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WHAT WORKS IN PREVENTING ELECTION VIOLENCE

EVIDENCE FROM LIBERIA AND KENYA

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[One in five elections in the world turns violent. Yet, despite our best efforts, the question remains: how can election violence be most effectively prevented?]

Summary

■ A growing number of peacebuilding and conflict prevention strategies are being used to mitigate the risk of election violence. Youth programs, election observation, police training, and civic education are just some of the approaches. Little is known, however, about which programs work and which do not for preventing election violence.

■ A strong performance by police and election commissioners is key to reducing election violence. At the same time, poorly performing election and security institutions are often responsible for much of the violence.

■ The Liberia National Police, the Supreme Court, and the National Election Commission in Liberia advanced trust and confidence in the election process and helped mitigate tension at critical moments during the 2017 elections. Liberian security personnel played a positive role during the campaign period, and their presence was mostly discrete, nonintrusive, and professional.

■ In Kenya, police units were generally well prepared for the 2017 elections, but responded to demonstrations violently, repressively, and abusively. The irregularities that occurred with the transmission of the votes and other technical processes triggered incendiary statements by opposition leaders and provoked demonstrations that were poorly handled by security forces.

■ We find no systematic evidence that peace messaging and voter consultation made a difference in the 2017 elections in Kenya or Liberia. Peace messaging often struggles to reach the members of society most likely to perpetrate violence, while political parties fail to connect meaningfully with voters.

■ Youth programming and civic and voter education seemed to make a difference in Liberia but not in Kenya. Election monitoring seemed capable of realizing some of its promise in changing certain attitudes, but was not associated with less election violence in either Liberia or Kenya.

■ More effective prevention is possible with timely and integrated risk assessments and inclusive, targeted, and locally led programming.

Introduction

One in five elections in the world turns violent.[1] Election-related violence is not unique to any political system or development level and takes many shapes and forms, from burning ballot boxes and intimidating the opposition to mass violent protests and state crackdowns on peaceful demonstrations. In rare cases, it is more extreme, such as assassinations of election candidates or mass killings. Tensions often rise long before voters head to the polls—during party nominations and the process of voter registration, and throughout the campaign period—so efforts to prevent election violence need to start early. Yet, despite our best efforts, the question remains: how can election violence be most effectively prevented?

In anticipation of election violence, government actors and local civil society organizations (CSOs) may educate voters, organize community dialogues, or engage young people as the new generation of political leaders. International donors, diplomats, and development actors may support local efforts to promote free, fair, and peaceful elections.[2] As seen in the run-up to the 2017 elections in Kenya and Liberia, international actors may provide support to political parties, observe elections, engage in peace messaging, and deploy several other prevention techniques in the hope that some of them will make a difference. However, little is known about which programs work or how well they work. This report evaluates the utility of seven approaches, or tools, commonly thought to reduce—directly or indirectly—the risk of election violence:

- election management and administration
- security sector engagement
- election monitoring
- civic and voter education
- peace messaging
- voter consultations
- youth programming

What Constitutes Election Violence?

Election violence is any form of intimidation or physical violence directed against electoral stakeholders, or the disruption of events or damage to materials, intended to affect an electoral process or influence the outcome. It is a form of political violence that may occur before, during, or after election day. Election violence prevention measures are taken with the explicit aim of protecting electoral stakeholders, events, and materials; promoting an environment conducive to a peaceful election process; and addressing the risk of violence in a proactive and sustained way.

During the 2017 general elections in Liberia and Kenya, the United States Institute of Peace conducted extensive field research in both countries, collecting and analyzing original survey data from more than two thousand respondents. In assessing the effectiveness of violence prevention practices, the Institute aims to inform the prioritization of election programming and to improve the effectiveness of the peacebuilding community in shaping environments conducive to peaceful elections.

The past decade has seen the emergence of a research paradigm for elections at risk of violence. A broadening field of scholars engages in impressive research to identify patterns in the drivers, perpetrators, and victims of election violence. Over the same period, impact evaluations in the development field have increasingly embraced systematic, qualitative, and quantitative methods. An important gap remains, however: the systematic and rigorous evalu-

ation of election violence prevention measures. To the extent that violence prevention tools are evaluated, they are rarely assessed comparatively or in relation to the risk of election violence. One exception is the recent study of election violence prevention tools by Sarah Birch and David Muchlinski, who find that "capacity building programs" that aim to strengthen the electoral process—such as election management body assistance—reduce election violence committed by nonstate actors.[3] Rigorous investigations such as this one, which look at multiple prevention instruments, are rare; most studies look at individual prevention efforts. For example, Steven Finkel demonstrates the ability of civic education programs to improve citizens' political knowledge and participation, a mechanism that may help prevent election violence.[4] In another case, Joseph Asunka and his co-authors, using a randomized control trial in Ghana, find that political parties shift electoral violence from polling stations where observers are present to stations that have no observers, but do so only in electorally competitive constituencies where violence could potentially affect the outcome.[5]

Rigorous investigations such as this one, which look at multiple prevention instruments, are rare; most studies look at individual prevention efforts.

Another limitation in the literature is a lack of focus on unintended consequences or the recognition of failed prevention. The few existing studies tackling this gap identify significant adverse effects of prevention tools. For example, election observation missions can have displacement effects, posing the risk that violence will occur much earlier than it otherwise would or in locations where monitors are not present; critical observation reports can facilitate post-election violence; and civic education can discourage voting.[6] More research is needed on the practices that are not effective and on those that could have unanticipated negative effects; such knowledge can help reduce wasteful spending and avoid raising false hopes.

Two previous USIP studies have evaluated international violence prevention. The first centered on the 2013 presidential elections in Kenya. The second, conducted in 2014 and 2015, was a multi-country study. Five recent elections were carefully selected: Bangladesh (2014), Honduras (2013), Malawi (2014), Moldova (2014), and Thailand (2014). Each of these elections displayed similar levels of risk but different levels of violence. The research included those prevention mechanisms covered in this report. The findings indicated that although prevention works, not all prevention models have equal impact. The project was an important step toward comparing multiple prevention efforts and their effectiveness but used national-level data across countries and thus was unable to explain local differences within a country.

The subnational approach in this report can help explain why violence erupts in some locations within a country but not in others. It also controls for a range of contextual factors, allowing for a better evaluation of prevention effectiveness on the local level. Importantly, this report relies on perceptions of local residents and thus allows us to see which interventions actually reached local communities and how locals perceived them. Although implementers may list areas in which they have been active, interventions may not always reach them and be taken up by locals. Yet for many of the prevention tools to be effective, locals must know about them and be affected by them. This study design, using local respondents' information about intervention and violence, helps us get at this issue.

Methodology

Previous studies have examined a single tool by a single organization through project evaluations. This one introduces practice evaluations as an innovative evaluative approach. Project evaluations offer a systematic and usually independent review of a completed or ongoing project, such as an election observation mission led by the European Union in Nepal. In contrast, a practice evaluation of election monitoring would examine the collective impact of various

domestic and international observer groups as they work toward the same broad objective. This report reviews the ability of seven tools, selected after a practitioner mapping exercise, to prevent election violence in distinct risk environments.

Kenya and Liberia were selected because they both had upcoming elections at varying levels of risk around the beginning of this research initiative; they both provided the necessary access; and they both had painful experiences in their recent histories with regard to the identified types of political violence USIP is mandated to prevent.

This evaluation involved extensive field research that included collaboration with the Constitution and Reform Education Consortium based in Nairobi, Kenya, and the Center for Democratic Governance based in Monrovia, Liberia. Both are leading CSOs in their respective countries engaged in research and analysis on elections. Together with these local partners, we carefully selected nine counties across Liberia and Kenya that were rich in votes and varied in geography and political party preference. Within each county, towns or neighborhoods (*sublocations* in Kenya, *communities* in Liberia) were chosen. To mitigate selection effects, these towns were chosen *as if randomly* from the larger pool of towns likely to experience violence prevention efforts.[7] All of the towns in this study were at risk of experiencing election violence and prevention, but some ended up receiving prevention and others did not. Based on local information from towns, we evaluate whether prevention was associated with less election violence and changes in attitudes. A total of three hundred towns were surveyed.

Local partners used experienced enumerators to conduct rigorous in-person interviews, surveying more than two thousand respondents across the three hundred locations. In each location, the enumerators interviewed seven categories of respondents: community elders, civil society leaders, women leaders, youth leaders, teachers, religious leaders, and local drivers.[8] The surveys were conducted in two waves—before the first round of voting and after the second round or repeat election—and inquired about three types of information: the type of election violence throughout the election cycle, the scope and quality of common prevention types, and the attitudes and behaviors expected to change if prevention worked. The survey included questions about various types of election-related violence including property damage, intimidation, physical violence, and violent protests—and thus provided a broad measure of election violence before, during, and after the elections.

Collecting information from the same people both before and after elections allowed researchers to test whether the prevention instruments were associated with changes in attitudes and behaviors and reductions in the level of violence. This report examines not only whether prevention correlated with reduced violence but also whether attitudes and behaviors changed in line with the logic, or theory of change, of the prevention instruments. For example, did police community outreach lead to increased trust in local police officers? Did peace messaging lower the acceptance of violence in cases of disputes? In addition to conducting the surveys, local partners conducted key informant interviews and telephone interviews with election monitors across both countries to measure the scope of election violence. In Liberia, USIP was one of the few actors systematically tracking various types of election violence.[9]

The report measures the seven prevention instruments using a scaled approach, in which higher values indicate better quality or scope of implementation. For example, survey questions about the prevention instrument security sector engagement related to the level of police presence, police resources, and police outreach. Questions about police presence measure how often police officers are present at election events. Questions on police resources measure whether police have adequate resources. Questions on police outreach measure whether community rep-

resentatives have talked with police officers about election security. The prevention instrument civic and voter education is measured based on whether survey respondents were aware of any efforts to educate or inform people within their neighborhood about the way elections work or the role of elections in the country's democracy. Our measurement captures local impressions and experience, beyond claims that practitioners make about the scope of their programs.

To evaluate whether prevention efforts possibly influenced election violence and, if so, whether they confirmed their theories of change, the report relies on regression models.[10] Separate models were run for each prevention measure and control variables were used to account for respondent characteristics, interview characteristics, and local context that may influence reporting about election violence and prevention instruments.

One important caveat about the survey data is that the survey is not nationally representative. Counties, towns, and respondents were selected with a particular purpose in mind: evaluating the effectiveness of prevention instruments. As a result, the descriptive statistics (such as the percentage of respondents trusting the police) cannot be simply extrapolated to the national level for all of Kenya or all of Liberia. The descriptive findings apply only to the 2,100 respondents in the three hundred locations. However, the regression findings on the effectiveness of prevention are more generalizable because they relate to the relevant set of locations at risk of election violence. In other words, the selected towns are representative of the broader pool of towns at risk of election violence and prevention programming, but not necessarily of the country at large.

Country Context and Election Violence

Outlining the risk environments in Liberia and Kenya entails describing some of the anticipated threats to peace during elections in the two countries, the violence that eventually materialized in 2017, and the local challenges that prevention efforts would need to address to keep the peace.

Liberia

Concerns about violence during the 2017 presidential and parliamentary elections in Liberia grew in the early planning stages. Initial assessments by the Liberia National Police (LNP) and the US embassy in Monrovia considered the elections at medium or low to moderate risk of widespread political violence.[11] The uncertain outcome and fears regarding the ability of Liberian institutions to ensure election security and integrity generated concerns that violence might return less than two decades after the end of a horrific civil war.

Losing candidates, opposition politicians, and local strongmen were identified as those with the resources to mobilize unemployed youth, members of motorcycle unions (which have a reputation for being easy to recruit for violent or criminal activity), or wartime combatants to commit violence of one sort or another.[12] Disagreement within or between political parties could lead to the destruction of campaign materials or escalate into violent clashes, stirred up by hate speech, inflammatory campaigning, and polarizing language used by politicians and journalists. Violence could result from outbursts during campaigns or protests around the announcement of election results, followed by excessive force on the part of police when facing groups of people protesting the outcome. Disinformation, suspicion about vote rigging, and technical flaws in the election process could also provoke violence.[13] In a conflict vulnerability assessment published in May 2016, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) cautioned about a possible rise in political murders, retaliatory killings, and ritualistic

Map 1. Liberia's counties

Adapted from artwork by Peter Hermes Furian, Ingo Menhard, and tele52/Shutterstock

killings (such as sacrificing children in the hopes of furthering a politician's chances) connected to the elections, as well as high rates of sexual and gender-based violence.[14] Catholic Relief Services carried out a survey in March 2016 in which 61 percent of respondents felt that the elections were likely to trigger renewed violence.[15] Concerns about electoral violence waned as election day approached except in Monrovia, where apprehension remained high given the city's large number of youths and high unemployment rate.

The country's history of civil war combined with overwhelming capacity gaps within the National Election Commission (NEC) and the LNP presented two critical concerns. The withdrawal of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), long-standing ethnic divisions, and the unpredictable nature of the election outcome raised the risk of violence as well.

History of Violence

A country's history of violence is often one of the best predictors of future instability. Liberia, however, had been beating the odds for almost two decades. Although the country has a history of political repression and violent conflict, its recent experience with election violence is limited. Elections thus are not associated with significant violence in the popular mindset.

Liberia's history has been characterized by a one-party system and exclusionary rule by the True Whig Party, as well as by high levels of repression, election intimidation, and fraud.[16] The country's 1927 election is listed in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the most fraudulent in history; incumbent Charles King claimed victory in the presidential contest with 235,000 votes to his opponent's nine thousand, even though the country had only fifteen thousand eligible voters at the time.[17] Decades later, the presidency of William Tubman (1944–71) featured networks of informants and widespread intimidation of the opposition by security forces. The repression and ballot-box manipulation in the months leading up to the 1955 elections would help Tubman secure a 99 percent margin of victory.[18]

True Whig dominance ended abruptly in 1980 with a coup d'état by Sergeant Samuel Doe and the assassination of President William Tolbert, the last Americo-Liberian president. Worsening human rights abuses, long-standing socioeconomic challenges, and ethnic tensions led to the first armed conflict in 1989 and, eventually, to the killing of Doe in 1990. Former government minister Charles Taylor had launched an uprising against the Doe regime from neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, expanding his forces as he made his way to Monrovia. The first civil war (1989–97) claimed an estimated 250,000 lives and was followed by a flawed election, in which Taylor was elected, and two years of unstable peace in the late 1990s. The second civil war (1999–2003) began when rebels attacked Taylor's government, resulting in his eventual resignation. His departure opened the door to the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement and the deployment of an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peacekeeping mission, which was eventually replaced by UNMIL. Taylor was convicted of war crimes by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2012, but the civil war left behind a profound sense of impunity.

Fortunately, Liberia did not relapse into large-scale violence after its civil wars. The political stability that returned is widely appreciated but not taken for granted. Liberians tend to regard peace not as the normal state of affairs but as the temporary absence of violence.[19] The risk of renewed conflict remains, driven by public-sector corruption, land disputes, and high levels of youth unemployment.[20] Despite these challenges, the elections in 2005, 2011, and 2014 were all recognized by the international community and domestic observers as free, fair, and transparent and as having seen minimal levels of violence.

The first presidential elections after the second civil war were held in 2005 and saw low levels of election violence. Presidential elections in Liberia typically involve two rounds; if no candidate wins more than 50 percent of the votes in the first round, the two candidates with the most votes contest a second, runoff round. In the first round in 2005, George Weah of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) won with 28.3 percent of the vote against 19.8 percent for Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Unity Party. Hate speech was prevalent during the campaign and in the lead-up to the runoff election. Because Weah had won the first round, his supporters found it difficult to accept Sirleaf's victory in the runoff and were adamant that the vote had been rigged. On the day of the runoff, four stabbings were reported. Despite calls for restraint by Weah, CDC supporters were also involved in rioting and looting.[21]

Although the 2011 campaign period was mostly calm, violence spiked briefly before the runoff between President Sirleaf and CDC candidate Winston Tubman. Clashes between CDC protesters and the LNP became increasingly violent. On November 7, one day before the runoff, CDC supporters staged an unsanctioned assembly and found police and UN security forces blocking their path. Liberian security forces were poorly trained and used live rounds, tear gas, and truncheons to disperse the crowd. At least one CDC supporter was killed,

resulting in a commemoration day to be known as Black Monday. Other incidents included the theft of voter registration materials, reports of intimidation, and destruction of property.

The elections held in December 2014 were for the Senate. They were largely calm, although party leaders made inflammatory comments and isolated clashes between supporters broke out.

Capacity Gaps

The primary risk factor complicating the organization of peaceful elections in Liberia is the existing capacity gaps in the country. The slow pace of social, economic, and political progress places the country among the least developed worldwide. The operating environment for organizing elections is challenging—30 percent of voting stations are disconnected from cell phone service and low literacy rates make it difficult to have qualified staff at each polling station. Harsh weather conditions further complicate logistics because elections are traditionally organized during the rainy season. Decades of political instability have weakened Liberia's institutions, hindered its development, and undermined its ability to organize elections independently. Although the elections in 2005 and 2011 were deemed free and fair, as noted, they were organized with significant international involvement. In 2017, the NEC oversaw the polls independently with the support of the LNP and only limited assistance from the United Nations.

The absence of widespread violence or fraud in recent elections gave the electoral institutions some credibility. But even though the NEC and LNP have never been stronger and more competent in the post–civil war era, they are still characterized by sizeable capacity gaps. The 2005 and 2011 elections highlighted several deficiencies, and the NEC was unable to enforce campaign finance rules or respond to the trucking in of people from other locations and even neighboring countries during the registration period and on election day. Early in the planning stage for 2017, the European Union and other international organizations expressed concern at the lack of state capacity to guarantee peaceful elections and to enforce the law due to budget deficiencies.[22] Most LNP officers lack even the basic equipment they need to perform their work, such as fuel to reach more remote areas. This limited capacity and preparedness was no secret: only half of the Liberians surveyed six months before the election agreed that the police had an adequate budget and enough training to ensure election security.

In addition to their lack of resources, police also have corrupt practices. The LNP has long emphasized protecting those in power rather than serving citizens.[23] "Often police act as predators," Human Rights Watch has found, "violating the law, rather than protecting the population."[24] Some improvements have been made in recent years. The Emergency Response Unit, a specialized SWAT-like unit responsible for maintaining public order, has earned a good reputation for its professionalism and crowd control. The number of arbitrary arrests and detentions by the LNP has decreased significantly.[25]

UNMIL Withdrawal

Closely related to the lack of resources was growing anxiety over the gradual decline of international support and particularly the withdrawal of the UN military presence in Liberia.

UNMIL, which assumed responsibility for security after the second civil war, had previously engaged in Liberian polls through its good offices, supporting election guidelines and dispute resolution, NEC communication and mediation, and a code of conduct for political parties. In addition, the United Nations played a crucial role in administering and securing the

Decades of political instability have weakened Liberia's institutions, hindered its development, and undermined its ability to organize elections independently.

polls, airlifting materials to remote areas, and deploying guards to polling stations. From fifteen thousand members at peak force, UNMIL reduced its presence to 1,240 military and 606 police personnel at the time it handed over security responsibilities to the national forces in June 2016. In December of that year, because UNMIL's core mandate to monitor the implementation of the peace agreement had been fulfilled, UN Security Council Resolution 2323 specified a new mandate that no longer included election security; henceforth, the UN role in elections would be limited to providing technical assistance through the UN Development Program.

The heavy international presence is the most commonly mentioned factor explaining the absence of widespread violence in postwar elections.[26] Some analysts were concerned that "once the international community leaves . . . the possibility of fraud and violence will likely return in full force."[27] A "psychological dependence on UNMIL" has developed that has the potential to undermine the confidence in the electoral security environment.[28]

Ethnic Divisions

Opportunistic politicians often manipulate ethnic or religious differences for electoral gain.

In addition to Liberia's structural vulnerabilities, another common factor that increases the risk of election violence is politically salient diversity in society. Opportunistic politicians often manipulate ethnic or religious differences for electoral gain. The division between the minority "Congo" population of Americo-Liberians, who settled there after being freed from slavery and then dominated Liberia for more than a century, and other "native" ethnicities fueled two military coups and a brutal civil war, and remains a salient cleavage in postconflict Liberia.[29] The most recent civil war period also cemented the rivalry between the Gio and the Mano, who were affiliated with Charles Taylor and Prince Johnson, and the Mandingo and Krahn communities, who were known to support Samuel Doe. The Mandingo community that had arrived from Guinea several hundred years earlier became successful in business, but its members have long been discriminated against, given their cultural and religious affinity with the Mandingos in Guinea. Following the controversial 2011 election, Sirleaf acknowledged the need for political reconciliation because "the cleavages that led to decades of civil war were still running deep."[30] The concern in 2017 was that identity-based incidents around the elections could trigger a broader conflict that would offer deprived or frustrated communities an opportunity to settle old scores.[31]

High-Stakes Elections with Uncertain Outcome

A final dynamic that increased the risk of violence was the competitive nature of the Liberia election, and the uncertainty about the outcome. Unpredictable elections often raise tensions and tempt politicians to use all available means, including violence, to tip the balance. Unlike the first two postwar Liberian elections in 2005 and 2011, which resulted in relatively clear victories, the 2017 contest presented a highly competitive race. The incumbent, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, had indicated that she would not seek to stay in power beyond her legal mandate. Hope was rising that the 2017 elections would present the first occasion in seventy years when a Liberian president completed a full term and voluntarily turned over power to a democratically elected successor.[32] The popularity of Sirleaf's Unity Party was waning and several frontrunners were jockeying to succeed her.

Joseph Boakai was the frontrunner from the ruling Unity Party in the 2017 election. He had served as vice president under Sirleaf and offered substantial government experience. Being an incumbent, however, was not necessarily an advantage: the party was roiled by severe

infighting and had been tainted by several corruption scandals, Sirleaf's legacy was mixed, and the country was in an economic recession. The opposition CDC had been frustrated in the 2005 and 2011 elections, alleging fraud and generating a broad sense of injustice among CDC supporters. For the 2017 elections, the CDC joined with the National Patriotic Party and the Liberia People's Democratic Party to form the Coalition for Democratic Change (known as CDC, the same acronym as the subsumed Congress for Democratic Change). Based on the incendiary tone evident early in the election campaign, concern was growing that violence would erupt if the CDC were to lose again.[33]

Violence Before and After the Election: Low

Despite the presence of the various risk factors just analyzed, the 2017 Liberia elections proceeded without major incidents (see figure 1, on page 16). Campaign activities were generally civil and orderly, and election observers considered the overall process to be peaceful and transparent.[34] The slow pace of resolving electoral disputes at the Supreme Court did create tensions and fears that a legal or institutional crisis was looming, and some peaceful protests called for the chairperson of the NEC to resign, but little violence occurred beyond isolated incidents.

The CDC and its supporters used incendiary language early in the election cycle. Supporters stated that they would not accept any result other than victory, an attitude that many Liberians experienced as a form of intimidation. The ECOWAS delegation drew attention to hate messages on traditional and social media, and NEC chairman Jerome Korkoyan was allegedly threatened by Senator Sando Johnson for approving the registration of the senator's opponent.[35]

Isolated incidents of interparty violence were reported in Clara Town (Monrovia), Sanniquelleh (Nimba County), and Kakata (Margibi County).[36] In Clara Town, fights between CDC supporters and Unity Party supporters left six people injured. In Sanniquelleh, similar clashes occurred between CDC and Liberty Party supporters when the two parties were campaigning in the same area. Several women were harassed at voting stations, ritualistic killings were reported in Bong County, and several campaign posters were damaged at the outset of the campaign period.[37] Overall, however, these incidents were isolated and calm prevailed throughout the country. Only 8 percent of respondents reported election violence in their communities, which included excessive use of force by police (6 percent), verbal attacks (2 percent), property damage (1 percent), and other isolated incidents.

Kenya

The risk environment in Kenya was quite different from that in Liberia. Elections in Kenya are commonly associated with violence and are among the most closely watched by the international community. Since the country shifted from a one-party system to a multiparty democracy in 1991, highly violent political campaigns have been a constant. Hate speech, repression, and violent attacks are often used to intimidate political opponents and their supporters, both within and between political parties. When protesters take to the streets, they often face police using disproportionate levels of force. Elections also intensify violence around long-standing conflict dynamics and frustrations over land disputes, ethnic competition, and impunity. In the run-up to the August 2017 elections, concerns also involved gender-based violence against female candidates and voters as well as attacks by al-Shabaab fighters and other extremist groups targeting crowded election events and critical infrastructure. Early assessments by the US government

Map 2. Kenya's counties

Adapted from artwork by Peter Hermes Furian, Q Stock, and tele52/Shutterstock

and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the run-up to the 2017 presidential elections in Kenya therefore considered the risk of violence moderate to high.[38]

History of Election Violence

Kenya gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1963 under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta. In a tumultuous shift to multiparty elections in 1992, a disorganized opposition failed to remove the party of President Daniel Arap Moi, Kenyatta's successor. Violence erupted along ethnic lines as the Kalenjin supporters of Moi targeted members of the Kikuyu, Luhya, and Luo groups, who were considered opposition supporters.[39] When Moi's Kenya African National Union party lost the elections to Mwai Kibaki in 2002, public officials from his ethnic group were sacked, triggering another outburst of interethnic violence. The memory of election violence increases the acceptance of coercion and other brutal tactics as a legitimate strategy and nurtures the desire for retaliation.[40] The pattern of deepening polarization and the association of elections with violence presented a fragile foundation for polls to come.

The 2007 elections were a close race between Mwai Kibaki, the incumbent president from the Kikuyu community, and his challenger Raila Odinga, from the Luo community. The run-

up to elections was relatively calm, but widespread violence erupted after election day. Kibaki was declared the winner after a narrow and dubious contest marred by rigging, according to domestic and international allegations; the opposition soon resorted to mass protests given its mistrust of the judiciary. Soon after, protests turned violent and reprisal attacks spread across the country, followed by media blackouts and a harsh response from security forces. The violence left more than 1,100 people dead and 650,000 displaced.[41] Diplomatic intervention led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan eventually resulted in a power-sharing arrangement that brought Kibaki and Odinga together in a coalition government and paved the way for constitutional reform and the creation of a new election commission.
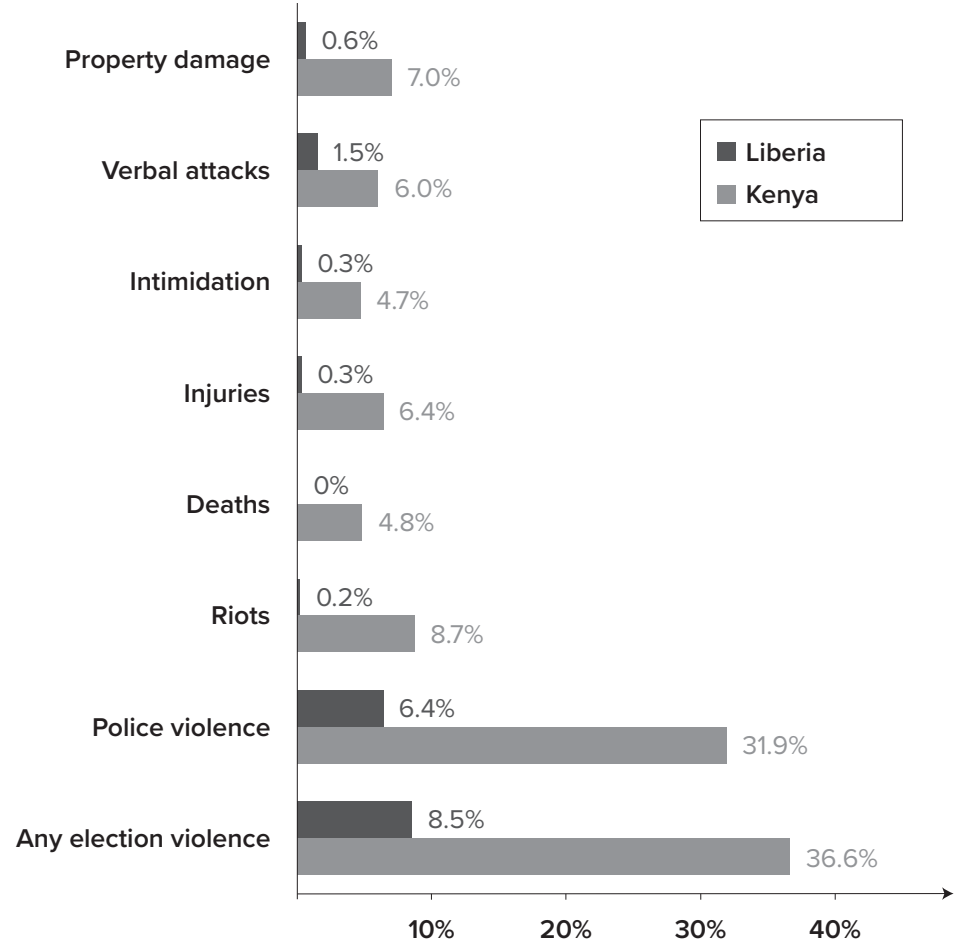
The 2013 election cycle presented a first real test for the new constitution, which aspired to dismantle Kenya's highly centralized power structures.[42] A devolution process had moved some of the political authority, legislative power, and budgets from the national government to county executives, thereby reducing the importance of the presidential race. The Jubilee alliance—led by Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, both seeking to escape an ICC indictment—ultimately defeated the Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD)—led by Raila Odinga—in the 2013 presidential vote.[43] Tensions were high throughout the election cycle, particularly when the results were contested by CORD and CSOs. Eventually, the opposition accepted the Supreme Court decision to uphold the results, and there was no repeat of the atrocities that had devastated the country in 2007 and 2008.[44] The heightened security presence and interethnic coalitions within Jubilee helped contain the level of violence.[45] International election observers and diplomats celebrated the vote as peaceful and successful, but Kenyans cautioned against a narrow definition of success based solely on the prevention of mass atrocities.[46]

The Competitive and Complex 2017 Elections

Tensions surrounding the 2017 elections were heightened by their complexity. Kenyans voted for the presidency, members of parliament, and governors and county assemblies in a set of competitive and expensive elections. Incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto solidified their partnership within the Jubilee Party. The opposition National Super Alliance (NASA) offered Raila Odinga another chance to compete for the presidency, with Kalonzo Musyoka as his running mate.[47]

After a trial run with Kenya's new constitution and administrative structure during the 2013 elections, candidates had become fully aware of the spoils that devolution made available through local-level government positions. Critics of devolution feared that violence would spread with the ongoing decentralization of power, particularly in ethnically mixed and battleground constituencies, and that the competition for well-paid county-level positions would intensify in 2017. The results of the decentralization process had been mixed. Only about 40 percent of respondents in our survey agreed that devolution had created a better distribution of resources and enhanced ownership at the local level. With the reforms came uncertainty about new conflict dynamics. The devolution process threatened to reignite old ethnic cleavages that were previously electorally irrelevant.[48] Only 32 percent of respondents agreed that devolution had reduced tension around the elections. Candidate registration confirmed the intensity of competition, with 14,523 people competing for 1,882 elective seats in the August polls.[49] Even with devolution, winner-take-all dynamics remained salient as party supporters considered elections a life-or-death situation, the presidency being the ultimate political prize.

Figure 1. Reports of election violence (percentage of respondents)

	Liberia	Kenya
Property damage	0.6%	7.0%
Verbal attacks	1.5%	6.0%
Intimidation	0.3%	4.7%
Injuries	0.3%	6.4%
Deaths	0%	4.8%
Riots	0.2%	8.7%
Police violence	6.4%	31.9%
Any election violence	8.5%	36.6%

Centralized Ethnopolitics and Divisive Campaigning

Kenyans often regard ethnic rivalries as a key driver of election violence.[50] Disputes over land, historical injustices, inequality, or accountability often take shape along ethnic lines and intensify during the campaign season.[51] Many voters affiliate with the leader or political party that represents their ethnic group.

Candidates deliberately manipulate societal diversity for electoral purposes, illustrated by the polarizing tone of their language and the horse trading within the political alliances. According to the police, political aspirants usually seek to excite and intimidate the electorate, playing the ethnic card to gain an electoral advantage.[52] In 2017, domestic and international observers nervously waited to discover which tone leading candidates would strike in public statements. Despite calls to campaign responsibly, several politicians from Jubilee and NASA were arrested on hate speech charges, contributing to a tense and polarized environment.[53]

Repeat Election

Beyond these structural challenges, which have increased the risk of election violence in Kenya for decades, several election-related events stoked tensions even further in 2017. On August

11, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) chairperson declared that the incumbent, Kenyatta, and the opposition candidate, Odinga, had received 54.27 and 44.74 percent of the votes, respectively. NASA rejected the results, accusing the Jubilee government and the IEBC of collusion and manipulation. Odinga claimed that the IEBC results released were "unverified and unauthenticated" (because polling-station forms had not been published online) and that the commission's IT system had been compromised.[54]

Initially, NASA leaders announced that they would not challenge the results in the judicial system and would turn to "the Court of public opinion" instead.[55] After some hesitation, however, the opposition decided to submit a legal challenge. To the surprise of many observers both in Kenya and abroad, the Supreme Court annulled the election result and called for new elections, mainly on the basis of irregularities in the transmission of votes and other technical processes.

The political response to the Supreme Court ruling caused widespread tension and triggered violence in several counties.[56] Odinga stated that he would not participate in a rerun unless significant reforms were made. When the requested reforms were not fully implemented before the repeat election in line with Odinga's "irreducible minimums," he called for a boycott and for a "peaceful resistance campaign."[57] NASA engaged in various nonviolent strategies to protest the Supreme Court decision; after the second presidential election NASA organized a boycott of businesses with alleged ties to the Jubilee Party and the symbolic swearing in of Odinga as the "people's president."[58] This resulted in a widespread government crackdown against political opponents and the closure of media outlets covering the ceremony.[59]

Kenyatta eventually won the repeat election with 98.27 percent, but the vote was boycotted by NASA, resulting in a low turnout estimated at only 39 percent.[60] Tensions gradually subsided in the aftermath, Kenyatta and Odinga symbolically shaking hands in April 2018 after weeks of talks.[61]

Attacks against the Electoral Commission and Supreme Court

Tensions spiked throughout the 2017 Kenya elections as leading contenders continued to issue statements that undermined the legitimacy and credibility of institutions at the helm of the election process, including both the IEBC and the Supreme Court.[62] Statements by NASA and Jubilee leaders during the campaign period, in response to the election results, and following the Supreme Court rulings, shaped the attitude of people in their party strongholds and further polarized society. Opinions about the IEBC and the Supreme Court rulings were split along party affiliations. For example, 85 percent of opposition partisans in our survey said that it is legitimate to challenge results peacefully if they are fraudulent; only 49 percent of incumbent supporters felt the same way.

The IEBC faced significant challenges in executing its mandate because of its own errors and the repeated attacks against its integrity. A series of corruption scandals had tarnished the reputation of the commission in the run-up to the 2017 election. The so-called Chickengate scandal, in which election commission officials allegedly received millions in bribes from UK firms for contracts to supply ballot papers, fueled widespread protests about a year before the August 2017 elections. Convinced that the IEBC had selectively suppressed turnout and manipulated the elections, the CORD coalition and segments of civil society organized weekly demonstrations to push out commissioners suspected of taking bribes.[63] The new election laws, which were meant to address the concerns of demonstrators, passed in January 2017, and new commissioners were appointed just six months before election day. Even after the IEBC was reconstituted,

it remained under intense scrutiny. According to the Elections Observation Group (ELOG), a domestic election monitor, the IEBC was "under siege" from numerous court cases, resulting in widespread distrust and confusion as the country entered the election season.[64]

Given its role in nullifying the August elections, the Supreme Court faced similar attacks from the Jubilee Party. Kenyatta and Ruto had already criticized the judiciary while campaigning before August for siding with the opposition. The court system had been labeled as politicized and corrupt, and bribery allegations were leveled against some of its members.[65] Accepting the verdict nullifying the August polls, Kenyatta nonetheless accused the Supreme Court of trying to delay the general elections and threatened to "reform" it if he were reelected.[66] NASA praised the verdict nullifying the August election but claimed that the Court's certification of the October election demonstrated its politicized nature. NASA also accused the National Police Service (NPS) and the Kenya Defense Forces of serving the interests of the ruling president.

Level of Violence During and After the Election: High

Considering the level of risk, it was no surprise to see significant levels of violence during the 2017 Kenya elections.

Considering the level of risk, it was no surprise to see significant levels of violence during the 2017 Kenya elections, with multiple violent protests, over one hundred reported deaths, and many more injuries (see figure 1).[67] The preelection period saw more geographically widespread violence. The incidents after the August election were geographically more limited but more intense in scale. Based on interviews with domestic observers across Kenya, election violence occurred in about 38 percent of constituencies before July 2017 and in 24 percent after that. Around election day and after, excessive use of force by police was reported to account for about one-third of the violence. These figures were similar to those produced by the survey in at-risk towns: 37 percent of respondents reported some form of violence in their sublocation, police violence accounting for the lion's share, followed by riots, property damage, and intimidation.

The patterns of violence encountered during the preelection period differed in some ways from those witnessed in the aftermath of the August vote and the repeat elections.

Violence before the August 8 election. Election preparations were rocky from the start. The weekly protests against the election commission in the summer of 2016 resulted in violent clashes with police in which five people were killed and several dozen injured.[68] ELOG and EU observers also reported violence and intimidation during the political party primaries and various campaign-related incidents.[69] Opposition strongholds Bungoma, Kakamega, Kisumu, and Migori, as well as parts of Nairobi City, recorded the largest number of incidents.[70] Given the climate of fear, many people moved to ancestral and ethnically homogeneous "safe zones" in rural areas. The EU Election Observation Mission also learned about weapons being moved into informal settlements in Nairobi, and individuals armed with machetes and batons were arrested ahead of the primaries in Kisumu.[71] One week before the elections, thirty-eight of Kenya's forty-seven counties had already experienced some violence. Al-Shabaab attacks complicated the election preparations in the counties of Lamu, Garissa, Tana River, and Mandera and threatened the voter registration process.[72] But fears of high-profile extremist attacks at election events did not materialize. The killing of the IEBC's IT manager, Chris Msando, shortly before election day fueled rumors about efforts to manipulate the electoral process. In addition, NASA offices were ransacked by security forces on August 4, two days before the balloting.

Violence on election day and immediately after. On election day (August 8), a man was stabbed during an attack on a tallying center; the day the results were announced, an observer was killed in Kisumu. Much of the violence that erupted after the election occurred in opposition strongholds when opposition leaders came out to challenge the results. In Mathare, a slum area

of Nairobi, the violence was clearly linked to announcements by Odinga claiming fraud. Angry opposition supporters, facing police fire and tear gas, also took to the streets in Kisumu, Homa Bay, Mombasa, and Busia. In Garissa, riots occurred in relation to tense gubernatorial races. The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights claims that most of the killings resulted from the excessive use of force by police in informal settlements. Of 126 cases of postelection violence reported by early October, only three involved civilian-to-civilian confrontations.[73] Police officers were accused of forceful entry into the homes of alleged suspects, at times followed by harassment and assault. The violence in the immediate election aftermath included at least sixty cases of sexual abuse and rape.[74] Protesters also responded violently to the Supreme Court ruling that nullified the election results, particularly in Jubilee strongholds like Uasin Gishu.

The destruction of property targeted specific ethnic groups. In Kisumu, for instance, Kikuyu business owners were deliberately intimidated and attacked. Most television channels would not cover the violence (fearing that doing so would instigate further violence), creating a discrepancy between media news reports and events described on social media. Several CSOs—including the Africa Center for Open Governance and Kenya Human Rights Commission—were threatened with closure or deregistration by the official NGO Coordination Board in the days before the deadlines for lodging presidential petitions.[75]

Violence related to the repeat elections. Opposition protesters mobilized again following the decision by Odinga to withdraw from the rerun scheduled for October 26, and yet again after the IEBC confirmed Kenyatta's election victory. The police used live ammunition, tear gas, and water cannons to keep rowdy demonstrators at bay.[76] Preparations for the repeat election were complicated in Odinga strongholds, where poll workers and election observers were physically attacked, had their materials stolen, or found their access blocked. IEBC trainings were disrupted by gangs of youths in Kisumu, Vihiga, Siaya, Homa Bay, Migori, and parts of Kakamega County.[77]

Intimidation by high-level politicians also complicated the work of the IEBC. One week before the repeat election, one of the election commissioners, Roselyn Akombe, fled the country, raising grave concerns about the intimidation commissioners were facing. Six months after the election, three commissioners resigned, stating that the IEBC was dysfunctional and vulnerable to external meddling.[78] The judiciary was also subject to intense intimidation. Politicians at the highest level criticized the justices; the deputy chief justice's driver was shot two days before the repeat election; and the Supreme Court was unable to obtain a quorum to hear a petition to delay the poll, raising significant concerns about political interference.[79]

The 2017 Kenya elections constituted an extremely violent process. All told, the two cycles resulted in at least one hundred reported deaths and many more injuries.[80] Although the elections were less violent than those in 1992 or 2007, deeming the latest polls successful purely due to the absence of mass atrocities would set a low threshold for success and could convey a misleading notion of the elections as peaceful.

Election Violence Prevention

To what extent were the different levels of violence—low in Liberia but high in Kenya—attributable to the various efforts by domestic and international actors to prevent election violence? And what was done to prevent violence? We outline the seven prevention instruments and their implementation during the 2017 elections in Liberia and Kenya before describing the theory of change underlying each instrument that clarifies the expected change if the prevention tool would be effective (for an indication of how widely they were used in each country, see figure 2, on page 21). Effectiveness is examined by evaluating whether

a prevention instrument is associated not only with reduced violence levels but also with anticipated changes in attitudes and behaviors.

Of the seven prevention instruments we examine, two are largely implemented by the government: election administration and security sector engagement. The other five instruments are often led, supported, funded, or implemented by local society and international actors.

Election Management and Administration

Election management and administration is a core domestic responsibility that involves regulating campaign financing, registering candidates and voters, locating and staffing polling stations, administering the vote, and counting ballots. These technical tasks offer opportunities for politicization, error, and fraud. Adequate election administration can prevent violence by improving the quality and legitimacy of the process, alleviating frustrations and suspicion, and enhancing awareness and respect for election laws and procedures. Electoral, institutional, or even constitutional reform may be necessary to enhance the transparency of the electoral process and ensure a fair distribution of political power. Mistakes, delays, and real or perceived fraud can trigger violent conflict, especially in the absence of credible dispute resolution mechanisms. A well-run election, for example, would reduce the risk of unruly crowds at voting stations or tense disagreements between political candidates and their supporters over the voting process.

In Liberia, the NEC is primarily responsible for election administration and is widely regarded as an impartial and credible institution.[81] The commission depends heavily on international donors for much of its budget, technical assistance, and training. The UN Development Program, the European Union, Sweden, Ireland, and Canada jointly contributed close to $16 million to a 2015–2019 UN basket fund to improve the NEC's capacity and operations, voter registration, and civic education. USAID contributed an additional $17 million to increase NEC capacity and promote CSO engagement in election processes. UNMIL and ECOWAS also provided significant support to improve the NEC's technical capacity and create a code of conduct for political parties. More than two million voters were registered—an increase of 18 percent over the 2011 elections—but discrepancies in the quality of the voter roll were unmistakable.[82] Many voters had failed to register in time because of technical difficulties at the registration centers, which prompted the NEC to postpone its deadline. Some NEC staff described the voting process as "peaceful but tense" because some citizens and political parties suspected the NEC of cheating.

In Kenya, the new IEBC was not sworn in until January 2017 and faced a short timeline in which to organize voter registration, party nominations, the campaign period, and the polling process. As it did so, it was inundated with petitions and court cases challenging its work, and its operations were shaped by controversial reforms. The commission, for example, was required to audit the voter rolls and to increase the use of technology for voter registration and results transmission.[83] The reforms included a manual backup voting system, which, the opposition claimed, would be vulnerable to fraud.

During party primaries, ELOG observed several malpractices, including pre-marked ballot papers, ballot stuffing, and burning of voting materials. Election day technology was not procured and put in place in time; the voter registry audit report pointed to several errors and irregularities, such as more than ninety thousand deceased people on the registry. Most election observers did not encounter systematic flaws that could have impinged on the integrity of the election day process, and the official results were within ELOG's parallel vote tabulation projected ranges.[84] Both domestic and international observers were thus taken by surprise

Figure 2. Awareness of local prevention instruments (percentage of respondents)
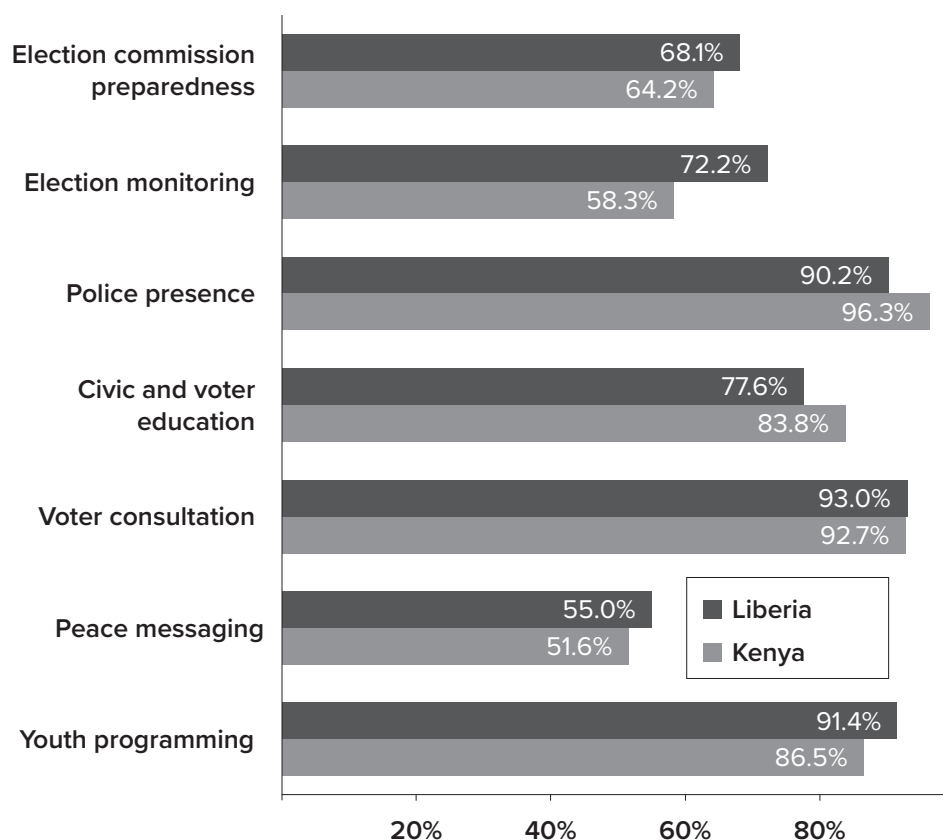
when the Supreme Court nullified the results. According to the Court, the transmission of the votes had not been conducted in accordance with the constitution; the IEBC had announced the results without having the appropriate forms in hand. Delays in the publication of the presidential results caused suspicion and weakened the ability of contenders to prepare petitions.[85]

In annulling the election results, the Supreme Court demonstrated its independence and put significant pressure on the IEBC to do a better job next time. In response to the verdict, the Jubilee Party pushed several amendments to the electoral law through parliament that limited the power of the Supreme Court to annul future elections.

Security Sector Engagement

Security sector engagement is another domestic prevention responsibility, one that encompasses the existing regulatory frameworks that structure the security forces' operations during elections, the performance of security forces throughout the electoral cycle, and the external support the security forces receive. A well-trained and well-equipped police or military force can provide a domestic guarantee for election security if it prioritizes protecting the electoral process over elite interests, is held accountable for abuses, and conducts itself professionally. The police, commonly responsible for election security, can deter violence or mitigate its spread by operating in a nonpartisan, visible manner and in accordance with clear rules of engagement. When poorly trained, biased, or ill-equipped, however, the police may instead function

as active perpetrators, provocateurs, or passive bystanders, neglecting their role in public order management, the apprehension of culprits, and the investigation of incidents.

In Liberia, the LNP assumed primary responsibility for election security, the international community providing valuable support and the NEC playing a coordinating role. As expected, obtaining the necessary human, financial, and logistical resources presented a formidable challenge. The identified budgetary and staffing needs far exceeded the LNP's existing capacities, jeopardizing the quality and security of the electoral process. As of April 2017, the force had only 5,180 trained civilian police officers and struggled to maintain a visible presence across the country.[86] About a third of Liberian respondents said that police officers were never or rarely present at election events, such as voter registration drives, political rallies, or campaign events. Most of the police were unarmed, as prescribed by law. The Police Support Unit and the Emergency Response Unit, some of whose officers were armed some of the time, acted as elite forces on standby at strategic locations. Despite the lead role of the LNP, international support for election security was substantial. For example, Liberian police officers were trained by ECOWAS, UNMIL, and the NEC to improve their professionalism and crowd control. UNMIL kept about three hundred police and just over four hundred military personnel in-country, and the US government supported community policing efforts and seconded twelve police officers to the UN mission.

In Kenya, the NPS was responsible for securing the election process. The number of trained police officers on duty at the August 2017 elections was almost 180,000, nearly double the number on duty during the 2013 elections. The violence in 2007 and 2008 had triggered several reforms to improve the accountability of the NPS and Kenya Defence Forces. About 75 percent of respondents considered the new laws a helpful way to improve security around the elections. Interestingly, these aggregate attitudes did not fluctuate throughout the election process despite some incidents involving police violence in several parts of the country. The National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management was mandated to identify possible flashpoints for violence and to mitigate potential threats; the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) monitored hate speech on social media, at political rallies, and on vernacular media. By September 8, the NCIC had investigated more than 270 cases but lacked the power to sanction most senior political figures inciting violence.[87]

According to survey respondents, the scope of police engagement was decent but not comprehensive in both countries. About 61 percent of respondents in Liberia and 43 percent in Kenya felt that police officers were often or always present at election events, such as party nominations or campaign events. About 60 percent also thought that police officers had enough resources (such as budgets and training programs) to protect candidates, voters, and election buildings, vehicles, and materials. In terms of contacts with local officers, 60 percent said that they or others in their area talked with police officers about election security.

Election Monitoring

Election monitoring involves observing and evaluating an electoral process against domestic and international standards for democratic elections. Election observers can confer legitimacy and transparency by evaluating the quality of the electoral process, confirming victory or defeat, and backing the election management body in the event of allegations of fraud.[88] If access is granted by the host government, international missions composed of neutral, short-term observers can arrive, often close to election day, accompanied by political party observers or accredited NGOs. In some instances, organizations often deploy a smaller number of long-

term observers to complement the core observation team for up to two or three months. International monitors may effectively deter violent actors or instigators, which is why they depend on their neutrality and access to polling sites. In both Kenya and Liberia, most respondents were convinced of observers' ability to mitigate fraud and prevent election violence. However, the election monitoring instrument is not without its challenges. Given the passive nature of their mandate, international monitors may convey a false sense of security and integrity.

In Liberia, the NEC accredited forty-five organizations as international observers, the US embassy, ECOWAS, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the European Union, and the African Union being among the largest missions.[89] Observers coordinated their work in consultative meetings. NDI's monitoring activity included a focus on gender-based election violence. The Carter Center deployed three preelection assessment delegations, including a group of experts to assess voter registration processes.[90] Domestic observers, such as the Election Coordination Committee and the Liberia Elections Observation Network, deployed in larger numbers and reached more polling stations.[91] The NEC also accredited five thousand citizen observers.[92]

In Kenya in 2017, international election monitors found themselves in the eye of a political storm in the aftermath of the August 8 elections. A preliminary consensus among nine international missions, including the Carter Center, the African Union, the European Union, and the Commonwealth, praised the IEBC and concluded that the election had been peaceful, free, fair, transparent, and credible.[93] The consensus collapsed when the Supreme Court declared the election null and void because of irregularities. International observers faced significant backlash and rising criticism from within the Kenyan political system.[94] ELOG and other domestic observers were generally more cautious.[95] During the rerun election, ELOG observers were unable to deploy in ten (of forty-seven) counties due to security concerns.[96] In several opposition strongholds, they were attacked or denied access to the polling stations.

The presence of monitors was widely noted both in Kenya and Liberia. Ninety-one percent of respondents reported seeing or hearing about election observers; 95 percent noted the presence of political party monitors.

Civic and Voter Education

Voter education campaigns can encourage citizen participation, help introduce new voting technology, and explain where to vote and how to file a complaint. Civic education campaigns have broader objectives beyond the election in question, in that they inform citizens about the political system and their democratic rights and responsibilities. Voters provided with civic education may be less apathetic and more likely to participate in elections, readier to criticize politicians' performances, or feel more empowered to counteract violence. Education campaigns are the responsibility of the government administration or election management body, although in practice governments often do not provide enough information, leaving local media and civil society to fill the vacuum. Empowering the electorate in a weak democratic system, however, is not without risks: informed citizens may develop unrealistic expectations; an engaged electorate may be mobilized for violence more easily; and larger turnouts may place voters at risk in hazardous environments.

In Liberia, the NEC took the lead in the design and coordination of civic education efforts through an ambitious effort to produce educational materials and accredit civil society to distribute the information. International donors supported the development of civic and voter education toolkits and funded Liberian CSOs to conduct strategic community-based cam-

paigns. For example, the Association of Liberia Community Radio hosted radio talk shows and community radio debates in all fifteen counties. NAYMOTE, a grassroots organization dedicated to democracy promotion, targeted first-time voters and students in its educational programs, and created pledge cards as a commitment to register, vote, and engage peacefully.

For the 2017 Kenyan electoral process, the IEBC recruited and deployed some 2,900 voter educators at the ward level.[97] Local civil society organizations such as Sisi ni Amani used dialogue formats and SMS-based campaigns to advance civic education and engagement.[98] The USAID Kenya Election Assistance Program had a voter education component that was implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). In December 2016, however, the Kenyan government ordered IFES to temporarily halt its education program, amid accusations that it was using foreign funds to shape the election outcome, and then went so far as to expel the IFES country representative.[99]

Although widely used, civic education failed to reach all sections of society. A large majority (89 percent) of survey respondents were aware of efforts to educate or inform people in their location about the way elections work or the role of elections in their country's democracy. However, only around 40 percent said that these educational activities were inclusive in terms of age and gender.

Peace Messaging

Peace messaging campaigns aim to influence the attitudes and behaviors both of the electorate as a whole and of vulnerable groups or possible perpetrators of violence. Sports events, cultural activities, social media, and public communications (such as radio broadcasts and SMS blasts) have been used to counter hate speech or persuade potential perpetrators as well as average voters to reject violence. Peace messaging campaigns are often combined with civic education programs. Ideally, the messages are crafted by locals, are broadcast beyond urban centers (depending on the areas deemed at risk), and begin to be delivered before election campaigns are in full swing. Organizers typically include religious, youth, and women's organizations, local media, election commissions, and even political parties. An effective peace campaign that targets communities vulnerable to violence or likely to pick up arms may enhance popular eagerness to engage peacefully in elections, foster a general rejection of violence, and enhance the perceived legitimacy of the polls. Peace messaging can also help counter toxic messaging by political leaders and their supporters.

In Liberia, the legacy of two civil wars imprinted peace as a priority in political processes, including elections. Most efforts were folded into civic education campaigns initiated or supported by NDI, the UN Development Program, and the Carter Center. Various local actors engaged in peace messaging, including NAYMOTE, the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia, the Pen-Pen Peace Network, and Liberia Crusaders for Peace. A campaign known as Say Yes to Peace, No to Violence originated within the LNP and brought together community representatives and police throughout the country to improve community-police relationships and to open dialogue with youth. The campaign was designed as a *soft security* approach that would add a conflict prevention component to the usual police emphasis on crisis management.[100] Despite its limited reach, funding constraints, and one-directional approach, the campaign targeted those most likely to engage in violence, including motorcycle gangs.

During Kenya's 2013 elections, peace messaging was met with skepticism because of its overwhelming scope and because voters regarded the practice as a way to suppress concern about the integrity of the election.[101] Although still commonly used in 2017, peace messag-

ing was less stifling: civil society and political parties called for a balanced focus on peace and election fairness and credibility. According to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, the peace messaging campaigns that took place largely targeted those already informed and resulted in few trickle-down effects.[102] Although most targeted the broader electorate and communities at risk, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops and the interfaith Multisectoral Forum convened religious leaders in the post-election period to issue a joint appeal for restraint by the security forces and for Odinga and Kenyatta to unite the country and cast divisiveness aside.

Voter Consultations

Voter consultations involve deliberate efforts by political candidates and their parties to connect with their voters and broader constituencies so as to identify, recognize, and—when possible—address their grievances. This instrument builds on an ambitious logic: because voters can vent their concerns in the presence of party officials, their needs will be addressed in party programs, thereby reducing voters' frustration. During the campaign period, voter consultations can reduce the risk of election violence by creating the perception among participating citizens that their concerns are being acknowledged by political candidates. To perform a preventive function, the communication between political elites and the electorate must extend beyond supporter rallies and typical campaign activities to include interactions. The consultations can take the form of community meetings, call-in radio or television programs, personal meetings, and other forms of direct exchanges between political candidates and voters.

In Liberia, all political parties claimed to be in constant contact with voters as part of their campaign activities, explicitly targeting those who already had voter cards, to try to understand their needs and identify how party policies could be reshaped to prioritize voter concerns.[103] By training party members in issue-based campaigning and by engaging female voters with a manifesto, the NDI conducted a sustained effort to close the gap between political parties and the electorate.[104]

In Kenya, efforts by political parties to engage in regular exchanges with citizens beyond campaign activities were limited. Voters said they were tired of seeing the same candidates run for president. Many voters also clearly felt that political parties did not represent their interests. Several organizations did encourage political parties to run issue-based campaigns. For example, the International Republican Institute worked with the Kilifi County assembly to organize citizen consultations intended to help fulfill citizens' expectations about the 2010 constitution and to facilitate the inclusion of citizens' opinions into new county legislation.

Youth Programming

Youth are often excluded from the political process and vulnerable to recruitment by political actors eager to incite or commit violence. They also typically experience high levels of unemployment. Consequently, programming that engages youth in the election process, educates on democratic values, and creates economic opportunities can reduce the appeal of violence. In addition to offering youth a voice to express their needs and concerns, efforts should be made to engage them directly in election administration as monitors, or even as political candidates, through recruitment fora. This approach is more likely to succeed when informal groups—such as militias and gangs, rather than police—are expected to perpetrate the violence.

Youth are often excluded from the political process and vulnerable to recruitment by political actors eager to incite or commit violence.

Liberia has a significant youth population. Children were particularly affected by the civil wars, during which they were primary targets for recruitment as fighters, especially into the ranks of Charles Taylor's army. Youths often have little more than military experience to offer in their search of employment and can be easily mobilized by political parties to participate in violent protests. NAYMOTE, one of several organizations engaged in youth programming, organized interparty youth debates and programs to build the capacity of young people to engage in professional political activism, resist hate mongering, and accept defeat. The NEC offered training and recruited youths to join the polling staff, and ECOWAS engaged seventeen local NGOs to promote the peaceful participation of over three thousand at-risk youth in the electoral process.

As in Liberia, in Kenya young people account for a large proportion of the population. An estimated 80 percent of the country's population is younger than thirty-six.[105] Perhaps as many as ten million Kenyan voters, just over half of the electorate, are considered to be youth.[106] This reality led USAID's Kenya Election Assistance Program to include a focus on youth participation and inclusion. The IEBC also led outreach and education efforts targeted at youth.[107] Mercy Corps, a humanitarian NGO active in more than forty countries, created youth *bunges* (Swahili for parliaments) to identify challenges in the community as well as possible business opportunities.[108] However, three months before the election, voter registration among youth was still low, and the cost of actively engaging in the political process as candidates was deemed by most youth to be too high.[109]

In interviews, most prevention actors mentioned youth programming or civic education as the most pronounced programming need, and many initiatives were undertaken in Kenya and Liberia: 87 percent of respondents noticed targeted efforts to educate young people about the elections and democratic governance, and 89 percent of respondents reported targeted efforts to train and mobilize young people to vote, participate as poll workers, or otherwise engage peacefully in the election.

The seven prevention tools highlighted here are used by a broad range of domestic and international actors. Indeed, prevention measures are expanding, both in terms of funding and scope. The United Nations Development Program completed 394 electoral support projects through eighty-three country offices at a cost of $3 billion between 1999 and 2011.[110] Expanded programming is encouraging, but with it comes heightened expectations and the risk of wasteful spending—hence the need for robust evidence-based analysis to ensure resources are employed strategically.

With this in mind, we assess which instruments seemed to work and which appear to have had little or no impact. To what extent did peacebuilding efforts help prevent an escalation of tensions in Liberia or a repeat of the 2007–2008 mass violence in Kenya? Were police efforts effective, or did election observation play a critical role?

What Worked to Prevent Election Violence?

It is encouraging to see broadening efforts and growing pools of funding dedicated to election violence prevention, but more prevention efforts do not necessarily reduce violence. Having considered the risk environment in Liberia and Kenya and the applied prevention tools, it is time to evaluate which of the prevention instruments helped reduce election violence and which did not.

Four core findings emerged from this analysis. First, sound security sector engagement and election administration appear to be the most promising routes to reducing election violence. The role of police officers, election commissioners, and judges and the support that they receive

are critical if elections are to be less violent. Second, no evidence suggests that peace messaging and voter consultation made a difference in Kenya or Liberia. Third, youth programming and civic and voter education seemed to make a difference in Liberia but not in Kenya. Fourth, election monitoring seems capable of realizing some of its promise and changing certain attitudes, but was not associated with less election violence in Liberia or Kenya. A review of each set of findings follows.

What Seemed to Work

The field research shows that an election administration and a police force that perform well are crucial to reducing election violence. Sound **security sector engagement** built popular trust and was significantly associated with reduced election violence during the 2017 elections in Kenya and Liberia. In Liberia, the LNP helped prevent tensions from escalating into violence. The NPS in Kenya had a stabilizing influence when it operated in a close relationship with local communities and had sufficient resources. However, when confronted with an increasingly tense election climate, the Kenyan police force further tainted its reputation and became the leading source of election violence.

Several survey results highlighted the promise of security sector engagement. When police units had adequate resources to protect candidates, voters, and election materials, election violence was less likely. Increased contact between police officers and community members was also significantly associated with less violence in both countries. Respondents who engaged more with police were more inclined to believe that police make elections safer and protect voters equally; respondents also became somewhat more trusting of local police officers. Overall, the analyses support the idea that sound security engagement can be an effective way to mitigate election-related violence.

But just as professional police conduct can have a stabilizing influence on violence, poor police engagement becomes a significant source of violence. The police did not perform flawlessly in Liberia, and in several parts of Kenya their performance was problematic. Merely increasing the number of police officers present in an area without ensuring that those officers act professionally or enter into a dialogue with locals, may not be enough by itself to mitigate violence. Notably, increased police presence was associated with less violence in Liberia but not in Kenya. The likely reason for this difference is that the police in Liberia engaged more positively and constructively than their Kenyan counterparts.

The LNP was in regular contact with communities at risk and conducted a security assessment with hotspot analysis in the early planning phase. Liberian police units were then deployed to potential hotspots (mainly in the capital Monrovia) with the explicit purpose of deterring and mitigating violence. According to the Liberian Elections Observation Network, security personnel played a positive role during the campaign period, and their presence was mostly discrete, nonintrusive, and professional.[111] The LNP struggled to maintain a visible presence across the country, but police units engaged constructively where they were. On election day and during other critical stages in the electoral process, police presence increased noticeably. During the voter registration period, the LNP made several arrests and effectively prosecuted individuals. Riot police were deployed to the Supreme Court and the NEC after the announcement postponing the elections.

In Kenya, police units were generally well prepared but responded to demonstrations violently, repressively, and abusively, confirming the NPS's reputation as one of the worst security providers worldwide.[112] The police identified NASA strongholds as the primary hotspots in

An election administration and a police force that perform well are crucial to reducing election violence.

the country and reportedly focused the deployment of paramilitary units accordingly.[113] During the campaign period, police efforts in managing crowds, securing political rallies, and safeguarding citizens were generally well regarded.[114] In the run-up to election day, 80 percent of Kenyan respondents felt that police officers made the election safer, and 71 percent said that the police treated everyone equally. The police were quick to respond to incidents of violence during party primaries, exercised restraint, and responded adequately to tensions during the campaign period and on election day.[115] Before the Kenyan poll in August, election monitors and human rights observers were positive about the police presence at election events.[116]

However, once violent protests erupted in Kenya after the August results, the police response rapidly deteriorated. An excessive use of force—especially in opposition areas—tainted their role in the period between the first round and the rerun election and in the post-election period. It affected 8 percent of constituencies before and during July, but 18 percent afterward. Security forces were accused of shooting protesters; conducting illegal house searches and arbitrary arrests; and engaging in sexual violence, assault, and other forms of brutality.[117] Police officers were considered responsible for most of the killings throughout the election period, having adopted a shoot-to-kill policy in response to demonstrations. As a result, much of the public remained distrustful of the police. The people of Kenya expect "security forces that protect, rather than intimidate."[118] In the survey, distrust is clearly higher in Kenya than in Liberia: one in two Kenyans trusted police only a little or not at all relative to one in five Liberians. Most violent incidents perpetrated by police officers did not lead to arrests or prosecution, and indication is scant that the killings will be thoroughly investigated by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution.[119] Police officials argued that force was used only against criminals who were out to loot and cause havoc.

Despite its intensity, this police brutality was geographically concentrated (in 18 percent of constituencies, mainly in opposition strongholds) and did not affect most of the country. This is reflected in the survey and helps explain the generally stabilizing role played by Kenyan police. Only 19 percent of Kenyan respondents said that the police did not make elections safer; 12 percent claimed that police made the situation worse. Moreover, when police officers engaged constructively, people tended to have more positive attitudes toward them and the risk of election violence became significantly lower.

Improved election administration is associated with perceptions of higher-quality elections, increased institutional trust, and less election violence.

The second prevention instrument that seemed to mitigate violence in both countries is sound **election administration and management**. The analyses show that improved election administration is associated with perceptions of higher-quality elections, increased institutional trust, and less election violence. The promise of peace through election integrity seems to hold. But, like security sector engagement, poor election management can make matters worse and even cause violent conflict. In Kenya, the poor IEBC performance triggered several violent incidents, whereas the NEC and the Supreme Court in Liberia helped overcome severe tensions.

The NEC was unable to counter the trucking of voters during the registration period and on election day. Several minor incidents occurred on election day related to poor queue control and challenges with the voter rolls.[120] Even so, the NEC performed quite well considering its limited capacity and the challenging circumstances; it drew praise for facilitating inclusive candidate nomination and registration processes, transparent counting procedures, and the timely pronouncement of election results. According to the survey, about 95 percent of Liberian respondents rated the counting process as good or very good.

The election commissions in Liberia and Kenya seem to have performed fairly well in the eyes of the respondents as a whole, although, predictably, supporters of the losing candidate

rated the commissions' performances much lower than supporters of the winning sides did. Signs of disillusionment were also evident: respondents who felt much more positively about election commission preparedness before the first round were more likely to become less trusting over time as the election processes in both countries unraveled. Election commissioners in Liberia and Kenya valued the quality of the electoral laws guiding their work, but both the NEC and the IEBC seemed to lack the capacity or legal authority to enforce those laws consistently.

The stabilizing influence that a pragmatic election commission and Supreme Court can have was illustrated in Liberia. The enforcement of a strict code of conduct had raised tensions in the months leading up to the election. The code requires appointed officials interested in running for president to resign two or three years in advance of doing so. Many people saw the code as a move by the ruling party to restrict competition. The NEC had rejected the candidacy of twenty-four applicants but eventually reversed its decision for twenty-two of them because the Supreme Court did not consider the noncompliance to be egregious. The Court's pragmatic ruling ensured the inclusiveness of the election process and prevented tensions from escalating.[121]

Tensions also rose when third-place candidate Charles Brumskine from the Liberty Party challenged the results of the first-round poll in the Supreme Court, with the vocal support from Boakai's Unity Party, claiming massive irregularities and fraud and demanding a rerun.[122] The Court ordered the NEC to postpone the runoff election until a thorough investigation of the claims had been conducted. The NEC dismissed the challenge by Brumskine, arguing that the irregularities did not significantly alter the outcome of the first-round elections. The Liberty Party did not accept the ruling and took its case to the Supreme Court, where it was eventually dismissed. Tensions rose significantly as the Liberian population waited for a final verdict. But the widespread faith in the functioning of the electoral institutions kept tensions from further escalating. Liberian citizens welcomed the Court rulings by and large, which contributed to a peaceful election, though some citizens and foreign officials were frustrated by the Court's slow response to the legal challenges. Eighty-three percent of Liberian respondents stated that the Supreme Court's involvement in the election increased their trust in the Court.

In Kenya, real and perceived irregularities during the election process triggered much of the violence in the run-up and aftermath of the election. The Supreme Court invalidated the results of the August elections, confirming the Court's independence but also evidencing several malpractices. Election day delays also reduced trust in the election commission and damaged the public's perception of the fairness of the election. Poor crowd management and incorrect application of voting identification procedures also created tensions on election day.[123] The irregularities that occurred with the transmission of the votes and other technical processes triggered incendiary statements by the opposition leaders and provoked much of the violence.

In preparation for the rerun election, a widespread retraining effort was organized. New procedures and protocols were put into place for the results management system. The IEBC considerably improved the tabulation process and the electronic transmission process, as well as the display of results forms in the rerun process.[124] Voting had to be cancelled in several opposition areas, however, due to fears of violence and an organized boycott that prevented poll workers from carrying out their responsibilities.[125]

The quality of election administration clearly matters, both for the integrity of the process and for the peaceful nature of elections. Better election administration is linked to higher levels of trust in institutions and higher levels of confidence in the credibility of elections.

The findings about sound security sector engagement and election administration as the most promising prevention tools confirm prior research in *Electing Peace*. The violence in the

2014 elections in Thailand and Bangladesh, the most violent cases covered in this comparative study, resulted not only from the passivity by the election authorities and security services, but also followed disproportionate or biased responses.[126]

What Did Not Seem to Work

No evidence indicates that voter consultation and peace messaging helped prevent election violence. Neither instrument seemed to realize its promise by shaping attitudes or behavior to create a more peaceful environment.

Peace messaging was not associated with reduced violence in either country and did not systematically influence the attitudes of respondents. This is remarkable given that peace messaging was one of the most widely used prevention mechanisms in both Kenya and Liberia. Some influence on attitudes, albeit not on violence, was noticeable in Liberia, where respondents who had greater exposure to peace messaging expressed a greater likeliness to discuss political differences peacefully. This correlation was not found in Kenya. One possible explanation for this difference is that the quality of program implementation was lower in Kenya than in Liberia. When asked whether peace messaging was capable of reaching those most likely to engage in election violence, 94 percent of Liberian respondents agreed, as opposed to 75 percent of Kenyan respondents. Similarly, in *Electing Peace*, peace messaging did not feature as a vital prevention tool given that neither strong nor weak peace messaging correlated with election violence levels.[127]

Neither does evidence indicate that **voter consultations** reduced violence. Certainly the frequency of communication between locals and political candidates is not linked to less election violence.[128] Although people who were approached by politicians were more likely to say that politicians hear the voice of the people, they ultimately did not become more convinced that their favorite party actually represents them. Only 13 percent of respondents in Liberia and Kenya indicated that politicians hear and represent the voice of the people. Voter consultation is often expected to increase at least the perception of greater representation, but this finding suggests otherwise and that, consequently, consultation is not an effective violence prevention mechanism. Political parties in Kenya and Liberia are often personality driven or identity based and only rarely distinguished on the basis of ideology or issues. Thus the logic of voter consultation may not apply in young or fragile democracies. Although many political parties report community outreach as a top priority, most respondents (74 percent) were not in frequent contact with political candidates. These results suggest that political parties fail to connect meaningfully with voters. Political parties often claim that the lives of their constituents are directly impacted by projects that the parties support—such as new sports infrastructure or initiatives to support farmers—but (as interviews with key informants confirmed) rarely are the projects responsive to genuine needs.

What Seemed to Work in Liberia But Not in Kenya

A third set of prevention instruments, youth programming and civic and voter education, seemed to make a difference in Liberia but not in Kenya. In Liberia, civic and voter education and youth programming were consistently associated with less election violence. The analyses, however, show that these instruments were not associated with changes in violence in Kenya.

Civic and voter education was associated with reduced violence in Liberia and increased political knowledge and participation. Respondents exposed to educational programs were

more likely to vote in the first-round elections in Kenya and to feel that eligible citizens should vote in every election in Liberia, a finding in line with other recent studies.[129] And although civic education did not make people prefer democracy over other forms of governance, it was linked to reduced violence in Liberia and to positive attitude changes in both countries. In Kenya, however, no evidence was found that education efforts reduced election violence.

Education efforts started quite late in both countries and struggled to be inclusive. Six months before election day, only 63 percent of Liberian respondents were aware of civic education efforts in their community; this percentage later rose sharply, 93 percent reporting after the elections that they were aware of such education efforts in their community. Twenty percent of those who were aware indicated that the activities were not inclusive in terms of age. Citizens in rural communities criticized the educational efforts of Monrovia-based CSOs as lacking understanding of local contexts. In Kenya, education efforts reportedly peaked during the voter verification phase of the electoral cycle and again around election day. Most Kenyan education campaigns were not tailored to localities or advertised on the local level but remained largely confined to broad media advertisements paid for by the IEBC.

Like civic and voter education, **youth programming** in the form of specialized election education and training was associated with less election violence in Liberia but not in Kenya. In Liberia, greater exposure to youth programming was linked to less reported electoral violence. Neither type of youth programming seemed to reduce violence in Kenya.

Why did youth programming and voter education work better in Liberia than in Kenya? One possible explanation is that these instruments had a broader reach and were more inclusive in Liberia. The vast majority of respondents in Kenya and Liberia (between 90 percent and 93 percent) were aware of youth and education programs in their location, confirming the frequent use of these approaches in both countries. However, program implementation was more inclusive in Liberia. About 24 percent of Kenyan respondents said that youth programming consistently reached people regardless of gender and income, whereas almost 40 percent of Liberian respondents did. Voter education was similarly more inclusive in Liberia than in Kenya, both in terms of gender (94 percent versus 79 percent) and age (81 percent versus 77 percent).

Promising Instruments

Election monitoring seems able to realize some of its promise and to change attitudes, but was not associated with less election violence in either Liberia or Kenya.

In Liberia, greater exposure to election monitoring was associated across the board with more positive attitudes about observers' efforts and higher trust in observers' abilities to reduce fraud and violence. Even the presence of political party monitors increased respondents' confidence in their neutrality and ability to reduce cheating and violence. In Kenya, greater exposure to monitoring did not change attitudes about the credibility of monitors or their ability to reduce fraud, but, interestingly, did increase faith in their ability to reduce violence.

In both countries, election observers enjoyed high but gradually declining levels of confidence over the course of the elections. In light of the controversy surrounding statements from international observers in Kenya, this is hardly surprising. When asked whether election observers were neutral and credible in conducting their work, 89 percent of respondents agreed before the election, but only 81 percent afterward. Conversely, the percentage of respondents who disagreed doubled, from 8 percent to 18 percent. Most respondents thought that observers help reduce both election fraud and violence. Seventy-nine percent agreed that election observ-

ers have helped reduce cheating in the electoral processes, and 73 percent that election observers have helped reduce violence, an opinion that was not confirmed by the regression analysis.

Conclusion and Recommendations

How can peacebuilders prevent election violence more effectively? The 2017 elections in Kenya and Liberia confirm that effective prevention starts at home, and that domestic institutions are the heart of election processes. Preventing election violence is a core responsibility of the state that is organizing the election; it is the state that creates the legal structure that permits law enforcement agencies, the court system, and electoral commissions to function independently and effectively. Development actors, local civil society, and international organizations play an important role in complementing or supporting government efforts through training, technical assistance, and by funding outreach and education programs.[130] Donor support of election commissions and security forces may further enhance the ability of these critical domestic stakeholders to pursue peaceful elections without losing their legitimacy. This study validates prior research and bolsters confidence in the value of police training, community outreach, and dialogue involving security actors, as well as efforts to strengthen election commissions for violence prevention purposes.

What Does Not Work to Prevent Election Violence?

Although the evidence base supporting the value of certain prevention approaches is still growing, this study raises additional doubts about the effectiveness of peace messaging and voter consultation as approaches to preventing violence.[131] As argued, the theory of change underlying voter consultations may be flawed given the personality-driven nature of political parties in many countries at risk of election violence. As respondents noted, peace messaging often seems unable to reach the members of society most likely to perpetrate violence. Many messaging programs are also unlikely to shape attitudes and behavior on a sustained basis given their short implementation timelines. Investments in peace messaging and voter consultation seem intuitively sensible but may not yield the desired impact because of the way these programs are commonly implemented. By no means should peace messaging and voter consultation be dismissed as worthless, but the evidence supporting their effectiveness is weak.

How Can Peacebuilders Prevent Future Election Violence More Effectively?

At any given time, more than a dozen elections around the world are at risk of violence. The success of election programming requires domestic and international actors to begin designing projects long in advance (often eighteen to twenty-four months in advance) of election day. Work on planning, budget requests, and risk assessments should begin as soon as election dates are confirmed.

The following recommendations—directed primarily to the international community but with utility for regional and national agencies—are intended to offer broad avenues for strengthening existing practices or addressing shortcomings and gaps.

- **Conduct timely and integrated risk assessments.** The selection of prevention programs should always be informed by timely and integrated violence risk assessments that tie concrete drivers of violence with realistic programming options to achieve the necessary changes. The findings of integrated or joint assessments to predict and preempt outbreaks of election violence should also be made public so that smaller

actors unable to invest in thorough assessments can ensure that their efforts are evidence based.

- **Improve participant recruitment.** Programs such as peace messaging, youth programming, and civic education that involve the general electorate or community representatives need either to be inclusive in terms of the participants they recruit, or to deliberately target those communities that are most at risk. Too often, community engagement fails to reach vulnerable communities outside the main urban areas and primarily engages those who are already predisposed to peaceful engagement in elections.

- **Invest in regional capacities.** In countries where providing international support for law enforcement and electoral commissions is complicated, because of either domestic resistance or limited knowhow, it is preferable to invest in the prevention capacities and coordination mechanisms of regional and subregional bodies. Regional organizations or networks such as ECOWAS and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding have the necessary access, legitimacy, and local knowledge to design training and capacity building tailored to the local context and welcomed by local actors.

- **Implement programming in a timely and sustained way.** In both Kenya and Liberia, prevention programming often began too late and concluded soon after election day. Many survey respondents and key informants believed that civic and voter education should also expand its reach. Local demand is strong for information about government, political processes, and elections to be made available earlier in the election process, to be offered not only during election campaigns but also between them, and to be targeted at younger generations as well as the older members of the electorate. All too often, efforts to engage youth, educate the electorate, and encourage peaceful engagement in elections fail to last several election cycles. Sustained conflict prevention is the most promising way to ensure peaceful elections because it helps address deeper grievances that spoilers can manipulate to incite violence.

- **Encourage responsible conduct by police and politicians.** In Kenya, the need is clear to depoliticize the role of police in security provision and strengthen their professionalism. In both Liberia and Kenya, politicians should be given more incentives to engage in responsible campaigning and to resist making polarizing or incendiary statements.

- **Capture election violence more systematically.** Given the experiences in Liberia and Kenya, human rights and domestic election monitors with nationwide reach should be trained in capturing early signs of violence more effectively and mapping different types of election violence. Beyond their valuable role in identifying technical challenges and general security concerns, both domestic and international election monitors should be encouraged to capture gender-based election violence and various forms of intimidation more systematically, as well as to make early efforts to manipulate the political system and reduce the competitive nature of elections.

- **Conduct practice evaluations.** New evaluative methods need to be developed that consider the combined impact of various actors that engage in similar prevention activities and try to mitigate risk using the same theory of change. International and domestic prevention actors should assess the impact of preventive engagement beyond their own projects. To ensure they have the desired impact, those actors need to continually question and test the logic behind their work and develop innovative methods to enhance their effectiveness.

Success with prevention tools remains highly contextual. Different risk environments require peacebuilding approaches tailored to local needs.

In the next phase of its evaluative research, drawing from existing typologies and conceptual classifications of election violence, USIP aims to identify prevention instruments best suited to different types of election violence. Further research is also merited to identify unintended consequences and discover how they might be avoided in future efforts.

In examining the effectiveness of violence prevention instruments, this study should help peacebuilders prioritize election programming and enhance their ability to shape environments conducive to peaceful elections. Ultimately, the research demonstrates that preventive action works when investments are strategically selected. As we continue to explore the dynamics of election violence, both domestic and external actors will benefit from having a clearer understanding of the best possible avenues to a peaceful ballot. Elections are likely to remain one of the most contentious and risky processes for emergent democracies and in postconflict societies. Nevertheless, we must continue striving to find the right tools to ensure that elections can be conducted in a fair, free, and peaceful manner and thus fulfill their purpose as a channel through which citizens can choose their leaders and express their hopes for their future.

Notes

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4. Steven E. Finkel, "The Impact of Adult Civic Education Programmes in Developing Democracies," *Public Administration and Development* 34, no. 3 (August 2014): 169–81.

5. Joseph Asunka et al., "Electoral Fraud or Violence," *British Journal of Political Science* (February 2017): 20–21.

6. Ursula Daxecker, "All Quiet on Election Day?" *Electoral Studies* 34 (2014): 232–43; see von Borzyskowski, "A Double-Edged Sword" and *The Credibility Challenge*; Leonardo R. Arriola et al., *Civic Education in Violent Elections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

7. Sublocations and communities were the election-relevant units of administration suggested by local partners as the unit of analysis. Choosing towns as if randomly essentially involved a lottery in which three hundred towns were selected from a larger pool of at-risk towns.

8. Drivers were included because they are not part of the elite, they talk with many different people, and they often have a keen awareness of ongoing changes in society and of the issues that ordinary people worry about.

9. The international and domestic observation teams and fact-finding missions looked for irregularities and security incidents through their long- and short-term observers but did not systematically track various types of lethal and nonlethal election violence.

10. More precisely, the study uses ordinary least squares and robust standard errors clustered on sublocation or community to account for the lack of independence among respondents in the same location.

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13. Liberia National Police (LNP), *Operational Plan Covering the Forthcoming General and Presidential Election Slated for October 10, 2017* (Monrovia: LNP, n.d.), 2.

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16. The True Whig Party was composed of free-born and formerly enslaved "Americoes" who had immigrated to Liberia in the nineteenth century. They became the founders of the state of Liberia and dominated the natives as a powerful minority.

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18. Ibid., 216.

19. CRS, *State of Peace*, 7.

20. Ibid., 2.

21. Stephanie M. Burchard, *Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Boulder, CO: FirstForumPress, 2015), 109.

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86. A National Election Security Task Force was created to include the LNP, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and the Liberia National Fire Service. Constitutionally, the Armed Forces of Liberia has no role in the electoral process, unless the security situation escalates significantly.

87. European Union, "Interim Statement—Recommendations for the Re-Run Based on Findings since the 8 August Election Day," September 14, 2017 (Nairobi: EU Election Observation Mission), 7; ELOG, *One Country*, 49.

88. Although the terms are used interchangeably in this report, *election observers* are technically more passive than *election monitors*; as observers, they merely gather information and present an informed judgment without interfering. Election monitors have the authority not only to passively monitor the electoral process but also to intervene in some manner if they believe that legal requirements are not being respected.

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97. ELOG, *One Country*, 52.

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101. USAID, *USAID Support*, 14–15.

102. KNCHR, *Mirage at Dusk*, 81.

103. Data from key informant interviews with political party representatives throughout the selected counties.

104. Interview with staff member of the NDI country office, Monrovia, March 2017.

105. Andrew Wasike, "How Kenyan Youth Could Swing the 2017 Election," *Deutsche Welle,* June 17, 2016, www.dw.com/en/how-kenyan-youth-could-swing-the-2017-election/a-39263472.

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109. NDI, *Kenya's 2017 General Elections*, 3.

110. Reducing the potential for electoral violence is one of three objectives of UN electoral assistance, in addition to assisting member states to hold democratic elections and contributing to a sustainable institutional capacity; United Nations, *Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Development Program: Revised Note of Guidance on Electoral Assistance* (New York: UNDP, 2010), 1; Julia Dudnik Stern, ed., *Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Strengthening Electoral Systems and Processes* (New York: UNDP, 2012), 18.

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115. ELOG, "ELOG's Preliminary Statement on the On-going Political Party Primaries," April 23, 2017, 1.

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118. Focus group discussion participant in Kenya.

119. ELOG, *One Country*, xix.

120. According to LEON, long queues caused tension in around 10 percent of precincts they observed, often as a result of poor queue control. For instance, in Precinct 30097, Montserrrado district 3, only two queue controllers were assigned to seven polling places.

121. Carter Center, "Pre-Election Statement," 6, 7.

122. Boakai and Weah had both proceeded to the second round, garnering 28.8 percent and 38.4 percent of the vote, respectively.

123. KNCHR, *Mirage at Dusk*, 117, 123.

124. Ibid., 34.

125. Carter Center, *Final Report*, 3.

126. Claes, *Electing Peace,* 196–97.

127. Ibid., 206.

128. In Kenya, more frequent and direct communication with political candidates was associated even with an increase of violence.

129. See, for instance, Finkel, "The Impact."

130. Inken von Borzyskowski, "Resisting Democracy Assistance," *Review of International Organizations* 11, no. 2 (2016): 247–82.

131. Claes, *Electing Peace,* 198–99.

One in five elections in the world turns violent. Not unique to any political system or development level, this violence takes many shapes and forms, from burning ballot boxes to mass protests and state crackdowns on peaceful demonstrations. In rare cases, it is more extreme. As seen in the run-up to the 2017 elections in Kenya and Liberia, international actors may provide support to political parties, observe elections, engage in peace messaging, and deploy other prevention measures in the hope that some of them will make a difference. Little is known about which work or how well they work, however. Drawing on extensive field research in both Kenya and Liberia, this report uses original survey data from more than two thousand respondents to evaluate seven approaches thought to reduce the risk of election violence, either directly or indirectly.

Other USIP Publications

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