



INSIGHTS

MISSION

USIP's Insights Newsletter aims to challenge and refine major assumptions about the theory and practice of peacebuilding and contributes to the design of specific peacebuilding tools applicable in conflict situations worldwide.

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STATE OF THE ART

On the Prevention of Election Violence

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The promotion of democracy and the prevention of election violence (PEV) in countries at risk of conflict is a well-established multibillion dollar industry that sends peacebuilding practitioners across the globe. The logic behind PEV is straightforward: After analyzing the sources of risk in countries with upcoming elections, one applies the appropriate set of policy instruments to address the frustrations, financial incentives, and fears of those considering violence as a means to win, disrupt, or protest the vote. At the same time, local capacities are strengthened to protect vulnerable citizens and communities. While many local, regional, and international organizations are dedicated to this cause, utilizing a wide assortment of tools, the effectiveness of PEV efforts remains unclear. In an effort to define the state of the art in election violence prevention, this introduction will reflect on the development, practice, and impact of this firmly established peacebuilding field.

The Rise of Election Violence Prevention

Elections can sow the seeds of good governance when adequately managed. At times, elections trigger widespread political violence because they can exacerbate tensions within fragile, conflict-prone, or oppressive societies. International organizations have recognized this risk since World War II, as reflected in their historically strong engagement in democratic support. The United Nations (UN) set the tone, administering elections when former colonies transitioned to independent status or as violent civil conflicts came to an end.

Following the Cold War, UN resolutions or peace agreements increasingly prescribed internationally supervised or verified elections as the formal closure of a violent conflict. Within countries previously marred by violent conflict, free and fair elections would present a common exit point to international donors or peace operations, indicating a level of democratic maturity that justifies a reduction in funds or staff. Until today, "voting is ag-

gressively promoted by the international community,” notes Paul Staniland from the University of Chicago, “and heralded as a sign of legitimacy by elected governments.”¹ In recent decades, international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), and the Carter Center, as well development agencies of the United States and United Kingdom or the UN Development Programme (UNDP), adopted a growing role in election monitoring and support. The practice of election support gradually transformed: From taking direct ownership over election administration and security, international actors now increasingly operate in support of independent election commissions, political parties, and local NGOs. The Organization of American States, the European Union, and other regional organizations created specialized units as well, dedicated to electoral assistance.

While the expansion of institutions addressing election violence has proceeded for nearly half a century, the prioritization of prevention is a more recent trend, resulting from two sequential dynamics: the revival of preventive action as an aspirational norm in the peacebuilding field in the 1990’s, and the growing characterization of elections as a process as opposed to an event.

Prevention as a growing norm in peacebuilding. The televised horrors of mass violence in Somalia, Rwanda, and the Balkans led to a broad push to conduct peacebuilding differently. *An Agenda for Peace* (1992) by UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali and the Carnegie Commission Report on *Preventing Deadly Conflict* (1997) furthered the realization that preventing violence before its eruption was not just a possibility but preferable to rapid response mechanisms and other reactive approaches. The mo-

mentum of prevention influenced both long-standing and modern peacebuilding practices, including mediation and efforts to counter violent extremism. For election support, the emphasis on prevention facilitated the creation of specialized early warning systems, recurring risk assessments, and a more timely provision of training and assistance. However, the commitment to prevention is slow to transform from an aspirational to an effective norm.



*Ballot Box in Ukraine, October 2014 Parliamentary Election.
Photo courtesy of Colin Cleary.*

Elections as a Process. More recently, the realization has grown that election support goes beyond the archetypes of trained election officials and vote tabulation software on the day voters head to the polls. The levels of foreign presence and funding still peak towards election day, even though research by Scott Strauss and Charlie Taylor, presented in the USIP volume *Voting in Fear*, demonstrated that most violence occurs prior to the elections. A growing consensus among the leading players in election support—UNDP, NDI, IFES, The UK Department for International Development, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)—has emerged around the “electoral cycle” as an organizing principle for programming. The risk of violence and the needs for institutional support is present before and after elections and even between election cycles.

Election Violence Prevention as a Field of Practice

As a strategic objective, the prevention of election violence closely overlaps with the distinct yet intricately related peacebuilding aim of stable democratic governance. Peacebuilding instruments are rarely implemented with election violence prevention as the sole purpose and frequently serve overarching purposes. As a growing practice undertaken by development organizations, NGOs, and foreign diplomats, preventing election violence differs from supporting “free and fair” elections. While overlapping, PEV is distinctive in its aim to increase the cost of violence and provide nonviolent alternatives to express disagreement, frustration, or concern about the election process and outcome. The risk of election violence may be reduced by creating clear and enforceable regulations or by empowering and protecting vulnerable members of society. In any violence prevention strategy, it is critical to keep political demagogues and the instigators or perpetrators of violence in check by addressing their capacity and incentives to manipulate the electoral process.

Preventing election violence goes beyond the organization of free and fair elections. Peaceful elections are no guarantee for democratic quality, while free and fair elections are no guarantee for election security. The 2011 elections in Nigeria illustrate this paradox: While the democratic quality of the polls had vastly improved compared to past elections, the elections were the most violent in the country’s history.

The methods and tools to prevent election violence vary widely in terms of the implementing actor, timing, or scope. Early changes to electoral laws may be authorized domestically years before voters hit the polls to improve access to and fairness of the voting process. Preventive measures can be taken by local government authorities, as they carry the primary responsibility

ity for the transparent and peaceful organization of elections. Political parties, local media, and domestic NGOs, such as youth organizations, may play a constructive role as well, as long as governing authorities allow them the space to operate. A well-trained and equipped police force may intimidate potential perpetrators on election day. The practice of election violence prevention also targets different groups and individuals, depending on risk assessments in particular contexts. Prevention models can be categorized in terms of the segments of the population they target, which may be ordinary citizens, political elites, or likely perpetrators.

- Many prevalent techniques are targeted at *citizens*, through peace messaging, voter education, and voter consultations. These approaches are based on the assumption that a shift in the attitude and behavior of the general electorate helps mitigate the risk of violence. Through peace messaging, ordinary citizens are encouraged to speak out against violence and are alerted to the human, financial, and development cost of violence. The messaging occurs through various media, including sports events, art, or advertisements, and on a variety of communication platforms. Voter education mitigates the risk of violence by educating the electorate on democratic procedures and responsibilities, empowering vulnerable communities, and enhancing the legitimacy and transparency of the voting process. Voter consultations are based on the assumption that participatory political platforms allow voters to articulate their grievances and concerns, enhance their perceived inclusiveness, and shape the policy priorities of the political elite.
- The role and responsibility of the political elite in inciting and organizing election violence cannot be underestimated, since violence commonly

results from an incumbent's fear of losing power in the face of an uncertain election outcome. An independent electoral management body (EMB) empowered to enforce election guidelines in a consistent and nonpartisan manner can help deter or mitigate violence. An EMB may sanction parties and candidates who see violence as a viable instrument, incentivize codes of conduct, and implement a transparent registration and result verification protocol. As a complement to this domestic approach, international diplomats can help mobilize local leaders for peace and resolve disputes between leading contenders. Through preventive diplomacy, senior diplomats can apply pressure or persuasion, alerting potential spoilers about the consequences of incitement and the benefits of legal dispute resolution.

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- Finally, security sector engagement and youth programs illustrate policy approaches informed by the anticipated *perpetrator of the violence*. A well-trained and equipped police force and military presents an important domestic guarantee for election security, as long as they prioritize the protection of the electorate over elite interests and display professional conduct. Whether the threats originate from violent riots, insurgent attacks, or targeted assassinations, police are responsible for the protection of election materials and stakeholders, including candidates, voters, or poll workers. Police training can also help ensure security forces are part

of the solution instead of the problem, as police abuse, intimidation, or repression present common types of election violence. Targeted education or employment programs may similarly reduce the risk of election violence, turning common perpetrators of violence into stakeholders in the economy and political system. Through employment programs, or direct engagement in the election process as a volunteer, monitor, or even a candidate, youth obtain a stake in the peaceful conduct of elections.

The assumptions regarding the potential outcome of these instruments are plausible as long as they are implemented according to best practice and follow a strategic risk assessment that establishes either citizens, elites, or violent agents as part of the problem or the solution. For example, the likely impact of citizen-oriented techniques on the risk of violence is questionable in cases in which well-organized insurgents are the sole perpetrators of electoral violence. Building up the material capacity of the security sector is only advisable in cases in which a well-trained and equipped police force presents a domestic guarantee for election security rather than a tool of manipulation in the hands of an authoritarian incumbent.

Identifying the will and capacity to base preventive interventions on rigorous and iterative assessments, starting at least eighteen months before election day, present just one of many challenges to enhance effectiveness. While rapidly expanding, our knowledge of the drivers and triggers increasing the risk of election violence remains imperfect, placing our prevention practice on a shaky knowledge base to begin with. At the same time, given the dominant focus on neutralizing short-term triggers of anticipated violence, initiatives to prevent electoral violence commonly fail to address the underlying motivations of violent political conflict.

Measuring and Improving Impact

Elections present an opportunity for preventive peacebuilding because of their potential role as a trigger of violence. Since the date of the poll is usually known well in advance, domestic and international peacebuilders are well-equipped to develop programming in a timely fashion. Thanks to a growing body of applied research, these practitioners are increasingly aware of the likely location, perpetrators, and motivations of election violence. In theory, this should allow election specialists to anticipate risk more accurately and better prioritize countries that would benefit from interventions. But the ability of preventive practice to achieve its intended outcome merits further investigation. To evaluate the impact of preventive programming, peacebuilders must look beyond the presence or absence of election violence in the aftermath. A more appropriate indicator is

a measurable decline in the structural risk identified as part of the assessment, prior to the preventive intervention.

The 2013 presidential elections in Kenya powerfully illustrate the importance of selecting the appropriate indicators for impact evaluation. Conventional wisdom among international observers indicated that the recent Kenyan elections presented a ‘prevention success,’ since the widespread violence of 2007–08 had not been repeated. However, a USIP study, “Elections and Violent Conflict in Kenya: Making Prevention Stick,” revealed that ordinary Kenyans disagreed with the optimistic assessment that the 2013 presidential elections had been peaceful. Instead, they described “palpable tension, fear, and anxiety” and reported localized violence across the country. The result of this “negative peace,” as locals described it, was not

the result of constructive peacebuilding but of conflict suppressing factors, including the memory of the recent violence and the fear of its return. There is a widespread expectation that violent conflict could erupt in Kenya during the next elections, if not before, since the structural drivers of conflict, including land disputes, the lack of a solution for the internally displaced, and growing tensions following ethnic and religious profiling in the government’s shoot-to-kill counter-terrorism campaign, remain in place.

Unless we improve the metrics for evaluating preventive success and address the underlying drivers of conflict, elections will remain a flashpoint for violence and tension, requiring the peacebuilding community to repeat its efforts each and every election cycle. ■





STATE OF THE ART

Preventing Electoral Violence: Greater Awareness, but Still Falling Short

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Electoral violence would seem an easier target for prevention efforts than most types of political violence, given that we know the date of the election, the divisive issues, and the protagonists in advance. And yet, if the data from sub-Saharan Africa offer any guide, we are no closer to reducing the incidence of electoral violence today, than in 1990—the onset of democracy on the continent.² In contrast, the efforts at the international, regional, national, and local levels to prevent electoral violence have increased steadily in the same time period, forming a patchwork of interventions that are revelatory in themselves: The flurry of activity in the advent of an election from a multitude of sources, attempting to affect a panoply of variables simultaneously, often fails to have an effective impact on the drivers of electoral violence.

As a community of conflict experts, we struggle to define and understand the phenomenon of electoral violence and, subsequently, how and when to prevent it. To successfully prevent it, we should start from the premise that electoral violence is a unique subset of political violence—distinguished by its timing, motivation, objectives, and perpetrators—used as a strategy by political operatives and supporters to achieve their political ends.

Political operatives use violence because it attains the desired political ends without suffering negative repercussions. Preventing electoral violence requires removing the use of violence from the toolbox of political strategies altogether. Concretely, that means improving the integrity of elections, improving the response to early warning, and punishing perpetrators. In recent years, practitioners have focused heavily on improving the integrity of elections. However, the challenges of responding to early warnings and the failure to punish perpetrators contribute to the persistence of electoral violence.

Predicting Electoral Violence

While electoral violence occurs on every continent, considerable strides toward unpacking its scope, characteristics, and intensity comes from the African Electoral

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Violence Database (AEVD), developed by Scott Straus and Charlie Taylor. The AEVD examines sub-Saharan Africa's national elections from 1990 to 2008 and reveals that violence (ranging from low-intensity intimidation and harassment to large-scale violence) accompanies 58 percent

of elections in Africa. However, the large scale violence that Togo witnessed in 2005, or Kenya in 2008, takes place in just 10 percent of cases. The AEVD also indicates a high rate of recurring cycles of electoral violence and reveals that 95 percent of all violence occurs before the election.³ Political operatives use violence as an electoral strategy on two occasions: first, when politicians face close elections or fear a postelection protest in situations of weak institutional constraints;⁴ and second, in majoritarian systems with environments of economic inequality and when large ethnic groups feel excluded from power.⁵ These data present opportunities for preventive measures, but often intervention programs overlook these facts.

Preventing Electoral Violence

Given what we know about electoral violence—that it occurs mostly before elections, political operatives use it as a tool to meet political objectives, weak institutional environments make it more likely, and it tends to repeat—how can organizations and governments successfully improve the

integrity of elections, respond effectively to early warning, and punish perpetrators?

Improving the Integrity of Elections

In their report, “Deepening Democracy: A Strategy for Improving the Integrity of Elections Worldwide,” the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy, and Security defined elections with integrity as “any election that is based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality...and is professional, impartial, and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle.”⁶ Indeed, improving the integrity of an election is important; its absence can lead to violence. In Bangladesh’s recent elections, for example, opposition parties violently protested the government’s refusal to name a caretaker government ahead of the elections, leading to the country’s most violent elections to date. Not surprisingly, therefore, electoral integrity informs the prevention efforts by local democracy-building institutions and international institutions, such as the United Nations, the European Union, IFES, the National Endowment for Democracy, the International Republican Institute, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, and USAID.

However, a country’s conflict dynamics and the political environment of a particular election can limit the positive impact of an election’s integrity, as Nigeria’s 2011 polls illustrate. Whereas observers lauded Nigeria’s electoral process for its vast improvement over previous elections, the postelection violence turned out to be more intense than all the elections in the country’s history combined. Supporters of Muhammadu Buhari (a northern Muslim), who lost to Goodluck Jonathan (a southern Christian), clashed violently, leaving more than eight hundred people dead and sixty-five thousand displaced in three days. Buhari’s supporters did not accept the result from Nigeria’s relatively well-managed election—even though observers found

it credible. The technical improvements could not overcome the conflict between those who claimed that it was the turn of a northern Muslim to rule versus those who argued that it was time to move beyond regional and religious power sharing.



*Polling Station in Ukraine, October 2014 Parliamentary Election
Photo courtesy of Colin Cleary.*

Linking Early Warning with Early Response

The prevention of violence necessitates a prompt response to emerging tensions or violent incidents. International and local efforts commonly identify hot spots or areas vulnerable to violence: USAID’s election security program uses its conflict analysis framework to understand a country’s propensity for electoral violence, and online platforms such as *Ushahidi*, which emerged from the 2007–08 postelection violence in Kenya, use information from texts, blogs, social media, and smart phone apps to map a picture of the occurrence of violence. The difficulty remains in the follow-up to the early warnings. Some organizations, however, address this critical link: The Open Society Initiative of West Africa helps coordinate civil society organizations to monitor and respond quickly to developments in the electoral process, and IFES’ Election Violence Education and Resolution program aims to train civil society on how to monitor and respond to unrest during the electoral process.

However, organizations find it hard to successfully operationalize early warning/early response programs. For instance, the

UN certification team reported a number of worrying irregularities and incidents in the lead-up to East Timor’s 2007 parliamentary elections, which cast doubt on the final results.⁷ Indeed, as Ghana’s Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) demonstrates, effective early warning/early response requires engagement and coordination with many stakeholders and processes. CODEO’s specially-trained electoral violence observers submit reports to a team comprising representatives of CODEO, security services, national institutions, community leaders, and civil society organizations. Drawing on consultations with community stakeholders and an understanding of local conflict dynamics, the team decides whether a tense situation warrants interventions by community leaders, mediators, security personnel, or the media. CODEO’s work validates that early response to early warning pays off; they report a substantial decrease in violent incidents as election day approaches.⁸ Yet assembling and coordinating such an approach often goes beyond the financial, staffing, and logistical resources of many organizations.

Punishing the Use of Violence

Punishing perpetrators can reduce the appeal of violence. Thus far, few have been prosecuted for electoral offences. Recently, the international community’s leverage to investigate and prosecute electoral violence was weakened with the International Criminal Court’s dismissal of charges against Uhuru Kenyatta, president of Kenya, for his alleged role in the country’s 2008 postelection violence. At the national levels, equally dismal track records exist, with alleged perpetrators of violence repeatedly contesting elections, remaining in office, or otherwise not investigated. As the unraveling Kenyan case demonstrated, only a multifaceted endeavor can remove these impediments towards punishment: witnesses and evidence must be protected, a clear justification for prosecuting electoral violence must be established, and national institutions must buy into the process.

In some cases, too, violence appears to have paid off: Zanzibar's opposition, the Civic United Front, and the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi negotiated a government of national unity after several years of recurring violence during elections. In this arrangement, all parties got a place in government. Similar controversial power sharing arrangements occurred after election violence in Kenya (2008) and Zimbabwe (2009). These cases demonstrate how preventing violence involves deepening democratic processes and strengthening institutions to resolve electoral disputes in addition to prosecuting perpetrators.

Conclusion

Preventing the use of violence as a political strategy to win elections includes improving the integrity of elections, responding to early warning of impending violence, and punishing perpetrators. Organizations increasingly focus on improving elections' integrity. But international, national, and local organizations struggle to intervene effectively when tensions rise, or punish the use of violence. Even when provided with early warnings, organizations and state entities frequently do not succeed in reducing tensions, resulting in escalating violence and apparent impunity for perpetrators.

This fails to break the cycle of electoral violence. Furthermore, innovative programs and partnerships that get to the heart of why violence appeals to political operatives mandates a deeper intervention into the political, social, and local conflict dynamics in which an electoral contest takes place—a risky endeavor for any organization. Unless prevention efforts account for the existing conflict dynamics in which an election takes place, develop a fast response to emerging tensions, or punish those who use violence to attain political objectives, electoral violence will continue unabated. ■

PEACE ARENA

Theory vs. Practice

In each Newsletter, the PeaceArena offers a space for discussion between scholars and practitioners as they comment on a selected quote. This week we feature an exchange between one of the authors of our selected quote, Nadia Naviwala, former USIP Country Representative for Pakistan, and a scholar/practitioner in the field of election violence, Jeff Fischer, Senior Electoral Advisor, Creative Associates International.

The quote for this issue is from a *Foreign Policy* article on the 2013 general elections in Pakistan entitled “Election Violence, a Good Sign for Pakistan’s Democracy?” by Megan Reif, Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Studies, University of Colorado, Denver, and Nadia Naviwala.

“The apparent increase in the extremists’ use of violence in [the run-up to] this historic election is a sign, not of their strength, but of their increasing irrelevance in a society that is moving forward with regular, competitive elections between mainstream parties. ... Violence is a symptom and a sign of a strengthened electoral system. At the same time, it creates the outrage necessary for further reform. Violence and reform feed into each other cyclically.”

Response from Jeff Fischer

While Megan Reif and Nadia Naviwala posit a relationship between electoral violence and reform which is worthy to examine, the statement seems to presume that this relationship is inevitable. In Pakistan, electoral reforms are fostering a positive trend in democratization; however, it is the persistence of electoral violence which can erode any such gains and not enhance them. In its 2013 country report for Pakistan, Freedom House asserts a positive democratic trend given the successful transfer of power from one civilian government to another that year. Electoral reforms were introduced after the 2008 elections to enhance the independence of the Electoral Commission of Pakistan and repeal General Pervez Musharraf’s Legal Framework Order, thereby strengthening parliamentary democracy. However, directly connecting an increase in electoral violence to such a positive trend arrow is complicated by a number of factors.

First, the relevant history of elections are those conducted since the fall of the Musharraf regime because of the new political landscape and electoral conflict dynamic, which was created by this departure. As a result, the examination of this violence–reform relationship can only be performed for two elections—2008 and 2013. In both cases, the number and intensity of electoral violence incidents were high. However, this short electoral history may not be sufficient to establish the relationship between reform and violence. Second, in some respects, electoral reform and parliamentary strengthening are irrelevant to the extremists who perpetrate this violence in Pakistan. Where political rivals may employ violence as a means of winning an election, extremists’ motives are to delay, disrupt, or discredit the electoral process. Reforms which inhibit electoral fraud may be lost on the extremists, who are not attempting to win votes or elections. As a result, any system of democratic governance regardless of its reform trajectory would be a target. And, third, as a result of the 2008 and 2013 electoral experiences, the use of violence as a means

to influence voting has already become a precedent and could be emulated by other perpetrators in future elections. These perpetrators could be less marginalized than the extremists, resulting in a different relationship between violence and reform and more complexity in motives, victims, and tactics.

Closing comments by Nadia Naviwala

Pakistan’s 2013 elections demonstrate, again, how outrage around electoral violence provides the impetus for reform. The period leading up to elections was already marked by historic reforms, informed by the experience of problems in previous elections. Reforms included stronger identification verification procedures to prevent bogus votes; increasing fines for malfeasance from \$50 to \$1000, making violations of the Code of Conduct legally punishable; and barring government recruitment and development projects in the run-up to elections.⁹

A year after elections, defeated, prime ministerial-hopeful Imran Khan led protests in Islamabad demanding that elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif step down. He cried electoral fraud, claiming that elections had been so badly rigged that they deprived him of his rightful victory. On December 17, 2014, after more than four months of relentless protesting, Imran Khan ended his demonstration. The result of his protest is huge appetite for reforms in the next election. According to various polls, 55 percent¹⁰ to 85 percent¹¹ of Pakistanis believe that electoral reforms are necessary. If the democratic process is allowed to evolve in Pakistan, the next election will be stronger.

In the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the area most affected by militancy, political parties were allowed to campaign for the first time in 2013. Elections were successfully held, and violence was much lower than expected, especially compared to the 2008 elections. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan and other militant groups

seemed as committed to thwarting the process as participating in it to influence the results. In FATA, some believed that candidates could not win without the Taliban's sanction. One Taliban chief advised voters on how to vote safely. In Punjab, the winning Pakistan Muslim League (N) traded seats with Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, a banned militant group that has turned into a political party. Still,

there was relatively less information about the conduct of elections in FATA and Balochistan, which are hard for media and NGOs to access. Without transparency and information about violence, there is less outrage to focus public attention and stimulate reform in these areas relative to the rest of the country. ■

IN PRACTICE

The “In Practice” section presents the scope of peacebuilding activity in a specific country in the form of a short case study or through personal accounts.

The November 2014 Elections in Moldova—Peaceful, but Not Fair

BY DOMINIK TOLKSDORF, CONSULTANT, RESEARCH PROJECTS IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES, 2014 USIP TRANSATLANTIC FELLOW

The November 2014 parliamentary elections in Moldova were peaceful. Attributing this ‘success,’ in light of the election violence the country experienced in April 2009, to the impact of violence prevention efforts is not entirely justified. The elections passed without major incidents not because but in spite of controversial decisions that were taken by Moldovan authorities. The Central Election Commission (CEC), which has been reformed since 2009, could not prevent political interference in the weeks before the election.

The most controversial development was the exclusion of the opposition party Patria. The party is led by Renato Usatii, a wealthy but new political figure with close ties in Russia. Four days ahead of the poll, the Moldovan police reported that Patria received funds from Russia, a violation of the election code. In a swift procedure that took many observers by surprise, the politicized Moldovan courts annulled the registration of the party as electoral contestant. The decision led to concerns of electoral violence,

a valid fear which fortunately did not materialize. In the run-up to the election, the CEC also had to implement controversial decisions made by the Moldovan government. The opening of just five polling stations in the Russian Federation (out of ninety-five stations abroad), the country with by far the largest community of Moldovan guest workers, presented a clear attempt to block Moldovan votes from Russia. A strengthened CEC with the authority to monitor party and campaign finances will be necessary for the conduct of free and fair elections in the future.

In the context of the crisis in neighboring Ukraine, the Moldovan security services frequently warned of attempts by external actors to destabilize the country during the election period. As a result, law enforcement agencies conducted special operations, including raids against groups that were suspected of planning plots after the election. The security sector, which is not seen as completely impartial, played a highly visible role before the election,



Election Posters in Moldova, November 2014 Parliamentary Election. Photo Courtesy of Dominik Tolkdorf.

but whether their heavy-handed efforts effectively prevented violence or merely polarized the preelection period remains an outstanding question. Voter consultations by the parties, as well as youth programming and civic education, present areas where further local engagement would be useful. These support measures could strengthen the legitimacy of the Moldovan government, which, due to its interference in the November election, has lost much of the electorate’s trust. ■

Electoral Violence Prevention in Nigeria: Redefining the Role for CSOs

BY UDO JUDE ILO, NIGERIA COUNTRY HEAD, OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE FOR WEST AFRICA

On February 14, 2015, Nigerians were scheduled to head to the polls for their general elections. Just a week before voting day, Nigerian authorities decided to postpone the elections for six weeks, as the country’s military and intelligence chiefs would not be able to guarantee the security of the electoral process given the threat posed by Boko Haram. Some opposition parties and indeed civil society are not convinced by this justifica-

tion. In any case, the sudden decision to postpone the elections has not helped the credibility of the electoral process.

This pivotal election presents the first time since the return to democracy in 1999 that the outcome is so challenging to predict. The contest features President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the South-South geopolitical zone, and General Muhammadu Buhari, a former military

head of state and a Muslim from the north-west. The tense nature of the electoral contest is itself a challenge. This is further heightened by the appeals of elite politicians to ethnic and religious sentiments as a means of swaying voters.

The inability of political leaders to provide leadership in ensuring violence free elections has made the engagement of nongovernmental peacebuilding actors not only

urgent but essential in addressing election-related violence. The Nigeria Civil Society Election Situation Room (SR) (@situationroom NG) illustrates the newly assumed role of civil society in addressing violence and promoting credible elections in Nigeria. The SR is a platform of more than sixty civil society organizations across the thirty-six Nigerian States and aims to prevent electoral violence through constructive engagement with government and relevant stakeholders, as well as countrywide civic education and peace messaging efforts. The SR has been very engaged in back channel advocacy, interacting with local and international leaders to flag potential flash points for conflict. These elections will also feature technologies that are new to Nigeria, including permanent voter registration cards that incorporate biometrics and automated, electronic card readers. However, it remains to be seen whether these well-intended efforts to provide free and fair elections to the Nigerian people will be able to contribute to a peaceful electoral process. ■

Notes

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3. Straus and Taylor, "Democratization and Electoral Violence," p. 23, 28
4. Emilie Hafner-Burton, Susan Hyde, and Ryan S. Jablonski, "When Do Governments Resort to Election Violence?" *British Journal of Political Science*, 44, no.1 (January 2014), p. 149-79.
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11. Ahmed Bilal Mehboob, "The Way Forward," *Dawn*, September 13, 2014, http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=13_09_2014_008_001.



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