parties seem prepared to organize large-scale campaigns across an entire country. Complementary qualitative research into any public platforms put forth by political parties can help observer groups to assess the extent to which parties have developed unique, issue-based platforms that can be easily communicated to prospective voters.

Where warranted, citizen observers can play a vital role in building trust and confidence in the post-conflict electoral process and institutions. Through regular communication of findings around the status of electoral preparations, they can help to reassure actors that election officials are meeting key milestones in the electoral timeline as well as carrying out their duties impartially and that other stakeholders are prepared to participate in the process.

In instances where preparations are delayed or where political parties do not seem to be playing an active role in electoral campaigning, however, citizen observers can

make recommendations to adjust electoral timelines or take other actions that will assist electoral actors to understand and appreciate the new roles that they will take on in the transitional environment. Within the peacebuilding community of practice, it is broadly accepted that the success of a democratic transition hinges in part on successful timing and sequencing of elections with respect to other transitional milestones. If elections are called before militant movements have sufficient time to transform into functional political parties or before citizens can appreciate why and how they should take part in a new electoral process, the transition risks to stall out or regress into violence at a later stage. Citizen election observers can help call attention to these risks before they become a reality, and can make recommendations to transitional authorities about how to avoid these pitfalls.

## Monitoring Official Peace Processes

In contexts where formal monitoring mechanisms for the peace process may not be sufficiently robust or trusted, nonpartisan citizen observers have the potential to play an important role. They can assess whether the peace process is being respected throughout the country and can ensure that the findings are made available to all parties.

In scenarios where conflict is ongoing or recently concluded and an official peace process is underway, the most likely scenario for election violence to occur is for one or more parties to the peace process to decide that their interests are better served by returning to armed conflict. Information asymmetries (where some parties have more information than others) can be a common cause of such a return to violence. If one party to the agreement starts to believe that the other parties are not respecting the terms of the peace process, that party has a strong incentive to disengage and take up arms. Monitoring information sharing mechanisms, including mechanisms for parties to air concerns that the agreements and/or election rules are not being followed (whether they are built into the peace agreement or instituted by the EMB or other institutions) can be important for helping to ensure communication loops are functioning. Where such mechanisms are not established or are problematic, observer group recommendations can be vital and their reports can fill gaps.

Most peace agreements include three types of provisions:

- **Procedural:** What will happen as part of the peace process? Elections? Disarmament and demobilization of warring parties? Establishment of a transitional government? What mechanisms are there for communications concerning implementation among the parties and to hear their concerns?

- **Structural:** What outcomes are the procedural changes intended to achieve? Will there be greater inclusion of marginalized groups in governance? Will there be a more equitable distribution of land or resources?
- **Peacekeeping mechanisms and enforcement:** Who is responsible for implementing the peace agreement? Will there be a United Nations peacekeeping mission? What happens if terms of the agreement are violated?

Nonpartisan observers can be well-positioned to monitor both procedural and structural aspects of peace agreements. Clear indicators can be developed for long-term observers deployed across a country to assess based on the terms of the peace agreement itself. For example, if the peace process puts forth a timeline for certain actions to take place, such as peace and reconciliation dialogues, or for certain institutions to be established, such as subnational election management organs, nonpartisan observers can provide nationwide information on whether these steps have been taken and if they have been taken on time. Citizen observers can also evaluate whether structural objectives are being achieved. For example, if a stated goal of the peace process is to have a more representative government, citizen observers can analyze and comment on the candidate nomination process to determine whether parties are actually putting forth diverse candidates that represent the entire population of the country.

Do No Harm principles are always important, but they are especially so in post-conflict environments where the peace process is still fragile. As a result, it will be very important for citizen observers to coordinate their observation effort with the formal mechanisms for enforcing the peace agreement. One can easily imagine a scenario where a citizen observer group discovers that Party X is, in fact, violating important terms of the peace accord in remote regions of the country. Before disclosing that information to Parties X, Y and Z — which could likely incentivize all three parties to withdraw from the peace agreement and cause a complete breakdown of the peace process — it would be important to strategize with representatives of the formal enforcement mechanisms. For example, working through these mechanisms, a preliminary meeting could be arranged with the leadership of Party X, which could in turn proactively commit to a new timetable for compliance before the information would be publicly disclosed. It is also essential in such a post-conflict environment that your observer network be trusted and welcomed by all parties to the conflict as nonpartisan and objective. Otherwise, your findings have significant potential to further politicize an already tense environment. Early coordination, as well as clear and transparent communication around your observation methodology and findings, can help to generate trust.

## Monitoring Political Party Codes of Conduct

Voluntary political party codes of conduct can be an important trust-building mechanism in post-conflict elections or elections taking place in active conflict. Through such codes, political parties may, for example, agree to refrain from using inciteful language or circulating false information in campaign advertisements. They

### CASE STUDY: CÔTE D'IVOIRE

#### Citizen observers hold political parties accountable during campaigns in Côte d'Ivoire



Prior to Côte d'Ivoire's highly contested 2015 presidential elections, political parties renewed their commitment to a mutual code of conduct governing peaceful and inclusive campaign practices by signing an updated version of the code. A coalition of civic groups called the *Observatoire* (Observatory) held the political parties to account throughout the campaign period by observing respect for the code of conduct's principles in the most hotly contested areas of the country, and systematically reporting incidents both to the public and to parties themselves. Observers simultaneously promoted the tenets of peaceful campaigning outlined in the code, distributing copies of the code of conduct and advocating for local level party leaders to abide by it. In one region of the country, observers noticed a decrease in the practice of supporters of a candidate destroying the campaign material of their opponent during the course of the campaign when they promoted the code of conduct. Observers were also able to defuse a potentially violent situation: when rumors were circulating that one party's supporters would take to the streets to protest the results of the election, sharing the code of conduct signed by party leaders contributed to convincing the party's youth leaders not to protest the results.

Throughout the campaign, election day, and post-election period, the *Observatoire* released statements drawing on their observers' reports of violations of the code of conduct and promoting peaceful campaign practices. The *Observatoire*'s secretariat also met regularly with representatives of political parties through an ad hoc committee where they were able to present their observation findings directly to party representatives and advocate for increased respect for the code's principles and rules within their parties.

may also agree to condemn hate speech, acts of violence, or inciteful language used by any of their supporters. A potential shortcoming of such political party codes of conduct, however, is that, while senior party leaders may sign on centrally, they may not always have the will or the internal party discipline to sanction violations of the agreement that are committed by more junior party members or supporters. Nonpartisan monitoring mechanisms can help to ensure that there will be regular nation-wide reporting on violations of the code by party members or supporters at any level. Party leaders can agree in advance on actions they will take in the event that a credible violation is reported. As with the observation of formal peace processes, in order for citizen observers to play a productive mitigating role in documenting violations of political party codes of conduct, it is essential that all political parties agree that their findings can be trusted and that they will take action on the basis of those findings.

### Monitoring Activities by Potential Spoilers

In the field of conflict resolution, **spoilers** are actors who believe that the peace process threatens their power, worldview or interests. They can be subdivided into internal spoilers, who are officially part of the peace process, but will seek to undermine it from the inside, and external spoilers, who are not a party to the official peace process. Some common examples of external spoilers include: militias that were not represented in the peace process, diaspora groups, government officials who are expected to lose power through a transition and might finance additional spoiler activity using corruption or misappropriated state funds, as well as terrorist organizations or rent-seeking cartels.<sup>[29]</sup> As in observation activities carried out in contexts where violence is perpetrated by actors outside of the formal political process, spoilers and external spoilers in particular may face fewer constraints on their behavior than formal participants in an electoral process. Unlike political parties, they do not have to fear negative repercussions at the polls if they engage in actions that are likely to turn public opinion against them.

For these reasons, organizations wishing to focus on spoiler activity should be very mindful of the safety and security of their observers, as they could easily become targets of spoiler actors who either want to derail the electoral process or prevent any information about their activities from coming to light. Although long-term observation may be an effective means of gathering some information about the behavior of spoiler groups in particular communities, observer groups may find that indirect observation through key informant interviews, focus groups, or partnerships

---

<sup>[29]</sup> For a more detailed description of how to observe the activities of terrorist organizations and/or rent-seeking cartels, see *Violence Perpetrated by Actors Outside of the Formal Political Process*.

with organizations that have experience in techniques of investigative reporting may yield useful and credible findings without potentially placing observers in harm's way.

## Inclusion-Focused Observation

Conflicts often create new patterns of marginalization or vulnerability. They can also significantly shift gender and other social norms if, for example, women suddenly take on more active roles in the economy or become active combatants themselves. A risk of post-conflict peace processes, however, is that in focusing on solutions that will be accepted by the appointed representatives of the official parties to a conflict the interests of women and other historically marginalized groups may become sidelined. In some circumstances, this can actually increase risks of future conflict. For example, research by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance has shown that when women combatants are excluded from demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration programs due to inaccurate assumptions that women are not active participants in conflict, this can facilitate the re-emergence of conflict dynamics. Moreover, high levels of gender inequality and violence against women are often associated with higher overall risks of violent conflict in a given society.<sup>[30]</sup> Citizen observers can help to better integrate the perspectives and needs of women and other historically marginalized groups into post-conflict institutions by conducting focused observation into patterns of violence and exclusion faced by different categories of marginalized communities — including women — around transitional elections.

Inclusion-focused observation that is focused on the experiences of one or more marginalized communities can draw on key informant interviews, focus groups or other forms of public opinion research conducted with members of that community to understand their perspectives. Such approaches may be particularly helpful for understanding experiences of violence that may not take place in the public sphere. As a reminder, inclusion-focused data collection techniques should employ an intersectional approach, ensuring that you include a range of perspectives from within a particular group. Inclusion-focused observation may entail the deployment of long-term observers with a targeted checklist of questions developed in coordination with members of that community to assess how publicly observable risks of violence against that community are changing over time.

---

<sup>[30]</sup> <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/women-in-conflict-and-peace.pdf>



## **METHODOLOGIES BASED ON PRIMARY PERPETRATORS**

### **Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Political Process**

This is the broadest category of electoral violence and is also the most common. In this violence type, electoral violence is perpetrated by formal actors in the political process, although at times they may be acting through alliances with non-state actors, as part of a deliberate strategy to win an election. Physical violence typically occurs as a strategy of last resort along a continuum of manipulation or violence; as other forms of fraud or manipulation increase around an election, the risks of violence also increase. This is why citizen election observers are so well-positioned to address risks of electoral violence; by observing the pre-electoral period election observers are, in some senses, already engaged in electoral violence early warning.












Under a scenario where violence is perpetrated by actors contesting the elections, incumbent political actors have greater opportunities to manipulate the electoral process, but also face incentives not to engage in such extensive or such overt manipulation that the opposition withdraws from the process and the election loses credibility as a mechanism to potentially legitimize continued incumbent rule. Opposition actors can also, and in some instances do, engage in pre-election violence, but they often have more limited resources for violence and face potentially higher costs. Unlike the incumbent actors, they typically exercise no authority or only limited authority over judicial actors, oversight bodies and security forces that may play a role in responding to and prosecuting electoral violations. Electoral violence by incumbent actors may be particularly likely in contexts where the executive faces few limitations on its authority and therefore may have reason to believe that, to some extent, it can commit acts of manipulation and violence with impunity.

### **Communication with potential response actors may pose particular challenges under a context of violence perpetrated by actors contesting the elections.**

We have already noted that incumbent political actors have the greatest opportunities to manipulate the electoral process, including through use of violence, particularly in contexts where incumbents exercise significant influence (through political appointments, oversight of the national budget, control over main channels of information sharing in the media, etc.) over other actors in the system that might hold individuals to account for violating the law, including the judiciary or oversight bodies. That said, when appropriate, traditional practice in electoral violence monitoring and mitigation is to work closely with state actors, including national security forces, to address risks of violence on election day.

Citizen observer groups are advised to carefully evaluate perceptions of state security and other state actors that could potentially be tapped to participate in a response mechanism as part of their initial political context assessment. If incumbent state actors are the primary perpetrators of violence, other state authorities may have strong incentives to turn a blind eye to the information you present to them and may not take any desired follow-on actions. In a worst case scenario, reporting about risks of rising tensions to state actors — who have been compromised and may themselves be complicit with or indirectly implicated in electoral violence — may provide them with additional information about where to restrict political space, where to target vote buying efforts, or where to carry out other acts of electoral manipulation. It may also put your organization and/or observers at risk. In this way, engaging traditional response actors may paradoxically have an adverse effect on electoral integrity and risks of violence.

An additional challenge of engaging more traditional response actors is that in many countries security forces are primarily trained to respond to armed conflict and physical violence. They may not have the necessary training and understanding to effectively respond to other common manifestations of electoral violence, including gender-based violence, hate speech, psychological violence or intimidation — particularly if these issues are not addressed in their official legal mandates. In such scenarios, citizen observers are encouraged to think creatively about how to leverage connectors or forces for resilience in their response mechanisms. Some non-traditional response actors who may nevertheless be able to play a helpful role in mitigating tensions include:

-  Educators
-  Ombudspeople or mediators
-  Youth groups
-  Service delivery organizations
-  Economic connectors such as lending circles, trade unions, business associations, or professional associations
-  Religious leaders
-  Healthcare organizations
-  Human rights organizations
-  Clubs and sports leagues, rotary clubs, etc.
-  Media and media associations
-  Traditional cultural associations

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to election violence monitoring and mitigation and in some contexts it may be more appropriate and effective to engage state security forces than the potential connectors listed above. In some contexts these connectors may actually serve as dividers; for example, religious leaders may not be trusted to mediate incidents of electoral violence in their communities if conflict primarily occurs along religious lines.

The main takeaway is that citizen observer groups, especially those operating in contexts where violence is perpetrated by actors contesting the electoral process, should not assume that traditional response actors will automatically play a helpful role. A corollary is that engaging nontraditional response actors takes time. If you simply deliver a pre-election observation report to a local football club three weeks before election day, the recipients will likely have no idea what to do with the information that you are sharing. Instead, you need to take advantage of advanced planning to clearly explain your observation methodology to any response actors and outline your expectations for what they might do.

For example, you might gather heads of local football clubs before your observers are expected to send their first reports, explain that — based on your political context assessment — young men in the community have been mobilized for electoral violence in the past but young men also tend to participate in football clubs and trust the individuals that they meet in this forum. If your observers report a significant increase in tensions in the community, you may request leaders of local football clubs to hold meetings with their players to discuss the observation findings that you share and how their members can come together as a community to prevent a further escalation of tensions. In this way, local football clubs may be mobilized as part of an electoral violence response mechanism.

Some organizations conduct specific outreach to groups representing marginalized populations to inform them about their observation effort, which can be a method of demonstrating solidarity and building relationships for effective monitoring.

**Establishing these relationships will take significant time and requires at least as much planning and preparations as deciding what and how you will observe.**

Although we will return to this point in more detail in the section dedicated to response mechanisms, you should be thinking about how best to integrate effective response actors into your observation effort even as you develop your observation methodology and tools.

## CASE STUDY: IRAQ



### Addressing Incidents of Violence Against Women Candidates

In October 2021, Iraq held early parliamentary elections following large-scale protests in late 2019 and the adoption of a new electoral law in 2020. Al Noor Universal Foundation, a citizen election monitoring group that has observed elections since 2005, carried out a comprehensive election observation initiative to monitor and promote inclusive, transparent, and accessible elections. A context of mistrust between stakeholders pervaded the election environment, which elevated risks of violence.

Al Noor began their long term monitoring of the electoral process as soon as early elections were announced. Coordinators in each province started their monitoring and progressively built relationships with key political party leaders, election administration officials, and citizen groups in their area. Long term monitors reported on the election environment and incidents of violence, allowing Al Noor to produce regular reports throughout the electoral process that spoke to issues of intimidation of voters and candidates, use of hate speech in political rhetoric, and incidents of physical violence — including assassination attempts targetting candidates and their families — at the national level. Al Noor placed a particular emphasis on monitoring intimidation of women candidates both on social media and offline.

Reports early in the electoral process allowed Al Noor to advocate at the national level for strengthened electoral violence mitigation measures, including increased security for at-risk candidates, well in advance of election day. National stakeholders adopted a number of Al Noor's recommendations, including a political party code of conduct. Early relationship-building with stakeholders, both at the national and provincial levels, was key, and over time, candidates themselves began to take the initiative to report incidents of violence to Al Noor. Al Noor continued their monitoring through election day, and in the post-election period, began advocating for legal reforms to more effectively address issues of political violence following the election.

## Suggested Observation Methodologies:

- Long-term observation or pre-election observation
- Observation of economic violence, abuse of state resources and vote buying
- Focused observation on contentious phases of the election cycle
- Inclusion-focused observation

### Long-term observation or pre-election observation

Long-term observation or pre-election observation is a methodology or approach that could potentially be integrated into observation efforts under other violence types, as well. However, because many of the best practices emerged in election contexts where violence was predominantly carried out by actors contesting the elections, the detailed description of this methodology is included here.

As part of their preparations for election day observation, citizen observer networks often recruit, train and deploy individuals throughout the country to assess the pre-election environment, identify election day observers and coordinate observation activities on behalf of the network. As engaged members of their local communities, these individuals are often well-positioned to provide insights into dynamic or longitudinal indicators of electoral violence — that is, indicators that will change over time. Much like citizen observer organizations, many response actors, particularly those operating at a national level, face challenges of limited time, limited human capital and limited financial resources. By asking observers to report on the same set of questions on a standardized checklist across multiple reporting periods, citizen observer organizations are able to track a comprehensive set of indicators over time. This in turn allows citizen observers to provide targeted recommendations to response actors about specific indicators that are trending in a negative direction as well as regions of the country that are at particular risk, so that they may focus their response efforts, making effective response more likely.

In most instances where citizen observers engage in pre-election observation with a focus on electoral violence, you will want to ensure that they have tools at their disposal to report confirmed incidents of violence, such as a **Critical Incident Form**, as well as tools to track the same set of indicators over time, such as an **Observer Checklist**. A good critical incident form is short, provides clear instructions for how to immediately send the report to the data analysis team at your organization's headquarters or secretariat and also asks the observer to gather qualitative follow-up information concerning:

- What happened?
- Who were the perpetrators of the incident? What were their genders?
- Who were the victims of the incident? What were their genders?
- Was the incident resolved and, if so, how?
- Did the observer directly witness the incident or was it reported to them? If it was reported to them, what was the source of the report?

Whenever a citizen observer organization receives a critical incident report at headquarters level, a team of call center operators should be available to immediately contact the observer and gather follow-on information about the incident to confirm its validity. In some cases, observer groups engage operators who have legal training and who can provide immediate advice over the phone or ensure they are collecting all information needed for a legal case. Response actions should be rapidly initiated, including — with the victim's expressed permission — connecting them with appropriate physical and/or psychosocial support services in the area. Effective steps should be integrated into information intake to ensure the anonymity of victims unless they provide express consent to identify them in various ways. **This is one element of the do no harm principle.** To develop your observer checklist, you should utilize the exercise for identifying and prioritizing indicators described under **What is An Observation Methodology?** Note that a good dynamic indicator for inclusion on a pre-election observation checklist is:

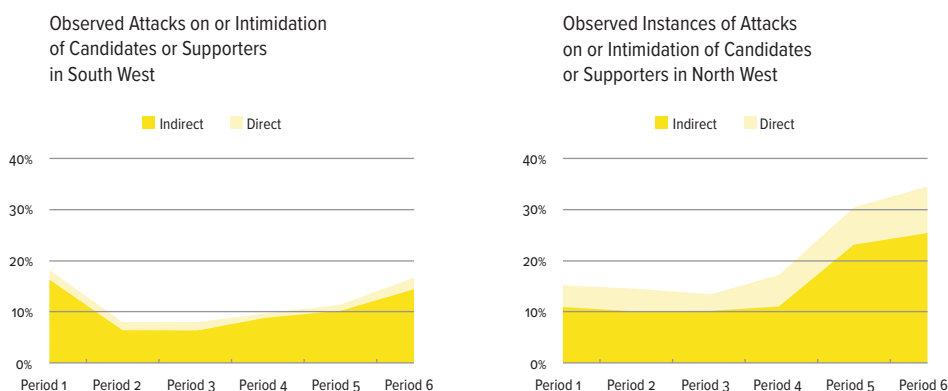
- **Objective and verifiable:** Observers should be asked to report on facts that can be triangulated or confirmed by external sources if necessary rather than sharing their individual opinions or perceptions, which may be subject to bias.
- **Observable using your chosen observation methodology:** If observers are simply asked to report on events that they may witness when deployed, it may not be realistic to ask them to report on detailed questions about difficult to observe subjects such as illicit campaign finance, gender-based violence that takes place in a domestic setting, or agreements made between political parties and local authorities to turn out the vote for particular candidates. Therefore, Your checklist should focus on indicators that are easily observable by third parties. (Please see the Sample Checklist Questions on p. 106.) If needed, additional methodologies may be employed to provide complementary information on other indicators that are not easily observable. Reporting on the existence of rumors can be valuable in a pre-election context. Rumors often have significant power to shape citizen perceptions of events, and can themselves be an underlying cause

of election violence. However, in any external reporting, it is important that citizen observers not contribute to the spread of harmful rumors. Reports should clearly differentiate events that observers directly witnessed versus information obtained from other sources that were corroborated versus reports of unsubstantiated rumors that could cause harm.

- **Time-bound:** If observers are asked to observe a particular indicator over time, they should receive clear guidance informing them how frequently the indicator should be assessed, which should be the same for all observers. Many citizen observer groups have found that collecting data on standardized observer checklists once every two weeks allows for dynamic tracking of fluid pre-election dynamics but does not overwhelm the data analysis and communications team or potential response actors with too much information. Some groups utilize shorter, structured checklists more frequently during the peak campaign period, but the frequency of data collection must be balanced with your group's capacity to analyze and communicate on the basis of the data collected.
- **Effective at predicting where violence is likely to occur or assessing where violence is already occurring:** As discussed above under **What is an Observation Methodology?**, you should regularly assess your indicators and whether the predictions made by each one about where risks of violence are high correlates with actual violent incidents. If you find that an indicator is not providing useful data — there is no change over time or the findings do not correlate with outbreaks of violence — you may choose to remove or replace this indicator in future observation efforts so that your observers and analysts can focus their attention only on the information that is most valuable.
- **Clear and easy to understand:** Every observer deployed anywhere in the country should have a common understanding of the indicator and what they are being asked to observe. A good practice is to field test your checklist before it is finalized for observer training by sharing it with a few friends of the organization who were not involved in its design, and asking them to identify any points of confusion as they read through.
- **Posed preferably as a close-ended and specific question:** Asking observers to respond yes or no to a question such as, "In the past two weeks, did any organizations hold events about supporting a peaceful election process in the community where you are assigned to observe?" will generate responses that are more objective and easier to analyze than saying, "Assess support for peaceful elections in the community you are assigned to observe." You will still be able to call specific observers as-needed to collect more background about what they observed.

A sample questions for long-term observation data collection can be found on page 106.

By tracking observer reports of attacks on or intimidation of candidates or supporters across different regions of Nigeria and over time in the lead-up to the 2015 presidential and general elections, TMG was able to draw attention to the North West geopolitical zone as an area where attacks and intimidation were increasing over time — as opposed to other regions of the country where reports of attacks and intimidation remained relatively constant.



As with any monitoring methodology, long-term observation of a fixed set of indicators has pros and cons. While the advantages outlined above related to rapid analysis and the ability to provide targeted recommendations to response actors are significant, by focusing only on those indicators of electoral violence that are expected to be applicable across the entire country, we lose some predictive power. Indicators that are good at predicting conflict in some parts of the country may be less strong in another part where the context is different. Citizen observers must balance the desire for specificity and nuance in their data collection approaches with the need for rapid communications that is vital to effective election violence monitoring. For this reason, however, observer groups may find it useful to complement nation-wide observation of a fixed set of electoral violence indicators with another observation methodology that allows for more regional specificity.

Citizen observers may also complement direct observation of the pre-election environment with data that is gathered from secondary sources. Public opinion research, including focus groups and surveys, can provide additional insights into citizen perceptions and experiences of electoral violence. Some citizen observer groups may also choose to open hotlines or to crowdsource information, providing opportunities for affected community members to directly contact the citizen observer network either through online platforms or phone calls and following up to verify these reports.



While such crowdsourced information and hotlines can provide valuable opportunities to connect directly with victims of violence and connect them to opportunities for redress, observer organizations should note that data gathered through such platforms cannot be treated in the same systematic manner as data that is gathered from trained observer networks deploying in a fairly representative manner. Data gathered through this type of incident-only reporting is likely to be less representative of the overall election environment, since citizens may only report from areas where incidents occur. Therefore, the information collected may show that the overall election process is more violent than it is across the country. Citizens must have both the knowledge that such platforms exist and the means to be able to use them, which may mean that crowdsourced platforms and hotlines will primarily reflect the perspectives of urban individuals with disposable time and income rather than the experiences of the most marginalized.

## CASE STUDY: KENYA



### Using Public Opinion Research to Identify Hot Spots and Develop Effective Peace Messaging

In Kenya, NDI worked with a local company to conduct face-to-face surveys in the lead-up to the March 2013 general elections to identify early warning indicators and likely hot spots for election-related conflict. As Kenya's first general elections since the country's December 2007 presidential election degenerated into violence — largely along ethnic lines — amid controversy over the results, many Kenya watchers feared that the 2013 elections would catalyze a similar resurgence of ethnic tensions and conflict.

To help stakeholders identify priority areas for peace and security programming around the elections, NDI oversaw the conduct of public opinion surveys in each of Kenya's 47 counties. Respondents answered questions about their experience with violence in 2007, pre-existing sources of conflict in their communities (cattle rustling, land disputes, criminal activity, etc.) and perceptions of security in the lead up to the election. The initial survey allowed for each of the counties to be put in different early-warning categories. NDI worked with a local organization to help them monitor in specific counties. As a follow on activity, focus groups were conducted in 10 counties identified as particularly high-risk to gather additional information about the likely drivers of electoral violence and motivations for maintaining peace. This information enabled stakeholders to develop targeted peace messages tailored to the

concerns of each community. According to the United States Agency for International Development's 2013 Kenya Rapid Assessment Review, "Peace messaging... achieved significant successes leading up to March 4. Key messages and effective messengers were identified based on NDI's extensive use of focus groups and large, random-sample surveys."<sup>[31]</sup>

<sup>[31]</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Kenya%2527s%25202013%2520Elections.pdf>, page 14.

Investigative reporting and media monitoring may also be important methodologies to explore as complementary sources of information on the pre-election environment. Citizen observer groups may seek to identify and partner with trained investigative journalists or human rights organizations with a background in such techniques to conduct investigations into more opaque issues in the pre-election period, such as illicit sources of campaign funds. In many cases, the media can be a valuable source of information, especially where observers do not have the capacity to cover large areas of the country with field monitors. Media monitoring can be carried out centrally, but observers should seek local media sources, and must verify reports shown in the media given the risks of misinformation or disinformation. It is important to evaluate the overall media environment to assess potential avenues for manipulation, which may serve as a driver of violence. A more detailed description of how to undertake social media monitoring is included at the end of this guide. Guidance on media monitoring can be found in NDI's publication *Media Monitoring to Promote Democratic Elections: An NDI Handbook for Citizen Organizations*.<sup>[32]</sup>

### **Observation of economic violence, abuse of state resources and vote buying**

Recent research into electoral violence has found a strong correlation between outbreaks of physical violence around elections and high degrees of political corruption.<sup>[33]</sup> In political contexts characterized by high degrees of corruption, there are strong economic incentives for incumbents to retain their hold on power as the public sector itself can become a considerable source of patronage and wealth for

<sup>[32]</sup> <https://www.ndi.org/publications/media-monitoring-promote-democratic-elections-ndi-handbook-citizen-organizations>

<sup>[33]</sup> Birch 29.

elected officials, and they may enjoy significant immunity from prosecution due to their ability to influence legal mechanisms. Such conditions provide both the incentive and the opportunity for state actors to engage in abuse of state resources and vote buying to maintain power, with the threat of violence serving as an enforcement mechanism for illicit exchanges in conditions of otherwise weak rule of law.<sup>[34]</sup>

Corruption itself can be a form of economic violence, depriving certain communities of resources and distributing them among an elite few. The abuse of state resources (ASR) in elections is a specific type of political corruption in which incumbent political parties and candidates unduly utilize official powers and public goods to win. ASR can particularly exacerbate existing tensions and grievances around the electoral process, which, beyond perpetrating economic violence, can be a driving factor for instances of physical violence as well. Like other forms of economic violence, ASR and political corruption around elections are particularly detrimental to the rights of women and marginalized groups, as they often reinforce existing harmful power structures, which are often male-dominated and exclusionary.

Political corruption, ASR and vote buying are therefore not only harmful in their own right, but also important early warning signs of a higher likelihood of state-initiated electoral violence. By monitoring abuse of state resources in the pre-election period, citizen observers can gain insights into regions of the country where violence is particularly likely to break out, or may begin to identify clientelistic relationships between non-state actors and state actors that could be activated for violence at a later stage in the election process.

ASR takes place in many different electoral contexts, from deeply divided societies, to post-conflict elections, to countries where one party has dominated power politics over a long period of time, to contexts where political power regularly alternates from one party to another through elections. In each context, ASR may manifest in multiple ways, with each having its own potential impacts on electoral violence risks. The table below outlines various categories of abuses of state resources, examples how each may contribute to risks or manifestations of electoral violence and potential methodologies that may be used to monitor them:

---

<sup>[34]</sup> Birch 30.

TYPE OF ASR	DEFINITION	ELECTORAL VIOLENCE APPLICATIONS AND RISKS	POTENTIAL MONITORING METHODOLOGIES
Institutional	Utilizing physical infrastructure and resources — such as vehicles, buildings, technology, institutional communication, personal data, or other goods — for campaign purposes. It can also include human resources, like the efforts and skills of civil servants, to support partisan or campaign activities while on government paid time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Partisan use of institutional resources, including human resources, can heighten opposition grievances and deepen divisions between political parties and their supporters</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Direct observation</li><li>• Social media monitoring</li><li>• Key informant interviews</li><li>• Verified citizen reports</li></ul>
Coercive	Deploying the power of security forces, law enforcement and other government authorities for political gain. This could include unequal treatment, intimidation or thwarting of opposition, or the intimidation of voters or funders to support certain candidates. This also includes pressuring civil servants to support campaigns, donate their salaries, or vote in a certain way. It may also include threats or intimidation of social service beneficiaries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intimidation or harassment of opposition supporters or candidates by security forces</li><li>• Use of force during campaign events or opposition protests</li><li>• Threats or intimidation of voters, civil servants, or members of the private sector who work closely with the state</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investigative teams</li><li>• Verified citizen reports</li><li>• Direct observation</li><li>• Key informant interviews</li><li>• Legal analysis of arrests or threats</li></ul>
Regulatory	Enforcing laws in an unequal or biased way. This includes the unequal enforcement of campaign permits, tax laws, party registration, or candidate qualification. This also includes regulatory harassment of businesses owned by opposition candidates and supporters or creating financial or other barriers to disadvantage opposition candidates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unequal application of election regulations can lead to protests and potential incidents of violence — especially around key electoral process events, such as candidate qualification — and undermine trust in institutions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Key informant interviews</li><li>• Analysis of official data</li><li>• Direct observation of election tribunals</li><li>• Investigative teams</li><li>• Legal/contextual analysis</li></ul>

TYPE OF ASR	DEFINITION	ELECTORAL VIOLENCE APPLICATIONS AND RISKS	POTENTIAL MONITORING METHODOLOGIES
<b>Budgetary</b>	Misdirecting public funds to benefit incumbents. This includes clientelism or vote buying, where public funds, development projects or services are illegitimately directed to certain populations. In some cases, incumbent leadership may take credit for these products on behalf of their political party, either implicitly or explicitly. This also includes the illegal transfer of public funds for use in campaigns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unequal funding for development projects, conditional cash transfers, and social services can be a form of economic violence, depriving certain communities of access to resources</li> <li>• Use of public resources for vote buying can be used as both a positive and negative incentive (for more details, see below)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key informant interviews</li> <li>• Analysis of official budget data and information about budget decision-making</li> <li>• Direct observation of campaign events or local development projects</li> <li>• Social media monitoring</li> <li>• Anti-corruption investigations</li> </ul>
<b>Media</b>	Using state-run or state-controlled media to promote incumbents, disparage opponents, or otherwise unfairly influence voters. This includes traditional state media, such as TV, radio, and print, as well as official government websites and social media accounts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unequal use of government media can compound existing grievances and perceptions of government-bias</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional media monitoring</li> <li>• Social media monitoring</li> </ul>
<b>Legislative</b>	Leveraging legislative majorities to pass election laws undemocratically favorable to incumbents or unfavorable to opposition. In some contexts, abuse of legislative power includes passing laws favorable to certain industries/elites in exchange for campaign donations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passing election laws that benefit incumbents can further solidify perceptions that opposition candidates cannot access power through the electoral process and lend credibility to potential spoilers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parliamentary monitoring</li> <li>• Key informant interviews</li> </ul>

Definitions excerpted from **How Citizen Organizations Can Monitor the Abuse of State Resources: A National Democratic Institute Guidance Document**.

**Designing a monitoring strategy:** In many cases, citizen organizations may identify numerous different types of ASR that are likely to occur during a given election. Your organization will need to prioritize which potential abuses should be the focus of their observation by looking at what types of state resources are most likely to be both frequently abused and highly impactful for the integrity of the electoral process. This includes considering the forms of abuses that are most likely to elevate risks of electoral violence. These types of abuses may be monitored through direct observation, key informant interviews, analysis of official data, in-depth investigation, verified citizen reports, and monitoring of traditional and social media. As with all types of monitoring electoral violence, ASR monitoring cannot be done in a vacuum. Often, citizen election observers or other citizen organizations will need to develop partnerships with other actors, such as investigative journalists, media monitoring organizations, and others to most effectively carry out their monitoring efforts. For more information on designing a strategy to monitor and mitigate the abuse of state resources in elections, see *How Citizen Organizations Can Monitor the Abuse of State Resources: An National Democratic Institute Guidance Document*.<sup>[35]</sup>

**Vote buying:** Vote buying is a particular subset of political corruption that is both especially problematic for electoral integrity and a potentially strong early warning sign of violence. Vote buying can take many forms, from explicit exchange of money between candidates and voters to garner their support, to provision of goods and services, or privileged positions, for certain communities or voters. Vote buying may occur both to incentivize high voter turnout in perceived candidate strongholds and as a means of encouraging otherwise undecided or politically apathetic voters to cast their ballots a particular way. In other contexts, vote buying may be such a prevalent and longstanding phenomenon that candidates face ‘pay to play’ incentives: voters will not seriously consider their candidacy in the absence of a ‘good faith pledge’ up front that may be perceived as a sign of the candidate’s willingness to provide for the local community if elected. Finally, vote buying may take the form of so-called **community collusion**, where candidates strike a closed door bargain with local authorities, who in turn agree to get out the vote in the community in the candidate’s favor. The enforcement mechanism for such transactions is often threatened or actual physical violence, which can compel voters to hold up their end of the bargain rather than selling their vote to all comers while nevertheless voting in accordance with their conscience. Widespread vote buying is therefore correlated with outbreaks of physical violence, and can serve as an important early warning sign that physical violence may occur.

---

[35] <https://www.ndi.org/publications/how-citizen-organizations-can-monitor-abuse-states-resources-elections-ndi-guidance>

Monitoring vote buying is notoriously difficult. Although parties, candidates or their proxies may sometimes offer money and goods out in the open where a trained observer could witness the exchange (such as in front of a polling station on election day), it more commonly occurs behind closed doors. Targets of vote buying may have strong incentives not to report the transaction for fear that they are also implicated in illegal behavior. Rumors of vote buying are often rampant and extremely challenging to corroborate. In some contexts, citizen observers have complemented attempts to directly observe vote buying through long-term observation with surveys on perceptions of money in politics that ask citizens to report on whether they have personally been approached to sell their votes or have witnessed others engaging in the practice. Analysis of polling station level results from previous elections, if such are made publicly available, can provide important indications as to where community collusion may have occurred in the past and is therefore likely to occur again. If voter turnout in a particular polling station was unusually high and overwhelmingly favored a single candidate or party, this could indicate the presence of community collusion (or, alternatively, signal ballot box stuffing or fraud in the tabulation process). Finally, partnerships with investigative journalists or other organizations experienced in undercover reporting techniques may yield additional insights into whether and how the practice of vote buying occurs.

**Focused observation on contentious phases of the electoral cycle**

Certain phases of the pre-election period may be especially prone to violence themselves or may generate additional risks for violence if they are not broadly perceived to be credible. In these instances, citizen observer groups may consider training and deploying observers to use checklists and critical incident forms that focus on indicators and incidents of violence specific to these phases of the process. If you are conducting focused observation, it may help to refresh your initial political context analysis by reaching out to key electoral stakeholders contacted during the early round of analysis to assess their perceptions of risks related to the upcoming phase. The table below is not intended to provide an exhaustive list of what to observe, but may provide some starting points for discussion:

PHASE	POTENTIAL INDICATORS	
	Early Warning Signs	Resilience Factors
Electoral boundary delimitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political parties contest the boundary delimitation process</li> <li>Information around boundary delimitation decisions is not made available to the public</li> <li>Independent assessments of electoral boundaries are suggestive of gerrymandering (manipulating electoral boundaries to favor one party)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear criteria are used to establish electoral boundaries</li> <li>Information around electoral boundary delimitation is made available to the public</li> <li>Independent assessments of electoral boundaries confirm that they were equitably established</li> </ul>
Electoral security training and deployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizens or subgroups of citizens hold negative perceptions of electoral security and their role on election day</li> <li>Electoral security does not receive adequate training on supporting elections, including how to interface with women, persons living with disabilities and members of other historically marginalized communities around elections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Election security must follow a clear and public code of conduct in its support of the electoral process</li> <li>Forces engaged in electoral security are positively perceived by most citizens</li> <li>Electoral security receives training on gender-based violence around elections or other forms of violence that may uniquely affect historically marginalized communities</li> </ul>
Political party registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prominent political parties or substantial numbers of political parties fail to successfully complete the registration process</li> <li>Criteria for political party registration are unclear or not communicated in a timely manner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political party registration criteria are clear and nondiscriminatory</li> <li>Parties that fail to successfully complete the registration process are notified and given time to amend their applications</li> <li>Decisions around the registration of political parties are transparent and communicated in a timely manner</li> </ul>
Ballot qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prominent candidates or substantial numbers of candidates fail to successfully complete the ballot qualification process</li> <li>Criteria for ballot qualification are unclear, discriminatory or are not communicated in a timely manner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ballot qualification criteria are clear and nondiscriminatory</li> <li>Candidates that fail to successfully complete the registration process are notified and given time to amend their applications</li> <li>Decisions around the qualification of candidates are transparent and communicated in a timely manner</li> </ul>



PHASE	POTENTIAL INDICATORS	
	Early Warning Signs	Resilience Factors
Voter registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voter registration centers fail to open in some or all parts of the country</li> <li>• Voter registration procedures are discriminatory, unclear or not communicated in a timely manner</li> <li>• Registration center staff are harassed, intimidated or attacked</li> <li>• Accusations of manipulation in the voter registration process (registering ineligible voters)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voter registration procedures are clear, nondiscriminatory and communicated to the public in a timely manner</li> <li>• Voter registration timelines provide sufficient time and opportunity for all eligible citizens to register</li> <li>• The percentage of eligible voters that registers is high</li> <li>• Trusted media and civil society organizations communicate clear information about the integrity of the voter registration process, where warranted</li> <li>• Election authorities provide clear and transparent information on the voter registry</li> </ul>
Election campaign period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign period is characterized by violent rallies and events with clashes between supporters</li> <li>• The state limits freedom of assembly or access to public spaces only for certain candidates and parties</li> <li>• Hateful speech or inciteful rhetoric is used in campaign speeches or in the media</li> <li>• Campaign materials for particular candidates or parties are routinely vandalized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil society is actively engaged in civic and voter education efforts</li> <li>• Political actors carry out positive and educational Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaigns</li> <li>• Election campaigns specifically conduct outreach to women, youth, persons living with disabilities, ethno-linguistic minorities and other historically marginalized communities</li> </ul>
Electoral claim and dispute adjudication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political parties prominently contest decisions rendered around claims and disputes filed at an earlier stage in the process</li> <li>• Criteria to file an electoral claim are burdensome and nontransparent, or last-minute changes to the legal framework for elections render the process of filing complaints difficult to navigate</li> <li>• Only a limited number of actors have legal standing to file electoral claims</li> <li>• Decisions around electoral claims are not transparent or are not communicated in a timely manner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electoral dispute resolution mechanisms are positively perceived by key electoral stakeholders and the public</li> <li>• Decisions on electoral claims are rendered within the period specified by law</li> <li>• Clear information on the resolution of claims is made publicly available</li> </ul>

### Inclusion-focused observation

Inclusion-focused observation is described in more detail under ***Elections Taking Place in the Context of a Formally Negotiated Peace Agreement***. However, it remains a valuable approach for violence perpetrated by actors contesting the elections as well.

## Post-Election Violence

Most violence that occurs in the post-election period occurs in conjunction with a post-election protest, which includes both spontaneous unplanned demonstrations and planned protests. Post-election protest and violence are both more likely in closely contested elections, perhaps due to perceptions that even minor instances of electoral fraud could have tipped the result one way or the other. Protests are typically initiated by the individuals who lose elections or by their supporters. When protests are planned, this can either indicate that the losing party or parties have legitimate concerns about significant electoral fraud or that the losers wish to cast doubt on the credibility of the process in the hopes of forcing a recount or the overturning of the results in key districts.

Of note, post-election protest is generally recognized and protected as a form of free speech and free assembly, including by the United Nations Human Rights Council.<sup>[36]</sup> Your objective as a citizen election observation organization should not be to deter post-election protests, but to monitor and where possible to help ensure that such protests do not turn violent. Statistically, most post-election protests do not become violent.<sup>[37]</sup> When they do, violence can either be initiated by the protestors who may feel that the confusion of a protest gives them leeway to commit acts of violence with greater impunity or by state security forces seeking to restore order or prevent the protest from taking place. Much of the work to address post-election violence is therefore preventative. The state should have clear procedures in place around how to respond to protests and what constitutes excessive use of force. Protestors and the state may also be deterred from committing acts of violence if they have sufficient trust in electoral complaints and disputes procedures.

External communications are always an important aspect of electoral violence monitoring, but it is especially important for citizen observer groups to coordinate

---

<sup>[36]</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5042-protection-human-rights-context-peaceful-protests-during-crisis>

<sup>[37]</sup> Beaulieu 2014

with connectors or forces for resilience when post-election violence is of particular concern. The primary mandate of citizen election observer groups is to assess whether elections met reasonable standards of inclusion, transparency and accountability. If citizen election observers uncover evidence that is suggestive of significant electoral manipulation, they have an obligation to the people, in whose name they observe, to make their findings public. The people have a right to know whether they are participating in a credible democratic process; answering this question is the *raison d'être* of citizen election observer groups.

Nonetheless, the release of such findings, may increase tensions and even the potential for violence. The do no harm principle means that the timing, tone, and manner of sharing such reports demands careful attention. To counterbalance such inevitable risks, citizen election observers, especially in the post-election period, should make clear through their platforms that they continue to support norms of peaceful democratic elections, even if a particular election failed to live up to these standards. By coordinating closely with connectors, they may also offset some of the risks of publishing statements or sharing information that is highly critical of an electoral process. Connectors may be better able to assist communities to focus on identifying priorities for reform after a bad election rather than responding with violence.

## Suggested observation methodologies:

- Assessing the legal framework for electoral complaints and disputes
- Monitoring electoral claims and disputes
- Assessing the legal framework around protests
- Monitoring planned protests
- Long-term observation or post-election observation

*Systematically collecting information on whether the official election results can be trusted through election day observation using the Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) methodology can also be instrumental in informing the public and mitigating a violent rejection of election results by promoting citizen confidence in the process where warranted. More information on the PVT methodology can be found in NDI's guide [The Quick Count and Election Observation](https://www.ndi.org/node/24021).<sup>[38]</sup>*

---

<sup>[38]</sup> <https://www.ndi.org/node/24021>

## Assessing the legal framework for electoral claims and disputes

Political leaders may be less likely to incite violence if there are trusted mechanisms in place for filing and resolving electoral claims and disputes. On the contrary, in systems where political stakeholders do not have faith that their claims will be justly adjudicated in line with the law, they may instead turn to the court of public opinion, and may be motivated to mobilize towards violence. Before election day, citizen observer networks can assess the legal framework for submitting electoral claims and disputes to determine whether it provides adequate opportunity for redress. While it may be helpful to identify an individual with both a legal and elections background to conduct the assessment, NDI's guide *Promoting Legal Frameworks for Democratic Elections* also provides a list of questions that any electoral activist can use to evaluate the claims and disputes process with respect to international best practice.<sup>[39]</sup> Additional standards may be found in the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) publication *Guidelines for Understanding, Adjudicating and Resolving Disputes in Elections*.<sup>[40]</sup>

In general, the framework should:

- Be consistent with principles of international human rights
- Clearly indicate which bodies have responsibility for addressing electoral claims
- Include clear and reasonable provisions for the standards that must be met to properly document and file an electoral claim. Evidentiary standards and deadlines should not be prohibitively complicated or restrictive.
- Ensure that plaintiffs receive timely notification of any public hearings or decisions related to their claim
- Compel the state to support the electoral claims and disputes process by supplying any documents such as voter rolls or election laws that may be relevant for understanding and adjudicating a claim
- Clearly specify who has standing to file complaints
  - In instances regarding human rights violations, individuals, groups of individuals and non-governmental organizations should all have standing before judicial bodies<sup>[41]</sup>

<sup>[39]</sup> <https://www.ndi.org/publications/promoting-legal-frameworks-democratic-elections>

<sup>[40]</sup> <https://www.ifes.org/publications/guidelines-understanding-adjudicating-and-resolving-disputes-elections-guarde>

<sup>[41]</sup> NDI is indebted to The Carter Center for this point. <https://eos.cartercenter.org/parts/15>

- Include a clear and prompt timeline for handling disputes, issuing decisions and implementing remedies
- Provide for the timely public release of decisions around electoral claims
- Clearly specify how remedies for infringements of the electoral law will be provided or enforced

On the basis of the assessment, observer groups can formulate clear recommendations for electoral legal reform that would help to better align the claims and disputes process with international best practices.

## Monitoring electoral claims and disputes

In addition to understanding how the electoral claims and disputes process is defined by law, it is important to understand public perceptions of its effectiveness. If critical election stakeholders, especially major political parties and candidates, do not trust that formal procedures will provide objective legal remedies for filed claims, they may be more likely to resort to violence.

- **Key informant interviews** can provide a sense of how electoral stakeholders view the electoral management body, electoral courts, ombudspersons or other actors involved in electoral justice. Low levels of trust are a risk factor for post-election violence.
- Observers can also conduct a **desk review of party or candidate statements** in response to complaints filed at earlier stages in the process — for example, around voter registration or ballot qualification — to provide complementary sentiment analysis that may indicate how likely parties and candidates are to trust formal dispute resolution mechanisms for complaints that are filed around election day proceedings or the tabulation and announcement of results.

In addition to assessing perceptions of electoral claim and dispute procedures, citizen observers may wish to evaluate whether the legal framework was respected in the actual adjudication of claims. If the law provides for effective legal remedies around electoral violations, but formal legal procedures are not respected in practice, this may cause critical election stakeholders to lose confidence in the process and view violence as a more positive alternative. In some countries, citizen observer networks may receive accreditation to **deploy trained observers** to monitor the judicial review of electoral claims and disputes. Observers can watch the proceedings, determine whether the legal framework for electoral complaints and disputes is

properly followed, and note the outcomes of individual claims. It may be helpful for observers to have some legal training or background so that they can understand the procedures. However, observers should also use clear, standardized checklists based on the legal framework assessment to gather information about the proceedings, in addition to their own knowledge, to ensure that all observers are assessing the same elements of the process and to facilitate rapid aggregation and analysis of findings.

**Analysis of open election data** around electoral claims and disputes can also provide a sense of how effective electoral dispute resolution mechanisms are likely to be. If claims are processed quickly and if the public has access to information about how and why the claims were resolved in the ways that they were, this can build trust in the dispute resolution process and decrease risks for violence. NDI's [Open Election Data Initiative](https://www.openelectiondata.net/en/guide/key-categories/complaints-and-disputes/)<sup>[42]</sup> provides nine principles for making electoral data open. Advocacy by citizen observers towards relevant authorities to ensure that data on electoral claims and disputes meets these standards can help to improve transparency and build trust in the process.<sup>[43]</sup> If data around claims and dispute is already made available to the public in accordance with these standards, observer groups can conduct analyses to assess who filed claims, how the claims were resolved, and the time frame in which they were resolved, as well as if and how these rulings resolving the claims were implemented. Such analyses, among others, may provide insights both into whether the process of filing claims is sufficiently accessible and whether claims are processed in a timely and impartial manner.



Other types of open election data, such as publication of election results for each polling station, can also increase transparency and promote citizen confidence in the electoral process, mitigating prospects for post-election violence.

## Assessing the legal framework around protests

Evidence suggests that protests are more likely to turn violent when the state has a restrictive approach to demonstrations. Before election day, citizen observers can analyze legislation and other relevant documents on the organization of planned protests and spontaneous demonstrations. The criminalization of demonstrations

<sup>[42]</sup> <https://openelectiondata.net/en/>

<sup>[43]</sup> Specific information about open data and the process of electoral claims and disputes can be found at: <https://openelectiondata.net/en/guide/key-categories/complaints-and-disputes/>

by law or in practice — or highly restrictive permit requirements for organizations wishing to organize a planned protest — could be an early indication that the state would be willing to respond with force to post-election demonstrations. If the legal framework around protests is unclear, overly restrictive or not consistently respected, citizen activists before election day can advocate for the need for a more permissive environment for peaceful protests that is in line with international standards.

The assessment should also consider how and whether the legal framework defines excessive use of force by state security in response to a demonstration. Although the precise definition varies by country, in general terms force is considered excessive when security actors respond with a more violent type of force than is needed to de-escalate a situation. Use of force by security can be categorized into five, increasingly violent, types:

- **Physical presence** — security actors deploy to a site to discourage or de-escalate violence
- **Verbalization** — such as spoken requests or orders
- **Empty-hand control** — such as grabbing, kicking or punching
- **Use of less lethal weapons** — such as tasers, chemicals or police dogs
- **Use of lethal weapons** — such as firearms

If the legal framework fails to define and discourage excessive use of force against protestors or does not provide clear legal avenues for reporting excessive use of force, citizen observers may also wish to advocate for more clear provisions and procedures to affirm that the state does not endorse indiscriminate force against peaceful protestors.

## Monitoring planned protests

For planned protests to be effective, participants have to know where to mobilize and when, which means that it is theoretically possible for an external organization to determine whether a planned protest will take place and to assess how the protest is being framed to attendees. Monitoring of public social media pages or private communications groups that major political parties use to share information with their supporters may be particularly valuable during this time. If your organization is regularly following these platforms, you will likely receive information about where protests will take place even if the organizers are not required, or choose not

to, follow a process of applying for protest authorization. These platforms can also be an important source of information about how attendees are preparing for and discussing the protest. High levels of hateful or inciteful language, as well as overt planning for violence amongst potential protest attendees, can be a strong sign that violence is likely.

When deciding whether to directly observe protests, your organization should consider observer safety and security as a first priority.<sup>[44]</sup> In many cases, especially if monitoring pre-protest planning reveals that potential attendees are discussing violence or using dangerous speech, or when there is an expectation that security forces may use violence on protestors, deploying observers to a protest can put them at risk. If, after conducting a comprehensive risk assessment, your organization determines that deploying observers to directly monitor protest activity would be sufficiently safe, you should consider what can realistically be assessed via direct protest observation. In many cases, it can be extremely difficult to determine who instigates violence in the context of a protest. As a part of your overall risk assessment, your organization should consider what kinds of observable and analyzable information you can gain by deploying observers in the context of a protest, or if similarly useful information could be collected through indirect sources — such as monitoring what commentary political stakeholders make on the protest or how it is covered in the media — or through monitoring pre-protest planning, as discussed above.

## Long-term observation or post-election observation

Although violence around political protests is a common manifestation of post-election violence, it is far from the only one. Election officials may face intimidation or pressure campaigns to reject election results, or may be attacked by disgruntled voters. In closely contested elections in particular, hate speech and inciteful language against those with opposing political beliefs may increase and localized clashes between partisan supporters may occur. Infrastructure for electoral dispute resolution may be vandalized and personnel harassed, intimidated or attacked. Levels of interpersonal violence may also increase when families or community members have differing beliefs about the outcomes or credibility of the election. This type of interpersonal or domestic violence can have a disproportionate impact

---

<sup>[44]</sup> For more information on observer security, please see *Safety and Security Planning for Electoral Violence Monitoring* in this guide and *Section 6: Observer Security* in [Monitoring and Mitigating Electoral Violence through Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observation](#).





on marginalized communities, including women, especially in contexts where patriarchal norms discourage women from expressing their political views.

As with pre-election observation as described under ***Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Elections***, citizen observer groups may wish to develop specialized checklists and critical incident forms for their network of long-term observers to monitor indicators and manifestations of post-electoral violence across the country. The same approaches to tool development and observer communication discussed in the pre-election period would apply to this methodology. However, it will be important to develop a separate checklist and reporting schedule for observers in the post-election period, as the early warning signs and incidents of electoral violence that they are most likely to observe after the election will look different than those observed in the pre-election period.

## Violence Perpetrated by Actors Outside of the Formal Political Process

Many actors in addition to those who are formally participating in the electoral process have a stake in the electoral outcome, and may seek either to capitalize on the strategic importance of elections to boost their own power and influence or to ensure that elected candidates will be favorable to their interests and agendas. Clientelistic networks operating outside the formal economy; terrorist cells; illicit traffickers of goods, people or funds; international actors; and armed movements all may have electoral interests and all may strive to maneuver the electoral process to their advantage. Generally speaking, their violent activities around elections will take one of two forms.

First, non-state actors may use attacks, intimidation or threats to prevent elections from being held, often in specific localities or broader parts of countries. They may be seeking to exercise or demonstrate their *de facto* control or to destabilize governments as was the case of the Taliban before their takeover of Afghanistan, separatists in contested parts of Ukraine, violent extremists in Nigeria, and rebel groups at times in Colombia. They also may be seeking a *quid pro quo* from the state in exchange for allowing elections to take place in territories that may be fully or partially under their control. State actors typically have an interest in seeing elections take place. By threatening to derail the process, non-state actors can force the state to the negotiating table whether they are seeking greater recognition for their movement, release of political detainees or other advantages.

Second, non-state actors may use violence to affect electoral outcomes and thereby influence the choice of policy proposals on offer or the degree to which they are implemented following the election or to secure their ability to operate with impunity. Drug cartels in Mexico, for example, assassinate noncooperative candidates or otherwise violently dissuade candidates with an anti-corruption platform for running for office. Garrison communities in Kingston, Jamaica, have historically used violence to ensure that residents vote for the community's local political patron on election day. In Sicily, Italy, the mafia has had long-standing informal ties with the Christian Democratic Party and engages in strategic violence to turn out the vote for its candidates. Sometimes non-state actors that seem to be operating of their own volition may receive covert financing or other support from state actors, as when political parties mobilize youth gangs to commit acts of violence on their behalf. These covert ties and informal alliances can muddy the environment around an election; even when it is clear that incidents of violence are taking place, it can be very difficult to ascertain the ultimate perpetrators and their motivations.

Observer safety and security is of paramount importance for all types of electoral violence monitoring, and contexts in which violence is carried out by actors outside the formal political process can have elevated risks for observers. The perpetrators of violence are often already operating wholly outside the rule of law, face few external constraints on their actions, and have a very strong interest in ensuring that their political ties and other operations are not publicized. Violently attacking citizen observers as well as journalists can dissuade others from shining too bright a light on their operations. Citizen observer groups working in these contexts will need to develop a detailed safety and security plan.

In instances where non-state actors are truly operating independently of or against the interests of some or all state actors, it may be possible to engage national or local security forces, intelligence services or judicial bodies or other state actors — either to contribute to observer safety and security or to otherwise participate in response mechanisms. In Sicily, Italy, for example, local police agreed to provide protection to business owners participating in the civil society-led 2014 *Addio Pizzo* (Goodbye Protection Fees) campaign to encourage businesses to transparently pledge not to pay additional protection fees to the mafia so that consumers could choose to prioritize shopping at ‘mafia-free’ establishments. The campaign had some success at weakening the mafia’s influence in the cities of Palermo and Calabria. Local police played an invaluable role and could be trusted by the local community at that time because the mafia had just prominently killed two police officers and colleagues left behind were eager to crack down on its activities in retribution. However, clientelistic ties may extend further than is immediately apparent, and security forces can have ties to gangs and other violence perpetrators. So citizen observers will need to exercise careful judgment in deciding which state actors can be productively and safely engaged.

## CASE STUDY: COLOMBIA



### Mapping Risks of Violence by State and Non-State Actors

Over the past decades, Colombia has experienced significant levels of violence due to active conflict between the security forces and illegal armed groups, including guerillas, paramilitary organizations and organized crime. The interest of these groups to control or disrupt the political system has resulted in increased pressures on the country's election processes.

Electoral Observation Mission (Misión de Observación Electoral — MOE), employs a variety of methodologies to observe violence by state and non-state actors during the election cycle. These methodologies include comprehensive electoral risk mapping and long-term observation during the pre-election period. As part of its electoral risk mapping exercise, MOE developed a matrix to identify possible aspects of the election process that may be more susceptible to violence and fraud. These indicators include campaign finance violations by non-state actors, presence of illegal armed groups, forced displacement, and violence against journalists in the lead up to elections. Based on the findings of its risk maps, MOE conducts more in depth analysis of high-risk topic areas and municipalities. MOE has also observed the direct links between non-state actors and violence against women and other marginalized communities. Based on the information gathered in previous years, MOE has been able to use the risk maps and analysis of high risk municipalities to compare changes over time and identify new high-risk areas.

The overall threat of violence, especially in high-risk municipalities identified by MOE, pose a significant challenge to observers monitoring in those locations. MOE utilizes many strategies to ensure the safety and security of its observers. For example, it might not publicize its association with local organizations and other sources of information, if this would put partner organizations and individuals at risk. Also, MOE uses a centralized communication system that allows the observers to directly reach out to the organization in the case of potential risks to their safety during observation. These practices also allow MOE to release information anonymously and keep observers' information private. This form of communication structure is utilized in the security context of Colombia, but may not be as beneficial in other areas where civil society organizations operate globally. Organizations in more closed spaces may find that having less centralized communication, or a more regional/ local structure, may be more beneficial for their security context, therefore each organization should assess most appropriate communication protocols for their context.

## Suggested observation methodologies:

- Campaign finance monitoring
- Observation of economic violence, abuse of state resources and vote buying
- Strategic partnerships with investigative reporters
- Long-term observation

## Campaign finance monitoring

While non-state actors may face fewer formal constraints on their behavior than state actors, outright violence is similarly unlikely to be their preferred strategy of electoral manipulation if more subtle means can enable them to effectively influence the process. Even when non-state actors currently enjoy impunity from prosecution, regimes may change and physical violence — as noted before — is often highly visible and difficult to disown. In countries with weak campaign finance regimes, where financial contributions to candidates are opaque or only belatedly disclosed, non-state actors may first seek to influence the electoral process through monetary means. A sizeable campaign donation that enables an illicit trafficking organization to maintain access to the infrastructure it needs to carry out its revenue-generating activities may make considerable economic sense. For this reason, citizen observers may wish to consider focusing their efforts on campaign finance laws and their implementation. Additional information on monitoring campaign finance can be found in the Open Justice Society Initiative handbook *Monitoring Election Campaign Finance: A Handbook for NGOs*.<sup>[45]</sup> However, it may make sense to structure observation efforts around:

- **Legal Framework Analysis and Advocacy** considering laws for both income and expenditure disclosure to ensure that there is greater transparency around candidate funding
- **Open Data Advocacy:** Where robust legal frameworks do exist, is relevant data for assessing campaign funding sources and expenditures available to the public in a timely, complete and analyzable manner from all necessary sources, including — potentially:

<sup>[45]</sup> <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/publications/monitoring-election-campaign-finance-handbook-ngos>



- The electoral management body
- State audit authorities
- Legislature
- Tax authorities
- Broadcasting regulators, media outlets, and social media companies
- **Monitoring electoral claims and disputes procedures** with a specific focus on claims related to campaign finance. Specific questions to consider might include:
  - Are disputes related to campaign finance adjudicated fairly/properly?
  - What happens when there are violations of campaign finance laws?
  - Are sanctions levied?
  - Are sanctions of a magnitude to deter parties from violating the law or are they more symbolic?

## Observation of economic violence, abuse of state resources and vote buying

These methodologies are described in more detail under ***Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Elections***. However, it can also be a useful methodology in contexts where violence is perpetrated by non-state actors but there are suspected ties between the state and non-state actors. Observation of economic violence and political corruption may help to identify these relationships.

### Strategic partnerships with investigative reporters

Techniques for investigative reporting or undercover journalism can be especially helpful to uncover additional information about the motivations, political ties and operations of violent non-state actors. However, undercover reporters who choose to embed themselves in violent organizations — even those who choose to embed themselves in online platforms where violent groups are organizing — face enormous risks to their personal safety, which are typically beyond the scope of a citizen election observation organization to manage. Undercover reporters require special training, including on how to minimize risks to themselves and those around them while undercover. For this reason, citizen election observers should not try to directly use investigative practices in the course of their observation effort, but could instead seek to identify media outlets specialized in investigative reporting to

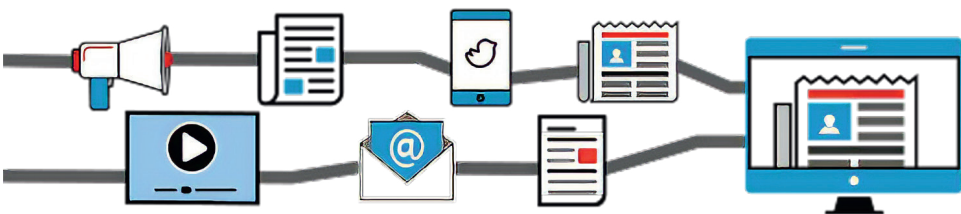
see if they are able to share any useful information with the observation effort about violent non-state actors.

## Long-term observation

Long-term observation as described under ***Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Elections and Post-Election Violence*** can also be a helpful strategy to assess the observable impacts of activities by violent non-state actors. However, clear observer safety and security protocols should be in place so that observers are not exposed to undue risk in the course of documenting potential actions by violent actors.

## Social Media Monitoring: A Cross-Cutting Observation Methodology

Increasingly, citizen election observers have come to appreciate the value of monitoring online space as a potential petri dish to understand what can happen in offline space. As the boundaries between online and offline interactions become increasingly fluid, what happens in one space has significant potential to spill over into the other. Disinformation<sup>[46]</sup> and dangerous speech that originate online can have very real and violent consequences offline. Although not appropriate for every election or country context, social media monitoring nevertheless has potential to provide important early warning signs about electoral violence risks cutting across each of the violence types presented.



However, it is important to note that even in highly connected environments the populations that choose to engage in online spaces are not representative of the full spectrum of public opinion in a country. Generally speaking, social media users tend to be younger and more urban, and are less likely to come from low-income

<sup>[46]</sup> According to *Disinformation and Electoral Integrity: A Guidance Document for NDI Elections Programs*, “Disinformation is the deliberate generation and dissemination of false information to manipulate public opinion and perceptions.”

backgrounds. While social media monitoring can provide unique windows and insights into public sentiment, its findings should not be treated as synonymous with general public opinion or even as necessarily reflective of majority viewpoints in a given context. Secondly, before deciding to engage in social media monitoring, it is important to understand the dominant channels through which most citizens access information. If your organization has access to data on media habits and internet penetration in your country, this information can be used to strategize about how and where to most successfully monitor the overall information environment surrounding the election. If community radio, traditional mass media or other mediums play a bigger role in the lives of most citizens in your country context, you may wish to instead focus your attention on traditional media monitoring, in which case NDI's guide *Media Monitoring to Promote Democratic Elections: An NDI Handbook for Citizen Organizations*<sup>[47]</sup> provides additional guidance.

## Social Media, Violence, and Electoral Integrity

Elections are increasingly affected by online platforms. Social media platforms provide a time and cost-effective means for electoral management bodies, parties, candidates and other electoral stakeholders to disseminate information and thereby assist voters to make informed choices at the polls. However, the ease of content creation and the speeds at which content can spread unchecked also poses risks to the electoral process. False or intentionally exaggerated information can spread just as quickly as credible information, and may fan the flames of divisive or violent narratives or be used to seed doubts about the credibility of the process.

- **Emotionally charged content is automatically prioritized and amplified through online algorithms that are designed to drive engagement with the platforms and their content.** Violent or divisive content is often highly polarizing and will elicit strong reactions from individuals who encounter it. For this reason, it may be automatically amplified by the social media algorithms. Over time, however, repeated exposure to violent or divisive content may cause users to normalize the ideas expressed, causing individuals to adopt more extreme or radical opinions themselves. This can cause what is known as the **Overton window**, or the window of policies and perspectives that are acceptable to mainstream society, to shift over time such that ideas that were previously only held by individuals on the extreme fringes of society gradually gain more widespread acceptance.

<sup>[47]</sup> [ndi.org/publications/media-monitoring-promote-democratic-elections-ndi-handbook-citizen-organizations](https://ndi.org/publications/media-monitoring-promote-democratic-elections-ndi-handbook-citizen-organizations)



- **People are more aggressive online.** The proliferation of **sock puppet accounts**, or accounts using fake names, provides a shield of anonymity to users behind violent narratives or narratives calling to action. These users find themselves in a position of invulnerability. This factor contributes to the proliferation of online channels contributing to spreading violent content. The impunity in the face of this type of behavior also contributes to the proliferation of groups and narratives that build on hate and divisive speeches to create communities online that will continue growing these ideas. Social media is also free from borders which means that foreign actors, diaspora and non state actors can also contribute to certain narratives.

## Nature of electoral violence online and how it manifests

**Violence against individuals (gender-based, threats, etc.):** Online violence can manifest in different forms. Social media platforms give the opportunity to users to create narratives that target certain actors based on their political orientation, gender, sexual orientations or ethnolinguistic group affiliation. Such narratives may intend to discredit political actors contesting for the election; it may also target key stakeholders. In extreme instances, such narrative can lead to calls for violent actions against the target.

Trolls are clearly visible disruptive actors harassing or threatening individuals in the online world. They operate in a certain way to target individuals or their publications with intentional inflammatory or offensive reactions. This behavior can be in certain instances made with the objective of amusement but is often done in a more systematic way (troll armies) to discredit or push for a certain direction in the online discussions. Such behavior often targets certain groups based on the gender or sexual orientations of individuals, which contributes to the creation of an unsafe context for free expression in the online channels. It also puts these groups in situations of discomfort, embarrassment and in certain cases of fear to engage with the public and in extreme cases can result in withdrawing from engaging in the election or politics in general.

**Violent extremism (where it is organized: private groups, instant messaging platforms):** The other form of online violence manifests in a more organized violent extremism. Such ideas grow generally in structured networks. Private groups are often spaces that give the opportunity for groups of people to create and discuss ideas that may be violent or calling to violence. Such discussions happen in private spaces like groups where members can freely express their opinions without being observed. Often, groups initiate ideas that may be misinterpreted and built on to evolve to violent actions happening in real life. The same phenomena is also

observed with instant messaging platforms where discussions can happen within closed groups without any control, which provides a space free from rules and at the margin of legal control.

**Early warning signs of electoral violence are often observed on social media.**

Given the space that social media offers for violent narratives to grow and for violent groups to organize, it offers a platform where violent narratives grow before turning to action. By monitoring the behavior of certain actors and groups on social media, observer groups can identify trends and early warning signs of potential violence. This is also valid in the opposite direction, where documented violent instances will be used online to promote violent actions and to initiate reactions of groups and individuals pushing them to respond.

**Election monitoring groups should comprehensively assess the election**

**information environment:** Multiple channels play a role in providing information to voters including rallies, meetings, traditional media, newspapers, etc. One of the most used tools during the recent years has been social media platforms. Social media is offering a space for quick information sharing. It is commonly used by election management bodies to provide information to voters and it is also used by political parties for their campaigns. However, social media is also used to spread fake, misleading or exaggerated information or to incite to violence. Social media has been used by malicious actors to either discredit the voting process or its results as well as to amplify certain violent narratives. As part of their assessment of the information environment around the elections, election observers should engage in assessing the quality of the information being delivered to voters online.

## **Online violence monitoring: structured methodology design**

Online dynamics of violence remain widely undocumented and, despite much research, it is still hard for groups to understand and analyze its complexity. It is important for groups to set the goals and narrow the expectations down to a level that can be observed in a quasi systematic manner. While considering a social media monitoring component to deter, prevent and mitigate online violence, groups need to think wisely about how to design the appropriate methodology considering certain factors.

**Set the objectives:** An online monitoring effort can be as broad or as narrow as the group can afford. For this reason, it is important to set clear achievable goals at the first stages of the strategy design. By looking at the context, history of recent elections and at the organization's capacity, groups can have a clear idea about the

scope of their project. Without clarifying the goals of the monitoring effort, it is hard to design the appropriate methodology.

**Rapid response (tracking individual peculiar behavior) vs Looking at trends (overall assessment of the information environment):**

While designing the monitoring methodology, groups are invited to consider what type of data they are interested in looking at as well as the type of responses the group is willing to give. Tracking individual behavior of users on social media is considered as a rapid response method to be looking at violent speeches on social media. It is based on identifying and categorizing peculiar behaviors. This method helps groups in identifying early signs of violent behavior before it grows and evolves to become trends. This method necessitates a relatively big set up in terms of the size of the project (resources, staff, etc.). On the other hand, groups can plan to look at broader trends and assess the overall information environment as part of their general assessment of the electoral process. Looking at the overall information environment is an important aspect of the electoral process and looking at it helps in identifying potential trends of violent narratives. While designing the methodology, groups are encouraged to develop mechanisms for forwarding their findings to other platforms or groups which can play a role in policy making advocacy, rapid responses or public awareness.

**Define what constitutes speeches as violent or inciting violence:** The definition of content that can be considered as violent, divisive or calling to violence can be subjective. It is important that the group define what should be considered as the type of content that needs to be tracked. Because it is hard to monitor the entire online universe, defining the type of behavior to be tracked that may refer to that type of content will help focus the effort towards a clear direction.

**Build a lexicon:** Some online monitoring tools offer the opportunity for the groups to search by certain keywords. This method allows groups to track certain words that may be perceived as either violent or calling to violence. By building lexicons, groups can generate or extract content on social media using a group of keywords which fall within the scope of the assessment. The lexicon building is a complex and continuous exercise meant to consistently adapt to the recent updates and content around the election. It is also important to consult with experts and other partners looking at minorities or marginalized groups that may be targeted by violent behavior online. These different actors can contribute to building an exhaustive and targeted lexicon that will allow the group to gather accurate data.

There are also certain challenges in building a lexicon that should reflect the group's objectives. The use of humor or sarcasm can often utilize certain keywords that may be within the group of words being tracked. The different possible definitions or uses of certain words can also mislead the content extraction. While building a lexicon,

it is also advised to consider a certain combination of words which build sentences that are categorized as violent. In multicultural and multilingual countries, building a lexicon that includes terminology in all languages can be a challenge.

**Identify the relevant social media platforms to monitor (specific to the context):**

Several social media platforms exist and every country, for different reasons, has certain platforms being more popular. The consumption of internet data or the ease of creating and posting content are among the reasons behind the popularity of certain platforms. While designing the monitoring methodology it is important to assess what channels are the most used to share content and get information. It is also important to have a clear understanding of the audiences and how different groups get the information using different social media platforms. Identifying the online platforms to monitor allows groups to design their strategy and pick the right tools to collect data.

**Identify potential pages or groups that propagate violent/hate/inflammatory/call to action narratives:** Certain pages or groups are continuous sources of online violent content. It is important to investigate and map such sources. Generally, pages or groups that play a role in spreading violent narratives have other sub groups and subpages affiliated to them. Collaboration with other organizations working in fact checking, for instance, can provide a good picture of malicious sources that need to be monitored.

While mapping such data sources, it is crucial to keep in mind that such pages or groups operate within networks that may include individual influencers as well as activists, political parties or actors, institutions, even celebrities in some instances with coordinated communication approaches. Observer groups' assessment should aim to understand the *modus operandi* and the impact of such behavior on the general environment.

**Track different languages/ethnic groups/regions:** The dynamism of online platforms is visible when it comes to the different ethnic/language affiliations. Often, pages, groups and even users from the same region or ethno-linguistic group have specific communication channels. It is important to be able to monitor such dynamics as in certain cases it can turn to spaces where divisive and inflammatory speeches grow. This is also important in the case of localized conflicts or long-term opposition between ethnic groups that can be exacerbated by the political polarization during election times. It is also crucial to integrate marginalized groups based on their gender, sexual orientation, physical disabilities as well as ethnic or religious identities among the assessment. Online violence can manifest in different forms against these different types of groups and understanding how they are being threatened or targeted can open a largely undocumented phenomena.

**Online monitoring tools:** There are different existing tools that can be used to monitor the online space. These tools have their specificities and help prioritizing the type of content to look at within the wide and complex data environment online. After defining the goals, the platforms to be monitored and the methodology of the monitoring effort, groups can identify the right tool that matches their vision.

## Other sources of information

**Traditional media:** Traditional media remain the main source of information for a wide range of the population. Due to limited internet penetration and lower social media literacy rates, many citizens still get their information from TV, newspapers and radio in a large portion of the world. Being informed about what is reported by traditional media can help groups cross check certain information and trends they identify on social media. Media can also be used as a channel to the escalation of violent speeches.

**Long Term Observers:** Online violence and violence happening in the ground are tightly linked in one direction and the other. Long term observers (LTOs) are members of the observer group trained and deployed in their areas to collect and analyze information about the conduct of the electoral process as well as in assessing the political dynamics in their regions. LTOs are generally deployed during the pre-election period to observe the important election activities that lead to election day but also to have a clear understanding of the environment under which the election is taking place. Their deployment also covers the post-election period to assess the acceptance of election results that may lead in certain cases to violent rejection of the official numbers. Given the fact that LTOs are recruited in their localities, they have a clear understanding of long-term drivers of potential violence in their communities and can then provide a better analysis of certain trends or information identified by online monitors. LTOs may also have access to localized groups or instant messaging threads in order to monitor the tone of the discourse. These types of groups may be effective sources of information, but organizations should carefully consider security risks to LTOs if joining these types of closed groups.

LTOs can also assess the impact of certain early signs identified online to evaluate their impact on the electoral and political processes in their areas. They have as well the possibility of assessing the reach and impact of rumors. Groups should also make sure to conduct the monitoring at the three stages of the electoral process, including the pre-election period, to look at divisive narratives, dangerous speech against minorities, call to action against political opponents, narratives inciting to violence against an electoral activity, etc. It is also important to observe the voting period and

the post-election with possible narratives questioning the integrity of the election results or calling for violent rejection of the election outcome.

### **Online surveys and focus groups for a better understanding of user behavior and how violent narratives impact them:**

A lot of research is being made by different civic groups, think tanks, and academics to better understand how online behavior is influencing users and how online content can change the users' perspective about certain issues. Such phenomena is observed in changing users' opinions and choices about political contestants, but it can also modify their perception about the credibility of an election or its outcome. Observer groups can use surveys or focus groups to better understand how violent behavior on social media, especially in closed messaging groups, is impacting users and how it can possibly attract them in such narratives. Such research should include data points from different demographic, ethnic, linguistic, political and social circles.

## **Additional Considerations**



### **Experiment and keep the methodology evolving as it is being implemented:**

The social media environment is extremely dynamic. Huge masses of data and content are being created indefinitely and new trends, pages, and groups are arising continuously. Keeping in mind these factors will push groups to ensure that their methodology keeps evolving as the social media environment and the context are changing. Otherwise, the social media monitoring effort can be blind to new behaviors and trends that may have a big impact on the process.



### **Decide on the size of the assessment and plan for staffing:**

Depending on the financial and human resources allocated to the online monitoring component of the observation, groups can manage the size of their project. It is impossible to assess every specific piece of the online universe. However, groups can structure their effort and narrow it down to a scale that matches their objectives and provide them with efficient datasets to comfortably assess and speak on the situation.

## **Be aware of your limitations**

Starting from the design phase of the project, groups have to be aware of the limitations of their effort including:

- *Low internet penetration:* The population access to the internet in certain areas of the country covered by the project is something to be considered

as it impacts the universe you are monitoring. Not all citizens or groups are online platforms users.

- *Access of certain vulnerable groups / minorities to online content:* The high cost of internet connection is often cited as one among the main barriers to certain vulnerable groups in accessing online information systems. Certain people also express having difficulties understanding and using digital solutions.
- *The size of the universe that is being monitored:* Given the size of the universe, it is very difficult and nearly impossible to be looking at every single piece of data. It is then important to acknowledge that the findings are not exhaustive of all that occurred online but rather uses a certain methodology to capture and analyze a reasonable amount of data.
- *Ability to assess sentiments:* Even when the monitoring effort is able to assess the reach of certain content, it remains difficult to assess the extent of its impact on users or what type of sentiments or actions it generated.
- *Instant messaging platforms and private groups/channels are often hard to monitor.* Despite efforts to assess and map private messaging platforms it remains a challenge to be aware of all of them or to guarantee access to them.

## Build partnerships

- **Election observers:** Election observation networks often have access to an in-depth knowledge of the political and security contexts with observers deployed in the field. Partnering with other groups can help the organization share information and better coordinate for a better understanding of the situation.
- **Human rights defenders:** Human rights organizations and activists have long experiences in referencing and mapping abuses and violent instances, and have a good understanding of legal frameworks.
- **Women's organizations:** Women's organizations can support an online monitoring effort of electoral violence contributing their expertise in violence against women in politics and in elections online, and can help understand the complexity and variety of forms of violence against women.
- **Groups representing other marginalized populations:** Organizations that represent and defend specific populations, such as people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ communities, racial, ethnic and religious minorities can also offer their expertise and help in understanding the complexity and variety of forms of violence their populations face.

- **Fact checkers / Social media monitors:** Fact checkers generally conduct long-term efforts and are able to provide a better understanding of the online dynamics and how it impacts users. Fact checkers can also be a source to verify information and assess the credibility of sources.
- **Journalists:** Journalists and investigative media collect and analyze sets of data in relation with the topic and are often open to building partnerships with civil society organizations as a credible and independent source. They can also help in providing your group with communication channels for your outreach and public information.
- **Academics:** Academics and researchers can help understand the causes and the impact of electoral violence.
- **Election Management Body:** The EMB is a key player in the electoral process that is often one of the major targets of online attacks, leading in certain cases to calls for violent actions against their offices or staff. Establishing a communication channel with the commission and sharing information will help them better respond to those threats.
- **Conflict Mediators:** In addition to their capacity to use findings from the monitoring effort, mediators have a good understanding of traditional drivers of violence and can provide a better picture of how it impacted the security situation in the past.

## Online violence mitigation:

- Promote social media literacy (being able to recognize credible sources of information)
- Implement user education campaigns
- Advocate for the use of codes of conduct
- Advocate for responsible, transparent, accurate and data driven communication from electoral stakeholders and particularly the EMB
- Engage with social media firms to understand their policies and assess their ability to act, including advocacy for better implementation of firms' terms of service as well as the possibility of groups to flag problematic content and users for removal
- Publish findings and recommendations and engage in regulatory initiatives



# PART V

## RESPONSE MECHANISMS

The primary objective of electoral violence monitoring is to elicit a response from stakeholders who can be trusted to mitigate tensions in a nonpartisan way that respects any potential victims of violence and does not otherwise unduly undermine electoral integrity. For example, while prohibiting campaign rallies from taking place would potentially be an effective means of preventing electoral violence during the campaign period, doing so would have unacceptable negative consequences for the principle of electoral transparency. It is not necessary that actors identified to participate in response mechanisms be electoral integrity activists. Some of the most effective actors may be those who do not traditionally participate in electoral activities.

Response participants should be actors that your organization trusts to uphold human rights and to take actions that will not harm the democratic process. Moreover, it is important for those individuals who may come into contact with victims of electoral violence during the program to not cause additional harm, even inadvertently, by reporting incidents of violence or risks of violence to hostile or dismissive stakeholders. This is especially true given that the secondary objective of electoral violence monitoring is to document verified incidents of violence that do occur, and to assess the effects of violence on the overall credibility of the election. Many election observation networks regularly use good practices to attain this second objective, including through the collection and verification of critical incident reports. However, it is crucial to ensure that in the process of verifying incidents your organization does not cause further harm or trauma to the original victims of the incident.



**IT IS ESSENTIAL  
TO IDENTIFY POTENTIAL  
RESPONSE ACTORS  
AT AN EARLY STAGE  
OF PROGRAM  
IMPLEMENTATION.**

Developing a robust network of response actors and agreeing on effective joint communication protocols is a time-consuming process. It is essential to identify potential response actors at an early stage of program implementation. Input from potential response actors

should be used to inform the sorts of data collection tools, observation strategies and communication protocols that your organization puts into place. You will want to ensure that the information you gather will not only support your own organization's efforts to assess the credibility of the election, but will also enable the response actors to take appropriate mitigating actions. For example, if you hope to work with teams of legal activists to file complaints against electoral security actors for excessive use of force to secure the polls, you may be required to meet certain evidentiary standards so that the case may be brought. Similarly, if you want to partner with local ombudspeople to mediate localized grievances, you may need to be able to provide them with certain background information about where a dispute took place and who was involved. The actors themselves can tell you what sorts of information they will need, so it is important that you consult with them before finalizing your observation tools.

Early consultation and engagement with response actors will also allow you to develop a clear communications strategy or response protocol for your observation effort. Certain kinds of data should be shared with some response actors but not others. However your organization chooses to communicate with response actors, the response protocol and lines of communication should be clearly articulated and agreed upon at an early stage of program design so that you can ensure sufficient headquarters staff to manage centralized communications efficiently and can appropriately train your observers on whether and how to communicate information.

Depending on the type of information and the broader political context, you may want to entrust your local observers to communicate certain information directly to response actors. YIAGA Africa in Nigeria, for example, provides copies of its pre-election observation reports for long-term observers to share with political party leaders, civil society organizations and security forces in the districts where they are deployed to observe. The Electoral Observation Mission (Misión de Observación Electoral — MOE) in Colombia, by contrast, employs a highly centralized communication structure, with the Secretariat taking the lead on external communications both to ensure a coherent message and to protect the identities of individual observers in a context where its members have previously been targeted by violent non-state actors. A third option might include introducing the observation effort, including long term observers, to stakeholders at a central level, and following up with local-level contact between observers and the local structures of the same organizations.

Generally speaking, your organization should be engaging **two distinct types of response actors**. The first type of response actors are **mitigators** or peacebuilders. These are the actors that you will rely on to reduce risks of violence based on early warning signs of electoral violence and to prevent further escalation of violence

based on verified reports of violence that has already taken place. Often, these actors will significantly overlap with the connectors that you identified during your political context analysis. Examples of common mitigators or peacebuilders may include: ombudspople, electoral management bodies, community associations working to promote peace and tolerance, economic or trade associations, and traditional authorities or respected community leaders.

The second type of response actors are **victim support actors**. When we collect data on incidents of electoral violence, it is important not only to consider how best to prevent further violence from occurring, but also to remember that real individuals have experienced instances of victimizations and that we have a duty of care to ensure that they can access appropriate services to address their physical and psychological needs. It is also important to work closely with victim response services in the design of data collection tools and response protocols to ensure that the observation effort does not further exploit, victimize, or traumatize individuals who have recently experienced violence through its attempts to gather verifiable information about what occurred.

Call center operations, observers, or any other members of the program who may be gathering follow-on information from victims of violence must be properly trained to frame conversations with the victims in ways that will be perceived as empowering rather than interrogatory or confrontational. For example, call center operators should be prepared to communicate clearly and respectfully with the victims about how the information the organization is gathering will be used, as well as how the victim's privacy will be protected, and to make clear that the victim is empowered to terminate the conversation, decline to answer questions or to take a break from discussions as needed at any time.

Typical victim support actors may include: mental health professionals; hospitals or clinics; human rights defenders; and local organizations specialized in addressing trauma, such as women's rights organizations with experience supporting victims of sexual harassment or assault. Your response protocol for engaging with these types of actors will likely vary. You will want to have the option of engaging victim support actors as soon as an incident of violence takes place and upon the request of the victimized individual. Your organization does not necessarily need to facilitate direct contact between the victims and the support actors; it may be sufficient to provide victims with information about how to independently access support services should they so choose.

**You should never force or seek to coerce a victim of violence into receiving support.** Rather, you should respect the autonomy of the victim in this decision and be guided by their wishes.

You will also want to engage the response actors that you have identified as mitigators or peacebuilders in a timely manner depending on the nature of the information received. A rapid response is critical if an incident of violence is already confirmed to have taken place, whereas information about early warning signs of and risks of future violence should still be shared in a timely manner but does not necessarily warrant an immediate response. You may also want to partner with victim support actors in developing your protocol with the mitigators to ensure that this aspect of your response is sensitive to gender concerns as well as to the concerns of other historically marginalized groups. For example, you may want to work with local police forces as mitigators so that incidents of violence that violate the law are addressed. In many countries, however, police forces have not received specialized training on how to support victims of sexual assault, and may re-traumatize the victims through invasive examination or questioning practices in their attempts to determine whether a violation of the law has taken place.

If you anticipate, based on your political context analysis, that women are likely to experience gender-based violence during the election cycle, you may want to consult with local women's organizations to determine whether they trust the police to respond to gender-based violence. If the police are not generally trusted, you should identify a different set of mitigators to address any instances of gender-based violence that may be reported to your organization. If, however, there is a sense that police have the potential to play a helpful role, it may be useful to convene a meeting between local women's rights organizations and the police so that the women's rights organizations can share their concerns and best practices around engaging with victims of gender-based violence. Similarly, organizations specialized in the rights of persons living with disabilities may be tapped to sensitize mitigators on how best to address any issues of violence that may particularly affect the communities that they represent. Other organizations will be able to provide guidance on the particular concerns and needs of additional historically marginalized communities that you have identified in your country context.



**YOU SHOULD NEVER  
FORCE OR SEEK TO  
COERCE A VICTIM  
OF VIOLENCE INTO  
RECEIVING SUPPORT.  
RATHER, YOU  
SHOULD RESPECT  
THE AUTONOMY OF  
THE VICTIM IN THIS  
DECISION AND BE  
GUIDED BY THEIR  
WISHES.**

## CASE STUDY: KENYA

### Spreading the word about victim services



In the three months leading up to the 2017 general elections in Kenya, NDI worked with local civil society, including the Elections Observation Group (ELOG), to establish an initiative to mitigate and respond to election violence, with special attention given to violence against women in elections. A number of highly publicized incidents of violence occurred in the pre-election period, and the partners identified a need to share information about services available for victims of violence and women who experienced violence during the election period in particular.

The initiative sought to ensure that candidates, voters, citizen observers, and party agents were aware of existing services and hotlines providing services to victims of violence. The partners carried out a victim service mapping exercise in order to identify organizations providing services related to violence against women and connect those organizations to observers and other groups working in the elections. A number of organizations focused on legal assistance, healthcare, and other types of victims services had established hotlines for reporting instances of violence against women, but did not have national networks through which they could spread the word about these available services. The partners developed a service provider card for observers and citizens that included key hotlines to call for different situations, such as reporting election incidents, receiving health care, or finding legal assistance, then worked with citizen observers, party agents, and women candidates to distribute the victims services cards across the country. The partners distributed an estimated 24,000 cards to observers, parties, and candidates in all 290 constituencies ahead of the election, in addition to sharing digital versions of the cards through WhatsApp groups.

A further best practice is to establish response mechanisms at both national and subnational levels. Some actors, such as the electoral management body, national commissions on human rights, national media oversight bodies, or social media platforms may be best engaged at a national level on the basis of information that has been aggregated across the entire country. However, conflict dynamics and early warning signs of violence and the actors who are best positioned to calm tensions may not be active in all parts of the country.

**Developing effective response mechanisms is extremely time consuming, and requires just as much forethought and preparation as determining how to recruit and train observers.** A suggested timeline for how to plan for response mechanisms is included below:

**Minimum of nine months before election day:** Conduct your political context assessment as well as the mapping exercise of peace and security actors. This exercise is expected to take at least one month to six weeks to complete depending on the methodology you use. Key informant interviews can be divided across members of the organization and take less time to prepare and conduct. If you wish to supplement the findings of your key informant interviews with focus groups or a representative survey, more time should be allotted. A representative survey is the most time-consuming means of information-gathering, as you will need time to contract with an external firm specialized in public opinion research if this is not an activity that your organization already routinely undertakes. You should plan to work closely with the firm on the design of the survey to make sure that it will capture information that is valuable to you, and you will also need to allow time for the firm to aggregate and analyze the survey results.

**Minimum of eight months before election day:** Hold follow-up meetings with potential response actors identified through the political context assessment and stakeholder mapping exercises. Plan to share information about your organization and explain why you are undertaking election observation with a particular focus on electoral violence as well as provide an overview of your planned observation methodology. Ask about the identified actors' willingness to coordinate and find out how they would need information to be shared and packaged so that they can take action. Sample questions to pose include:

- Are they able to act on the basis of a pre-election observation report? Does their organization have the bandwidth to read longer reports or do they prefer one-page executive summaries with recommendations or some other format? Would they prefer one on one briefings with a member of your organization and, if so, how frequently?
- Can they identify a focal point for immediate contact in the event of certain critical incidents?
- What indicators do they suggest that it will be important for your organization to monitor?
- Will they be collecting any complementary information about the electoral or security environment that your observers may not be able to directly assess and could that information be shared with you?

Based on these follow-on conversations, identify potential gaps in the response mechanism and work to pinpoint additional actors to engage that may not have surfaced in the initial political context assessment. **Snowballing** can be a helpful technique for finding additional response actors. Plan to ask every actor you meet to recommend additional actors that they think could play a helpful role either to mitigate tensions or provide victim services based on their understanding of your project. In this way, like a snowball that gathers more snow as it rolls downhill, you can identify more potential partners with each meeting that you take.

**Minimum of seven months before election day:** Finalize your observation methodology as well as plans for observer recruitment and deployment. Develop a draft of your observation tools and response protocol to circulate with potential response actors for feedback. At this stage, it is a good practice to convene a joint meeting or meetings with the mitigators and the victim support actors to review the response protocol together and ensure that the finalized protocol is sensitive to the concerns of likely victims, including members of historically marginalized communities.

## RESPONSE MECHANISM EXAMPLES

Elections Held During Active Conflict or in the Context of a Formally Negotiated Peace Agreement

Observation Of...	Potential Response Actors					
Peace Process Implementation	→	Official Enforcement Mechanisms (United Nations, monitoring committees, transitional governments, regional bodies)				
Political Party Codes of Conduct	→	Platforms for Inter-Party Dialogue	Internal Party Monitoring Structures	Electoral Management Body	Electoral Justice Mechanisms	
Spoiler Groups	→	Official Enforcement Mechanisms (United Nations, monitoring committees, transitional governments, regional bodies)		Platforms for Inter-Party Dialogue	Transitional Authorities	
Marginalized Populations	→	Human Rights Commission	Local Leaders in Affected Communities	Electoral Management Body	Victim Support Services	Ombudspersons or Mediators

# RESPONSE MECHANISM EXAMPLES

Violence Perpetrated by Actors Contesting the Elections

Observation Of...	Potential Response Actors					
Longitudinal Indicators / Trends	➔	Will depend on specific indicators				
Abuse of State Resources / Vote Buying	➔	Parliament -Statutory Oversight Institutions	Local-Level “Connectors”	Electoral Management Body	Electoral Justice Mechanisms	Legal Advocates
Focus on Voter Registration	➔	Electoral Management Body	Electoral Justice Mechanisms	Platforms for Inter-Party Dialogue	Legal Advocates	Civic Activists
Marginalized Populations	➔	Human Rights Commission	Local Leaders in Affected Communities	Electoral Management Body	Victim Support Services	Ombudspeople or Mediators

# RESPONSE MECHANISM EXAMPLES

Violence Perpetrated by Actors Outside the Formal Political Process

Observation Of...	Potential Response Actors				
Campaign Finance	➔	Electoral Management Body	Electoral Justice Mechanisms	Civic activists / Media	Platforms for Inter-Party Dialogue
Vote Buying	➔	Local-level “connectors”	Electoral Justice Mechanisms	Legal Advocates	Platforms for Inter-Party Dialogue
Community Collusion	➔	Civic activists	Local-level human rights organizations		NOTE: Communication with ANY response actors is sensitive under Type 4 due to high risks of retaliation by the individuals your observation may expose. It is important to weigh whether information should be made public or communicated only to select stakeholders.
Political Ties (In direct observation or investigation)	➔	Civic activists / Media	Voters	State security actors	



# RESPONSE MECHANISM EXAMPLES

## Post-Election Violence

Observation Of...	Potential Response Actors					
Legal Framework (Protests)	→	Legislative Bodies	Legal Advocates			
Electoral Claims and Disputes	→	Electoral Justice Mechanisms	Electoral Management Body	Legislative Body or Committees	Legal Advocates	Platforms for Inter-Party Dialogue
Longitudinal Indicators / Trends	→	Will depend on specific indicators	NOTE: If you are monitoring likely protest dynamics, you will need to carefully weigh the decision to share information with state actors.			
Marginalized Populations	→	Human Rights Commission	Local Leaders in Affected Communities	Electoral Management Body	Victim Support Services	Ombudspersons or Mediators

Once you have identified appropriate response actors and the actions they may take to mitigate risks of violence, it is important to establish a system for how information that triggers such a response will be collected, communicated to the actors, and how response effectiveness will be monitored. Carrying out all steps of this process may not always be possible for citizen election observer groups, but such planning can help to identify coordination mechanisms and establish roles and responsibilities within the response network. The table below provides an example of how data collection, communication, responses, and ongoing monitoring can be interconnected and coordinated.

**LONG TERM OBSERVATION OF THE PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT**

Indicator	Data Source	Method and Frequency	Response Actor	Response Action	Follow-On Monitoring	Monitoring Source
In the past month, has anyone offered you a tangible incentive (money, job, rice, etc.) in exchange for voting?	Survey question	Nationally random representative survey conducted one time per month	Inter-Party Forum	Monthly briefing on pre-election findings	Are any actions taken by the Inter-Party Forum to deter the buying of votes?	Media reports, informal consultations
			Community leaders in regions of the country with high percentages of “yes” responses	LTOs hold monthly meetings with community leaders to discuss trends	Do community leaders conduct awareness raising activities to prevent vote buying?	LTO reports
Ritualistic attacks on albinos	Critical incident report	As they occur	Health services (Physical / Psychosocial)	Victims receive prompt treatment	Did victims receive needed support?	Call center operators (follow-up calls)
			Human Rights Monitors	Raise awareness of need to protect minority rights	Do attacks continue to occur?	LTO reports

# PART VI

## COMMUNICATING FINDINGS USING A CONFLICT-SENSITIVE APPROACH

Citizen election observers monitor instances and early warning signs for electoral violence to seek to prevent violence from breaking out, to advocate for change in political practices that can instigate violence, or to mitigate instances of violence when they happen. If our goal is to generate change, we must reach audiences that are capable of making that change happen, whether they be legislators, political parties, other civil society organizations, local leaders, or the general public. Those in power often have strong incentives to mask involvement in instigating electoral violence. Only with a strong communications strategy will we be able to have our messages break through and reach the stakeholders who need to hear them to make change happen.

Every communications strategy needs a clearly defined **goal**; **target audience**; **strategies** and **tactics**; and **targeted messages** as well as a **communications frame**. There may be more than one necessary target audience if more than one group of people may help to achieve the communications objective. Strategies and tactics help to determine the most effective ways to reach a target audience and what specific actions should be taken. A communications frame and targeted message are used to determine how to adapt key messages so that they will resonate with individual target audiences the most. Timing is a key consideration in any communications strategy, and advanced planning can help your organization prepare ahead of time to release external communications when they will be most impactful. For more information on developing a comprehensive external communications strategy, please see *Raising Voices in Closing Spaces: Strategic Communications for Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observer Groups*.<sup>[48]</sup>

You will need a dedicated communications protocol to share information with response actors who have been identified because of their potential to take helpful mitigating actions if early warning signs suggest that violence is likely. You will also need a second communications protocol that is focused on incidents of violence and

---

<sup>[48]</sup> [raiseavoice.net](http://raiseavoice.net)

can connect victims of the violence with appropriate support services. Groups may consider using pre-election communications to gradually raise awareness about risks of violence and their impact on the overall election environment and inclusivity of the process. In some cases, groups may advocate for the presence of international observers to support de-escalating tensions around the election.

Depending on the context in your country, you may wish to centralize all external communications at the headquarters level to protect the identities of your observers, which will require very robust central communications staffing. In many cases, observer groups are subject to threats or attempts to discredit their work, particularly in highly polarized political contexts. In these types of situations, and when there are a high number of incidents occurring, centralized communication is essential to manage consistent messaging and ensure the safety of all members of the network.

In some less sensitive contexts, you may wish to empower members of the observation structure at a more local level, such as coordinators, to handle some aspects of communication around the project, like sharing findings with local stakeholders. Because communications around electoral violence are extremely sensitive, you should always plan for a dedicated training model on communications with your election observers. Even if you do not wish for them to play an active role in external communications, they should receive talking points on how to describe the project and how to appropriately interface with potential victims of violence since it is generally a good practice for your organization to gather additional follow-on information around any of the incidents reported. When observers are not able to describe their activities in a particular community in a way that is reassuring or precise, they often face increased risks of harassment or legal action.

When determining a communications strategy for an electoral violence monitoring initiative, groups must carefully assess risks to ensure that the group can mitigate any potential negative impacts of public communications on individuals or the electoral environment. Risks and potential mitigation strategies may include:

## Exposure of lived trauma for survivors of electoral violence

**RISK:** By elevating incidents of electoral violence on a public stage, those who directly experienced or witnessed the violence may be forced to relive it, either through personally recounting their stories, or through hearing and seeing them replayed in the media over time.

**MITIGATION STRATEGIES:** Any communications planning should include not only an open conversation and process of **informed consent for those who have shared their stories**, but **also taking steps to ensure these individuals have access to necessary psychological support services** wherever possible. Survivors of violence should be part of a discussion on what the expected public response to the reports may be, developing an individual risk mitigation plan, and ensuring a common understanding that campaigns for accountability may be a very long process.

## Reprisals targeting perpetrators or those who report

**RISK:** Any campaign for accountability, by exposing instances of violence, poses a risk of reprisal or reactions from the broader public. These may include attempted violence towards accused perpetrators, or targeting those who report violence, which could devolve into more generalized violence. In cases where the accused perpetrators hold significant power, such as when reports of violence implicate political figures or security services, risks may be elevated. These risks also include reputational risks for the observer organization and physical or psychological risks for staff or observers.

**MITIGATION STRATEGIES:** Risk mitigation plans should include a plan for protection for those who report instances of violence, which should include physical security. If the report implicates government officials or security services, formal state structures for protection may not be available or appropriate for seeking support. In these cases, if those who are involved decide they want to move forward with the report, a protection plan may include discussing how to disguise the reporter's identity, and whether they need to do so from outside a particular city or even outside the country, among other concerns. This should include risk planning for the observer organization and staff as well.

Risk mitigation planning should also consider a potential broader public reaction to the report. Messaging about instances of violence should be values-based, rather than targeting individuals or groups of people. In many cases violence can be exacerbated by "othering", or creating psychological distance based on group identities, and it is important to avoid any perceptions to this effect.

Groups will always have to confront a core tension between accountability, potential risks of additional violence, and exposure to trauma. Through thorough scenario planning, groups can have a plan in place to activate in moments of crisis. Often, when a serious incident of violence occurs, tensions are high and it can be more difficult to anticipate risks and mitigate them in a calm and calculated manner. Advance planning can help to anticipate different types of risks, have a protection protocol in place, and establish procedures for what to communicate and when.

# PART VII

## INTEGRATING PERSPECTIVES OF MARGINALIZED AND UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS

**A**s highlighted throughout this guide, election violence often has the greatest impacts on marginalized and underrepresented populations, including women in all population groups. Violence can compound pre-existing inequalities and structural barriers to power for those who have been historically excluded from political decision-making and representation. To ensure that electoral violence monitoring, mitigation, and response programming responds to the needs of marginalized communities and seeks to change rather than perpetuate inequalities, it is essential to actively integrate the perspectives of these communities at every stage of designing and implementing a monitoring initiative, and to as well as embracing gender parity. Approaches to monitoring electoral violence should acknowledge the disparate impacts violence can have on different populations within society, engage and empower them to mitigate and demand accountability for the violence they experience. Measures to ensure inclusive programming may include:

- **Recruiting staff and observers who identify as members of marginalized communities**, including women from all population groups, can help to minimize blind spots in program design and implementation.
- **Evaluating the political context from a broad range of perspectives**, including through internal political context analysis for your organization, and by engaging external actors through key informant interviews or surveys. Political context analysis should also consider overlapping identity factors from an intersectional perspective. For more information, please see *Getting Started: Conducting a Political Context Analysis*.
- **Building partnerships with experts and consistently seeking out their perspectives** can ensure that the program's approach is responsive to the actual challenges faced by marginalized populations, especially as forms of marginalization may change over time. This will include coordinating

response efforts with experts and groups who are specifically focused on effectively addressing the challenges experienced by a particular community or marginalized community. For more information on facilitation and interview techniques that promote inclusion, please see **Inclusive Responsive Facilitation** at the end of this section. .

- **Integrating sensitive and responsive approaches and indicators** will help to collect accurate data and ensure the program maintains its Do No Harm approach. This may involve utilizing increased security protocols or more intensive data collection approaches, such as individual interviews as opposed to focus groups or surveys.
- **Ensuring data collection approaches are linguistically inclusive and accessible to those who do not read and write** is essential for ensuring full and accurate analysis. Public reporting mechanisms for early warning signs or incidents of violence, such as hotlines, should have operators who speak multiple languages to be able to collect information from callers. If literacy rates are low in an area where a survey will be carried out, the organization should consider in-person or phone interview approaches, and observers or research teams deployed to a particular region or locality should always speak the necessary languages to operate in that area or operate with interpreters.
- **Prioritizing inclusion and conflict sensitivity training for staff and observers** will help to ensure that everyone involved in the project uses a consistent inclusion approach and understands the importance the organization places on the issue throughout the project.



# >>> INCLUSIVE RESPONSIVE FACILITATION

## CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS, IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS, OR OTHER FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING WITH CITIZENS, REQUIRES FACILITATORS TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS.

An effective facilitator must show respect to the participants and command respect for themselves. To create an environment in which all participants or respondents feel comfortable sharing their perspectives, it is important to acknowledge the unique experiences of each individual. Some participants or respondents may be more comfortable participating in an interview or reporting an incident individually. Others may be comfortable in groups, but certain other individuals may make them uncomfortable to speak up. It is critical that facilitators analyze power dynamics within potential focus groups or group discussions and consider creating groups disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or any other important identifying criteria in the given context, if this may make some participants more comfortable actively participating.

## GENDER-SENSITIVE FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

In most societies, people of different genders have different roles, responsibilities, and authority in decision-making processes. As a facilitator, it is important to take these different roles and interests into consideration when designing and conducting your activities. Remember that a trainer can be gender-sensitive without ever discussing gender. Some suggested strategies follow:

- Create a welcoming environment where participants feel comfortable expressing, listening to and learning from one another's experiences and views. This means redirecting discussions away from insults, blaming, misunderstandings and stereotypes towards facts, views and values. Ensure that people of all genders, including both women and men as well as non-binary people, listen to and respect one another.
- Consult people of all genders about their objectives and expectations for the discussion.
- Give examples that reflect the experiences of both women and men.

## >>> INCLUSIVE RESPONSIVE FACILITATION

- Women are often less confident about voicing opinions when compared to male counter-parts. You may wish to encourage women to share by asking questions such as, “Could we hear a woman’s perspective on this issue?” or by directing questions to particular women participants.
- Validate women’s experience by encouraging them to speak as subject-matter experts in the room on topics such as violence against women in politics, women’s electoral participation or the experience of women as election observers.
- If you are facilitating a session that requests that women share their experiences of violence it is important that this is done in a safe and responsive environment. Facilitators should be well versed in working with victims of gender based violence, otherwise facilitators are encouraged to have experts in the room to be responsive to the needs of participants. Facilitators should understand that other participants may be triggered by the experiences of others and too may need psycho-social support. While your organization may not be in the best position to provide these services, it is important to engage with those organizations that do so that we don’t encourage individuals to relive their experiences and trauma without being able to provide and/or direct women to support, if they desire.

# PART VIII

## SAFETY AND SECURITY PLANNING FOR ELECTION VIOLENCE MONITORING

Ensuring safety and security is paramount in any election violence observation initiative. Electoral violence monitoring can elevate the profile of the organization and of individual observers, increasing operational and security risks. Election observers must maintain their real and perceived personal and organizational security in order to continue to carry out their work, and planning to protect the safety of those who report incidents, share information through focus groups or surveys, and those who speak on behalf of the organization or otherwise interact with the program is crucial to ensuring a Do No Harm approach and to building trust relationships with communities. NDI's guide *Monitoring and Mitigating Electoral Violence Through Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observation*<sup>[49]</sup> provides overall guidance on observer security for an electoral violence monitoring initiative, including guidance on building relationships with stakeholders who can assist with ensuring observer and staff security, developing a security plan, improving internal communications, conducting training, and disseminating information about the project. The methodologies and types of electoral violence observation highlighted in the present guide merit additional security considerations, which are highlighted below.

### Decisions on whether to observe

The security of observers, those who report incidents, share information through focus groups or surveys, speakers and those who speak on behalf of the organization should be the top priority in any violence monitoring effort. Deciding whether your organization can establish sufficient security protocols to allow for observation in a particular geographic area or during a certain aspect of the electoral process can be one of the most difficult aspects of planning for an observation, especially given external pressures and the overall desire to communicate full, accurate information on the process to the broader public. However, if security and scenario planning

---

<sup>[49]</sup> [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/conflictguide\\_sec6\\_observersecurity\\_en\\_o.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/conflictguide_sec6_observersecurity_en_o.pdf)

reveal that observation carries too many risks to observers, the organization, or members of the community, this assessment in and of itself can be an important proxy indicator of electoral integrity. Security risks to observers are likely to indicate broader concerns for the inclusivity, transparency, and accessibility of the electoral process in a given area or at a particular time, and this assessment can be important to communicate to the public.

## **Security planning for interviews, focus group discussions, and incident reporting**

As noted in *Communicating Findings Using a Conflict Sensitive Approach*, observer groups will need to conduct detailed risk assessments and security planning for potential downstream impacts of publicly sharing information about incidents or early warning signs reported by observers. In addition, collecting that data in the first place also carries with it inherent risks. Those who use violence in all of its forms to influence the electoral process have incentives to keep that information private, and thus the process of uncovering evidence of such manipulation can be risky. Observers are not investigators and should not attempt to play this role. An observer's duty is to collect information, but an observer should never put themselves at undue risk to do so.

When interviewing victims of electoral violence or other sources, observing at electoral process events, or carrying out other monitoring activities, observers should always communicate their plans to a family member, friend, supervisors, or another member of the observer network. Organizations may decide to use a smartphone application with a "panic button" that observers can use in case of an emergency. Depending on the level of risk, observers may conduct their activities, including interview, in pairs and travel with a driver or colleague who can alert an emergency contact if needed. As discussed in other sections of this guide, in some cases, security forces can be a neutral actor who can provide protection to observers and others who engage with the monitoring effort. However, in other contexts, security forces may be engaged, indirectly or directly, in acts of electoral violence, and contacting them for support may in fact elevate levels of risk. Groups should conduct a comprehensive analysis of the most appropriate actors who can provide protection when designing their safety and security plan.

## Data security and storage

If observer reports will be written up and saved on a device such as a computer, smartphone, or tablet, this information should be stored securely and password protected. It may be best to centralize such information on “the cloud” rather than storing it on individual devices, which can be subject to loss, confiscation or hacking. This applies for both information collected by individual observers, and aggregated reports analyzed and stored by the secretariat of the organization. Observer reporting can use an alphanumeric encrypted format to avoid any data leaks. If observers are using paper forms to collect incident reports or regular data collection, these too must be stored in a secure manner and destroyed when no longer needed.

When considering options for storing data, groups should consider that the best practice is anonymizing the information stored in databases by removing all personally identifiable information — such as names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, physical descriptions of individuals, employment information, or any other details that may allow someone who accesses the data to link a report with an individual — for observers, victims or witnesses who report incidents, survey respondents, or others associated with the project. In some countries, observation groups have had their offices searched or investigatory commissions have called on groups to turn over personal information of those who reported violations of electoral law. Political context analysis and examination of the legal framework governing data privacy and election observation can help observer groups to assess risks and make an appropriate security plan.

## Communicating safely

As a part of a broader communications and security protocol, choosing communication platforms wisely can help to ensure that communications within the observer network and with individuals who report incidents reach only their intended recipient and protect the identity of all parties involved. When communicating via instant messaging platforms, use trusted peer-to-peer messaging tools that allow for fully encrypted communications, limiting the ability of a third party to read or listen to the messages. Observers should evaluate the communication methods they use periodically, as tools evolve quickly. In addition, observers should use a secure internet connection whenever possible, and limit communicating personal information when using open connections.

# CONCLUSION

Citizen election observers are uniquely placed to analyze the intricacies of the local political and security context in a given election in order to understand risks of violence and assess capacities for resilience to those risks. Observers can utilize their existing networks to conduct comprehensive and detailed assessments of key issues related to the context-specific early warning signs of electoral violence that they identify. Observers can utilize specific monitoring methodologies appropriate for the context and the early warning signs they have identified, and ensure these methodologies allow for full participation and integrate the perspectives of marginalized communities. Based on their political context analysis, observers can also identify appropriate response mechanisms and the actors who can play a role in carrying out those responses. Moreover, citizen observers can build on their existing relationships with key political stakeholders to highlight potentials for election violence early on in the electoral process, mobilizing public opinion and identifying response mechanisms to mitigate risks of violence before incidents take place. This guide seeks to provide citizen election observers with the tools and information they need to play these roles.

However, citizen election observers alone cannot deter all election violence or respond to incidents when they do take place. Activating appropriate response mechanisms — and ensuring those responses are effective in mitigating risks or impacts of electoral violence — requires the engagement and mobilization of an entire ecosystem of election stakeholders. While citizen observers can be a core component of this ecosystem, their work must be complemented and amplified by contributions from political leaders, electoral institutions, security actors, other civil society groups and movements, and the international community.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SELECTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## NDI Guidance Materials Referenced in this Guide

Brothers, Julia. *Disinformation and Electoral Integrity: A Guidance Document for NDI Election Programs*. National Democratic Institute, 2019.

<https://www.ndi.org/publications/disinformation-and-electoral-integrity-guidance-document-ndi-elections-programs>.

Brown, Michelle, Elana Kreiger-Benson, Michael McNulty, and Samantha Moog. *Unleashing the Potential of Election Data*. National Democratic Institute.

<https://openelectiondata.net/en/guide/>.

Estock, Melissa, Neil Nevitte and Glenn Cowan. *The Quick Count and Election Observation*. National Democratic Institute, 2002.

<https://www.ndi.org/node/24021>.

Grace, Laura. *How Citizen Observers Can Monitor Abuse of State Resources in Elections*. National Democratic Institute, 2022.

<https://www.ndi.org/publications/how-citizen-organizations-can-monitor-abuse-states-resources-elections-ndi-guidance>.

Klein, Richard L. and Patrick Merloe. *Building Confidence in the Voter Registration Process*. National Democratic Institute, 2001.

[https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/1322\\_elect\\_voterregis2001\\_o.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/1322_elect_voterregis2001_o.pdf).

Merloe, Patrick. *Promoting Legal Frameworks for Democratic Elections*. National Democratic Institute, 2008.

<https://www.ndi.org/publications/promoting-legal-frameworks-democratic-elections>.

Norris, Robert and Patrick Merloe. *Media Monitoring to Promote Democratic Elections*. National Democratic Institute, 2002.

<https://www.ndi.org/publications/media-monitoring-promote-democratic-elections-ndi-handbook-citizen-organizations>.

Stovall, Francoise. *Raising Voices in Closing Spaces*. National Democratic Institute, 2019. <https://www.raiseavoice.net/>.

## Bibliography

- Abrams, Amanda. "International Election Fraud Alerts May Spark Violence." *United States Institute of Peace*. March 16, 2016.  
<https://www.usip.org/publications/2016/03/international-election-fraud-alerts-may-spark-violence>
- Beaulieu, Emily. *Electoral Protests and Democracy in the Developing World*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Bekoe, Dorina. *Voting in Fear: Electoral Violence in sub-Saharan Africa*. USIP, 2012.
- Birch, Sarah, et al. "Electoral violence: An introduction." *Journal of Peace Research*. 57. (2020): 3–14.  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022343319889657>
- Birch, Sarah. *Electoral Violence, Corruption, and Political Order* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2020)  
<https://press.princeton.edu/books/ebook/9780691203645/electoral-violence-corruption-and-political-order>
- Birch, Sarah and David Muchlinski. "Electoral violence prevention: what works?" *Democratization*. Spring 2017): 385–403.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13510347.2017.1365841>
- Birch, Sarah and David Muchlinski. "The Dataset of Countries at Risk of Electoral Violence." *Terrorism and Political Violence*. 32 no. 2. (Fall 2017).  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1364636>
- Borzyskowski, Inken von. "Preventing Election Violence in Liberia." *United States Institute of Peace*. (Fall 2017).  
<https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/09/preventing-election-violence-liberia>
- Brosché, Johan et al. "Electoral violence and the legacy of authoritarian rule in Kenya and Zambia." *Journal of Peace Research*. 57. (2020): 111–125.  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022343319884983>
- Burchard, Stepanie. *Electoral Violence in sub-Saharan Africa: Causes and Consequences*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2015.
- Daxeke, Ursula. "All quiet on election day? International election observation and incentives for pre-election violence in African elections." *Electoral Studies*. 34. (2014): 232–243.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2013.11.006>
- Daxeke, Ursula. "Electoral contention and violence (ECAV): A New Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research*. 56. (2019): 714–723.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343318823870>



- Daxeke, Ursula. "Unequal votes, unequal violence: Malapportionment and election violence in India." *Journal of Peace Research*. 47. (2020): 156–170.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319884985>
- Fischer, Jeff. "Electoral Violence Prevention Social Enforcement of Electoral Security." *Creative Associates*. (2019).  
[https://www.academia.edu/105550594/Electoral\\_Violence\\_Prevention\\_Social\\_Enforcement\\_of\\_Electoral\\_Security?source=swp\\_share](https://www.academia.edu/105550594/Electoral_Violence_Prevention_Social_Enforcement_of_Electoral_Security?source=swp_share)
- Gambetta, Diego. *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection*. The Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Garber, Larry. "Violence Prevention Through Election Observation." *United States Institute of Peace*. No. 165. (Summer 2020).  
[https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/20200824-pw\\_165-violence\\_prevention\\_through\\_election\\_observation-pw.pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/20200824-pw_165-violence_prevention_through_election_observation-pw.pdf)
- Harish, SP and Andrew Little. "The Political Violence Cycle." *American Political Science Review*. 111 no. 2 (2017): 237–255.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000733>
- Iff, Andrea. "Ballots or Bullets: Potentials and Limitations of Elections in Conflict Contexts." *Swisspeace*. (2010)  
[https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/134656/Conference\\_Paper\\_2010.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/134656/Conference_Paper_2010.pdf)
- Jonas Caes, "Keeping Elections Peaceful Ahead of the Crises." *United States Institute of Peace*.  
<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2017-02/Electing-Peace-Summary-Findings-Preventing-Electoral-Violence.pdf>
- Kraus, Jana. "Restrained or constrained? Elections, communal conflicts, and variation in sexual violence." *Journal of Peace Research*. 57. (2020): 185–198.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319891763>
- Krook, Mona and Juliana Restrepo. "Gender and Political Violence in Latin America: Concepts, Debates and Solutions." *Política y Gobierno*. 23. (Winter 2016): 127–162.  
[http://mlkrook.org/pdf/pyg\\_2016.pdf](http://mlkrook.org/pdf/pyg_2016.pdf)
- Lyons, Terrence. *Demilitarizing Politics: Elections on the Uncertain Road to Peace*. Lynn Rienner Publishing, 2005.
- Norris, Pippa. "Why Lack of Integrity Triggers Electoral Violence." *American Political Science Association 2013 Annual Meeting*. (Summer 2013).  
[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2301339](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2301339)
- Ouedraogo, Rasmane and Idrissa Ouadrego. "Gender Equality and Electoral Violence in Africa: Unlocking the Peacemaking Potential of Women." *IMF*. (Summer 2019).  
<https://doi.org/10.5089/9781513510545.001>

- Ruiz-Rufino, Ruben and Sarah Binder. "The effect of alternation in power on electoral intimidation in democratizing regimes." *Journal of Peace Research*. (2020): 126–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319885171>
- Taylor, Charles. "Shared Security, Shared Elections." *American Friends Service Committee*. (Summer 2018). <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Electoral-violence-report-web-version.pdf>
- Taylor, Steven. *Violence Amid Violence: Electoral Democracy in Columbia*. University Press of New England, 2009.
- Trelles, Aljeandro and Miguel Carreras. "Bullets and Votes: Violence and electoral Participation in Mexico." *Journal of Politics in Latin America*. (Summer 2012). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X1200400204>
- Trejo, Guillermo and Sarah Ley. *Votes, Drugs, and Violence: The Political Logic of Criminal War in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press, 2020
- Yang, Xing et al. "Monitoring Electoral Violence through Social Media: A Machine Learning Approach." *International Conference on Computational Social Science*. (Summer 2016). <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/120312/1/120312.pdf>
- Yang, Xing et al. "Using Word Embeddings in a Twitter Election Classification." *Cornell*. (Summer 2016). <https://arxiv.org/abs/1606.07006>