Introduction to current trends in election-related violence

Barcelona, 22-26 March, 2010
Afghan presidential and local elections 2009

- Insurgency – war
- Weak rule of law/scant disarmament
- Very powerful executive – "winner takes all", patronage
- Massive corruption
- Long recent history of conflict
- Historical grievances/ethnic divisions
- Partisan EMB – distrusted by opposition
- Legacies of fraud from previous elections

Electoral violence

- Voter registration – sporadic attacks on sites, staff and registrants (Taliban and factional)
- Campaign – local candidates killed and 10 of 41 presidential candidates quit. Widespread attacks, intimidation, threats (Taliban and factional)
- Polling – “most violent day since the Taliban’s ouster from Kabul”
  - 11 election workers, 12 security forces, 58 insurgents, 31 others killed in over 300 incidents – attacks, bomb blasts

Results tabulation & complaints adjudication

- Massive fraud
- One third – million -- Karzai ballots disqualified
- No reforms ahead of the second round

RESULTS ACCEPTED PEACEFULLY
Strong presidency – high stakes

Threatened incumbent, hopeful opposition

Weak rule of law institutions – courts, police

History of conflict – ethnic lines

Grievances – land, resources

Poverty, unemployment

Ethnic political mobilisation

Legacies of electoral violence – and impunity

President appoints commissioners

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Kenyan presidential and parliamentary elections 2007

Electoral violence

Primaries

Voter registration

Campaign – less violent than previous elections

Polling

Results tabulation & complaints adjudication

- Flawed, manipulated results process led to ethnic-based violence – youth gangs, community leaders, media, reprisals
- 1,200 killed and 350,000 displaced in violence ("brink of civil war")
- Sharp economic downturn, 80% tourism lost, rise in price of basic goods
- Entrenched social fragmentation

Powersharing arrangement mediated
What is electoral violence?

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

UNDP 2009

“Electoral conflict and violence can be defined as any random or organised 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.”

Jeff Fischer 2002
1. Subtype of political violence – actors employ violence towards political ends, advancement of their own power. **Countries that suffer electoral violence usually suffer other types of political violence**

2. Includes acts – assassination of opponents or spontaneous fighting between rival supporters – and threats, coercion and intimidation of opponents, voters or election officials, which can be just as powerful.

3. Can be targeted against people or things – candidates, supporters, communities or materials, vehicles or ballot boxes.

**Spoiler or factional?**
“Since the 2003 elections, there has been a rise in the kidnapping of opponents, assassination of would-be candidates and other political figures, and violent disruption of political meetings and campaigns of rivals. These acts are…increasing in frequency as the elections draw closer.”

“Widespread illiteracy and poverty make the lower socioeconomic classes readily available to be drafted into odd jobs, including acts of political violence. A majority of the foot soldiers of electoral violence are drawn from the teen and adolescent age groups. These youths…are the ready pool from which politicians recruit thugs to fight their opponents.”

“Voting, like the campaign, was also marred by widespread violence and general insecurity. Most involved official harassment of opposition leaders on the eve of the elections, failure to secure election materials and preempt incidents during the polls or ruthless repression of protests following the announcement of results. Underlying all this was the tendency of security personnel to acquiesce to, or actively collaborate with, the ruling party in rigging the elections.”

“The polls – communal, presidential, then legislative – are scheduled between May and September, but opposition parties are facing harassment and intimidation from police and the ruling party’s youth wing and appear to be choosing to respond to violence with violence. “

“The CNDD-FDD youth wing’s physical training, war songs and quasi-military organisation raise the spectre of militia violence and a large-scale intimidation campaign. The other former rebels, the Forces nationales de libération (FNL) and the Front pour la démocratie au Burundi (FRODEBU) are mobilising their own youth wings to oppose intimidation tactics. The police have remained passive or become accomplices to the ruling party’s abuses.”

“Opposition politicians, journalists and even bureaucrats told Crisis Group that intelligence agency officials are using both bribes and coercion to produce defections to pro-military parties. Several PML-N leaders in the Punjab said blackmail and physical intimidation was used against them. 137 PPP politicians in Sindh told similar stories and also accused intelligence and administrative officials of electoral manipulation at the local level. In the past, election results have been changed at the last minute by security agency intimidation of voters and polling staff.”

What causes electoral violence?

- Context (grievances -- exclusion, inequality – ethnic divisions, patterns of conflict, corruption, context of democratisation)
- Actors and interests
- Relationships (trust)
- Expectations
- Patterns of political mobilisation (ethnic, youth gangs or militias)
- Rule of law (impartial courts and police)
- Security (well-trained official forces, weapons available, unemployed young men)
- The media
- The stakes ("winner takes all"?)
- The rules – electoral system choice
- The “process” – administration of elections

Context-specific
Complex interplay between interconnected factors
"How the electoral process and administration is designed, managed and implemented has a strong bearing on electoral violence. Those elections considered free, fair and transparent are less likely to experience electoral violence than those where allegations of mismanagement or deliberate cheating are prevalent."

UNDP 2009

Experience shows that nearly every election in Africa is a risky undertaking, whether well run or not, as peace is easy to break. Denis Kadima, EISA, 2010

“80% of the multi-party elections in the continent were marred by electoral violence. The elections declared “free and fair” by observers were as bloody as those elections rejected by observers.” Staffan I. Lindberg 2002

Electoral violence is the methods of the opposition: incumbents cheat and their opposition responds violently. Paul Collier 2009
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The impact of electoral violence on democracy and development

1. Impact of electoral violence from a democracy perspective (e.g. influence registration process, leading to parties/candidates leaving the process, electorate may refrain from participating in the election etc).

2. Impact of electoral violence from a conflict management perspective (e.g. leading to further polarisation, new violence, insecurity, appeals for law and order instead of reconciliation).

3. How does electoral violence impact human security?
Elections

Accountability

Legitimacy

Elections

Turnout

Fairness

Results

Equality

Competition

Good governance

Human security

Societal cleavages

Economic costs

Implications?
“Within days of the supposed relaxation of the security and media laws, police cracked down on the MDC and its supporters. Wielding batons and firing tear gas, they beat up and arrested MDC supporters making their way to a court-sanctioned rally on 23 January 2008 at which Tsvangirai was giving an address.”

“Mugabe was concerned about the prospect of intra-ZANU-PF violence even before that challenge. Observers considered his uncharacteristic call at the ZANU-PF congress in December 2007 for the party to shun violence a coded message to factions to refrain from fighting each other.”

“Serious incidents involving violence and the loss or destruction of voting materials required a rerun at fourteen centres around the country. In Port-au-Prince, a tacit truce declared by armed gangs in the weeks preceding the elections was maintained, and there were no violent incidents.”

- Crisis Group Latin America/Caribbean Briefing N°10, Haiti after the Elections: Challenges for Préval’s First 100 Days, p. 4.
“Most Internally displaced people (IDP) living in camps, people from groups hostile to the NCP living in “insecure” quarters of cities, and the population in rebel-held areas were not counted. Disenfranchising large numbers of people will only **further marginalise them.** They will…look to rebel groups to fight and win back their lost rights and land…”

- The Elections and Darfur (forthcoming)