

Elections in Fragile States: Between Voice and Violence

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Abstract

Electoral processes in “fragile states” – war-prone or war-torn societies – present palpable dilemmas: while elections provide for opportunities of voice and participation in governance and they ostensibly manage political competition through non-violent rule-bound procedures and institutions, the campaign, voting, and proclamation phases of such contests are frequently accompanied by degenerating election-related violence. In recent times, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Colombia, Guyana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Zimbabwe all witnessed endemic violence with widespread consequences and in the worst cases, state failure. As a form of political violence, election-related violence is special. The strategic intent and practical consequences of violent acts are designed to in some way to affect the process of election processes, commonly to disable and disrupt opposing forces in order to prevail at the polls, to vitiate the elections all together by undermining the integrity of the results, or to influence voting behavior through threat or intimidation.

This paper evaluates common explanations of the contexts, causes, patterns, and consequences of election-related violence in fragile states. A typology of election-related violence is presented and several hypotheses are articulated that explore the conditions under which electoral violence can be expected to be especially acute. Among the principal causal explanations are social structural conditions, electoral system choice and the stakes of political competition, the neutrality and competence of electoral administration, and the nature and functioning of the security sector. Patterns of violence across the electoral “cycle” are described and explored. The analysis of the types, manifestations, and causes of election-related violence yield important findings that inform the strategic design of election-assistance programming provided by the international community in fragile-state environments, such as the need to streamline prevention activities ingeniously through each stage of the electoral cycle and to carefully assess and track violent incidents. At the same time, the limited ability of the international community to engage early and to affect the behavior of perpetrators of violence suggests that elections in fragile states will continue to be pivot between voice and violence, and, commensurately, to contribute either to democratic consolidation or to state failure.

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Today, almost all governments in the world – save a few “worst of the worst” deeply authoritarian regimes (Rotberg 2007) – are legitimated through electoral processes.¹ Elections pose distinct opportunities and challenges in the context of “fragile states” – war-prone or war-torn societies engulfed in turbulent transitions or emerging from civil war. When elections

¹ For frequency and trend analysis of democratization, see Pate (2008), whose work also focuses on instability in quasi-democracies or “anocracies.” She finds that “democracy is clearly the norm in the 21st century. However, the majority of democracies today are relatively young, having had democratic institutions for less than a generation... While the continued spread of democracy is good news for the international community, the slow pace of democratic consolidation in younger democracies could be a concern... anocracies were more than twice as likely to experience genocide/politicide events and nearly two and a half times as likely to experience adverse regime change” (Hewitt, Wilkenfeld and Gurr 2008: 13).

approach the ideal of a “free and fair” process, they provide legitimacy through direct popular participation, and, in turn, legitimacy creates capacity for effective governance (Malloch Brown 2003). Hence, in democratizing environments or post-war settlement contexts, elections offer a unique opportunity to create legitimate governments following authoritarian rule or to validate negotiated pacts that end bitter internecine strife.

On the other hand, precisely because election processes are vehicles through which political power is retained or pursued, and social differences are highlighted by candidates and parties in campaigns for popular support, they tap deep vulnerabilities for violent interactions. Election processes have, in recent years, catalyzed conflict as some candidates mobilize extremist elements of the population to win office, rival factions vie for votes and to secure turf, parties or factions seek to weaken or even eliminate opponents, or where mass mobilization in events such as campaign rallies may set the stage for seemingly spontaneous social clashes among rival supporters. In recent times, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Colombia, Guyana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Zimbabwe all witnessed endemic violence with widespread consequences and in the worst cases, state failure.

Perhaps no situation underscores the urgency of understanding the complicated nexus between elections and sustained political violence than in Kenya in late 2007 and early 2008. Despite a sustained and significant effort by the international community to avert conflict and violence well before the poll, during voting, and in the tumultuous political crisis that emerged after the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) announced that incumbent president, Mwai Kibaki “won” the hotly contested presidential elections. Afterwards, violence flared and took on an interethnic conflict dimension, and the result was more than 1,000 dead in the few weeks following the voting. The electoral crisis and violence emerged as a serious crisis for the United Nations, the African Union, and major global powers: eventually mediation through the United States, and later by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, a power-sharing pact was clinched to resolve the electoral crisis. The 2008 election in Kenya precipitated a rapidly failing state and a spiraling escalation of violence along ethnic lines, which according to some observers reached the depth of “ethnic cleansing.”² The Kenya imbroglio underscores a key finding in this paper: electoral processes that are fraught with fraud, mismanagement, and political influence, and which are accompanied by high levels of social violence, can be the stimulus for deeper, serious social conflict and ultimately “failing” states that are unable to address essential human security and human development imperatives of governance.

I. Elections between Voice and Violence

When successful, electoral processes offer a means of channeling social conflict into debate, persuasion and common rules for choosing authoritative representatives of the people who can serve in executive, legislative, and other institutions; elections are in this sense a critical means of social conflict management through peaceful deliberations and decision-making processes, in which “winners” carry out promised platforms and “losers” are given the opportunity to either be represented as a loyal opposition in government or to try again in future competitions. As Dahl suggests, at the end of the day democracy and electoral processes are mutual security pacts (1973), operating, as Przeworski suggests, with the continent consent of elites under conditions of bound uncertainty (1991: 12).

Voice and Legitimacy

² See Jeffrey Gettleman, “U.S. Officials Sees Kenya Ethnic Cleansing,” *The New York Times*, 31 January 2008.

Election processes offer safe, predictable, rule-bound method for arbitrating social conflicts through the selection of representatives or the definitive resolution of questions before the community (as in referenda). When elections are putatively free and fair, they imbue the government with legitimacy garnered by the consent of the people, improving the capacity of the state to ensure human security through legitimate authority under the rule of law, and to improve levels of human development through effective service delivery. Procedurally fair elections create legitimate governments that enjoy popular support for programs and policies (Elkit and Svensson 1997) (although there are also cases in which the electoral process can be procedurally fair, however the election can be violence-inducing as a function of the stakes of electoral competition, as described below).

When citizens are provided a direct “voice” in political life; society’s trust of and willingness to cooperate with the state in achieving development is strengthened. As such, electoral processes are very much about the peaceful management of social conflict through public dialogue, vigorous debate, and the authoritative selection of leaders through electoral rules. That is, a good electoral process will allow society on its own to determine the nature of its similarities and differences (Ellis 2006); representation may be geographic, ideological, identity based (religion, ethnicity, or gender) or along other lines. In some situations, it is true that ethnicity or religion may be a salient basis of representation, whereas in other situations issues such as the alleviation of poverty, gender equality, geographic representation, or economic/class interests may be more important.

Whether any given electoral process fulfills the functions of voice and decision is a consequence of its overall quality, often described in terms of an election being either “free and fair,” or not. As Reynolds and Elklit argue, “the greatest failing of election assessment to date has been the tendency to see election quality in bimodal terms. The election is either good or it is bad, or when a fudge [qualification] is required, it is ‘substantially free and fair.’ But there is no doubt that that the quality of elections across cases and across time can be seen as existing on a continuum.... In essence, one needs to look at the process and outcome to gauge a full picture of election quality (Reynolds and Elklit 2005: 3).” Clearly those elections that are substantially free and fair, and that imbue new coalitions with legitimacy and a mandate to act, democracy takes a step closer toward consolidation.

Elections as Conflict-Inducing

At least one detrimental aspect of electoral processes in fragile states is the accompaniment of voting with violence. The focus on election-related violence stems from an appreciation that electoral processes are inherently conflict-inducing; Ethiopia, Burundi, Guyana, Haiti, Kenya, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe are oft-cited examples of countries where electoral processes have been chronically violence ridden. Many observers argue that such processes introduce new uncertainties and that they make countries in transition or war-torn, fragile societies deeply vulnerable to new tensions and ultimately in the worst-case scenario to the escalation of civil war (Snyder 2000; Mansfield and Snyder 2005). Snyder and Mansfield contend, for example, is that the expansion of political participation in democratization processes, especially where state institutions are weak, give opportunities for elites to appeal to exclusionary nationalism and the concomitant identification of internal or external enemies in order to gain or retain power. Consequently, in this view, partially consolidated democracies are prone to both international *and* internal war.

Certainly, the experience of the democratizing the former Yugoslavia – and in particular, the ways in which nationalism became a leitmotif of electoral campaigning by Slobodan Milosevic in

an effort to retain power – informs this analysis, and critics of the work often point to the narrow base of recent experience that underlies the Snyder and Mansfield findings; other critics point to counter evidence that mass mobilization does not necessarily lead to violence (Borneo 1997). However, the arguments offered by these scholars and the catchy titles of their books (*From Voting to Violence* and *Electing to Fight*, respectively) point out that there is deep skepticism in many quarters about the conflict-inducing nature of elections in democratizing states. In myriad instances – such as the oft-cited 1992 presidential elections in Angola or parliamentary polls in Algeria (also in 1992), or in the run-up to in Iraq in December 2005, elections and their outcomes can often be a strong stimulant for violence.

Election violence is a particular type of political violence, and it occurs within the context of the overall process of democracy and democratization. Although election-related violence can occur within countries that are putatively “consolidated” as democracies internally, as in the Netherlands in 2002 which saw the assassination of controversial politician Pim Fortuyn by an animal rights activist, the more consolidated a democratic system is the less likelihood that political violence will be employed by contenders for power as a way to retain or attain office. (Likewise, sporadic violence in Paris suburbs followed the election of Nicholas Sarkozy to the French presidency in May 2007.)

Effects on Democracy and Development

In most instances, election violence has devastating effects on democracy, conflict dynamics, and development. When such violence occurs, it often impairs the function of the governmental institutions that emerge from processes where violence has tainted the fairness of the process and the legitimacy of election outcomes.³ As Höglund observes:

- From the *perspective of democratic politics*, violence and insecurity may affect the election results or the outcomes of elections in various ways. Threats and intimidation may be used to interfere with the registration of voters. Voter turnout may be influenced if large sections of the population refrain from casting their votes due to fear of violence. Assaults, threats, and political assassinations during the election campaign may force political contenders to leave the electoral process or prevent elections from taking place.
- From the *conflict management perspective*, violence may have a negative impact by polarizing the electorate along conflict lines and in extreme cases lead to new outbursts of violence. In situations of insecurity, appeals for law and order are often a more tempting alternative than calls for reconciliation (2006: 2; italics in original).

There is a clear linkage between violent conflict and impediments to human development. In The Philippines, for example, those provinces that have experienced the most election violence are also those that are most impoverished.⁴ Election violence, like higher-order civil war, can

³ The qualification “in most instances” is needed because, in some situations, rebel group challenges may increase public support for ruling regimes. For example, Garcia and Hoskin argue that in Colombia “Violence challenges, but does not necessarily delegitimize electoral politics: The dynamic of violence generates negative effects upon the electoral process, and the impact of political violence upon electoral participation suggests a growing challenge to democratic institutions and organizations. However, in a country such as Colombia, with a long tradition of institutionalized elections, the political institutions may show a remarkable resilience to the assaults of armed groups, which, while taking their toll, fail to undermine the legitimacy associated with the electoral process.” See *Miguel García and Gary Hoskin, ‘Political Participation and War in Colombia’*. <http://www.crisisstates.com/download/bp/bp14.pdf>

⁴ Pantino and Velasco (2006) note that “The southern Island of Mindanao and the Autonomous Region of Mindanao (ARMM) routinely register high rates of election violence.... The ARMM also happens to be the

mean “development in reverse” as incidents of violence undermine government legitimacy, scare away domestic foreign investors, and result in low levels of social trust.⁵

II. Election-Related Violence: Definitions and Contexts

In the two weeks ahead of the much-anticipated Philippines congressional and local elections on May 14, 2007, the country’s Chief of Police Operations, Wilfredo Garcia, reported that some 22 politicians had been already killed and about 80 election-related violent events had been occurred in the four months of official campaigning that preceded the vote.⁶ Since “People Power” launched democratization in the country in 1986, each subsequent election cycle has been fraught with widespread and devastating election-related violence. Observers attribute a pattern of election-related violence in the country to several factors, such as a history of intense rivalry among political clans, stark competition for government posts that carry the potential for power and access to resources and state largesse, and a broader culture of violence in which small arms are plentiful and often in use.⁷ According to the police, powerful politicians often have their own private armies and some members of the security forces were also acting to protect or serve political bosses. Additionally, armed insurgencies in parts of the country also stepped up attacks during the election process.⁸ In The Philippines and many other countries in early 2007, such as Nigeria’s much watched elections that also unfolded during this time,⁹ political violence is an endemic feature of electoral processes.

Although there is no common database on election-related violence, or overall on “political violence,” evidence from these and many other cases suggests that election-related violence is widespread and, according to at least one study that sought to quantify the extent of the problem in cross-national research, at least half of the electoral processes observed in 2001 featured significant election-related violence before, during or after the pivotal days of the election (Fisher 2002).

Election-Related Violence: A Definition, Some Attributes

Efforts to prevent election-related violence are grounded in the urgency of the problem and in a clearer understanding of the term itself. Election-related violence is

...Acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arises in the context of electoral competition. When perpetrated to affect an electoral process, violence may be employed to influence the

region with the lowest social indicators and the highest misery index. Its vulnerability to machine politics is also high. Machine politics means that the ballet of the politicians’ organization, i.e., networks, alliances, and balliwicks, and campaign structure determines the election outcomes.”

⁵ The phrase is descriptive of the effects of civil war on development, but it is also accurate when employed to areas experiencing high levels of election-related violence. See Anke Hoeffler and Mara Reynal-Querol, “Measuring the Costs of Conflict,” Centre for the Study of African Economies, University of Oxford, April 2003.

⁶ Manny Magato, “Philippine Police War of Rising Poll Violence,” *Reuters* 24 April 2007. In the elections some 12 Senate seats, 235 House of Representatives, and 18,000 local government offices were contested in the elections. In prior elections in the country, such as the 2004 presidential race, some 140 people had died in election-related violence.

⁷ Patrick Pantino and Djinora Velasco, “Election Violence in the Philippines,” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Philippine Office Online Papers, at www.fes.org.ph/papers_elecviolence.htm.

⁸ A bomb blast in a Tucarong on May 9, on the island of Mindanao, was attributed to the insurgents and as related to the election process.

⁹ See the International Crisis Group report, “Nigeria: Failed Elections, Failing State?” Report No. 126, 30 May 2007.

process of elections – such as efforts to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll – and to influence the *outcomes*: the determining of winners in competitive races for political office or to secure approval or disapproval of referendum questions.¹⁰

Some of the common understandings about the nature and attributes of electoral violence are the following findings from scholarly research and practitioner reflection.

- Electoral violence is sub-type of political violence in which actors employ coercion in an instrumental way to advance their interests or achieve specific political ends. Similarly, societies prone to experiencing election-related violence are normally vulnerable to broader kinds of political violence; Kosovo, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Kenya, or Colombia are examples of instances in which electoral violence is embedded in a broader, often ongoing context of deep-rooted social conflict.
- Electoral violence includes *acts*, such as assassination of opponents or spontaneous fistcuffs between rival groups of supporters – and *threats, coercion, and intimidation* of opponents, voters, or election officials. Threat and intimidation is a form of coercion that is just as powerful as acts of violence can be. Indeed, one purpose of acts of terrorism – such as tossing a grenade into a crowd of rival supporters¹¹ – is an act diabolically designed to induce fear and to intimidate (e.g., to suppress mobilization or voting by that group).
- Violent acts can be targeted against people or things, such as the targeting of communities or candidates or the deliberate destruction of campaign materials, vehicles, offices, or ballot boxes.

As the last point suggests, there is a complex linkage between election violence and fraud, or cheating.¹² In one direction, the employment of coercive methods to gain votes or affect outcomes *is itself a form of election fraud*. On the other hand, massive cheating or fraud – such as conspiracies to bribe voters, tampering with ballots, fallacious counting, or other measures (such as releasing large numbers of prisoners to vote) – can be the stimulus for a violent reaction by those who react to such fraud; one of the common reasons for mass mobilization and violent resistance to state authority is allegations of stolen, cheating, or “façade” democracy. Thus, how the election process and administration is designed, managed, and implemented has a strong bearing on electoral violence: those elections considered to be free, fair, and transparent are less likely to experience electoral violence than those where allegations of mismanagement or deliberate cheating are prevalent.

Contexts

The context of democratization matters significantly in evaluating the ways in which electoral processes may be a catalyst of violence. The current literature tends to focus on election related violence in three distinct categories of contexts:

¹⁰ In another useful definition, Fisher (2002: 4) offers this formulation: “Electoral conflict and violence can be defined as any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence an electoral process. Election security can be defined as the process of protecting electoral stakeholders, information, facilities, and events.”

¹¹ Such an incident occurred in April 2004 during a campaign rally in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India, in the context of India’s Lok Sabha elections of that year. See Grenade attack at Mehbooba’s rally Three killed, cameraman among 7 injured” *The Tribune*, 25 April 2004.

¹² For an extensive analysis of what constitutes election fraud, see Lehoucq (2003).

- *Countries in transition*, which have experienced transitions from authoritarian or single-party rule to multiparty politics but which are considered to be partial, unconsolidated, façade, or gray-zone (mixed) systems and which may be especially prone to or vulnerable to conflict due to the uncertainties of transition that these societies experience (as in The Philippines, above, which saw an initial transition to democracy in 1986, nearly twenty years ago) (Carothers 2002);
- *Weak or fragile democracies*, such in Guyana. Guyana has been a formal democracy since 1966, but the quality of democracy deteriorated as racial politics, economic hardships, cold-war related ideologies, and migration took its toll. When the current ruling party took power after 28 years of People’s National Congress Reform (PNCR) rule, election violence increased, perpetrated mostly by supporters of those who lost power.¹³
- *Post-war societies* undergoing a war-to-democracy transition and in which elections are seen as a critical turning point in the implementation of a peace agreement but in which disarmament and demobilization may be incomplete, in which social division and enmity runs very deep, those who reject the terms of the peace agreement may continue to operate, and in which the economic and social effects of war remain strong (e.g., the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2006) (Lyons 2005; Reilly 2004); and
- Situations of *referenda to ratify peace agreements* (as in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in May 1998; 71.12% of voters in Northern Ireland voted in favor of the Belfast Agreement) *or to determine the sovereign status* of a disputed territory (as in Timor Leste in 1999 in which 78.5% of voters opted for independence from Indonesia over autonomy).

¹³ For an assessment of Guyana, see the IFES report from mid-2006 www.ifes.org/files/EVER_Report_guyana_1.pdf.

Matching Election Type to Conflict Considerations

Type of Election	Electoral System Considerations	Conflict Considerations/Common Types of Violence Seen	Issues and Analysis
<i>Presidential</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ By definition are majoritarian, winner-take-all contests ■ May be single or two-round 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Usually high-stakes contests ■ State repression of opposition, destabilization of voters; crystallization of conflict among two principal factions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Much depends on the incentives generated by the details of the electoral system, to include super-majority requirements
<i>Parliamentary</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Common distinction between district or constituency voting for one or more candidates; in PR list, for political parties ■ Can be mixed in a myriad of often complicated ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Political parties tend to feature more heavily in parliamentary polls; ■ Party and candidate rivalries are most acute ■ Effects of boundary delimitation strongly affect identity conflict dimensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Election violence is not evenly distributed, and certain high-risk areas could be mapped prior to elections to identify this areas ■ Critical to determining the extent to which an election result is broadly inclusive of a country's diversity
<i>Local and Municipal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can be mayoral or council (or mixed), mirroring presidential/parliamentary considerations ■ Similar choices among electoral systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Localized rivalry and attacks on candidates more likely; ■ Competition may be high-stakes for control of local power and resources ■ Personalized attacks on candidates and communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local elections often involve thousands of candidates and potential offices, and because of the scale more diffuse opportunities for intervention strategies
<i>Constituent Assembly</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Choosing representatives for constitution-making processes ■ Tend to be PR in some form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Often very high stakes as the composition of the Assembly affects core constitutional matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Although rare in occurrence, such elections – because of their high stakes – deserve especially conflict-sensitive assistance missions
<i>Referenda</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Majority-rule (50%) or super-majority (66%+) requirements; ■ Often resolve major issues, including sovereignty; ■ Can contribute to or work against peace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ May generate significant pre- and post-election violence ■ Losers have intense preferences that may surface much later ■ Can lead to armed rebellion or mass rioting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Commonly used to decide major issues such as sovereignty, however many analysts question whether such measures are appropriate for such volatile questions

Evaluating Root Causes

While no single theory can account for all the root causes of election violence, there is consensus that three approaches are critical: the context of democratization or political change in which violence occurs, the effects of electoral system choice on conflict dynamics, the nature and patterns of political mobilization, electoral administration, and the effects of violence-management efforts such as peace pacts and security-force deployments. To understand root causes of election-related violence, analysis must focus on the stakes of competition, expectations about winning and losing in election contests, and the incentives that the electoral process creates, or how the rules of the electoral game may provide reward or return for certain behavior or action.

The stakes involved in electoral contests can be considered in several different ways and in various contexts. A common cause of election violence is that the stakes of winning and losing valued political posts is in many situations, and especially in conditions of high scarcity and underdevelopment, incredibly high. When winning a state office is the key to livelihood not just for an individual, but for their entire clan, faction, or even ethnic group, the stakes involved in prevailing in electoral competition are incredibly high. Studies of election-related violence often highlight the perpetuation of patronage politics or a system in which politicians are gang-like “bosses” that control resources (such as access to jobs and income) and dispense public services such as housing, health care, or lucrative government contracts.

Thus, the stakes of elections are often seen as opportunities to engage in corruption and economic rent-seeking. This in turn leads to highly factionalized politics, often along religious, sectarian, or ethnic lines or along party-political divides, where control of the state leads to the reinforcement of class divisions or economic opportunity along lines of social difference. Scholars have pointed to the existence and perpetuation of the overlap between control of the state, economic opportunity, and identity politics – known as “horizontal inequalities” – as strongly contributing to the likelihood of violent encounters (Stewart 2001).

While much focus in on violence is placed on national elections as high-stakes contests, in weak state environments much election violence is quite localized because the stakes on winning local offices (such as mayoral contests) is also quite high. Research on local elections in situations indicates that access to government power at the municipal level is a strong driver of election-related violence. Darlene Damm notes that in Cambodia, “At both the local and national level, election violence occurs in the form of direct intimidation of voters through violence directed at specific individuals, and at the national level, violence additionally occurs in the form of perpetrators attempting to control social institutions that influence voter opinions, such as the media or civil society” (2003: 3). Ironically, efforts to achieve more responsive and effective governance through the decentralization of power may also raise the stakes of local contests and thus increase the incentives for election-related violence. Likewise, central government authorities in Cambodia have failed to prosecute perpetrators of election violence at the local level, according to Damm.

Election violence can also be generated as a consequence of the *expectations* of the players in the electoral contest: they may expect or imagine the fruits of victory or the perils and risks of loss. Elections may exacerbate social conflict under conditions of high uncertainty about the outcomes and under situations of high certainty alike; exploring the linkage between expectations and violence is a complicated problem. A riveting and tragic example of election-related violence in the context of democratization was the assassination of Pakistani political leader Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2007; she was killed campaigning in a tense election slated for

January (subsequently postponed) that would usher in, again, democracy in the strife-torn country.

For example, when there is high uncertainty about the ultimate outcome of the electoral process – when margins of victory are quite close – there is a greater likelihood that allegations of fraud will lead to frustration and potentially to violent clashes, or where parties may use violence to affect uncertain outcomes, for example by trying to limit voter turnout of opponents expected supporters. For incumbents in office who seek to maintain a grip on power but who fear the uncertainty of a possible majority support for opposition parties, the use of violence and intimidation to assure a win at the polls is an all-too-common practice; in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of March 2005 in Zimbabwe, opposition leaders were arrested and tortured, the press was intimidated, and international observers kept away.¹⁴

Certain *outcomes* can also generate electoral violence. When parties are quite certain of loss or exclusion in an electoral contest, especially when they expect to be “permanent minorities” (to lose not just once, but again and again), the certainty of outcomes is also a strong causal driver of violence. When a strongly insecure party or faction expects to be systematically excluded from political power, they may well turn to violence to either prevent their exclusion or to prevent the election’s success.

As in Angola in 1992, much depends on actual or expected exclusion of key protagonists in terms of electoral outcomes. Because of the perceived likelihood of permanent exclusion as a result of election outcomes, violence is often caused by supporters and fringe elements rather than the parties (officially) themselves. In the case of Guyana, for instance, the opposition said about the previous round of election violence: “We did not condone the violence and we tried to stop it, but we understood why some of our supporters took the route of violence.”¹⁵

That electoral processes produce winners and losers is an indicator of their capacity to catalyze or to open “windows of vulnerability” to violence: when a strongly insecure party or faction expects to be systematically excluded from political power, they may well turn to violence to either prevent their exclusion or to prevent the election’s success (Höglund 2006). Thus, it is likely that at least some of the insurgent violence in Iraq following the U.S.-led coalition’s occupation there after 2003 can be explained by the expectations of the Sunni minority of ethnic-census voting elections and thus the likelihood of a *Shi’a* dominated government that, in coalition with Kurdish parties, would overwhelmingly dominate as far as the eye can see.¹⁶ Likewise, in Sri Lanka, election violence has been an endemic feature of a broader social conflict reflected in the country’s long-running, and now renewed, civil war (Höglund 2006).¹⁷

¹⁴ For a full analysis, see the International Crisis Group report, “Post-Election Zimbabwe: What Next?” Report No. 93, 7 June 2005.

¹⁵ Communication with the Chris Spies, Dynamic Stability CC, via communication with the author.

¹⁶ For an analysis of the Iraq imbroglio, see Diamond 2005. For a broader analysis of the issues of ethnic census voting, expectations in electoral contests, and the effects of electoral system choice in such considerations, see Horowitz 1985.

¹⁷ The 1994 assassination by the Tigers of the United National Party presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake and the 1999 effort to kill then-President Chandrika Kumaratunga are examples of suicide bomb attacks in the context of election campaigns. However, at the same time, Höglund’s (2006) analysis also shows that much election-related violence in Sri Lanka has been perpetrated by the country’s established political parties.

Conflict-exacerbating election outcomes can be mitigated by a pre-election power-sharing pact¹⁸ that determines the fate of the election well before the ballots are cast; negotiation of pre-election pacts is strongly encouraged when there are significant challenges to elections or when an especially powerful party or faction seeks to boycott an election. This challenge of “permanent exclusion” is often found in situations where there exists a minority ethnic community and a large ethnic majority and in situations in which people are expected to vote their identity – elections become an “ethnic census.” The ill-fated February 29, 1992 referendum on Bosnian independence from the former Yugoslavia was *the* trigger that ignited the civil war, in part because the Serb minority could see a future as a permanent majority in an independent Bosnia whereas they were part of the largest identity group in the Yugoslav federation as a whole.

Incentives also affect the likelihood of election-related violence. A central factor often cited is the role of “*ethnic entrepreneurs*” – political leaders who articulate beliefs in kinship bonds, common destiny, and who mobilize and organize groups to press group claims; these are the types of nationalists central to the analysis of Snyder and Mansfield in their critique of elections as conflict-inducing (above). Ethnic entrepreneurs may be perceived as benign “interest aggregators” that serve a critical representative function, or manipulative and exploitative power-seekers that mobilize on ethnic themes for their own individual aggrandizement. Political leaders, seeking to capitalize and gain on mass sentiments, outbid moderates by decrying acts of accommodation as a “sell-out” of group interests, citing collective betrayal and humiliation. Manipulation of identity to frame disputes in ethnic terms by political leaders heightens the breadth and depth of inter-group conflict. Ethnic outbidding – and mass responsiveness to “playing the ethnic card” – is an especially acute problem in the contemporary era, precisely because a moderate multiethnic center is often unable to sustain itself against the centrifugal forces unleashed by the heated rhetoric of ethnic chauvinism.¹⁹

Some countries have decided that one way to manage the tendency of party politics to contribute to ethnic enmity is to ban political parties that purport to represent an ethnic, tribal, or racial identity. It is also important to evaluate how political parties that define themselves as broadly “nationalist” – or standing for everyone in a united country – define the political community. Concerns with identity based parties is that in the cacophonous environment of newly formed or transitional democracies, political parties with very narrow mandates can seize power on divisive ethnic, racial, or religious themes and end democracy, ironically, through the ballot box. At least one strategic entry point for the mitigation of social tension is through the skillful regulation of political parties (Reilly 2007).

Electoral Systems and Conflict Dynamics

A final, pivotal factor in the evaluation of the conditions under which elections stimulate violent conflict is the strong effects of electoral systems choice on conflict management (Reilly and Reynolds 2000; Reynolds, Reilly, and Ellis 2005). The relationship between the rules of electoral competition and the likelihood that they will either ameliorate or generate conflict has been the subject of considerable scholarly analysis (Lijphart 2004, Norris 2004, Reilly 2006, Reilly 2001, Reilly and Reynolds 2000), as has the more specific question of electoral system

¹⁸ For a recent, comprehensive analysis of the debate over various power-sharing institutions, see Roeder and Rothchild 2005.

¹⁹ The problem of ethnic outbidding is not only one of errant or manipulative political leadership, but also a more general one of collective action. If appeals to ethnic solidarity do not resonate among the populace, political leaders would have very little incentive to resort to them. For a formal theory treatment of the problem of outbidding, see Rabushka and Shepsle (1972; 2008). For further analysis of these issues, see Reilly 2001, 2007.

choice in post-war situations (Blanc, Hylland, and Vollan 2006). While other aspects of electoral processes are equally critical (such as election administration, described below), the electoral system is a critical factor to analyze precisely because they determine the “rules of the game” under which elections are held. Such rules, importantly, determine who will be included and excluded in governing coalitions following electoral events. Among the critical linkages between electoral system choice and electoral violence are the following.

- The *structure of the party system*, because election rules provide incentives and disincentives for the forming and maintenance of coalitions (Reilly 2006); electoral systems have strong effects how many parties form, whether and when they may coalesce or break up, their prospects for gaining power, and various social divisions that might exist within any given political community (e.g., municipality, region, or country).
- *The ways in which candidates craft their appeals*. In some situations, it may be possible to induce candidates for certain kinds of candidates for office to adopt certain types of appeals. A common example is requirements for a presidential winner to carry a certain minimum percentage of the votes in a very large, and often disperse set of regions. With this rule, it is almost essential that any winner will have had to appeal to at least some voters throughout the country. As a result, it is hoped that presidential candidates will be unifiers, not dividers, of society (Horowitz 1985).
- *The overall character of the contest* in terms of what the competition is for. The electoral system, which in more technical terms translates votes into particular “seats” or positions, is about determining how ruling coalitions are put together. Winner-take-all systems, including plurality/majority systems, give the winners of a certain threshold of votes – for example, 50% in simple majority-rule systems – all the power to make decisions for the entire community. There is widespread concern of systems that are often known as “majority without comment,” in which through first-past-the-post, a coalition only needs 50% of the votes in 50% of the seats to win near total power to make decisions for the entire community. Other systems, too, such as the Alternative Vote or Two-Round systems, have similar winner-take-all effects (Lijphart 2004). Proportional systems give various political parties an equal share in political power for an equal share of overall votes cast. In the former, candidates and parties are competing for unbridled rule, trying to form coalitions of people and groups to garne the threshold in a given system that produces a majority.

It is a common prescription for countries with considerable social divisions, especially along ethnic, religious, or other identity lines, to move from winner-take-all system to one that arguably more consistently mirrors the diversity of society in legislative or representative bodies: proportional representation (PR). From the experiences of recent years, there is good reason to consider this advice. PR elections in countries such as South Africa (1994, 1999, and 2004) or Northern Ireland (1998 especially) have been seen as an almost necessary choice for peace: they give a premium to inclusion over exclusion and to ideally broad versus narrow representation. However, in recent years there has been a return to majoritarian election rules with the presidential elections in Afghanistan, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). While some of these polls did feature election violence (Afghanistan and DRC, notably), Liberia did not witness significant strife (Sisk Forthcoming); whether there is more to said on the debate about whether presidential elections are always violence-inducing, or whether presidential contests can (though building broad national coalitions) contribute to conflict containment.

Thus, electoral systems matter but there is no consensus on whether any single electoral system is always “best” in terms of contribution to conflict mitigation. Those involved in electoral system choice thus have inherently challenging choices to make about precisely how an

electoral system may operate in a particular society (Reynolds, Reilly and Ellis 2005). Clearly, with such varying contexts and the contingencies they introduce, there is no single, best electoral system, or “one size fits all.” Nonetheless, it is important to evaluate the affects of electoral system choice on conflict dynamics both at the moment when electoral system choice is made (often in constitution-making processes or in peace talks), and how current systems in place affect conflict dynamics.

III. Manifestations: Perpetrators and Patterns

In the absence of a clear data set or even the existence of a broadly accepted typology of election-related violence, it is clear that there are common patterns of violence seen across various cases or across time within cases: election-related violence often involves direct or targeted killing, abductions, acts of terrorism such as attacks on rallies, destruction of property to include homes, offices, and vehicles, and the like.²⁰ Patterns recur in the types of perpetrators commonly associated with election-related violence. Likewise, it is useful to catalog the types of election-related violence that is commonly associated with a typical election cycle, often conceived of in terms of at least one year prior to an actual election event (Wall, et.al. 2006).

The Culpable: Perpetrators of Electoral Violence

Violence perpetrated to affect an electoral process begs an important question: Who are the perpetrators, and what are their motives? An analysis of culpability in violence needs to address its usually organized and purposeful nature; while small-scale acts of violence may be perpetrated by lone individuals, usually endemic or chronic election violence is the consequence of extensive organization and mobilization. Moreover, as suggested in the definition above, at least a significant portion of electoral violence is not accidental or spontaneous (as riotous clashes among rival groups of supporters might be); violence is purposeful or instrumental and thus is organized and mobilized. Overall, the literature on political violence suggests that extensive or instrumental use of violence requires no small amount of leadership, organization, and resources.²¹

- *Leadership.* Evaluation of small-scale political conflict (in contrast to larger scale violence in the context of war), places emphasis on the entrepreneurial motives of political elites in articulating the rationale or ideological basis for violence, for inciting and justifying acts of violence, and in the symbolic or representation of a faction or group and its interests. The implication is that instrumental violence is *strategic* – calculated to achieve a specific effect – and that the articulation and design of strategies in which violence is an element requires a leadership cohort. (This understanding about the role of leaders in mobilization for violence has strong implications for conflict prevention, as described below).
- *Organizational Factors.* Likewise, there is a structural or organizational aspect of many acts of violence. Either from within political parties, or from militias or armed groups

²⁰ For a comparative analysis of election violence in East Africa, see the study conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, “Political and Electoral Violence in East Africa,” Working Papers on Conflict Management No. 2 (2001).

²¹ For works on social and political violence, see Tilly (2003), Taylor (1988); Rule, (1988); Taylor (1991); and Hewitt (1993). Donald Horowitz, in the final chapter of his book *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, provides the most cogent and clear analysis of alternative theories of violence, emphasizing at the end of the day its essentially orchestrated nature as “calculated passion” (Horowitz 2001: 523-525).

associated with political parties, large scale political violence requires an organizational element that bridges leaders and rank-and-file, that creates the logistical requirements needed to perpetrate acts, and that creates an associational or community representation dimension. Often, such organizations are political parties themselves, but sometimes these can be more loosely organized – such as the politically mobilized youth groups and martial arts clubs that perpetrated acts of intimidation in the 2007 elections in Timor Leste.²²

Likewise, research has shown that linkages between political groups and organized criminal elements often constitute the key organizational aspect required for extensive election-related violence. Even in those events that may appear on the surface to be “spontaneous,” such as riots that may occur, scholars such as Donald Horowitz in his classic book *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (2001) have shown that these events, too, are often the result of prior organization and the exercise of political cunning by usually mid-level, factional elites.

- *Resource Capacities.* Finally, the literature on political violence also focuses on the importance of resources that allows leaders and organizational structures to foment violence. Such resources may well be human, in the presence of large numbers of often young, disaffected, and commonly unemployed young men susceptible to recruitment; or, resources can be material, such as access to money (e.g., from trade in drugs or other “lootable goods”) or access to small arms.

Patterns of Violence across the Electoral Cycle

Phase I: The Long Run-Up to Electoral Events

During these phase, the targets of electoral violence are often incumbent state officials or emerging candidates from political parties. Rivalry violence can be within parties – such as contests between hard-liners and moderates or among various factions drawn on other lines – or between political parties. Often the objective of political violence during this phase is to eliminate or weaken an opponent, to affect early the shape and nature of the voting process, establish a dominant position within a particular district by eliminating or threatening potential adversaries. Common types of violence seen in this period include:

- Intimidation or removal of independent judges;²³
- Intimidation or targeting of election officials;
- Intimidation or harassment of journalists;
- Incitement to violence in the media or other public for a (such as in places of worship)²⁴
- Police or internal intelligence services targeting of meetings of opposition figures;
- Protecting, expanding, or delineating turf or “no-go zones;” and
- Increased rates of hostage-taking, kidnapping, and extortion.²⁵

²² For an account, see the Preliminary Statement of the European Union Observer Mission, Democratic Republic of Timor Leste, 11 May 2007, at www.euomtimorleste.org.

²³ Wallenstein (2008) argues that the removal of judges is a leading indicator of potential future relapse of violence in post-war countries such as Lebanon or Uganda, often decades after the conflict has been formally terminated.

²⁴ In Guyana the relative absence of election violence in 2006 is attributed by some commentators to the absence of three prominent talk show hosts, who are believed to be partly responsible for the incitement of disgruntled opposition factions during the previous election in 2001. One talk show host is still awaiting trial after 5 years on a charge of treason and is linked by the authorities to the attack on the Presidential Offices that led to the fire that demolished part of the building. Another talk show host was gunned down by a group of assassins in January 2006, and the third had migrated to the UK.

Phase II: The Campaign's Final Lap

Campaign conflict often involves rivalry based violence, efforts to intimidate or influence voters and candidates, and efforts to affect participation (usually to limit it through creating insecurity); often, such violence intensifies in the final weeks leading up to elections, as the election event approaches. For example, less than 24 hours before voters were to cast ballots in Taiwan's presidential elections in May, 2004, President Chen Shui-Ban and his vice-presidential running mate, Annette Lu, were shot and injured by unknown gunmen (some opposition parties wondered whether the wounds were self-inflicted, as they are believed to have generated considerable "sympathy votes;" an official investigation pointed to a single, deceased subject). Common patterns of violence seen in the final laps of campaigns include:

- Clashes between rival groups of supporters;
- Attacks on election rallies, candidates;
- Bomb scares;
- Attacks or intimidation of election officials; and
- Attacks on observers, domestic and international.

Phase III: Polling Day(s)

Polling day can be especially bloody (as in Egypt in December 2005),²⁶ however there are also interesting cases in which the run-up to elections were particularly violent, but somewhat surprisingly the actual days of voting turn out to be relatively peaceful.²⁷ South Africa's celebrated transitional elections of April 26-27, 1994, are one such example; despite predictions of violent encounters, the actual days of voting were quite peaceful (perhaps because of the extensive security force deployments). When voting days are violent, common types of election violence are the following.

- Attacks by armed rebel groups to disrupt the polling, to limit turnout, or to attack security forces or police stations;
- Intimidation of voters to compel them to vote, or to stay away;
- Attacks on election administrators, observers; and
- Physical attacks on election materials such as destruction of ballot boxes.

Phase IV: Between Voting and Proclamation

The period between voting and proclamation – while election officials are tabulating results, or during the period between a first and second round of elections (in cases of run-offs), can be especially perilous. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo elections in October 2006 there was a dramatic escalation of violence that occurred following the first round of presidential elections and a second round.²⁸

²⁵ In some situations, such as in Nigeria, hostage-taking has also been seen to rise dramatically in the run-up to elections; see "Nigeria: Sharp Rise in Hostage[-taking, sic] May be Linked to Upcoming Elections," IRIN February 5, 2007. In this and in other cases such as the Philippines, the increase in kidnapping appears to be related to efforts to use ransom moneys as campaign funds.

²⁶ See Michael Slackman, "Election-Day Violence Fuels Anger in Egypt," *The New York Times*, 9 December 2005. As reported in this article, there are allegations that the violence was perpetrated by elements of the incumbent government in efforts to keep likely supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood away from the polls.

²⁷ This pattern has been observed by Rappaport and Weinberg (2001).

²⁸ See the International Crisis Group Report, "Securing Congo's Elections: Lessons from the Kinshasa Showdown, Africa Briefing N°42, 2 October 2006" and "Tense Congo awaits poll as U.N. rescues politician," Reuters 27 October 2006.

- Armed clashes among political parties;
- Violent clashes among groups of rival supporters;
- Vandalism and physical attacks on property of opponents; and
- Targeted attacks against specific candidates or political parties.

Phase V: Post-Election Outcomes and their Aftermath

Perceptions of fraudulent or stolen elections are a strong predictor of violence; elections of this type can precipitate armed conflict and even civil wars. At the same time, vehement minorities who have lost in election contests may also turn out in the streets to protest the outcome.

Governments may repress protests when they have conducted a fraudulent poll, creating the classic dilemma between mass action and the government's security imperatives. For example, following a United Nations-sponsored independence "consultation" on August 30, 1999 on the sovereign status of East Timor, hundreds (and perhaps thousands) died in a rampage of killing allegedly organized by Indonesian armed forces and local militias in a "punishment" campaign as a consequence of the strong majority of supporters for independence; the violence only ebbed following an Australian-led military intervention.²⁹ Some examples of post-election violence include:

- Attacks on rivals who have either won in elections, or were defeated;
- Violent street protests and efforts by armed riot police to maintain or restore order; teargas, firing on protestors, attacks by protesters on property or the police;
- Emergence of armed resistance groups against an elected government (as in Algeria 1992); or
- Escalation and perpetuation of ethnic or sectarian violence (as in Iraq).

IV. Implications: Preventing and Managing Election Violence

This paper illustrates that election violence is common in fragile state environments, even though no single database presently captures the scope and intensity of the problem. The causes of election-related violence are found in social-structural relations (e.g., ethnic or religious tensions), the stakes, incentives, and expectations related to election outcomes, and the strong effects of electoral system choice on these factors. Moreover, we see common patterns in the types of violence across the phases of the electoral cycle and similarities in the patterns of perpetration across a number of disparate cases. These findings on the causes, perpetrators, and types of electoral violence can strategically inform program design for external electoral assistance, especially when technical assistance is paired with conflict-prevention objectives. External, international assistance for electoral administration is a critical component of overall conflict-mitigation efforts in fragile states to include a broader focus on democratization and statebuilding.

Two policy-relevant conclusions emerge from this research on election related violence. First, the structure, balance, composition, and professionalism of the electoral management body (for example, an electoral commission) is a key component in successful electoral processes that generate legitimate, accepted outcomes (Pastor 1999; Lopez-Pintor 2000, Wall et al 2006) and in turn, when these attributes are absent, the election-related violence. The key components of a legitimate electoral process is one that is free and fair in both political *and* administrative terms, that is inclusive of all elements of society through a well-considered law of citizenship and of voter registration, and that offers meaningful choices to the population (Pastor 1999).

²⁹ For an account and analysis, see Chopra (2000).

Second, it is important to simultaneously address the electoral system and its consequences for behavior, including incentives for fomenting violence at various stages of the electoral cycle, or for its potential to generate spoilers. Likewise, electoral system functioning relates to the stakes of electoral competition, particularly in weak state environments where access to power through elections – at national and local levels – generates powerful incentives to use violence to prevail when other means of mobilization fail. Similarly, the agency dimension of election violence cannot be discounted: agents of electoral violence are often found in the mid-level cadres of party-political organizations where individuals organize and maintain collective violence.

While the ways in which electoral systems affect conflict dynamics is more fully explored, less understood is how the international assistance can engage in election-related conflict prevention. A deeply troubling aspect of the Kenyan elections in 2008, mentioned in the introduction to this paper, is that the international community responded to electoral fraud by Kibaki – who according to all accounts lost the presidential poll and fomented violence in its wake – was that the international response was to broker a power-sharing pact. Thus, in this instance, perpetrators of election-related violence were “rewarded” by the international community’s efforts (in the mediation by the U.S. and Kofi Annan, for example) to prevent the further escalation of violence and the slide of Kenya into the ranks of failed states. Thus, in this case, those who lost the election did not lose power; instead, they retained power by fomenting violence and were in effect aided by international action pursued in the name of conflict prevention. Thus, there truly are deep and enduring dilemmas between the objectives of democratization and imperatives of conflict prevention.³⁰

The international community of democracy promotion networks has already come to appreciate that integrating conflict prevention into electoral assistance programs is a critical part of overall governance-improvement programming (Holohan 2006; Reinicke and Deng 2001; Reilly 2003; Newman and Rich 2004). For example, in countries in transition, it is now more fully appreciated that extensive election monitoring is essential to ensuring free and fair outcomes and in mitigating the tensions that arise from widespread perceptions of “stolen elections” (Bjornlund 2004; Abbink and Heselling 1999); innovative methods such as parallel vote tabulations reassure the public that official elections results are legitimately determined.

The move toward “integrated missions” in United Nations peace operations now more directly link security and conflict management, human rights, humanitarian, development and democratization efforts into a common country-level plan and a Headquarters and on-the-ground set of processes for coordination.³¹ Recent UN-managed post-war elections in Timor Leste, Liberia, and the DRC, for example, have generally been successful in ensuring that new governments are to the extent possible freely and fairly elected (Sisk forthcoming). In conducting peace agreement referendums or plebiscite-like polls, there is increasing awareness that conflict management strategies must be carefully integrated into election administration

³⁰ See the essays in Jarstad and Sisk (2008) for a fuller articulation of the tensions between democratization and peacebuilding in war-torn societies with application to management of violence, civil society, rebel-to-political-party transitions, power sharing, elections, and international engagement.

³¹ See “Note from the Secretary-General,” Guidance on Integrated Missions, 9 February 2006. See Security Council Resolution 1719 (2006) on the establishment of “the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB) help support the Government in its effort towards long-term peace and stability and coordinate the work of the Organization’s agencies in the country under the leadership of the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General, who would also serve as Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Humanitarian Coordinator.”
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8857.doc.htm>

process, and that sometimes the results – as in the Cyprus referendums of April 2005, in which Greek Cypriots turned down a UN-mediated peace plan – may not always be what the international community hopes for.

In the broader set of cases, it is the United Nations Development Program which has proven especially effective in working with electoral management bodies, engaging in critical election-related administrative tasks such as voter registration (which was linked to violent protest in Bangladesh, for example), and in working with and training the security forces (as in Nigeria). At the intergovernmental level, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee has created guidelines for development aid (to include governance aid) and conflict prevention,³² and other intergovernmental organizations such as International IDEA looked into a wide range of ways in which democratic processes can contribute to human security and to human development (Large and Sisk 2006).

Regional organizations, likewise, have made great strides in integrating norms into specific electoral standards that implicitly or explicitly include efforts to prevent and manage election related conflict. The Organization of American States' Unit for the Promotion of Democracy and Southern African Development Community's regional guidelines on election processes both directly acknowledges an elections-conflict nexus (for example, through emphasis on regional monitoring missions). Finally, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has included measures for ensuring that regional minority rights norms are integrated into its monitoring, election assistance, and observation activities in broader Europe.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like IFES (whose name derives from an erstwhile acronym for International Foundation for Election Systems) have created new, dedicated programs in some countries for conducting pre-, during, and post-election violence mitigation strategies, and other NGOs like the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA) have been conducting programs that link conflict prevention and election assistance quite directly.³³

Still, there remains a yawning gap of knowledge about how programming can more consistently and effectively address the causes, manifestations, and consequences of election violence. Bengt Säve-Söderbergh and Izumi Nakmitsu Lennartsson suggest that electoral assistance needs to expand beyond the technical aspects of polling, however important they may be, to directly embrace the underlying political, social, and economic conditions in a society that give rise to and perpetuate conflict; they argue for a more “process-oriented approach to peacebuilding and nation-building, development, and democracy support, which in turn will serve the cause of conflict prevention” (2002: 375).³⁴ This is a tall order, particularly as organizations

³² See the OECD DAC “Tip Sheet on Democratization and Violent Conflict” which is based on a study for the Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation (SIDA) conducted by Thomas Ohlson and Mimmi Söderbergh, “Democratization and Armed Conflict in Weak States,” available at www.sida.se.

³³ The IFES program, Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) support and trains civil society organizations for observation and documentation of election-related violence, reporting findings, and building relationship and dialogue processes during and between election cycles. For EISA's programming on elections and conflict prevention, see www.eisa.org.za.

³⁴ The overall strategy of electoral-conflict mitigation thus implies not just integrating violence-mitigation measures into election-specific assistance packages (which should be done), but it should also include a continuous effort to assist the strengthening of entire range of governance institutions that are essential for election process success, such as the judiciary, human rights monitoring, legislatures, election management bodies, security forces, and civil society groups to include the media (de Zeeuw 2005). Indeed, efforts to anticipate and prevent election violence in Nigeria's 2007 elections were informed by prior experience of malpractice and violence in prior election in the country, particularly the 2003 polls.

are hamstrung by limited budget cycles, short-term mandates, and – most importantly – resistance by governments who fear the consequences of too-much international monitoring and involvement.

While external assistance has gone far to create professionalism and imbue global standards into electoral administration and monitoring, the tools of assistance aimed at addressing the behavior and compliance of key perpetrators of violence – security forces, party political militias, affiliated or unaffiliated groups in civil society – means that the capacities for international engagement to address the root cause and collective action dimensions of election violence are inherently limited. Working with parties to develop pre-election peace pledges or no-violence pacts, backed by violence assessment, tracking and monitoring methods (Marco 2007), represents the best possible and most pragmatic approaches given limits to international engagement at the mid-rank levels. These measures may be helpful in anticipating the likelihood of election-related violence, and to engage in early action to prevent its occurrence or escalation, but like all conflict prevention measures there are deep and persistent limits to success. Consequently, electoral processes in fragile states will continue to be caught between voice and violence, with each new round of competition for power a potential step in the direction of democratic consolidation or state failure.

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