Helpdesk Research Report: Election monitoring, voter education and election-related violence

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> **Query:** Is there any analysis on whether election monitoring reduces election-related violence? Does research point to any particular strategies that are more or less effective than others? Is there any analysis that compares the relative value of investing in voter education against investment in election monitoring to reduce election-related violence? Is there any analysis on the kinds of voter education that work best in different environments?
>
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1. Overview

This report addresses the links between election monitoring, voter education and election-related violence. It finds little generalisable evidence to show that election monitoring or voter education consistently lead to a reduction in levels of election-related violence. On the contrary, some cross-country quantitative studies suggest that in certain contexts, election monitoring may actually promote violence. The report outlines a number of methodological difficulties with establishing a general argument about these links. It also finds contradictory evidence on the question of which election monitoring strategies are most effective, and little analysis of comparative assessments about the relative value voter education versus election monitoring. Finally, the report highlights limited analysis of the degree to which different voter education strategies are more or less appropriate in particular environments.

<u>Is there any analysis on whether election monitoring reduces election-related violence?</u>

The claim that election monitoring can reduce election-related violence appears frequently in the literature (see e.g. Carothers 1997, Schimpp & McKernan 2001, Binder 2009, Global Commission 2012). This claim is most commonly based on the assumption that since electoral fraud may make election-related violence more likely, monitoring that reduces fraud may reduce violence (Global Commission 2012). Other studies assert that the presence of observers helps to encourage losers to accept the legitimacy of elections, or to participate in elections they might have otherwise boycotted, thereby reducing the likelihood of violence (Carothers 1997, Schimpp & McKernan 2001, Atwood 2012). While it is possible to highlight specific cases where these deterrent effects have occurred – Carothers (1997), for example, highlights the Nicaraguan elections of 1990 or the Dominican Republic elections of 1996 – they are difficult to measure systematically and there has been no research that rigorously examines these links across countries (expert comments). The links between election monitoring and voter education on the one hand and election-related violence on the other are difficult to measure systematically for at least five main reasons:

- Election monitoring and voter education programmes are rarely designed solely or explicitly to reduce election violence and therefore it is usually not recorded (expert comments).
- The assignment of monitors or education programmes is not random (Kelley 2012, expert comments).
- Elections in which there is a lot at stake are more likely to be violent, and more likely to be monitored (and probably more likely to attract donor funding for voter education) (expert comments).
- Election observation is often poorly implemented, making it difficult to assess the violence reducing potential of these interventions (Global Commission 2012).
- Many electoral assistance programmes involve a range of interventions (such as election monitoring, supporting the creation of electoral commissions, support for election security and support for the adjudication of elections), which makes it difficult to trace impacts back to election monitoring alone (see Walton 2012).

There is a rich literature on election monitoring, but the vast majority of this is based on case studies with very limited systemic analysis (Kelley 2012). While some evaluations of election monitoring projects suggest that these interventions reduced election violence, this is difficult to prove with any certainty. The literature tends to stress that the causes of election-related violence are complex, and that a range of electoral support interventions should be applied to address these issues. Atwood (forthcoming) stresses that election observation should not be seen primarily as a violence-reduction tool, and warns against expecting too much from election observation.

A small number of quantitative, cross-country studies have helped to improve understanding of the general effects of election observation on election-related violence. Although it does not specifically focus on election observation, a study by Norris (2012, 1) provides support to one part of the common assumption underlying the claim that observation can reduce violence by finding that 'electoral integrity does have a significant impact by reducing outbreaks of electoral violence'. Several quantitative studies support the hypothesis that under certain circumstances, election observation can exacerbate electoral violence. Hyde and Marinov (2012) show that post-election protests (and one could infer post-election violence) are more likely, last longer, and attract more supporters following negative reports from international observers. This implies that international observers make protest more likely in the short term, but increase incentives to hold democratic elections in the long term. A study by Daxecker (2012) finds that 'the presence of election fraud and international observers

increases the likelihood of post-election violence'. Another paper by Daxecker (forthcoming, 1) finds that the presence of international observers reduces the potential for election-day violence, but 'creates incentives for political actors to engage in violent manipulation in parts of the electoral process receiving less international attention, such as the pre-election period'.

<u>Does research point to any particular strategies that are more or less effective than others?</u>

Assessing the relative effectiveness of local and external monitors in reducing violence is problematic because they tend to co-occur (expert comments). There is some discussion in the literature about the relative efficacy of international and local monitors, but very little analysis of the relative extent to which these different types of engagement affect levels of electoral violence. There is some consensus in the literature and from experts that long-term commitment is required to make a sustainable reduction in the likelihood of electoral violence (expert comments). The Global Commission (2012, 53) states that if there is 'long-term attention and if election observation reports are used as part of a long-term dedicated process of improving electoral integrity, then [there will be] even greater positive change'.

<u>Is there any analysis that compares the relative value of investing in voter education against investment in election monitoring to reduce election-related violence?</u>

Some studies state that civic education and specifically non-violence training programmes can reduce violence by encouraging voters to vote outside of ethnic and religious lines, to avoid vote-buying and to support non-violent tactics, but only a very small number of studies do this systematically. No analysis that compares the relative value of investing in voter education against investment in election monitoring to reduce election-related violence was identified. Experts argue that while comparing the relative value of investing in voter education against investment in election monitoring to reduce election-related violence is possible at a country level, it would be difficult to do cross-nationally, since the nature and assignment of both monitors and voter-education varies significantly and depends on many factors (expert comments).

<u>Is there any analysis on the kinds of voter education that work best in different environments?</u>

There is limited comparative analysis that examines which kinds of voter education work best in particular environments. Most studies focusing on unstable or violence-prone contexts stress the need for educators to maintain neutrality and bi-partizanship (Brady 2009, IFES 2012). Brady (2009) suggests that in unsafe regions where there are security issues for citizens and educators, voter education efforts that utilise broadcast media may be more appropriate. Jennings (1999) stresses the importance of civil society involvement in voter education programmes in transitional contexts where people are not necessarily convinced of the importance of voting.

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2. Election Monitoring

<u>Background</u>

Election monitoring is the observation of an election by one or more independent parties to assess its quality and usually focuses on judging whether the election meets international standards. Observation may focus on electoral administration, the participation of political parties, candidates and interest groups. Elections can be monitored by international observers (such as the European

Commission or the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)), local observers, and often by both concurrently. It is expected that election observers will be impartial and observation is generally seen to boost transparency and enhance the accountability of election officers (Bargiacchi et al. 2011, Binder 2009). Election monitors can perform a range of goals including confidence-building, conflict prevention, reporting, verifying, and legitimising elections (Anglin 1998). International election observers are now present at more than four out of every five elections in the developing world (Hyde 2010).

Most studies on election-related violence identify a range of causes and advocate a range of interventions to address these (Haider 2011, Sisk 2008, Schimpp & McKernan 2001, Global Commission 2012). Causes of election-related violence include structural conditions, electoral system choice, the competence of electoral administration and the nature and functioning of the security sector (Sisk 2008, Schimpp & McKernan 2001). As a result, the literature generally suggests that electoral support interventions should address the whole electoral cycle and allow for specifically designed response measures to prevent, mitigate and/or resolve election-related violence (Haider 2011). They include reviewing the legal framework, building the capacity of election administration bodies, improving planning and budgeting, civic and voter education, strengthening electoral dispute resolution mechanisms, violence monitoring, non-violence training and improving evaluation (Haider 2011, Schimpp & McKernan 2001, Global Commission 2012). Other interventions such as providing incentives to promote cooperation between rival parties may also help to reduce the likelihood of electoral violence (Sisk 2008). Most studies acknowledge that transforming electoral systems can take time and fundamental transformation. The Global Commission (2012, 26), for example, states that in many contexts long-term electoral security requires addressing rule of law issues and infusing 'the institutions of democracy with the ethos of democracy'.

Atwood (forthcoming, 24) argues in a report to the EU that 'international observation should never be viewed as a sole policy response to prevent violence' and that 'the EU should not expect too much from them' (Atwood forthcoming, 25). He asserts that observation should be seen as a tool not a policy, and that 'the causes of violence run much deeper than electoral mechanics, and observers can seldom shape them' (25). He argues that the primary goal of observers is to 'assess elections and, perhaps, deter particularly egregious abuses', noting that for some polls this might reduce the risks of violence, but for others it might increase these risks (p.24).

One of the key assumptions linking election observation to a decreased likelihood of electoral violence is the broader argument that an improvement in electoral integrity can reduce the likelihood of violence. This assumption is supported by a recent cross-country quantitative study. Based on a dataset that covers all election events in independent states with populations over half a million between 1945 and 2010, Norris (2012, 1) finds that 'electoral integrity does have a significant impact by reducing outbreaks of electoral violence'.

There is a rich literature on election monitoring, but the vast majority of this is based on case studies with very limited systemic analysis (Kelley 2012). While some evaluations of election monitoring projects suggest that these interventions reduced election violence, this is difficult to prove with any certainty. For example, a UNDEF evaluation of an election-support project in the Philippines (UNDEF, 2012, 2) notes that although some partners stated that the project had led to a reduction in violence, 'the cause and effect of this, however, is impossible to determine'.

Measuring the impact of election observation is complicated by the fact that these interventions are often poorly implemented and therefore ineffective. The Global Commission (2012) argues that

international donors and democratic governments have not used election observation to its fullest effect. 'In particular, they have not fully taken advantage of pre-election observation reports to do more to prevent egregiously flawed elections and the political use of violence during elections. Nor have donors and democratic governments done enough to use observer reports after elections to strengthen political processes of electoral integrity and democratic change throughout the electoral cycle in advance of the next election. Finally, donors and governments have not done enough to build up domestic electoral observation capacity' (Global Commission 2012, 54).

Hyde and Kelley (2011) argue that observer missions often arrive late or are understaffed and that as a result, attention tends to be directed solely on the election day. Darnolf (2011) claims that observation handbooks often downplay the importance of non-election day activities. This may have prompted some governments to move their fraudulent activities and improper behaviour to the periods prior to (and after) election day (Beaulieu & Hyde 2009). Kelley (2010) argues that election observers may also be biased in certain circumstances. She finds that there are multiple observer missions in most cases where external monitors observe elections, and that 'in roughly a third of the cases, monitoring missions disagreed with one another about their overall assessments' (p. 162). These criticisms are disputed in the literature and have been challenged specifically by Stremlau and Carroll (2011, no p.n.) in a recent article, where they argue that 'serious election observation increasingly begins many months before voting and counting, and often continues after the elections to monitor the resolution of election disputes'. They also state that 'observers are keenly aware of the dangers of renewed conflict or instability after elections and must weigh those concerns while conducting their missions. Still, credible observation organisations know that their most important asset is their record of impartiality' (Stremlau & Carroll 2011, no p.n). The Global Commission's (2012, 55) report also argues that 'as early as 2005, the most experienced observer missions were much longer than they were in the early 1990s'.

<u>Is there any analysis on whether election monitoring reduces election-related violence?</u>

A recent cross-country study by Hyde and Marinov (2012), drawing on cross-national, inter-temporal, and individual level datasets, shows that post-election protests (and, one could infer, incidents of post-election violence) are more likely, last longer, and attract more supporters following negative reports from international observers. This implies that international observers make protest more likely in the short term, but increase incentives to hold democratic elections in the long term. One could speculate from these findings that election monitoring may increase the risk of violence in the short term, while decreasing it in the long term. This assumption is confirmed by a recent study by Daxecker (2012) examines post-election conflict events for African elections between 1997 and 2009. It finds that 'the presence of election fraud and international observers increases the likelihood of post-election violence'. The study confirms the hypothesis that when 'elections are manipulated to deny citizens an opportunity for peaceful contestation and international observers publicise such manipulation, violent interactions between incumbents, opposition parties, and citizens can ensue' (Daxecker 2012, 503). Another forthcoming paper by Daxecker (forthcoming, 1) draws on the data on African elections between 1990 and 2009. It finds that the presence of international observers reduces the potential for election-day violence, but 'creates incentives for political actors to engage in violent manipulation in parts of the electoral process receiving less international attention, such as the pre-election period'.

This potential for observation to increase the likelihood of violence is well known amongst practitioners. International election monitors often downplay their criticisms where they worry that their assessments may fuel violence (Kelley 2012). This stance is particularly common in contexts where

pre-election violence has been widespread such as Zimbabwe, Cambodia and Kenya (Kelley 2012, Atwood forthcoming). The Global Commission (2012) report states that international actors rarely adopt punitive measures against countries whose elections fall below international standards partly due to fear of stoking instability.

Does research point to any particular strategies that are more or less effective than others?

Assessing the relative effectiveness of local and external monitors in reducing violence is problematic because they tend to co-occur (expert comments). There is some discussion in the literature about the relative efficacy of international and local monitors, but very little analysis of the relative extent to which these different types of engagement affect levels of electoral violence (see Haider 2011). Several studies stress that monitors representing inter-governmental organisations may be liable to tone down criticism of elections under pressure from nondemocratic members (Hyde & Kelley 2011). In other circumstances, international observers may tone down criticism on the grounds that they have invested political capital or provided funds to support elections. Darnolf (2011), for example, criticises the decision of the EU to send an observation to monitor the 2009 elections in Afghanistan that donors were funding. It is often argued that domestic observers will have greater local knowledge and a wider field network (DFID 2011).

Research for the Global Commission (2012) finds that if international actors engage before potentially flawed elections and use positive incentives or mixed positive/punitive strategies, the quality of elections often improves on voting day. The Commission's research also suggests that if there is 'long-term attention and if election observation reports are used as part of a long-term dedicated process of improving electoral integrity, then [there will be] even greater positive change' (Global Commission 2012, 53).

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3. Voter Education

Background

The main goal of voter education programmes is to expand democratic participation, particularly among marginalised and under-represented segments of society. Activities include raising awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, including voting rights, and practical information about where, when and how to vote. Civic and voter education is often conducted by different types of civil society organisations (international, national and local level organisations). Successful education programmes tend to encourage the formation of NGO umbrella groups for civic and voter education activities to balance support provided to the national election monitoring body (Haider 2011).

Violence reduction

Some studies state that civic education and specifically non-violence training programmes can reduce violence by encouraging voters to vote outside of ethnic and religious lines, to avoid vote-buying and to support non-violent tactics (Haider 2008). Gregory Kehaila from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) (IFES 2012, n.p.) argues in a recent interview that of seven different types of electoral violence (party-on-party, party-on-voter, party-on-state, voter-on-voter, voter-on-state, state-on-voter, state-on-state), 'only two types of electoral violence can be mitigated through voter education: voter-on-voter electoral violence and voter-on-state electoral violence'. He argues that

voter education can reduce violence by 'reinforcing voters' understanding of the electoral process; by encouraging an electoral choice based on candidates' programs; and by fighting against the 'strong man syndrome' and vote-catching, voter education can help prevent these types of electoral violence which result from a misunderstanding of the electoral process or its ideological refusal. Suitable voter education can include a wide range of activities from theatre shows to a classroom or street demonstration (IFES 2012). Carl Dundas, in response to a question posed on the ACE Project website, argues that voter education is one of several appropriate strategies for responding to violence triggered by rivalry between contestants (rather than for violence triggered by actors who want to block elections completely) (Laserud 2007).

Only a small number of case studies systematically analyse the impact of voter education on electoral violence. A field experiment conducted by Collier and Vicente (2011) assesses the effectiveness of an anti-violence programme in Nigeria. It finds that the anti-violence campaign 'reduced the intensity of violence, as measured by independent sources', led to an increase in voter turnout, which leads the authors to 'infer that the intimidation was dissociated from incumbents'. The study also found that these effects were 'accompanied by improved perceptions of security and empowerment to counteract violence' (Collier & Vicente 2011, 1). They conclude that '[a]nti-violence campaigns may…constitute a particularly effective form of voter education', which worked by boosting voter participation and electoral penalisation of candidates perceived to use intimidation, by increasing perceptions of local safety and by leading to rising empowerment of the population (Collier & Vicente 2011, 24). They also note, however, that it is important to bear in mind that the impact of voter education interventions are likely to be closely shaped by the varied electoral strategies of politicians, which may include other types of illicit behaviour (such as vote-miscounting and vote-buying), which may be less obviously tackled through voter education. They stress that 'an anti-violence campaign cannot be the sole remedy to problematic elections; attention should be devoted to political accountability and to all illicit strategies in an integrated manner' (Collier & Vicente 2011, 24).

Which strategies work best in different environments?

There is a reasonably large body of literature that draws general lessons about the design of voter and civic education programmes (see e.g. Morris 2002). Few studies, however, examine the more relative effectiveness of different strategies in different contexts.

The interview with Kehaila referred to above (IFES 2012) addresses the question of which voter education strategies are most effective at reducing electoral violence. Kehaila argues that ideally voter education efforts should be permanent and fit into broader national civil education programmes. While awareness-raising efforts should adopt a long-term approach, get-out-the vote (or get-out-and-register) activities are more efficient as short-term activities. Kehaila states that 'to properly address electoral violence, voter education must fit into a scheme of technical assistance which helps guarantee free and fair elections to the voters' (IFES 2012, n.p.). He also states that voter education programmes may have an additional conflict preventing effect – due simply to the fact of being present in the field. In highly politicised environments such as the Democratic Republic of Congo he stresses the importance of avoiding any programmatic choice that could be perceived as discriminatory, and ensuring that messages were neutral and balanced (IFES 2012).

A small number of studies examine which types of voter education strategy are most effective in conflict-affected or transitional contexts. The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) has implemented civic education programmes in two post-conflict contexts: Sudan and Iraq (the programme included a voter education component in Sudan). A report by Levine and Bishai (2010, 1) finds that these experiences 'illustrate the challenges and rewards of developing effective, sustainable models of civic education in areas recovering from violence' and that such programmes 'require local engagement,

flexibility, patience, and long-term commitment'. It notes that '[p]ostconflict environments create several severe challenges for educators…[which] must be addressed as such program[me]s are developed' (Levine & Bishai 2010, 1). In Sudan, participants in a voter education programme wanted more details on the specifics of the elections and proper electoral processes. In response, USIP staff developed a programme of electoral violence prevention workshops, which featured the three following interwoven components.

- Case studies of four other elections on the African continent, including positive and negative lessons about dealing with violence and the roles of various stakeholders in this process.
- Conflict management skills, such as negotiation and problem solving that allowed learners to deal with conflict locally.
- Citizenship components that provided a long-term perspective on democracy and political participation.

The report concludes that the new programme was very popular and highlighted a number of key lessons, including the following.

- Make creative use of the arts in reaching different sectors and making the message memorable.
- Be patient and adopt a long-term approach.
- Look for alternative approaches to engage in civic education when the most obvious path seems blocked.
- Civic education as an issue can build bridges between conflicted groups.
- Schools are not the only venues and students are not the only targets.

Brady (2009) emphasises the importance of conducting voter education programmes in unsafe areas of a country. In these contexts, he argues that extra care must be taken to protect the security of citizens and educators on the way to education events and notes that broadcast media may be the most appropriate tool for voter education in these contexts. He also stresses that non-partisanship is crucial in these contexts. Educators should be drawn from different regions of the country.

Jennings (1999) stresses that in transitional contexts, voter education programmes should not simply focus on teaching voters to learn where, when and how to vote. They should also work to convince voters that 'voting will make a difference' (Jennings 1999, 3). As a result, civil society actors must be involved in the process – it is not enough for these messages to come from government officials.

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5. Additional Information

Key Websites:
The Carter Centre http://www.cartercenter.org/index.html
The Electoral Knowledge Network (ACE) http://aceproject.org/
International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) http://www.ifes.org/
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) http://www.beta.undp.org/undp/en/home.html
Global Commission on Elections, Democracy & Security http://www.global-commission.org

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