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# **ELECTORAL VIOLENCE MITIGATION TOOLKIT: EVIDENCE FROM SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

JULY 2022

Electoral Violence Mitigation Toolkit: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Electoral violence is a fundamental challenge to democratic processes, particularly in countries where political institutions are fragile and lack legitimacy. For years, academics have studied electoral violence to better understand its triggers, patterns, and consequences. Yet, only in the last decade has attention turned to electoral violence mitigation.

With an emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa, this toolkit is the International Republican Institute's (IRI) contribution to the burgeoning literature on electoral violence mitigation. Drawing from scholarly literature and IRI's programmatic experience, the toolkit provides an overview of electoral violence interventions frequently employed by international development organizations. It classifies these interventions as part of six broad theories: (i) pacts and pledges; (ii) social and norm-changing behaviors; (iii) contact hypothesis; (iv) deterrence theory; (v) informational interventions; and (vi) network and collaboration theories. The toolkit presents the underlying logic and key assumptions for each of these theories, outlines evidence on their effectiveness, and offers some key considerations for intervention design, especially around engaging key political actors and groups.

### Introduction

Democracy often makes societies more peaceful by institutionalizing non-violent means to contest political power.<sup>1</sup> Regular elections can enable peaceful political transitions, replacing 'bullets' with 'ballots.' However, when elections become the central means to contest political power, they can also present an opportune moment to use political violence. During an election cycle, the likelihood of violence increases as candidates compete and, in some cases, as incumbents manipulate the process to remain in power. This is particularly true where both the ruling and opposition parties view elections as a zero-sum contest. Elections can, thus, trigger violent events leading to thousands of people dead and displaced around the world each year.<sup>2</sup> Beyond that grim toll, electoral violence can undermine people's confidence in the outcome of the vote, feeding disillusionment with the democratic process. This relationship is not linear: lack of confidence in the vote can trigger violence just as violence can undermine confidence in the vote.

Electoral violence is conceptually different from violence that simply occurs during the election cycle. Borrowing from the definition provided by Birch, et al., electoral violence is a coercive force directed towards electoral actors and institutions with the specific intent to sway election outcomes.<sup>3</sup> The key elements of electoral violence entail a politically motivated action<sup>4</sup> that involves coercion (violent and/or non-violent) directed against people, property and institutions.<sup>5</sup> Such violence can occur before, during, and after elections.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bayer, Reşat. "Peaceful transitions and democracy." *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 5 (2010): 535-546.

<sup>2</sup> Dunning, Thad. "Fighting and voting: Violent conflict and electoral politics." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 3 (2011): 327-339.

<sup>3</sup> Birch, Sarah, Ursula Daxecker, and Kristine Höglund. "Electoral violence: An introduction." *Journal of Peace Research* 57, no. 1 (2020): 3-14.

<sup>4</sup> Höglund, Kristine. "Electoral violence in conflict-ridden societies: Concepts, causes, and consequences." *Terrorism and political violence* 21, no. 3 (2009): 412-427.

<sup>5</sup> Bekoe, Dorina Akosua Oduraa. "Voting in fear: electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa." (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Salehyan, Idean, and Christopher Linebarger. "Elections and social conflict in Africa, 1990-2009." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 50, no. 1 (2015): 23-49.

Some of the most vulnerable phases include outbreaks of violence at the announcement of elections<sup>7</sup>, party primaries<sup>8</sup> and voter registration.<sup>9</sup> Post-election violence is also a profound challenge, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa and in Asia, where disagreement over the outcome of elections has caused both selective and indiscriminate violence.<sup>10</sup>

The Countries at Risk of Election Violence (CREV)<sup>11</sup> data estimates that 78 percent of elections are violent in countries seen as vulnerable to electoral violence.<sup>12</sup> Another dataset, Electoral Contention and Violence (ECAV)<sup>13</sup>, highlights threats and coercion as the most common forms of violence (91.64 percent), followed by assaults and attacks (89.91 percent).<sup>14</sup> Yet another study of electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa between 1990 and 2014 found that nine percent of elections experienced 'widespread violence', 11 percent saw instances of 'repression' and 37 percent of the elections experienced 'harassment'.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond these sobering statistics and the direct effects of electoral violence on voters and candidates, electoral violence also decreases electoral participation<sup>16</sup>, reignites latent social tensions<sup>17</sup> and constrains political awareness among the electorate. Violence around elections therefore inflicts searing consequences on the practice of democracy.

While preventing and mitigating electoral violence is essential to sustaining and expanding democracy, the array of tools and approaches available to democracy and governance practitioners are generally focused on grassroots and local actors. For example, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has developed an election tool focused on civil society and domestic observers to deter violence during voting and before results are released. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has an electoral integrity assessment tool to help election management bodies (EMBs) combat systematic manipulation, malpractice and fraud.<sup>18</sup> Search for Common Ground employs a "people-to-people" approach that brings together representatives of conflicting groups at the grassroots level to talk in a safe space.<sup>19</sup> Other electoral violence prevention programming focuses mainly on

<sup>7</sup> Söderberg Kovacs, Mimmi, and Jesper Bjarnesen. "Violence in African elections: Between democracy and Big Man politics." (2018).

<sup>8</sup> Wanyama, Fredrick O., and Jørgen Elklit. "Electoral violence during party primaries in Kenya." *Democratization* 25, no. 6 (2018): 1016-1032.

<sup>9</sup> Seeberg, Merete Bech, Michael Wahman, and Svend-Erik Skaaning. "Candidate nomination, intra-party democracy, and election violence in Africa." *Democratization* 25, no. 6 (2018): 959-977.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, Charles Fernandes, Jon CW Pevehouse, and Scott Straus. "Perils of pluralism: Electoral violence and incumbency in sub-Saharan Africa." *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 3 (2017): 397-411.

<sup>11</sup> Birch, Sarah, and David Muchlinski. "The dataset of countries at risk of electoral violence." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32, no. 2 (2020): 217-236.

<sup>12</sup> Birch, Sarah, and David Muchlinski. "Electoral violence: Patterns and trends." *Electoral Integrity and Political Regimes: Actors, Strategies and Consequences* (2017): 100-112.

<sup>13</sup> The dataset can be accessed at: <https://ecavdata.org/>

<sup>14</sup> Daxecker, Ursula, Elio Amicarelli, and Alexander Jung. "Electoral contention and violence (ECAV): A new dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 5 (2019): 714-723.

<sup>15</sup> Burchard, Stephanie M. *Electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa: Causes and consequences*. FirstForumPress, A Division of Lynne Rienner Publishers, Incorporated, 2015. For other statistics, please refer to the National Elections Across Democracies and Autocracies (NELDA) dataset, which mentions that there was significant violence, involving civilian deaths, in 19.23% of elections globally. Another study found that "10 per cent of elections in Africa during the 1990-2008 period were affected by 'widespread' violence, 10 per cent witnessed 'repressive violence' and a further 38 per cent experienced 'violent harassment'".

<sup>16</sup> Fjelde, Hanne, and Kristine Höglund. "Electoral institutions and electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa." *British Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 2 (2016): 297-320.

<sup>17</sup> Brancati, Dawn, and Jack L. Snyder. "Time to kill: The impact of election timing on postconflict stability." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57, no. 5 (2013): 822-853.

<sup>18</sup> For more details on the tool, please refer to <https://www.ifes.org/issues/electoral-integrity-assessments>

<sup>19</sup> For an overview of the core principles of Search for Common Ground, please read: <https://www.sfcg.org/core-principles/>



civic education and peace messaging to encourage citizens to participate in the elections peacefully and deter them from turning violent to resolve political disputes.

These tools offer valuable insights into the risks and vulnerabilities associated with electoral violence, but they do not focus on engagement of key political elites and political parties, who have significant influence over the electoral process and are often the main perpetrators and/or targets of electoral violence. Much of the democracy and governance sector's electoral violence prevention work targets voters and citizens more than political actors and institutions.

IRI seeks to address this gap by developing and sharing a toolkit that interrogates and surveys evidence on existing approaches to mitigate electoral violence. This toolkit aims to help program teams develop a strategic approach to electoral violence prevention that specifically engages political and state actors in efforts to prevent and mitigate electoral violence before, during and after an election cycle.

This toolkit draws on IRI's expertise in programming in the sub-Saharan Africa context—a region that has seen significant electoral violence during the last 20 years—by providing examples of useful practices as well as guidance on intervention design to mitigate electoral violence. Yet, while IRI's work in the sub-Saharan context is the inspiration behind this toolkit, the insights and guidance articulated in this document may be relevant to other regions. The key to designing and operationalizing any of the interventions discussed in this toolkit is thoughtful contextualization in local politics. The obvious and intuitive, yet necessary, lesson from the broader work supporting international development is applicable to this toolkit: interventions are more likely to be useful if they are co-created with local partners who take ownership over the process and if the interventions respond specifically to the underlying power dynamics in specific contexts.

## Methodology

IRI conducted this research in three phases. Each phase was instrumental in revisiting assumptions about the causes of electoral violence and associated mitigation interventions.

**Phase 1:** To develop systematic guidance for program teams, IRI perused the evidence from its own programming in sub-Saharan Africa and from academic literature on interventions that mitigate electoral violence. IRI used five broad questions to inform this preliminary review of literature:

1. How does political party-driven electoral violence manifest: intimidation, harassment, lethal and nonlethal physical violence? How does the intensity of electoral violence vary temporally and spatially?
2. How do political parties advocate for electoral violence?
3. Where and in what conditions is electoral violence most likely to occur?
4. What drives political parties (their elected officials, members and supporters) to use electoral violence? Why does electoral violence occur in some electoral districts but not others? How and why does the incidence or intensity of electoral violence change over time?
5. What tools exist for preventing electoral violence? What is the evidence of their effectiveness?

**Phase 2:** Based on the review of literature and existing programming approaches, IRI identified the six interventions most frequently employed to mitigate violence around elections. IRI examined each intervention's logic and scope, key assumptions, targeting considerations, useful strategies, key results and measures, unintended consequences and concrete programming examples.

**Phase 3:** Drawing upon frameworks developed for the six interventions, IRI commissioned Singel Consulting to gather a better understanding of their applications, successes and challenges.<sup>20</sup> After gathering evidence on their successes, IRI synthesized the implications of the evidence on program design.

The rest of this document captures a two-year effort to review the literature on electoral violence, identify the most frequently used interventions (and the theories undergirding those approaches) and interrogate the evidence of their success. Most evidence on the effectiveness of MEV approaches lacks systematic, cross-national comparisons, with most evaluations limited to case studies.<sup>21</sup> The inferences drawn through program examples in this toolkit are thus meant to be suggestive, rather than definitive.

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## INTERVENTIONS

This section outlines six of the most common MEV intervention approaches: (1) pacts and pledges, (2) social and norm-changing behaviors, (3) contact hypothesis, (4) deterrence theory, (5) informational interventions and (6) network and collaboration theories. Each intervention description introduces the approach and its key assumptions, presents illustrative activities and discusses existing evidence and the implications for programming. Each invention summary concludes with the approach's potential unintended consequences and examples of best practices from IRI.




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### INTERVENTION 1: COORDINATION THEORIES: PACTS, PLEDGES AND CODES OF CONDUCT

#### Introduction

Many approaches to mitigating electoral violence focus on helping groups of people coordinate their behavior because of the collective nature of the production of electoral violence.<sup>22</sup> In an electoral context, political parties would be better off if they coordinate their

<sup>20</sup> Singel Consulting focuses on research design, data analysis and training on research methodology. They specialize in studying elections, public opinion and political transitions. For more details, please visit <https://sites.google.com/view/singel-consulting/home>

<sup>21</sup> Von Borzyskowski, Inken. *The credibility challenge: How democracy aid influences election violence*. Cornell University Press, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> As opposed to personal vendettas or neighbor-to-neighbor violence that characterize apolitical violence, electoral violence is inherently political and is produced and inflicted collectively.



actions to avert violence, but they often fail to do so because of their conflicting interests. On many occasions, parties, just like individuals, simply fear that acting in the collective interest may undermine their individual interest because other relevant actors (parties) may simply not reciprocate. This presents a typical collective action dilemma, where the best group outcome for several key actors might be to act similarly. However, if the best outcome for each individual (or party) is to act differently while all other key actors act similarly, the group will have difficulty coordinating its behavior to achieve the best group outcome.

Applied to electoral violence, all key political parties could benefit from contesting elections without violence, *if they could be sure that all other competing parties would also contest the elections without violence*. Violence costs political parties time and resources. It inflicts suffering on their supporters and dents their reputations. Still, a party might decide violence is worthwhile if it will help win elections. Furthermore, the electoral payoff of violence could be greater if a party is the only key actor using it as an electoral tool. If several key parties in a political system are making this calculation simultaneously, this collective action dilemma creates an equilibrium in which all competitive parties engage in violence.

Given this dilemma, Democracy, Rights and Governance (DRG) interventions can help mitigate electoral violence if they help groups coordinate a commitment to nonviolence. In practice, activities based on coordination logic often attempt to engage key actors in pacts or pledges. Interventions might be designed to help party leaders coordinate *refraining* from violence, or coordinate discouraging their members or supporters from engaging in violence. However, careful attention to the details of how pledges are designed can make them more effective. Pledges and pacts are more likely to be effective when they are public-facing and when they engage audiences that are likely to punish leaders for violating their commitments.

## Key Assumptions

The following assumptions are important to consider in designing these interventions.

- Each actor is rational and seeks to maximize their utility.
- Each actor signs the pact based on accurate information about others also committing to the same pact.
- The pacts and pledges are set up as noncooperative games, i.e., cooperative behavior is induced primarily through self-reinforcing agreements.
- The pacts and pledges entail repeated interactions, i.e., all actors know that their current action affects other actors' future actions.
- The pacts and pledges are normatively appealing to all actors.
- The pacts and pledges are undergirded by the actors' desire to maintain their reputation as being committed to peace.
- The pacts and pledges are signed by all key actors and each key actor understands who the key actors are.

## Illustrative Activities

- Security coordination committees at the local and national levels.

- Peace pacts and pledges among political elites and the subsequent proliferation of independent peace pledges following the signing of peace pledges during program implementation.
- Candidate and political party codes of conduct.
- Establishment of national peace committees (as established in Ghana and Nigeria).
- Monitoring of peace pact and pledge adherence.
- Establishment of electoral offenses commissions/committees.

## Evidence Overview

This evidence synthesis focuses largely on codes of conduct, which are more widely documented as interventions than peace pacts and pledges. Political party codes of conduct, while providing a means for actors to coordinate their behavior, also reinforce “ethical and moral behavior” (International IDEA 2017). Codes of conduct can be a vehicle to modify or reinforce social norms depending on how widely the principles of the codes are disseminated and whether the political parties see a reputational, and not just legal, cost to violating them. They are commonly used election-violence prevention tools, particularly for political candidates and parties. They may be legally binding or voluntary (with or without enforcement and/or monitoring oversight). While these interventions are common, their effectiveness has not been systematically evaluated, either comparatively or on a case-by-case basis. The existing evidence is based more on anecdotes than on a systematic understanding of different political actors and/or the circumstances under which the pacts were or were not upheld. The evidence also focuses largely on codes of conduct, which are more widely documented than peace pacts and pledges. It is useful to assess a code of conduct, but is equally important to understand, for example, why a code was violated. For instance, was there no enforcement mechanism? Did the elite not fear incurring any reputational cost for violating a code? Examples below illustrate some of the ways in which codes of conduct have been implemented.

## Key Findings

1. **Pacts, pledges, and codes of conduct may be more relevant for lower levels of state-initiated violence.** Birch and Muchlinski’s study groups most election interventions into two broad categories: *technical assistance* (to EMBs, courts, security forces, etc.) and *attitude-transforming* programs, which encompass an array of activities (pacts, pledges, codes of conduct, peace messaging, community meetings and dialogues, etc.).<sup>23</sup> It is therefore difficult to disentangle the pathways for preventing electoral violence. Their study of the UN Development Programme’s efforts to prevent electoral violence from 2003 to 2015 found that technical assistance is associated with lower levels of nonstate violence, and attitude-transforming interventions are associated with lower levels of state-initiated violence, though less strongly.<sup>24</sup> They argue that attitude-transforming assistance publicly and “morally” binds state actors to nonviolence and offers opportunities to resolve disputes peacefully.

<sup>23</sup> Birch, Sarah, and David Muchlinski. “Electoral violence prevention: what works?” *Democratization* 25, no. 3 (2018): 385-403.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

2. **There is a general skepticism of the effectiveness of voluntary pledges and codes of conduct.** An expert survey of academics, researchers and practitioners in the field ranked voluntary codes of conduct as the least effective of 10 interventions to prevent electoral malpractice (reform of EMBs followed by domestic election observation ranked highest).<sup>25</sup>
3. **Political party consultative mechanisms seem to be important parts of political party codes of conduct, pacts and pledges.** These bodies serve important functions: they “foster accountability for political behavior to prevent violence, facilitate interparty communications to manage violence and provide a dispute resolution mechanism to mediate disputes before they lead to violence” (USAID 2013). They are an opportunity for rival political parties to engage as peers. Furthermore, they provide ongoing information and feedback to parties about electoral practices and rules, and EMBs may utilize them as a convening platform to meet with the parties.
4. **The Ghanaian code is frequently pointed to as a model voluntary code of conduct.** The code is revised well in advance of each election. Spearheaded by the Ghana Political Parties Program (GPPP)<sup>26</sup>, a group of political parties represented in parliament over the prior year, it is a document created by peers. The code establishes a national and regional enforcement body, and party leaders meet once a month at the EMB to review compliance with it. While there are no legal mechanisms to hold signatories accountable, they may be rebuked or publicly called out by the GPPP, their peers or the enforcement body. The mechanism is generally seen as helping to mitigate electoral violence.<sup>27</sup>
5. **Codes of conduct may be crafted for specific regional or local concerns.** While most attention is on national-level codes, codes of conduct may be implemented on a regional or local level, either in the absence of a national code or to address specific concerns or to create a greater sense of local ownership over the code. In 2015 in Nigeria, at least four states signed versions of the national-level Abuja Accord at the state or local levels.<sup>28</sup>
6. **Codes of conduct are also vehicles for changing social norms if they are actively referenced and become part of the discourse surrounding the elections.** In January 2015, political party leaders signed a peace pact, the Abuja Accord, which was monitored by the National Peace Committee (NPC), an independent group of prominent Nigerians. A post-election study of the 2015 general elections found anecdotal evidence that the accord may have helped shift some social norms surrounding the elections.<sup>29</sup> For example, the NPC’s repeated emphasis of the tenets of the pledge helped voters see the two main presidential candidates as “political rivals, not enemies, and realize that the country needed to stand united during and after the electoral process.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Birch, Sarah, and Jeffrey Carlson. “Electoral Integrity Framework Project.” Electoral Malpractice Primer: Insights and Priorities. Creative Associates International (2012).

<sup>26</sup> For a primer on GPPP, please refer to <https://nimd.org/videos/the-ghana-political-parties-programme/>

<sup>27</sup> Fischer, Jeff. *Electoral Violence Prevention: Social Enforcement of Electoral Security*. Working paper, 2017. <http://www.electoralviolenceproject.com/pubviolence>, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Afolabi, Babatunde, and Sabina Avasiloae. “Post-election assessment of conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms in Nigeria.” Center for Humanitarian dialogue. UK Aid and Australian Aid (2015).

<sup>29</sup> Afolabi, Babatunde, and Sabina Avasiloae. “Post-election assessment of conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms in Nigeria.” Center for Humanitarian dialogue. UK Aid and Australian Aid (2015).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

## Considerations for Program Design

Despite the difficulty of coordination dilemmas, pacts or pledge programs have the best chance of succeeding if they are designed and implemented using certain approaches:

- **Design codes that unambiguously articulate expectations for key stakeholders and are responsive to the local context.** Standardized codes inspire weak commitment. Codes should be crafted before the start of an electoral cycle to avoid tensions as the election nears. Engagement with political parties in creating the code is critical to their ownership of the process. Codes need to be specific, i.e., “not moving or destroying campaign materials,” “not engaging in attacks on candidates’ private lives,” etc. Codes should be crafted before the start of an electoral cycle to avoid tensions as the election nears.
- **Work with smaller, more homogenous groups that are more amenable to collective action.** Instead of targeting candidates, officials and citizens widely, consider targeting narrowly. Focus on small groups of the most relevant or competitive candidates or officials, or design pacts/pledges catered to small groups.
- **Build in an ongoing monitoring mechanism, like Transparency International’s anti-corruption pledge tracker.** The code should establish if and how it will be monitored and/or mediated. Monitoring mechanisms should identify what costs individuals or groups can meaningfully impose on defectors and provide those actors with information on compliance. For example, monitoring groups could include the general public, political opponents, civil society groups or watchdog coalitions and/or regional and international organizations.
- **Emphasize compliance as part of group identity:** studies on pro-environment pledges suggests that playing to norms and self-identity strengthens pacts and pledges. The content of the pledge or the ceremonial side could emphasize something like “commitment to peaceful elections is who we are.”
- **Do advance work to determine how best to present the promise and enforcement mechanism for the specific context.** The actual framing of the pledge and description of monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms likely affects whether people will uphold a pact. For example, framing the pact as “I commit to peace” will have different effects than “I commit to not engaging in violence,” though we are not sure what those effects will be in specific contexts. Consider workshopping messaging or think about piloting and scaling a pledge program.
- **Build in a costly pre-commitment device.** Though it seems counterintuitive, a pact might be stronger if it demands more of a commitment. If the code is not part of the formal legal framework, its legal status should be made clear to the public. Costs need not be financial or legal; they could be reputational. Publicize the signing ceremony as much as possible. Create a public badge for politicians to display on their social media accounts. Try to find a way to make the pact more than “cheap talk.”
- **Target deliberately.** Think about what the population looks like where you would want to have an effect. Some people are always going to be honest. They don’t need to sign a pact. Some people are always going to cheat. They are going to sign a pact and do what they were going to anyway. Seek out those in the middle—the ones who will engage in violence if they think everyone else does but are willing (or might even prefer) to be peaceful. Tailor the pact, the publicity and the monitoring toward them.

■ **Pacts should target elites, or groups of elites, with local legitimacy and influence, however broadly defined.**

- » Targeted elites can be ethnic entrepreneurs or leaders of a solidarity group, or those close to power.
- » Targeted elites should formally/informally represent a constituency whose engagement is critical to the success of the pact.
- » Targeted elites should come from areas that reflect varying degrees of state presence: urban, urban-periphery, rural (alternately: state control, nonstate armed group control and contested control).

**Unintended consequences:**

- Perpetrators of electoral violence infiltrate and use security coordination committees to guarantee their own impunity.
- Ineffective electoral violence prosecutions could undermine citizen confidence in accountability processes for electoral violence in particular and the justice system in general.

**Key Results and Measures:**



- Increased coordination between state and nonstate security actors, as evidenced by more joint operations.
- Improved coordination between security actors and citizens, as evidenced by the number of security operations undertaken with community input.
- More effective criminal accountability mechanisms for electoral violence, as evidenced by increased prosecutions and convictions for electoral violence-related offenses.

**IRI's Promising Practices and Innovations**

**Abuja Accord (Nigeria, 2015)** — IRI supported the National Peace Committees (NPC), along with many other domestic and international election stakeholders, to sign a peace pact known as the Abuja Accord, by mobilizing the leading political parties to participate and negotiating terms. Ahead of election day, both leading candidates, former President Goodluck Jonathan and his main challenger, Muhammadu Buhari, signed the accord in a widely publicized ceremony in the presence of ex-military ruler and NPC Chairman Abdulsalami Abubakar, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, representatives from all five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China and Russia) and leading traditional and religious leaders of the country. The accord committed both candidates to respecting the outcome of the 2019 presidential election and to urging their supporters to refrain from violence. The Abuja Accord contributed to the first peaceful transfer of power since Nigeria's transition to civilian democratic rule in 1999.

**First-time collaboration between INEC and the NPC (Nigeria, 2020)** — As a result of IRI's dialogue facilitation, the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) and the National Peace Committee (NPC) collaborated for the first time to sign peace accords for

leading candidates and other prominent electoral stakeholders ahead of the 2020 off-cycle gubernatorial elections in Edo and Ondo states. Previously, INEC and the NPC had conducted distinct and duplicative peace accord processes that were less effective at mitigating electoral violence. While INEC has the legal authority to enforce a peace accord, it lacks influence among political actors. The NPC, on the other hand, has moral authority in the political sphere but lacks an adherence mechanism. IRI brought these two bodies together to combine their strengths and bolster the legitimacy of the resulting peace accord.

IRI also facilitated extensive media coverage for the peace accords in Edo and Ondo states. In a first for Nigeria, three major television channels had live broadcasts of both signing ceremonies, a major feat, particularly for a state-level election. The increased awareness of the peace accords ultimately made it more difficult for parties and candidates to flout them. According to a survey conducted by IRI partner Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI), 48 percent of respondents in Ondo and 82 percent of respondents in Edo were aware of the NPC's intervention in the governorship elections. Due to heightened tensions in Edo, IRI and partners strengthened efforts to amplify activities there, contributing to a greater awareness of interventions. In addition, 79 percent of respondents in Ondo and 73 percent in Edo believed the elections would have been marred by violence had the NPC not intervened. Eighty-eight percent of respondents in Ondo and 87 percent in Edo agreed that the peace accord signing should be maintained for future elections.

Recognizing the improved process and outcome, stakeholders can continue to review the design and implementation of future peace accord processes. Stakeholders have already begun to discuss institutionalizing this collaboration through a memorandum of understanding and other means to strengthen peace accords for elections at all levels in Nigeria.

**Regional interfaith peace committees (Tanzania, 2018-2019)** — Tanzania's constitution requires that each regional administrative unit create a regional interfaith peace committee (RIPC) to promote inclusive dialogues on new and existing challenges to interfaith cohesion locally. Members most often are community faith leaders with varying levels of political connectedness. It is not uncommon for an RIPC member to have an outsized role in a regional political party apparatus. RIPC members can also be fairly removed from politics. Apart from the provision to include Christian and Muslim faith leaders from the region, the annual requirements for the committees are minimal.

Aiming to eliminate and mitigate the faith-based drivers of violent extremism, IRI partnered with the Mwanza, Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar interfaith peace committees to provide technical capacity training in responsibly disseminating religious doctrine, promoting peace and mitigating conflict. Following a period of time for the training content to be absorbed and incorporated into the routine practices of the peace committees, IRI and a local partner worked with each committee to (re)introduce itself to its community and identify areas where the committee could fulfill its mandate of supporting community-level religious tolerance. Examples of the RIPC activities include unity festivals, community dialogue workshops, at-risk youth empowerment programs and multi-stakeholder dialogues to review and recommend changes to Tanzania's policy and legal framework on religious tolerance.

In Mwanza, the RIPC became central to the region's effort to mitigate and prevent violent extremism. Critically, the Mwanza RIPC concluded that the regional level was slightly too removed from the day-to-day lives of most communities to understand the drivers of violent conflict at the local level and, ultimately, to mitigate and prevent violent conflict. The Mwanza RIPC subsequently supported the creation of Mwanza's first district interfaith peace



committee (DIPC) and is supporting the DIPC through ongoing consultations and mentoring. The Mwanza RIPC maintains its connection to regional and national political actors.

The format of an RIPC can be tailored to the sociocultural contexts of other countries, even outside sub-Saharan Africa and thematically reoriented to mitigate and prevent electoral violence. Activities such as unity festivals and community dialogue workshops could remain nearly identical to the Tanzania model with a thematic change to focus on mitigating and preventing electoral violence. A program supporting the creation of RIPC's would likely benefit from concurrent national dialogues that aim to create a legal mandate for these RIPC's.



## INTERVENTION 2: SOCIAL & NORM-CHANGING BEHAVIORS

### Introduction

Social norms are the informal, unwritten rules that define appropriate, acceptable, and obligatory actions in a community. Social norms exist when a number of individuals in a community prefer to behave in a certain way because they expect others in the community to do the same (empirical expectations) or/and because they believe that other members of their community expect them to behave in a certain way (normative expectations).<sup>31</sup> People's behavior—individually and collectively—is greatly influenced by their social norms. People expect social rewards or anticipate social punishment for upholding or flouting a norm. They also seek to signal their membership in a given group to themselves and/or to others; they therefore follow what they think are the norms specific to that group. Sometimes, people also internalize norms of specific actions that are considered acceptable in a given situation.<sup>32</sup>

In the context of electoral violence mitigation, interventions can focus on invoking norms by citing empirical evidence, or by appealing to the moral worth of alternative behaviors (that are likely to be more acceptable in a community) or by highlighting the incongruence between a norm and specific behaviors.<sup>33</sup> Top-down interventions such as directives from the government or legal approaches (using law to shape behaviors) are more likely to work when people trust the ostensible legitimacy of institutions and when the degree of desired change is moderate (when the desired change is not dramatically different from existing norms).<sup>34</sup> Economic initiatives tend to be inefficient in changing norms because they often generate perverse incentives and end up corrupting behaviors that they profess to promote.<sup>35</sup> But information campaigns such as progressive messaging over radio and TV and behavioral nudging over social media are seen as more promising.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, open deliberation that allows people to freely discuss norms without the constraints of power dynamics or the fear of manipulation is likely to be effective in reshaping social norms. These initiatives can take the form of peace messaging, cultural activities, multiparty mediation and other similar interventions.

<sup>31</sup> Bicchieri, Cristina. *Norms in the wild: How to diagnose, measure, and change social norms*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Cialdini, Robert B., and Melanie R. Trost. "Social influence: Social norms, conformity and compliance." (1998).

<sup>33</sup> Bicchieri, Cristina, and Erte Xiao. "Do the right thing: but only if others do so." *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making* 22, no. 2 (2009): 191-208.

<sup>34</sup> Bicchieri, Cristina. *Norms in the wild: How to diagnose, measure, and change social norms*. Oxford University Press, 2016. See also: Brennan, Geoffrey, Lina Eriksson, Robert E. Goodin, and Nicholas Southwood. *Explaining norms*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Bicchieri, Cristina. *Norms in the wild: How to diagnose, measure, and change social norms*. Oxford University Press, 2016. See also: Brennan, Geoffrey, Lina Eriksson, Robert E. Goodin, and Nicholas Southwood. *Explaining norms*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

## Key Assumptions

The following assumptions are important to consider in designing these interventions.

- People are aware of the norms of their group and they can situate their behavior in relation to those norms.
- People have access to information about what their peers or other relevant individuals consider acceptable behavior.
- Providing people with updated information about group norms can alter their understanding of group norms.
- If people's understanding of their group norms changes, it helps them understand their own standing in the group and modify their behavior.

## Illustrative Activities

- Social media and traditional media advocacy that encourages peaceful participation in electoral processes.
- Cultural engagements that remind participants of the social/cultural expectations around electoral participation.
- Sporting events that bring together participants around a shared interest.
- Peace caravans that reach remote areas of the country that may not be involved in other peace campaigns.
- Community meetings that serve as a forum for discussion on electoral issues.
- Multiparty mediation that brings together groups with disagreements and helps the parties find common ground.
- Stakeholder dialogues at the local and national levels.

## Evidence Overview

There are mixed findings about the effectiveness of interventions aimed at changing norms and behaviors that contribute to electoral violence. As discussed below, experimental evidence from a single case (Malawi) points to a direct link between social norms-changing intervention and levels of electoral violence. However, two other multi-country case studies do not find an effect on electoral violence. There are several potential explanations for this discrepancy. First, in the former, the evaluation was on the geographic area and individuals where the intervention took place, whereas in the latter, the evaluation was countrywide and looked at the cumulative impact of a variety of peace messaging programs. Second, the success of social norm-changing interventions is probably dependent on contextual factors (who delivers the intervention, who is targeted, the duration of the intervention, etc.) and may be best evaluated as single cases or small numbers of cases in which these many variables can be better disentangled.

Social norm-changing interventions can be aimed at different audiences, with their messages tweaked accordingly, whether they be for political leaders ("do not incite protests"), party supporters ("do not engage in violence if asked to by political leaders"), or the general public

("accept defeat of party").<sup>37</sup> Part of an evaluation should analyze whether an intervention reaches the target group(s).

## Key Findings

1. **There is no strong evidence that peace messaging, in general, affects electoral violence, though individual programs may be effective.** A study of the 2017 elections in Liberia and Kenya, based on multi-wave survey responses from citizens found no association between peace messaging and electoral violence levels.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, while there was some evidence that they had an effect in Liberia (respondents who had been exposed to peace messaging were more likely to say that they would be more likely to engage in discussions peacefully), there was no systematic evidence that they affected norms and behaviors that could have led to electoral violence in Kenya or Liberia (the survey instrument was not available). Another comparative case study of electoral-violence prevention interventions in Bangladesh, Honduras, Malawi, Moldova and Thailand came to the same broad conclusion on the lack of evidence for peace messaging, which it attributed to three causes: focusing on goals that take time to achieve, not targeting the most critical audiences (those most prone to commit violence) and being conducted by actors seen as partisan.<sup>39</sup> Changing social norms and attitudes takes time and often peace messaging is conducted too close to the election. Additionally, the interventions, if targeted at the population at large, will not reach individuals who are most at risk of electoral violence.
2. **To be effective, peace messaging needs to be conducted by respected leaders and organizations with moral authority.** The country with the most successful peace messaging program, of the seven case studies described above, was Malawi during the 2014 elections, which targeted politicians.<sup>40</sup> While multiple actors—civil society groups, traditional leaders, the media—used peace messaging, the most influential messaging was conducted by the Public Affairs Committee (PAC)<sup>41</sup>, an organization of religious leaders. PAC held meetings with the political parties, mediated disputes, led a nonviolence pact-signing for the main presidential candidates (Lilongwe Peace Declaration) and discouraged violence. PAC's success in helping to hold down electoral violence was attributed to its religious affiliation and perceived moral authority: Politicians feared they would lose "legitimacy" with their voters if they were seen as acting in opposition to PAC's message.<sup>42</sup>
3. **Peace pacts and pledges are also vehicles for changing social norms if they are actively referenced and become part of the discourse surrounding the elections.** In January 2015, leading political party leaders signed a peace pact, the Abuja Accord, which was monitored by the National Peace Committee, an independent group of prominent

<sup>37</sup> Arriola, Leonardo R., Justine Davis, Aila M. Matanock, and Manuela Travaglianti. "Effects of Civic Education and Electoral Observation During Violent Elections." In *ASA 2016 Annual Meeting Paper*. 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Claes, Jonas, and Inken von Borzyskowski. *What Works in Preventing Election Violence*. United States Institute of Peace, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Claes, Jonas, and Geoffrey Macdonald. "Findings and conclusion." *Electing Peace: Violence Prevention and Impact at the Polls* (2016): 195-220.

<sup>40</sup> Claes, Jonas, and Geoffrey Macdonald. "Findings and conclusion." *Electing Peace: Violence Prevention and Impact at the Polls* (2016): 195-220. Also read: "In Preventing Bullets at the Ballots: A Comparative Evaluation of Election Violence Prevention", edited by Jonas Claes, 101-130. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> For more information on PAC, please refer to <https://www.pacmw.org/>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Nigerians. A post-election study of the 2015 election found anecdotal evidence that the accord may have helped shift some social norms surrounding the elections.<sup>43</sup> For example, the work of the National Peace Committee (NPC) to repeatedly emphasize the tenets of the pledge helped voters to see the two main presidential candidates as “political rivals, not enemies, and [to see] that the country needed to stand united during and after the electoral process.”<sup>44</sup> The candidates actively embodied this principle by appearing together publicly and shaking hands on the night before the elections. Furthermore, the practice of political leaders signing peace pacts was adopted by several Nigerian states and communities.

4. **Social norm-changing interventions can discourage election day violence and these norms spread to individuals not involved in the interventions.** In a field experiment during the 2007 Nigerian elections, researchers put 24 communities across the country into 12 matched pairs.<sup>45</sup> In each pair, one community was randomly selected and exposed to multipronged anti-violence messaging (the treatment community) and one community was not exposed to the intervention (the control community). The interventions, conducted by the local chapter of the international NGO Action Aid, included distribution of clothing and pamphlets with the intervention slogan (“No to electoral violence! Vote against violent politicians!”), town hall meetings and community theater with the goal of portraying electoral violence as an illegitimate response and empowering participants to vote. Treatment communities were significantly less likely to experience election day violence than control communities, suggesting that these events may have affected the behavior of local politicians and their supporters (especially given the intervention slogan) and community members’ acceptance of violence. Additionally, there is evidence that the information provided at the events made participants and individuals within their social networks also feel more empowered to counteract violence.<sup>46</sup>
5. **Social norm-changing interventions may be more likely to be associated with lower levels of state-initiated violence.** Birch and Muchlinski’s study groups most election interventions into two broad categories: *technical assistance (to EMBs, courts, security forces, etc.)* and *attitude-transforming programs*.<sup>47</sup> The second encompasses an array of activities, such as peace messaging, community meetings, pacts and dialogues. It is therefore difficult to disentangle the pathways for preventing electoral violence. Their study of UN Development Programme electoral-violence-prevention activities from 2003 to 2015 found that technical assistance is associated with less nonstate violence and attitude-transforming interventions are associated with less state-initiated violence, though not as strongly. The authors theorize that technical assistance increases the credibility of the election and reduces opposition violence, which was also found by von Borzyskowski.<sup>48</sup> As for attitude-transforming events, they argue that these publicly and

<sup>43</sup> Afolabi, Babatunde, and Sabina Avasiloae. “Post-election assessment of conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms in Nigeria.” Center for Humanitarian dialogue. UK Aid and Australian Aid (2015).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Collier, Paul, and Pedro C. Vicente. “Votes and violence: Evidence from a field experiment in Nigeria.” *The economic journal* 124, no. 574 (2014): F327-F355.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid; Fafchamps, Marcel, and Pedro C. Vicente. “Political violence and social networks: Experimental evidence from a Nigerian election.” *Journal of Development Economics* 101 (2013): 27-48.

<sup>47</sup> Birch, Sarah, and David Muchlinski. “Electoral violence prevention: what works?.” *Democratization* 25, no. 3 (2018): 385-403.

<sup>48</sup> Von Borzyskowski, Inken. *The credibility challenge: How democracy aid influences election violence*. Cornell University Press, 2019.

“morally” bind state actors to nonviolence and offer opportunities to peacefully resolve disputes.

## Considerations for Program Design

### Key Considerations:

- » Social norm interventions need to be undertaken by individuals, groups and organizations that are respected and enjoy moral standing in their communities. Different implementers may be best suited in different communities.
- » Social norm interventions should be clear in their target audience(s) and shape the message(s) accordingly.
- » Social norms are often resistant to change and interventions should be realistic about how long the process will take.
- » Social- and norm-change interventions should include both mass messaging as well as corresponding small-group activities that interrogate and transform individual interaction with societal attitudes.

### Individual or group targeting criteria:

- » Individual: leaders, opinion makers, information gatekeepers, behavior enforcers. These actors can often include religious leaders, youth group leaders, elders and local business leaders.
- » Group: adversarial groups who have demonstrated a propensity to use violence to resolve their disagreements, such as armed groups, gangs and certain political parties.

### Avoid common pitfalls:

- **Avoid conflating community-level social norms with individual-level attitudes.** Behaving respectfully with elders can be both a local social norm and an individual attitude. Disapproving dishonesty can be a personal preference as well as a locally accepted social norm. Marrying inside one’s tribe or ethnic group can be a communal norm, whereas open-mindedness towards inter-ethnic and inter-tribal differences can be an individual attitude. The distinction between the two is not always obvious, so it is essential to interrogate the extent to which an individual refers to communal norms to explain her/his behavior.
- **Understand how norms intersect with other variables that motivate behaviors.** One could, for example, want to avoid engaging members of other communal groups (religious, ethnic, sub-ethnic, other solidarity groups) that are antagonistic towards one’s group, but still pursue such opportunities for selective engagement if they are tied to one’s economic interests. Another example may include a scenario where the social norm and personal interest align. One could want to comply with a local social norm of engaging in business with members of her/his own community and that particular engagement may be the most beneficial one to the individual.
- **Avoid confusing the prevalence of a social norm with its influence.** The presence and discussion of a social norm that privileges non-violent means of resolving disputes does not necessarily mean that people actually abide by it.

- **In designing interventions, focus on understanding how different norms register heterogeneous effects on individual and group behavior.** Members of a community differ in their sensitivity to norms, their autonomy and their perception of (and appetite for) risk. Trendsetters or first-movers may be more autonomous and risk-prone than other members of a group. Interventions should identify these individuals within a community and engage them in the norm re-shaping process. Formation of small trendsetter groups can subsequently lead to changes in the behavior of larger groups through a combination of public commitments and media interventions. Similarly, norm entrepreneurs are members of social groups who have the legitimacy and capacity to suggest and diffuse normative changes across a community or a society. Interventions should actively engage norm entrepreneurs over the course of the intervention.

#### Unintended consequences:

- Malign political actors can leverage norms to justify their continued use of violence or repressive tactics. For example, many researchers have suggested that the peace messaging in Kenya's 2013 election contributed to the suppression of dissenting opinions and the justification of the use of force to preserve "stability."<sup>49</sup>
- Participation in social- and norm-change interventions like social media advocacy can give public relations cover to malign political actors.
- Certain social norm interventions can cause a boomerang effect by increasing the undesirable behaviors they intended to decrease.<sup>50</sup>

#### Key Results and Measures:

- Improvement in individual attitudes related to the social norm targeted by the intervention.
- Duplication of social- and norm-change messaging as measured by the number of messaging activities carried out by leaders and citizens independently and without incentives from the original programming.



### IRI's Promising Practices and Innovations

#### "Enhancing Political Pluralism and Tolerance" (The Gambia, October 2018-December 2019)

— Two years after the democratic transition from the 22-year dictatorship of Yahya Jammeh, IRI contributed to shifting national norms around political inclusion and tolerance by promoting multiparty engagement through social activities, such as sports events (soccer and wrestling matches), community meetings and youth dialogues and via a public-messaging campaign through radio and social media. At each activity, IRI invited respected figures from different ethnic groups and political parties who have moral standing in their communities—such as National Assembly members and political party and community

<sup>49</sup> Gabrielle Lynch, Nic Cheeseman and Justin Willis, "From Peace Campaigns To Peaceocracy: Elections, Order And Authority In Africa," *African Affairs*, 184/473, 603–627

<sup>50</sup> Schultz, P. Wesley, Jessica M. Nolan, Robert B. Cialdini, Noah J. Goldstein, and Vidas Griskevicius. "The constructive, destructive, and reconstructive power of social norms." *Psychological science* 18, no. 5 (2007): 429–434.



leaders—to deliver messages and, in some cases, lead the activities. This model acted as a physical representation for citizens of the success and benefits of cooperation and nonviolence. This project normalized interparty dialogue and political tolerance in Basse, Upper Nuimi and Kaba Koto, as evidenced by political party peace pledges signed in each locality.

**Youth Mediator for Peace Project (Mauritania, December 2018-February 2020)** — In the wake of Mauritania’s 2019 presidential election that produced the country’s first democratic transfer of power, IRI took advantage of new political openness to hold community social events and conduct a nationwide digital and radio advocacy campaign on social cohesion and interethnic, interracial peace. As documented by 86 interviews nationwide, this campaign helped normalize social relationships among members of different ethnic groups, particularly through the digital and in-person imagery of diversity.



## INTERVENTION 3: CONTACT HYPOTHESIS

### Introduction

The contact hypothesis holds that fostering interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice among groups who harbor animosity toward one another. By being in contact and, subsequently, communicating with one another, the groups enjoy the opportunity to appreciate their differences. This enhanced understanding of “the other” is likely to address and curb stereotyping, discrimination and prejudicing among groups.

Contact reduces prejudice by changing how people think about, behave toward or feel about the ‘out’ group. Contact interventions are widely used for conflict resolution, peace-building and restorative justice initiatives as a methodology for building positive long-term relationships between parties to a conflict. In the electoral violence context, there is potential to use contact approaches to enable dialogue, minimize distrust, and foster collaboration among opposing parties, and between election management bodies (EMBs) and parties.

### Key Assumptions

The following assumptions are important to consider in designing these interventions.

- Different groups are of equal status within the intervention; prejudice is likely to be reinforced if the two groups make contact when one enjoys a hierarchically dominant position during the intervention.
- Contact between the groups is not a one-off occurrence but is rather repeated so the groups have a chance to develop a meaningful relationship.
- Both groups seek to privilege cooperation over competition and each group’s goals cannot be attained without cooperating with the other group.
- Enforcement mechanisms, such as unambiguous endorsement from authorities or norm-setting by social elites, enable and institutionalize contact between the groups.

### Illustrative Activities

- Intergroup dialogues that bring together groups to discuss relevant issues such as security coordination, key triggers of violence, and possible approaches to mitigate violence.

- Intergroup sociocultural events, such as interparty soccer games and unity festivals that provide a venue with a common interest or point of cultural connection for participants.
- Multiparty mediation to moderate disputes between parties.
- Roundtable discussions with breakout conversation groups discussing the role that they can play in mitigating violence.

## Evidence Overview

While extensive studies have examined the use of intergroup social contact to reduce conflict in other settings, there are not rigorous studies on its use to specifically mitigate electoral violence. Some project evaluations suggest that such interventions can help, though they are not based on rigorous evaluation. Several interventions, described below, provide initial evidence that should be more systematically analyzed in future interventions. Overall, this evidence suggests that intergroup contact is an intensive undertaking that demands time to build trust, as well as emotional and mental labor for participants to change potentially long-standing ways of thinking and relating to out-groups. Interventions emphasize the need for inclusive and targeted engagements.

## Key Findings

1. **Moderated dialogues may build cooperation among peer political party leaders that can open lines of communication and help mitigate violence.** A participatory action research study brought together more than 500 leaders from nine political parties across Zambia immediately prior to the 2016 elections.<sup>51</sup> While the purpose of the project was to analyze the ongoing conflict and generate solutions, it also had the secondary effect of fostering relationships among these leaders. The participants met over two days in small groups with other political party representatives from the same government level (i.e., provincial, district and constituency levels). Though there was not a formal evaluation of the event's impacts on violence, there were several reports suggesting positive spillover effects to mitigate violence: a) in two areas participants agreed to hold a joint event to demonstrate to supporters that the parties were not enemies; b) there was a reported decrease in election-related violence and conflict immediately following the training, including in two areas that had traditionally been hot spots; and c) participants successfully reached out to another political party to ask them to intervene with their supporters so that they would not disrupt an important rally.
2. **Inclusive engagement through a multiparty liaison committee with EMBs or another consultative body may help address violence.** These interactions maintain regular communication among parties, hold parties accountable and provide a forum for dispute resolution.<sup>52</sup> Comparative case studies of elections in Malawi, Ethiopia and Zanzibar from 2004-2005 noted that EMBs, in an effort to be perceived as independent, risk isolating themselves too much from political parties.<sup>53</sup> The authors suggest that EMBs foster

<sup>51</sup> Fumpa-Makano Ph D, Rose. "Participatory action research and prospects for electoral conflict prevention in Zambia." *Journal of International and Global Studies* 10, no. 2 (2019): 2.

<sup>52</sup> Fischer, Jeff. *Electoral Violence Prevention: Social Enforcement of Electoral Security*. Working paper, 2017. <http://www.electoralviolenceproject.com/pubviolence>, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> Opitz, Christian, Hanne Fjelde, and Kristine Höglund. "Including peace: the influence of electoral management bodies on electoral violence." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 4 (2013): 713-731.

collaborative and inclusive relationships with political parties, as in Malawi, to build the trust needed to work toward compromises and prevent electoral violence, particularly in countries with weak institutions. Such convening platforms can also be undertaken by bodies other than EMBs. As mentioned above, the Abuja Accord, a 2015 nonviolence pact among Nigerian political parties, established the National Peace Committee, composed of prominent Nigerians, to monitor the agreement and mediate related disputes. The two main parties highlighted the important role that the committee played in facilitating much-needed communication between them and acting as a neutral body that could mediate electoral disputes.<sup>54</sup>

3. **Meaningful contact over a sustained engagement through goal-oriented projects may reduce bias, at least at the interpersonal level.** The Bumbatira Amahoro (Support Peace) project<sup>55</sup>, coordinated by a local civil society group, sought to prevent Burundian youth, frequently mobilized by political actors during episodes of political violence, from engaging in electoral violence.<sup>56</sup> While the program had many components, a core objective was to build contact and dialogue among youth from different political backgrounds. The young people first participated in trainings on managing conflict, nonviolence, the electoral process and resisting the calls of politicians to engage in electoral violence, which helped them generate nonviolent solutions to conflict. While participants initially did not interact much with out-groups, ultimately, they reportedly built friendships, though it took six months before there was sufficient trust to engage in collaborative activities. However, the young people did trust one another enough to participate in weekly dialogues and three goal-oriented activities. First, they took part in a saving and lending group to generate collective income and resist the financial incentives of electoral violence. Second, alongside youth from other political parties and other community members, they participated in youth-led peace and mediation committees in their communities to promote mutually beneficial solutions in more than 1,000 interventions, 70 percent of which were deemed successful, though it is unclear how this was measured. Third, they planned and implemented community peace-building events such as concerts, football matches and theater performances. Program implementers said the youth's work on common projects and goals was critical to building social cohesion among them. These new relationships, however, did not necessarily translate into acceptance for the out-group as a whole: trust in the out-group in general declined from 16 to 14 percent over the course of the project.

## Considerations for Program Design

### Key considerations:

- Interventions may take sustained contact over long periods of time to yield results and facilitate useful dialogue.

<sup>54</sup> Afolabi, Babatunde, and Sabina Avasiloae. "Post-election assessment of conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms in Nigeria." Center for Humanitarian dialogue. UK Aid and Australian Aid (2015).

<sup>55</sup> For more details on the findings of the project, please refer to <https://www.gpplatform.ch/sites/default/files/PP%2023%20Entry%20Points%20for%20Preventing%20Youth%20Engagement%20in%20Political%20Violence%20Lessons%20from%20Burundi%27s%202015%20Elections.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Paducel, Anca H. "Entry Points for Preventing Youth Engagement in Political Violence: Lessons from Burundi's 2015 Elections."

- The nature of the engagement may be as important as the quantity. Activities with a common goal (e.g., collective victories and/or success) rather than mere discussion appear promising.
- While attitudes toward fellow participants may improve, they may not carry over to the out-group in general.
- Fostering interpersonal contact should start well before the electoral period. Building empathy and connections to out-groups may be more difficult during an already contentious election cycle.
- Intergroup contact should be facilitated across the most relevant segments of the two groups (uneven or random application of contact may be counterproductive).
- Facilitators should emphasize that each member has multiple identities whose relevance will vary with the context.
- Contact should be repeated periodically to enable members of the two groups to understand one another.
- Existing structural inequalities, such as economic instability that helps lure young people into violence for the promise of gain, should be acknowledged and may undermine these interventions.

#### **Individual or group targeting criteria:**

- » Individual: within a group that has demonstrated active or tacit hostility toward another group, contact should be enabled between their formal and informal leaders, opinion-makers, information gatekeepers, individuals with traditional legitimacy and individuals close to decision-making within the group.
- » Group: those groups that have participated in violence against other groups, or that have incited violence, or even tacitly nurtured conditions that sustained hostility toward other groups.

#### **Avoid common programming pitfalls:**

- » Avoid one-off dialogue interventions that do not include structures for follow-up activities.
- » Avoid short-term dialogue interventions that are not useful in addressing roots of electoral violence. For example, a policy roundtable that aims to discuss historic cyclical violence between political parties is less useful than a longer-term dialogue series that seeks to develop a political framework that focuses on consensus building and inclusion among adversarial groups.<sup>57</sup>
- » Avoid mediation interventions without post-agreement monitoring mechanisms or clear enforcement mechanisms to prevent violation of agreements.
- » Avoid interparty advisory councils or other multiparty platforms that operate without the participation of all registered political parties.

<sup>57</sup> Elbadawi, Ebrahim, and Nicholas Sambanis. "Why are there so many civil wars in Africa? Understanding and preventing violent conflict." *Journal of African economies* 9, no. 3 (2000): 244-269.

**Unintended consequences:**

- Contact may reduce prejudice, but not necessarily change behaviors.
- Contact may produce an initial “high” of interpersonal relationship-building but fail to explore participants’ deep-rooted prejudices.

**Key Results and Measures:**

- Improved intergroup relations, as evidenced by the number of reported examples of intergroup collaboration.
- Fewer reports of intergroup violence.
- Improved individual and collective attitudes toward issues that drive intergroup conflict.
- Improved individual and collective attitudes toward members of other groups.

**IRI’s Promising Practices and Innovations**

**Promoting Interfaith Tolerance (Tanzania, May 2017-October 2019)** — IRI held unity festivals in Arusha, Mwanza, Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar that helped increase interaction between government stakeholders and disillusioned community groups and built intercommunal trust and good faith, as evidenced by increased shared definition of local conflicts. Comparison of baseline and endline assessments of community perceptions of conflict-resolution processes showed that the project increased community cohesion in target localities.

**Promoting Inter-Party Dialogue (Nigeria, 2013)** — Through its programs to strengthen political parties, IRI created a platform for sustained, multiparty engagement involving dialogues among members of different political parties, also known as the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC). Today, IPAC continues to lead dialogue at state and national levels among the country’s registered parties and to promote peaceful participation in elections. In 2017, with technical assistance from IRI, IPAC updated its code of conduct to reflect consensus among party leaders for greater representation of women in elected positions. IRI has also supported IPAC to build consensus among party leaders for electoral reforms and other issues to promote peaceful and credible elections in Nigeria.

**Algiers Accord Sensitization and Interregional Dialogue (Mali, April 2018-July 2019)** — Through interregional dialogue and communications strategy forums with subnational civil society leaders, IRI improved interregional understanding about Title IV of the 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement on Mali. Malian popular opinion on the accord is divided: Southern Mali perceives it as solely beneficial to northern Mali. Through IRI-facilitated contact among civil society leaders from all 10 regions of the country and the District of Bamako, IRI increased the number of Malian leaders who embraced the peace accord and its nationwide applicability.

**Increased Collaboration between the NPC and EMB (Nigeria, 2020)** — Due to the success of the 2015 Abuja Peace Accord, peace pacts have proliferated ahead of elections at all levels in Nigeria. In some instances, candidates have signed multiple peace pacts for a single election, as in the 2019 off-cycle gubernatorial elections in Bayelsa and Kogi states. Partly as a result, these agreements have begun to carry less weight.

Both institutions are crucial to mitigating electoral violence because the National Electoral Commission (INEC) has the legal authority to enforce a peace accord and the National Peace Council has moral authority in the political sphere. However, both bodies rarely collaborate. To address this challenge, IRI facilitated dialogues between INEC and the peace council ahead of the 2020 Edo and Ondo off-cycle gubernatorial elections, resulting in joint activities to mitigate electoral violence. IRI's interventions helped make Nigeria's EMB better able to hold parties accountable and foster collaborative and inclusive relationships with political parties.



## INTERVENTION 4: DETERRENCE THEORY

### Introduction

Theories of coercion, of which deterrence theory is a subset, entail threats of force to influence the behavior of individuals or groups, with the aim of reducing an adversary's options. Deterrence theory uses the threat of force to demand that an adversary refrain from a particular action. The objective is to make compliance preferable to defiance. In the context of electoral violence, deterrence discourages or restrains parties from undertaking transgressions such as ballot fraud, voter intimidation or violence.

Literature on deterrence identifies two principal approaches: denial and punishment. Deterrence by denial seeks to deter an action by making it prohibitively costly (financially, reputationally), unfeasible or simply unlikely to succeed. For example, parties are less likely to commit fraud at polling stations if they know "neutral" election monitors are present, and they are less likely to engage in violence at polling stations if the stations are guarded by armed forces. Conversely, deterrence by punishment threatens penalties and sanctions if an adversary undertakes an undesirable action. The focus, therefore, is not on directly limiting the adversary's opportunities for action, but rather on threatening punishment or retaliation that would raise the adversary's cost for hostile action.

Deterrence presents the adversary with a choice between the neutral status quo of compliance and the risky gamble of defiance. Deterrence policies can be employed generally or to address specific and immediate undesirable action. *General* deterrence entails continuous or continual effort to prevent unwanted action over a stretch of time. *Immediate* deterrence, on the other hand, entails a short-term, concentrated effort to prevent a specific action during a crisis. In an ideal world, *general* deterrence would reduce the need for *immediate* deterrence, i.e., refraining from hostile, unwanted action would become habitual.

Deterrence theory is generally applicable in the case of interstate crisis. Like most rational choice theories, it is an individual-level theory. In the context of electoral violence—which entails multiple groups and individuals participating in violence—deterrence would thus be unevenly effective, depending on a range of variables: the nature of elections (are the outcomes zero-sum?), the individual and group stakes involved, interparty dynamics, the level of community cohesion, etc.

### Key Assumptions

The following assumptions are important to consider in designing these interventions.

- Individuals are instrumentally rational, in that they use clear thought and reason to determine the best courses of action based on their given interests.
- They are risk-prone, gain-maximizers.



- Individuals see the status quo as the neutral reference point.
- They can freely choose their actions and behaviors.

## Illustrative Activities

- Domestic observation of electoral processes (short- and long-term) to provide local credibility and oversight of elections.
- International observation of electoral processes (pre- and post-election day assessments, short- and long-term observation) to provide external or diplomatic oversight of elections.
- Training of security institutions such as the local police force on de-escalation, and protest/riot management.

## Evidence Overview

Deterrence theory—as exemplified by electoral observation and monitoring—is the most studied and most rigorously examined theory of change for its effects on electoral violence. That is due to the global ubiquity of electoral observation and monitoring, the widespread financial support from the international donor community, the ability to categorize and quantify findings based on electoral observation reports and the ability to statistically compare findings across many countries. Because international aid is often predicated on the findings of international electoral observation missions, negative evaluations can have significant ramifications for governments and act as deterrents (Donno 2010).

The presence of election monitors can improve the quality of elections, for example by reducing fraud, because political actors fear punishment and reputational damage based on the observer findings.<sup>58</sup> However, observer missions' effects on electoral violence are mixed; in some cases, they may contribute to it, or simply shift it from one place or time to another.

## Key Findings

1. **Election observation appears to deter violence on election day, but primarily in polling stations where observers are present, as observation can displace violence to unmonitored polling stations, particularly in competitive areas.** A field experiment during the 2012 Ghanaian elections, in which domestic election observers from a locally credible organization were randomly assigned to 1,000 polling stations, found that the polling stations in which the observers were present for the entire day experienced fewer incidents of violence and/or voter intimidation (in the unmonitored polling stations researchers surveyed political party agents from multiple parties about the presence of violence).<sup>59</sup> Additionally, there were fewer incidents of fraud (measured by suspiciously

<sup>58</sup> Hyde, Susan D. "The observer effect in international politics: Evidence from a natural experiment." *World politics* 60, no. 1 (2007): 37-63; Asunka, Joseph, Sarah Brierley, Miriam Golden, Eric Kramon, and George Ofori. "Electoral fraud or violence: The effect of observers on party manipulation strategies." *British Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 1 (2019): 129-151.; Hyde, Susan D. "Catch us if you can: Election monitoring and international norm diffusion." *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 2 (2011): 356-369; Hyde, Susan D. *The pseudo-democrat's dilemma: why election observation became an international norm*. Cornell University Press, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Asunka, Joseph, Sarah Brierley, Miriam Golden, Eric Kramon, and George Ofori. "Electoral fraud or violence: The effect of observers on party manipulation strategies." *British Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 1 (2019): 129-151.

high turnout). The unmonitored polling stations, however, were more likely to experience violence in competitive areas where parties did not have the resources to engage in fraud, and incidents of fraud were more likely to be displaced to polling stations in areas dominated by a single party with the resources to commit fraud.

2. **The presence of international election observation on election day is associated with increased violence during the pre-electoral period.** A study of 330 African elections from 1990 to 2009 shows that the presence of election observers (mostly limited to election observation on/around the election day) significantly increases the incidence of pre-election violence in the three months before elections.<sup>60</sup> Violent actors recalibrate their strategies and perpetrate violence in those time periods where their activities are less likely to be detected by observers. This finding does not undermine the importance of election observation missions (EOM), but emphasizes the need to integrate pre-election and post-election periods in observation missions. The study did not find that the presence of election monitors significantly decreased violence overall on election day, though this may likely be the result of violence shifting from monitored to unmonitored polling stations.
3. **Critical reports by international election-observation missions can have the unintended consequence of contributing to post-electoral violence.** A study of 189 elections in Africa from 1997 to 2009 found that post-election violence is more likely when international election observers describe the elections as not free or fair, as in Ethiopia in 2005.<sup>61</sup> Because such statements carry weight, they can confirm doubts about an election's legitimacy and motivate protesters, particularly opposition supporters, who might have been unsure about collective action otherwise.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, lack of criticism from international observers can reduce the likelihood of "sore loser" protests.<sup>63</sup> But even when international observers certify the elections as free and fair, post-election violence can still erupt if elections take place without sufficient overall security or institutional reforms to address social divisions and conflict fault lines, as in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010.<sup>64</sup>
4. **Initial findings suggest that domestic monitoring efforts may deter electoral violence, but more information is needed** to understand under what circumstances and how this may differ from international election monitors.<sup>65</sup> For example, domestic election monitoring may also affect change by making political violence less socially acceptable, while international monitoring may operate primarily through deterrence.<sup>66</sup> Evidence from Ghana shows that domestic observers can deter electoral violence at the polling

<sup>60</sup> Daxecker, Ursula E. "All quiet on election day? International election observation and incentives for pre-election violence in African elections." *Electoral Studies* 34 (2014): 232-243.

<sup>61</sup> Daxecker, Ursula E. "All quiet on election day? International election observation and incentives for pre-election violence in African elections." *Electoral Studies* 34 (2014): 232-243.

<sup>62</sup> Smidt, Hannah. "From a perpetrator's perspective: International election observers and post-electoral violence." *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 2 (2016): 226-241; Von Borzyskowski, Inken. "The risks of election observation: international condemnation and post-election violence." *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2019): 654-667.

<sup>63</sup> Hyde, Susan D., and Nikolay Marinov. "Information and self-enforcing democracy: The role of international election observation." *International Organization* 68, no. 2 (2014): 329-359.

<sup>64</sup> Bekoe, Dorina A. "The United Nations operation in Côte d'Ivoire: How a certified election still turned violent." *International Peacekeeping* 25, no. 1 (2018): 128-153.

<sup>65</sup> Grömping, Max. "Transparent elections: Domestic election monitors, agenda-building, and electoral integrity." PhD diss., 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

stations that they observe, though this violence may be displaced to other locations.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, a cross-national study of 1,047 elections from 1990 to 2012 found that the presence of domestic observers may bolster electoral integrity in general (which includes the absence of electoral violence).<sup>68</sup> Regardless, for domestic observers to prevent electoral violence, they must be perceived as both nonpartisan and credible.<sup>69</sup>

## Considerations for Program Design

### Key considerations:

- More attention should be paid to the pre-electoral period, which may require more long-term observers to document incidents or extended collaboration with domestic observers to increase pre-electoral coverage.
- There is a particularly high need for election monitoring in contested areas.
- A greater coverage of election observers across polling stations may be needed to prevent violence from shifting to unobserved polling stations.

### Individual or group targeting criteria:

- » All major political parties, whether they are directly participating in the elections or serving as members of a coalition of parties, shall be engaged and observed.
- » All major political groups, even those groups that are not institutionalized as parties but that aggregate preferences of their constituencies, should be engaged and observed.

### Deterrence programs such as EOMs are reasonably likely to be effective if:

- Before accepting the invitation to monitor elections, the EOMs set a high standard for government cooperation in the process.
- Prior to deploying to monitor elections, the EOMs assess how willing and able all relevant actors are to formulate a range of responses to deter violence.
- In advance of participating in the process, the EOMs train local partners in negotiating circumstances that, to the extent possible, demand neutrality.
- Under circumstances that enable violence, EOMs avoid inviting unnecessary attention by being measured in their engagement with media to avoid inflaming tensions and exacerbating violence.
- During and after the elections, EOMs focus on documenting deviations from the acceptable conduct of elections and issue timely reports publicly and electronically to increase awareness of the process among key stakeholders.

<sup>67</sup> Asunka, Joseph, Sarah Brierley, Miriam Golden, Eric Kramon, and George Ofosu. "Electoral fraud or violence: The effect of observers on party manipulation strategies." *British Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 1 (2019): 129-151.

<sup>68</sup> Birch, Sarah, and Carolien Van Ham. "Getting away with foul play? The importance of formal and informal oversight institutions for electoral integrity." *European Journal of Political Research* 56, no. 3 (2017): 487-511.

<sup>69</sup> Asunka, Joseph, Sarah Brierley, Miriam Golden, Eric Kramon, and George Ofosu. "Electoral fraud or violence: The effect of observers on party manipulation strategies." *British Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 1 (2019): 129-151; Grömping, Max. "Transparent elections: Domestic election monitors, agenda-building, and electoral integrity." PhD diss., 2017; Bush, Sarah Sunn, and Lauren Prather. "Who's There? Election observer identity and the local credibility of elections." *International Organization* 72, no. 3 (2018): 659-692.

**Avoid common programming pitfalls:**

- Avoid election observation missions that do not include robust coverage in the pre-election and post-election periods, such as registration, party primaries, vote collation, results announcements and post-election litigation.
- Refrain from committing to election observation missions that do not ensure coverage in the most strategic polling stations, i.e., areas where the likelihood of violence is high and/or contested areas characterized by diffused power dynamics where no single political actor exercises exclusive influence.
- Avert elections observation missions that do not coordinate domestic and international monitoring based on regional contexts (domestic election monitoring may affect the calculus for parties by altering social norms surrounding the acceptability of political violence, while international monitoring may operate primarily through a deterrence mechanism).
- Exercise caution and evenhandedness in making statements about elections given the potential inflammatory effects of such statements in inciting violence and in deterring legitimate protests.

**Unintended consequences:**

- Unintentional legitimization of an electoral process or outcome that did not meet international standards.
- Creating or exacerbating existing lines of conflict among stakeholders.
- Strategic displacement of violence by elites, for example from election-day to the pre-election period to avoid EOMs on election day.
- Geographic displacement of violence from the areas covered by EOMs to areas not covered by EOMs.

**Key Results and Measures:**

- Increased transparency about the administration of elections and conduct of political and electoral actors.
- Evidence concerning the administration of elections and conduct of political and electoral actors that can be used for accountability, i.e., deliberate reputational costs such as public condemnation and international sanctions.
- Increased coordination among civil society organizations participating in elections.
- Enhanced participation and empowerment of civil society in electoral processes.
- Enhanced credibility of civil society actors as crucial electoral stakeholders.
- Increased response from the international community to election-related developments based on credible information from citizen and international observation missions.

## IRI's Promising Practices and Innovations

**Citizen Observation (The Gambia, 2021-22)** — IRI provided technical assistance to Gambia Participates and its partner organizations to observe the 2021 presidential and 2022 legislative elections in The Gambia. The observation effort from Gambia Participates made the vote more transparent and enhanced the credibility of civil society as an important actor promoting free and fair elections. Information collected by Gambia Participates contributed to changes implemented by the electoral commission and civil society groups to boost voter turnout and improve access to polling units. IRI will be providing similar assistance to Gambia Participates to observe the 2023 local and mayoral elections.

**Citizen Observation (Benin, 2021)** — In a closing political space, IRI formed a civil society coalition (Coalition des Organisations de la Société Civile pour les Elections et la Paix (COSCEP)) that deployed a credible, inclusive, and independent domestic election observation less than one month before election day. The observation consisted of 635 short-term observers—of which 35 were mobile, 225 were women and 549 were under the age of 35—to all 77 districts of Benin. Over 80 percent of observers submitted all six observation checklists to the command center comprised of 35 data clerks and the Coalitions secretariat. Five public advocacy statements supported by private data analysis conducted by COSCEP with IRI's support increased transparency of the elections by revealing the 20 departments where polling units did not open, incidents of intimidation and voter manipulation, and a lower voter turnout than reported by the election commission.

**International Election Observation Missions** — Below are recent international election observation missions fielded by IRI that followed the best practice of combining long- and short-term observers:

- **2019 Tunisia** — Joint NDI-IRI Preelection and Presidential Elections Missions.
- **2019 Ukraine** — IRI Presidential and Parliamentary Elections Missions.
- **2019 Nigeria** — Joint IRI-NDI Preelection and Election Missions.
- **2019 Moldova** — IRI Parliamentary Election Mission.
- **2018 Zimbabwe** — Joint NDI-IRI Preelection, Election and Post-Election Missions.
- **2021 Timor-Leste** — IRI Parliamentary Election Mission.



## INTERVENTION 5: INFORMATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

### Introduction

Scholarly research identifies three major types of frictions that can beset decision-making. The first is the scarcity or high cost of information that people need to make sound choices. The second is information overload, which creates complexity that can paralyze decision-making. The third is the administrative or logistical barriers that increase the cost of reaping benefits from a decision. Literature from economics, psychology and education suggests that providing simplified information, choice architecture (influencing choice by organizing the context within which people make decisions) and behavioral nudges (subtle interventions that shape choices without constraining them) can help address these frictions. Informational interventions can help zero in on the most salient information, narrow the scope of choices and/or facilitate comparisons among alternatives.

Informational interventions provide relevant actors information about a process and the consequences of supporting or violating that process. Policies and programs that are based on informational interventions rely on the assumption that providing people with information can change their behavior—e.g., MEV public messaging campaigns suggesting nonviolence alternatives to electoral violence assume that citizens will be refrain from engaging violent behavior as a result.

## Key Assumptions

The following assumptions are important to consider in designing these interventions.

- Individuals are rational, utility-maximizing actors.
- Individuals rationally update their beliefs when they get new information.
- Individuals with updated beliefs make more optimal decisions.
- As new information makes clear the benefits of some actions over others, people may undertake those actions even if doing so contradicts their fundamental beliefs.

## Illustrative Activities

- Public messaging campaigns that provide information about voting and other topics related to electoral processes.
- Trainings for party leaders and members on election administration.
- Small-group community workshops that provide a forum for discussing electoral processes.
- Trainings for security actors that teach security actors their responsibilities in engaging with electoral actors, protestors, and citizens at the polls.
- Civic and voter education that provide information about citizens' rights and responsibilities.

## Evidence Overview

Evidence from multiple countries suggests that information interventions, namely civic and voter education programs, are sometimes associated with decreased electoral violence. Additional research on the content of these interventions and the mode of delivery could help to better assess best practices. Further survey studies could better determine *which* information is most important and *how* it may change behaviors. Informational interventions are common and may be paired with other MEV interventions and may also operate through other theories of change. For example, the information provided in these interventions may also contribute to social norm changes (situate social norms alongside additional information, etc.) or have a coordinating effect to counteract collective action problems (e.g., widely distributing or standardizing information upon which individual and collective decisions can be made, such as election monitoring reports described below).

## Key Findings

1. **Civic and voter education campaigns could reduce violence and should not be limited to election periods.** A comparative study of the 2017 elections in Liberia and Kenya



found that civic and voter education interventions were associated with reduced violence in Liberia, but not Kenya.<sup>70</sup> The reasons for the difference were not clear, but Liberian respondents reported that the programs were more inclusive and were more likely to reach citizens regardless of their gender or age. Kenyan respondents criticized the campaigns for not being locally tailored. Interventions in both countries were criticized for starting too late in the electoral cycle.

Another comparative case study of MEV interventions in Bangladesh, Honduras, Malawi, Moldova and Thailand found that robust civic and voter education campaigns were strongly associated with decreased electoral violence.<sup>71</sup> However, the programs needed to be long-term across electoral cycles to be effective, as in Malawi and Moldova. It's not clear what type of organization should be the implementer, beyond being seen as credible and nonpartisan. In Malawi, campaigns were primarily undertaken by the EMB and civil society, whereas in Moldova the UN Development Programme and USAID had prominent roles. Education campaigns focused on civil society in general may fail because they do not effectively reach the state and nonstate actors most likely to engage in violence.

2. **Informational interventions can lead participants to feel empowered to reject violence and influence electoral violence.** A field experiment during the 2007 Nigerian elections placed 24 communities across the country into 12 matched pairs.<sup>72</sup> In each pair, one community was randomly selected and exposed to multipronged anti-violence messaging (the treatment community) and one community was not exposed to the intervention (the control community). The interventions, conducted by the local chapter of the international NGO Action Aid, included distribution of materials with anti-violence messaging, town hall meetings to discuss options for responding to electoral violence and theater comparing "good" politicians with "bad" politicians who incite violence. In a survey, individuals who were targeted by these interventions reported that they felt more "empowered" to stand up to electoral violence in their communities. Furthermore, in treatment communities, voter turnout significantly *increased* and incidents of electoral violence *decreased*. This program also operated through a social norm theory of change, with its emphasis on rejecting violence.
3. **Election education conducted by impartial facilitators can prevent violence even in conflict areas and nonconsolidated democracies.** A study in Côte d'Ivoire from 2010 to 2016 found that UN peacekeeping operations' (PKO) election education initiatives were associated with decreases in electoral violence that could operate in three pathways (measured by survey data).<sup>73</sup> Respondents in communities with election education activities were less afraid of electoral violence because they learned about PKO security measures and nonviolent alternatives, and, through peace messaging aimed at changing social norms, they became more resistant to disinformation from actors encouraging violence. It is critical that the facilitator be seen as impartial, though this is particularly challenging in opposition-supporting areas and communities.

<sup>70</sup> Claes, Jonas, and Inken von Borzyskowski. *What Works in Preventing Election Violence*. United States Institute of Peace, 2018.

<sup>71</sup> Claes, Jonas, and Geoffrey Macdonald. "Findings and conclusion." *Electing Peace: Violence Prevention and Impact at the Polls* (2016): 195-220.

<sup>72</sup> Collier, Paul, and Pedro C. Vicente. "Votes and violence: Evidence from a field experiment in Nigeria." *The economic journal* 124, no. 574 (2014): F327-F355.

<sup>73</sup> Smidt, Hannah. "Mitigating election violence locally: UN peacekeepers' election-education campaigns in Côte d'Ivoire." *Journal of peace research* 57, no. 1 (2020): 199-216.

4. **EOM reports may also be seen as informational interventions with respect to post-electoral violence and protest** in that they provide what may be viewed as an unbiased assessment of whether the elections were free and fair that is widely shared with citizens and stakeholders. A study of 189 elections in Africa from 1997 to 2009 found that post-electoral violence is more likely when international election observers deem the elections not free or fair.<sup>74</sup> Because these statements of impartial factual information about the quality of the election carry weight, they can confirm doubts about an election's legitimacy and motivate popular protest. Conversely, they can discourage protests when they judge an election free and fair.<sup>75</sup>

## Considerations for Program Design

### Key considerations:

- » Information should be shared by an entity that is seen as credible and impartial.
- » These interventions may need to be undertaken over a sustained period to register an effect. Informational interventions should not be limited only to the electoral cycle.
- » Evidence suggests that informational interventions do not necessarily reduce violence. Implementers should therefore pay attention to the manner in which the information is presented, while ensuring accuracy.
- » It is difficult to know whether new knowledge will make people more or less willing to engage in electoral violence.

### Individual or group targeting criteria:

- » Individual: leaders, opinion-makers, information gatekeepers, behavior enforcers.
- » Group: adversarial groups that have demonstrated a propensity to use violence to resolve disagreements.

### Useful strategies:

- » Let local communities be the ones to call for interventions.
- » Determine what success would look like by developing a clear expectation of specific behaviors that need to change (change on a continuum or a switch from negative to positive).
- » Develop a clear understanding of the triggers for those behaviors.
- » Identify the people whose behavior needs to change (targets of change), those who will likely lead the change (agents of change) and those who are likely to enforce the change (enforcers of change).
- » Identify the change/s that need to be introduced in the informational context to induce individual and group behavioral change.
- » Assess the primary, secondary and tertiary effects of the intervention.

<sup>74</sup> Daxecker, Ursula E. "The cost of exposing cheating: International election monitoring, fraud, and post-election violence in Africa." *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 4 (2012): 503-516.

<sup>75</sup> Hyde, Susan D., and Nikolay Marinov. "Information and self-enforcing democracy: The role of international election observation." *International Organization* 68, no. 2 (2014): 329-359.

- » Pilot the intervention to test the message, tool, medium, sequence and interaction effects.
- » Develop a measurement strategy to capture the effect (direct observation, behavioral surveys or review of records).

#### **Avoid common programming pitfalls:**

- » Ensure programming reaches the state and nonstate actors most likely to engage in violence.
- » Avoid short-term information campaigns that are too brief to widely disseminate information through repetition.
- » Avoid information campaigns conducted by biased actors, like political parties or certain advocacy groups.

#### **Unintended consequences:**

- » Potential perpetrators of electoral violence could use publicly accessible informational interventions to inform geographic and temporal targeting strategies.
- » Content development for informational interventions could be subject to confirmation bias if activity designers do not independently evaluate the information they present to beneficiaries.

#### **Key Results and Measures:**

- Application of acquired knowledge to mitigate violence, as measured through behavioral surveys of participants



### **IRI's Promising Practices and Innovations**

**Youth Mediators for Peace Project (Mauritania, December 2018-February 2020)** — In 2019, IRI collaborated with local civil society groups, including Mauritania's largest youth development organizations, cultural associations and sports clubs, to form the Youth Mediator for Peace (YMP) Network, the country's first youth-led conflict resolution collective. The YMP Network conducted social activities and disseminated social cohesion narratives that ultimately reached more than 253,000 Mauritians across the country. Post-campaign interviews with participants indicate that the messaging intervention set the example for improving youth interracial, intercaste and interethnic relations by framing pluralism and diversity as values integral to any young Mauritanian.

**Preventing Mitigating Electoral Violence Through Strengthening Local Electoral Security Management Teams (Burkina Faso, September 2020-January 2022)** — Ahead of the 2020 presidential and legislative elections in Burkina Faso, IRI conducted a rapid risk assessment that informed the design and implementation of a peace messaging campaign led by customary chiefs and youth social media influencers. The campaign reached 3,508,000 citizens in Passoré, Yatenga, Séfo, Sanmatenga and Ganzourgou with violence-prevention messaging. A further 3,346 citizens accessed digital election-violence risk messaging through the dissemination of electoral violence analysis, infographics and Facebook profile filters. The combined social legitimacy of the customary leaders and youth activists gave each provincial team considerable influence over different demographic targets. Since political party leaders feared censure from popular and well-respected customary chiefs, the radio interviews and

recorded messages released by the traditional leaders influenced their strategic calculations and contributed to a decrease in political party-driven violence in the target localities.



## INTERVENTION 6: NETWORK & COLLABORATION THEORIES

### Introduction

A network is a group of individuals or organizations that pursue a shared objective and interact with one another on an ongoing basis. Since many IRI projects include both these elements, it is useful to situate networks on a continuum, based on the degree to which the goal of the network is coordinated action. *Support networks* function via peer-to-peer sharing, whereas *coalitions* function via coordinated or complementary action. Support networks aim to influence actors within the network, whereas coalitions aim to influence actors outside the network. Support networks tend to support the personal goals of individual network members, whereas coalitions tend to support collective goals of the group. Support networks tend to be loosely organized, whereas coalitions are structured. Support networks entail informal commitment, whereas coalitions often require a formal commitment. Networks at IRI will not usually fall perfectly on one side of this continuum or another, but research suggests that a key to successful network programming is to not lose sight of what your network focuses on, and why.<sup>76</sup>

To use a metaphor, think about support networks like a swim team. The support of the team matters and there is an aggregate score, but races are won by individuals or small groups. In contrast, coalitions are more like a basketball team, where winning happens collectively. A support network might focus on something like building professional skillsets. A coalition might focus on something like advocating for new laws. Regardless of where on the continuum it falls, a key feature of a network is that purposeful, ongoing interaction that is not coordinated by external actors must be fundamental to its existence. In the electoral violence context, domestic election observation groups and coalitions of non-governmental organizations can oversee the process of elections, identify risks of violence, and help coordinate behavior among key institutions and actors.

### Key Assumptions

The following assumptions are important to consider in designing these interventions.

- Members of these networks and coalitions have similar preferences.
- Members of these networks and coalitions are united over similar objectives, i.e., they are part of the network or coalition because they perceive their engagement in it furthering their ambition.
- Networks and coalitions involve formation of groups as well as enforcement of group actions.
- Once the network or a coalition arrives at an agreement over a process, it has the means to enforce behavior that would strengthen the process.

<sup>76</sup> International Republican Institute, Networks Field Guide, <https://www.iri.org/resources/networks-field-guide/>

- Even if members of a network or a group have competing interests, individuals are able to set their differences aside in the broader interest of the group.
- Coordination action toward formation of networks or coalitions can represent collusive behavior in repeated games (interactions).

## Illustrative Activities

- Incubation of new networks or coalitions through membership recruitment, organizational structure development and meeting facilitation.
- Capacity-building, strategic planning and organizational support to preexisting networks and coalitions.
- Cross-regional coordination conferences among local electoral violence prevention coalitions.
- After-action reviews and reflection conferences with network or coalition members.

## Evidence Overview

Domestic election observation, early warning systems, advocacy and parallel vote tabulation seem to be particularly common and productive areas for collaborations to mitigate electoral violence. Despite the frequency of such partnerships, there is little empirical evidence that provides more than a cursory examination of how these partnerships work and under what conditions different formulations may be most useful.

## Key Findings

1. **Networks may be particularly beneficial for working on highly technical functions, such as early monitoring and warning systems for electoral violence and parallel vote tabulation.** While many organizations are interested in these approaches, few have the technical capabilities to undertake them independently. In parallel vote tabulation, for example, it is especially important that an organization does not publicize a tabulation that is based on a faulty methodology, which could cause citizens to question official election results. Furthermore, networks of organizations give the projects enough participants, geographical coverage and local knowledge to make them more effective. For example, in Ghana the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers trained thousands of observers from Ghanaian civil society organizations to conduct a parallel-vote tabulation exercise.<sup>77</sup> In turn, national networks benefit from the expertise of established transnational and transregional networks that can share established methodologies and trainings so that individual countries can effectively build on existing knowledge and best practices (e.g., the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors, etc.).
2. **Networks and coalitions may have the visibility and clout to influence government and stakeholders that single organizations may not have, and thus can set the agenda.** For example, the international donors of the Conseil National D'Observation (CNO), a network of Haitian civil society organizations conducting domestic election monitoring,

<sup>77</sup> Gyimah-Boadi, Emmanuel. "Another step forward for Ghana." *Journal of democracy* 20, no. 2 (2009): 138-152.

secured a guarantee from the Haitian EMB that CNO observers would be accredited. CNO observers thus could get accreditation more easily than nonmembers, which also encouraged nonaffiliated organizations to join CNO, further diversifying the network.<sup>78</sup> The Afghan Women's Network, composed of more than 125 civil society organizations, collectively had the standing necessary to be invited to major national functions and to address the UN Security Council. This social and political clout enabled it to push for gender quotas and to be a leading voice for the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law, as well as to partner with international organizations on campaigns to increase women's political participation (Lough 2012).<sup>79</sup> As with many networks, however, individual organizations, particularly smaller members, may feel sidelined in both the decision-making and funding process.<sup>80</sup>

3. **Networks and coalitions can be susceptible to disagreements and conflict, which can diminish their impact.** For example, CNO in Haiti deployed more than 7,000 observers during the 2000 elections, which the Organization of American States (OAS) deemed problematic, leading the OAS to refuse to monitor the second round of elections. CNO officially sided with the OAS, but several member organizations, including two of the largest, split and observed the second round, dinging the network's reputation.<sup>81</sup>
4. **Networks and coalitions must be viewed as independent and nonpartisan.** International funding for networks and coalitions can lead to accusations of bias or partisanship. For example, networks of domestic election monitors (the Conseil National D'Observation in Haiti, the Alianza Cívica in Mexico, etc.) have had to contend with allegations that the funding they received from the United States would affect their conclusions. Furthermore, if leadership or members of the partnership are perceived as partisan, this can influence how the rest of the members are viewed, as in the case of CNO.<sup>82</sup>

## Considerations for Program Design

### Key considerations:

- Networks and coalitions build public credibility based on their professionalism and neutrality. Cooperation can strain credibility if the negative actions of one organization reflect poorly on the entire group.
- Networks and coalitions should evaluate decision-making processes to ensure that all members feel heard.

<sup>78</sup> Lean, Sharon F. "Democracy assistance to domestic election monitoring organizations: Conditions for success." *Democratisation* 14, no. 2 (2007): 289-312.

<sup>79</sup> Lough, Oliver, and Chona E. Echavez. "Equal Rights, Unequal Opportunities: Women's Participation in Afghanistan's Parliamentary and Provincial Council Elections." (2012); Larson, Anna. "House of the people? Afghanistan's parliament in 2015." *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 6 (2016): 595-612; Tariq, D. M., Anwar Ali, Dr Arif Khan, Manzoor Ahmad, Muhammad Ayaz, Said Saeed, and Rizwan Ahmad. "Political Participation of Women in Afghanistan in the Present Set up." *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* 15, no. 7 (2021).

<sup>80</sup> Larson, Anna. "House of the people? Afghanistan's parliament in 2015." *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 6 (2016): 595-612.

<sup>81</sup> Lean, Sharon F. "Democracy assistance to domestic election monitoring organizations: Conditions for success." *Democratisation* 14, no. 2 (2007): 289-312.

<sup>82</sup> Lean, Sharon F. "Democracy assistance to domestic election monitoring organizations: Conditions for success." *Democratisation* 14, no. 2 (2007): 289-312.



**Individual or group targeting considerations:**

- Individual: Individuals who may add influence, legitimacy and access to a preexisting or new group.
- Group: Pre-existing groups or networks that enjoy legitimacy and strong track record of effective coordination in the target community.

**Networks can be a powerful way to build a sense of community, solidarity or momentum toward a social goal, but they don't work in every context. Based on IRI's research, networks seem to thrive when a combination of the following conditions exist:**

- **Network members have an incentive to be connected.** These incentives could include access to things that they couldn't get on their own, such as:
  - » **Peer support and "safety in numbers."** This is especially true for marginalized groups or people working on sensitive topics or closed spaces who may feel isolated or powerless on their own. For more on the value of networks in closed and closing spaces, see this resource.
  - » **Specialized skillsets.** This is especially true for people working on collective goals who lack the skills to achieve the objective. (For example, a coalition made up of human rights advocates might benefit from the addition of a few legal experts to help proofread their policy proposals against existing laws, or communications experts to make sure that their message is appealing.)
- **There is sufficient political will and social trust for network members to meaningfully share information or collaborate.** This is often a challenge for networks that aim to incorporate members of opposing political parties, or political parties and CSOs, unless there is significant preexisting momentum for these groups to coordinate.
- **Multiple actors are already working on the topic of the intended network.** If a nascent network already exists, all the better. Try to diagnose what that network needs and support it, rather than creating a new one.
- **There is a trusted organization or individual who can serve as a network facilitator,** especially if the network you want to support is more focused on collective goals.

**Avoid common programming pitfalls:**

- Ensure engagement and activity of coalitions/networks between election cycles.
- Safeguard internal democracy in coalitions/networks, including but not limited to leadership elections, equal participation of all members, inclusion of marginalized groups and mechanisms to resolve disputes.
- Articulate clear roles and responsibilities for member organizations.
- Engage full-time coalition members to manage the day-to-day administrative tasks necessary to sustain the coalition/network.
- Institutionalize clear vetting of members, potentially leading to the inclusion of problematic members in a group.

**Unintended consequences:**

- Networks may be unintentionally duplicative of other coordination efforts, minimizing their capacity to make a difference through their interventions.
- Some networks may create an “in-group, out-group” phenomenon—especially with elite actors at the local and national level—which could engender resentment among those not included in its membership.
- Occasionally, networks may also seek to create a broad membership to ensure inclusivity and thus become too large to rapidly respond to emerging electoral violence threats.
- It is possible that networks experience the risk of infiltration, especially by elite actors with undisclosed or unknown ties to electoral violence perpetrators.

**Key Results and Measures:**

1. Number of collaborative interventions designed and implemented by network members to prevent and mitigate identified electoral violence threats.
2. Percentage of collaborative interventions designed and implemented by network members that sway potential perpetrators of electoral violence to peacefully participate in the electoral process.
3. Number of joint media statements, reports or articles published by the network as a form of public advocacy to counter electoral violence.

**IRI's Promising Practices and Innovations**

**Post-Electoral Community Dialogues (Mauritania, June 2019-May 2020)** — In 2019 and 2020, IRI created and trained community-based peace-building coalitions representing youth and religious leaders from all five ethnic groups to resolve conflicts and foster constructive dialogue following the violence after Mauritania's 2019 presidential election. Empowered to address long-term drivers of conflict within their communities, the facilitators then led 20 dialogues that resulted in consensus-based recommendations to address discrimination and conflict. These recommendations included addressing ethnic discrimination at the national level; creation of a conflict management committee to address disputes between youth groups; inclusion of representatives from all ethnic groups in the management of the football league; and integration of local languages in the public life in the Kiffa region.

**Preventing Mitigating Electoral Violence Through Strengthening Local Electoral Security Management Teams (Burkina Faso, September 2020-January 2022)** — Ahead of the May 2021 local elections in Burkina Faso, IRI worked with subnational electoral management bodies to strengthen their coordination with local security, civilian government and civil society actors to jointly identify risks of electoral violence that inform the development and coordinated implementation of risk-reduction plans in hot-spot provinces.

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## CONCLUSION

Over the past 20 years, academics have undertaken several cross-national empirical studies of electoral violence to understand the conditions under which it is likely to occur, the instigators, targets, and effects of violence. It has only been in the last decade that attention has finally turned to electoral violence mitigation and prevention. Thus, the literature on electoral violence mitigation is nascent and lacks systematic, cross-national evidence.<sup>83</sup> Most evidence on the effectiveness of interventions aimed at mitigating electoral violence is limited to individual case studies.<sup>84</sup>

A majority of rigorous studies examine international election observation missions or technical assistance provided primarily to election management bodies (EMBs). There are few systematic studies undertaken of other interventions, such as elite pacts or peace messaging. Data on these interventions originates primarily from case studies.

Studies interrogating the direct effect of interventions on electoral violence employ different dependent variables to measure electoral violence. These include a binary presence/absence of violence; the number of violent incidents in a time period; the intensity of the violence (measured by an increase or decrease in violence relative to another time period); the scope of violence (measured by the range of violent tactics employed); the number of deaths resulting from violence; the perception of violence (often measured by self-reported scores on freedom of movement). The conclusions that these studies draw vary with the measure of 'success' they focus on.

Similarly, comparative studies take different approaches to their conceptualization of their independent variable. For example, they may only measure the presence or absence of a certain type of intervention (e.g., peace messages or presence of an observation mission) or they may try to also create a measurement that takes into account the quality and/or scope of the intervention, the latter of which can be challenging in cross-national studies.

Electoral violence mitigation programs, particularly those aimed at civil society, incorporate a variety of activities (i.e., peace messaging, community meetings, dialogues, etc.) that may operate through different theories of change. Depending on how the activities are evaluated, it may be challenging to disentangle the effects of individual interventions on mitigating electoral violence.

Yet, despite these constraints, this toolkit has sought to demonstrate the merit in thinking about electoral violence systematically, interrogating the logic underlying the key interventions to mitigate violence, and articulating how these interventions can be usefully designed in an electoral context that is vulnerable to violence. As policymakers and program implementers draw upon this toolkit and the examples embedded in the document, we hope that their design of programmatic interventions also entails an evaluation component. In other words, programs that seek to mitigate electoral violence should be designed in a

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<sup>83</sup> Birch, Sarah, Ursula Daxecker, and Kristine Höglund. "Electoral violence: An introduction." *Journal of Peace Research* 57, no. 1 (2020): 3-14.

<sup>84</sup> Von Borzyskowski, Inken. *The credibility challenge: How democracy aid influences election violence*. Cornell University Press, 2019.

way to systematically capture evidence on the effectiveness of individual interventions. In a recent (2021-2023) program funded by the US State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) on preventing electoral violence in Kenya, IRI designed three interventions: targeted peace messaging, long-term security monitoring, and elite pledges.<sup>85</sup> IRI is evaluating the impact of these interventions by piloting them in select wards that are demographically and politically similar to those wards where IRI is not programming its interventions. With this controlled comparison approach, IRI is using baseline and endline surveys to assess the impact of these interventions.

To overcome the limitations of existing evidence, there is a greater need for matched comparisons, experiments, and statistical controls that help identify effects of interventions. Equally important, though, is the need to understand the processes of electoral violence and its social and cultural context through carefully designed ethnographic studies.

The unsurprising and somber finding in the literature as well as program evaluations is that violence is invariably strategic and employed deliberately by elites—and co-produced by their supporters—to further their political objectives. Elections can be violent events simply because orchestrating violence around elections pays off as a strategy for elites. The key implication is that the introduction of democracy in a context increases the potential for violence around elections, but it also decreases violence in nonelectoral periods. Elections can, then, be peaceful in two scenarios: either they are not a legitimate means to contest power (in which case, violence would move towards the other legitimate means to contest power), or they provide such an effective and non-violent means to contest power that violence is no longer seen by elites as useful.<sup>86</sup>

From a programming and policy perspective, there is a pronounced need to think about strategies and tools to increase the cost of violent political activities and decrease the cost of non-violent political activities for elites. Our optimism in the ability of policy communities to coordinate its actions and mitigate electoral violence underscores the ambition behind this toolkit.

<sup>85</sup> IRI is employing these three approaches simultaneously in select counties: Uasin Gishu, Nairobi, Kisumu, Migori, and Kirinyaga. *Elite pacts and pledges* represent a top-down initiative to mitigate electoral violence. It focuses on engaging the political party elite in making public-facing commitments to refrain from violence during and after the elections. This approach is particularly effective in contexts where elites face reputational costs for betraying their public commitments. The second approach, *targeted Peace messaging* entails disseminating anti-violence and pro-peace messages through a mix of social media, traditional media, and credible local actors. It represents a bottom-up approach that targets the incited (unemployed youth), rather than the inciters (political party elite). IRI's third approach focuses on deploying *long-term security monitors (LTSMs)* to the five target counties. This long-term (3-6 months) deployment of monitors helps IRI accomplish two objectives. It helps build an early warning system, i.e., information gathered by election monitors provide valuable insight for stakeholders to respond to issues such as violence, harassment, voter suppression, and intimidation promptly. It also helps IRI create a deterrence effect, i.e., political actors are less likely to violate norms of good behavior when they realize that their behavior will not go unnoticed.

<sup>86</sup> Harish, S. P., and Andrew T. Little. "The political violence cycle." *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 2 (2017): 237-255.



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