



**European Commission  
United Nations Development Programme**

# **Introduction to current trends in election-related violence**

In cooperation with

**NEEDS**  
Network for Enhanced Electoral and Democratic Support



# 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. 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.**”

**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**

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# *What is electoral violence?*

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 **physical acts** – assassination, beating 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.

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# Examples

- 1. Perpetrators**
- 2. Motives**
- 3. Method or form of violence**
- 4. Timeline**
- 5. Causes or enabling conditions**
- 6. Victims**
- 7. Effects**
- 8. (Prevention)**

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# Nigeria

"Voting, like the campaign, was 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."

Crisis      Group      Africa      Report      N°126,  
[Nigeria: Failed elections – failing state?, 30 May 2007.](#)

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**"The entire pre-election period was marked by violence and bombings caused by a number of factors and actors: a larger conflict between Government forces and extremists; attacks by extremists on political parties; government violence to suppress political campaigners and civil society; violence between political parties themselves."**

- Report on Election-related Violence and Killings by the of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, 21 May 2010



**Haiti**

“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.

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# European Commission United Nations Development Programme

- 1. Perpetrators**
- 2. Targets**
- 3. Motives**
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# *What causes electoral violence?*

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

**Context-specific**

**Complex interplay between interconnected factors**

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## Guatemala

**“Over 50 political candidates and activists were killed in the run-up to Guatemala’s general elections, making them the most violent since the end of the civil war in 1996. Individuals across the spectrum were subject to bombing and machete attacks, as well as shootings, although more killings targeted parties on the left.”**

- Report on Election-related Violence and Killings by the of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, 21 May 2010

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# Nigeria

"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."

Crisis

Group

Africa

Report

N°123,

[\*Nigeria's Elections: Avoiding a Political Crisis, 28 March 2007, p. 9\*](#)  
—10.

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# Afghanistan

**A few hours after the preliminary results were released, a bomb blast killed 43 people in Kandahar city. (The Taliban were suspected but denied responsibility). As the first full results were being announced by the election commission, a wave of attacks across the country resulted in 66 deaths.**

- Report on Election-related Violence and Killings by the of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, 21 May 2010**

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## *Burundi elections 2010*

“The ruling party 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.”

- Africa report N°155, [Burundi: Ensuring Credible Elections, 12 February 2010.](#)**

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