



**MONITORING AND
MITIGATING**

**ELECTORAL
VIOLENCE**

**THROUGH NONPARTISAN
CITIZEN ELECTION
OBSERVATION**



LONG-TERM OBSERVATION TO MONITOR AND MITIGATE ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

For decades, nonpartisan citizen monitoring organizations have conducted long-term observation to monitor a variety of critical election components, including incidents of violence and intimidation, legal frameworks, boundary delimitation, campaign finance, media coverage, freedom of expression, political party conduct, ballot qualification, women and minority participation, voter registration, results tabulation and complaints resolution. This broad access to the electoral process allows discerning monitors to identify trends in the pre-election and post-election environment and to recognize, evaluate and report any “red flags” that could provide a flashpoint for existing tensions and lead to violence.

Groups seeking to take electoral violence into account during their long-term observation effort have two main strategic options, or a combination of both.

- One option is to monitor and report **incidents of violence**. Timely, fact-based and accurate reporting on incidents of violence by nonpartisan citizen observers can increase transparency and accountability, and can help dispel unfounded rumors that tend to increase tensions. However, because this type of monitoring does not address or monitor the causes and triggers of electoral violence, it is less effective in mitigating violence.
- Groups seeking to help mitigate violence can go beyond monitoring violent acts by also **monitoring and reporting early warnings signs of potential causes and triggers of violence** appropriate for the country context. Observer groups can then use this information to help authorities, observers and other stakeholders direct their attention and resources to particularly vulnerable areas, target audiences and potential flashpoints before violence occurs.⁶

Combining these approaches can make important contributions, particularly if each is conducted in coordination with other election observers and conflict prevention and management efforts of other organizations and the government. Those efforts can range from developing and strengthening local mediation capacities, to developing community forums to address conflict-related issues and

⁶ For more details, see *Using Feedback Mechanisms to Mitigate Violence*.

build bridges across issue divides, to enhancing inter-party dialogue and inter-agency electoral security planning, among other efforts.

PLANNING: STRATEGY, SCOPE AND DURATION

Observer groups have a number of issues to consider when planning violence monitoring and/or early warning systems programs. This includes determining the group's goal, assessing underlying tensions and causes of violence in the country, identifying potential triggers or flashpoints during the electoral cycle, defining specific indicators of early warning signs and violent acts to monitor, identifying high-risk geographic areas and developing an observation methodology and deployment strategy that takes all of this into account. These key planning considerations are explained in more detail below.⁷

1. What is the observer group's top priority goal for long-term observation?

Observer groups first need to determine whether their highest priority is strictly to monitor electoral violence, to help mitigate electoral violence or to provide a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the electoral process for the public while mitigating electoral violence is a secondary priority. Observer groups have scarce time and resources and, consequently, have to make many difficult choices that should be guided by their highest priority.

2. What root causes of violence and/or underlying tensions could impact the potential for electoral violence?

Observer groups should carefully assess the potential factors external to elections that could contribute to causing electoral violence. Examples of root causes of electoral violence are provided in the “Nature of Electoral Violence” section and in Figure I.1.

3. What are likely to be the most significant violence triggers or flashpoints during the pre-election, election day and post-election periods?

Before making an action plan, observer groups should carefully review historical data and the current political climate to estimate when, where and in what form

⁷ A more detailed consideration of such factors is provided in International IDEA's Guide on Factors of Election-related Violence External to Electoral Processes (2013).

problems may occur during the electoral cycle. This includes reviewing what has happened in previous elections and any patterns of violence that may have emerged. Observers should analyze each aspect of the entire electoral cycle to determine potential risk factors and flashpoints, including: the legal framework; voter registration; election commission formation, training and preparations; candidate and party registration; election campaign; media environment; voter education; voting and counting processes; results tabulation and announcement; and legal enforcement and dispute resolution. Groups should take into account the electoral system as well. Some electoral systems create greater stakes than others or place emphasis on different aspects of the electoral process. For instance, party registration may be more contentious in a multi-party proportional representation system, while the campaign period may be more vulnerable in a candidate-centered first-past-the-post system.⁸ More details on electoral violence triggers are provided in the “What to Monitor” section and Figure 1.2.

Fortunately, there are almost always ways to consult with respected experts and organizations that concentrate on conflict prevention, management and resolution when developing this analysis, and such consultations can lead to cooperation going forward.

4. What are the specific indicators that point to causes and triggers of violence (early warning signs) that should be monitored? What types of electoral violence incidents should be monitored?

Groups must carefully define each indicator that they plan to monitor, distinguish between early warning signs and incidents of electoral violence, and determine how and what information should be collected to ensure that the data is credible. More details on this are provided in the “What to Monitor” and “Data Collection and Verification” sections and in Figures 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3.

5. Are there any geographic areas that are considered “hot spots” and may be more susceptible to violence?

This may include areas that may be politically contentious or “political battlegrounds” but also areas where non-political conflict, such as land seizures or violent organized crime, is, or has been, prevalent. Groups may consider increasing the concentration of observers in these areas or prioritizing information from those locales. Hot spots can range in size from larger geographic areas such as provinces or districts to very specific locations, such as towns or even

⁸ For a detailed consideration of the conflict implications of different electoral systems, please refer to pages 18-19 of the Elections and Conflict Prevention: A Guide to Analysis, Planning and Programming. UNDP, 2009.



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Promoting Peaceful Elections through Citizen Observation in Cote d'Ivoire

The second round of the November 2010 presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire sparked a serious political and humanitarian crisis that led to the deaths of more than 3,000 people and the displacement of approximately one million Ivorians. The two main candidates, incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo and opposition candidate Alassane Ouattara, represented the ethnic and geographic divisions of a society deeply fractured from its five year civil war. Gbagbo's refusal to accept electoral defeat pitted these factions against each other once again, throwing the country into violence that ended only when international forces intervened and arrested Gbagbo in April 2011.


Unfortunately, civil society had not been prepared to mitigate challenges to the credibility of the elections. The elections had been repeatedly postponed for five years, draining donor funds and undermining civil society's ability to mount a coordinated, systematic assessment of the process nationwide. Groups that were able to organize observation were limited in funds, time and geographic reach. When the Independent Election Commission announced Ouattara's victory, the pro-Gbagbo Constitutional

Court invalidated those results, citing irregularities in Ouattara strongholds. Without an independent assessment from a credible, nationwide network of observers, civil society was not in a position to deny or verify these claims. The UN had its internal workings in place as part of its mandate to certify the election, which allowed it to confidently back the election commission, though that was insufficient to prevent post-election violence as Gbagbo refused to step down.

Following the crisis, civil society recognized the missed opportunity to play a role in mitigating tensions by better coordinating their efforts and providing credible, systematic information on the election process. In preparation for the 2011 legislative elections, the six leading citizen observation coalitions came together to develop a pilot violence monitoring plan, deploying 36 monitors to hot spots throughout the country and in Abidjan. This first step of coordination and strategic deployment set the groundwork for more robust election observation better positioned to mitigate potentials for conflict surrounding the upcoming presidential elections in 2015.

EXAMPLE





Long-term Electoral Violence Monitoring in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a long history of election-related violence. For decades, civil society groups in the country have undertaken long-term electoral violence monitoring efforts to address recurring political and electoral violence. Since 1997, the Center for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) has focused on contributing to peaceful elections through careful documentation of election-related violence. CMEV employs a “name and shame” approach centered on raising public awareness and reducing the level of impunity around violence using data from long-term observers deployed across the country, information from media sources and verified reports from citizens. CMEV’s observation methodology includes long-term observation, pre-election field visits by a core expert team and election-day observation.

For the 2010 presidential elections, CMEV deployed a total of 170 long-term monitors to every province to monitor electoral violence. Field visits by a small group of election, conflict, legal or other experts to “hotspots” identified by LTOs bolstered CMEV’s ability to document critical incidents and identify escalating tensions. On election day, CMEV deployed

approximately 4,000 stationary observers and 230 mobile teams across the country with higher coverage around areas identified as potential violence hotspots through analysis of LTO reports and historical CMEV and official data. Pre-election and election-day reports were entered in a database and mapped on an online platform, and made public through regular reports. During elections, CMEV also collects data from a number of sources beyond their trained observers, which they carefully verify through a range of means before including in their final data and analysis. For national elections, the Center establishes and publicizes a public incident hotline for citizens to report incidents of violence. CMEV has also established and maintained good working relations with police forces, allowing the organization access to the police log of election-related incidents and enabling CMEV to share data with the police for more rapid and appropriate responses to violent incidents. Overt acts of violence in elections have declined in Sri Lanka over the past decade -- a trend that CMEV has both carefully documented and contributed to through their long-term observation efforts.

neighborhoods within towns.

6. What should the deployment strategy for violence monitors be?

The answer to this question must take into account the answers to the questions above. In most cases, particularly when the group's top priority objective is to provide a comprehensive and accurate assessment of the electoral process, observers should be deployed to all relevant geographic regions, although this may not be possible due to groups' capacity, coverage and/or funding limitations. In circumstances where the group's top priority is to mitigate electoral violence, and particularly when groups aren't able to deploy LTOs in all geographic regions, observers could instead be strategically deployed so they have a higher concentration in potential hot spots and so they can easily access uncovered areas if needed. In addition, groups should have a plan for ways to collect data from areas where they cannot deploy observers (whether due to difficulties in geographic reach, communication constraints or security risks).

The timing of deployment should also be considered. Ideally groups should strive to begin monitoring as early in the electoral process as possible, with long-term observers (LTOs) deployed in a manner that maximizes their access to all major localities. However, groups may have to prioritize and strategize their efforts in light of available resources. For example, if a group has already deployed local or regional level coordinators or supervisors, they could be trained to serve as LTOs if groups do not have the capacity or resources to deploy additional observers.

After evaluating these questions, citizen observation groups should develop a deployment and reporting plan that spans the critical electoral process periods to be monitored. This plan should include alternate methods of collecting information in places where observers are not deployed, including phone interviews with local authorities and monitoring relevant data, such as media and police reports, from those areas.

WHAT TO MONITOR

After clearly identifying the potential early warning signs of electoral violence and developing an overall deployment and reporting plan, observer groups are then able to narrow down the specific types of triggers, incidents and issues that they will monitor during each period of the electoral cycle. It is not possible for groups to monitor all aspects of the electoral process. Thus, groups must prioritize what they will monitor based on which early warning signs are expected to have

the most impact on fueling violence, which incidents best show the presence of electoral violence, and, in turn, which will have the most impact on the integrity of the electoral process itself. The following text and Figure 1.1 and 1.2 provide guidance to groups in sorting out the question of what to monitor.

Detecting Early Warning Signs

For groups whose goal is to help mitigate electoral violence, citizen LTOs need to monitor indicators (early warning signs) that could forecast the potential for conflict. As mentioned above, these indicators relate to both the underlying causes as well as triggers of electoral violence. If caught and reported in the early stages, these issues can be interceded, mitigated or resolved before violence erupts.

There are a number of indicators that citizen observers can examine, although the meaning, types and complexity of warning signs will vary drastically depending on the local and political context.⁹ Observers should not only monitor obvious indicators of political friction but also other non-political conflicts that have the potential to leach their way into politics at flashpoints. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 list the main types of causes and triggers of electoral violence to consider, including a description and illustrative examples of each.

Documenting Incidents Of Violence

In addition to monitoring early warning signs, citizen monitors should also track and document incidents of violence and violent behavior. Violence monitors have used this information to create a visible public record that can discourage perpetrators in light of public scrutiny. Monitors should look for all confirmed incidents of violence but will have to make a judgment, based on compelling evidence, concerning whether they are intended to harm persons or property involved in the electoral process, or otherwise affect the process, with the intention of influencing the elections' outcome and/or conduct. For instance, an armed robbery resulting in a death of a politician or electoral official is likely not electoral violence unless observers can find convincing evidence to the contrary. Monitors should also pay close attention to missing persons reports, as well as any reports of physical threats and coercion. The "Violent Acts and Incidents" column of Figure 1.3 lists a number of examples of violent incidents, organized by the different periods of the electoral cycle.

⁹ For more detailed, context specific information about early warning signs in Asia, see: Understanding Electoral Violence in Asia. UNDP, 2011. For more about early warning signs of electoral violence in Africa, see: Atwood, Richard. How the EU Can Support Peaceful Post-election Transitions of Power: Lessons from Africa. EU, 2012.



Powerful Interests and State-Sponsored Violence

In some cases, cartels or mafias that operate illegally will use force to exert political influence. In other situations, observers may notice acts of electoral violence supported by the state. Both of these circumstances can be particularly challenging for observers, as it makes data harder to collect and could increase the likelihood of observers to become targets. In these extreme scenarios, LTOs will want to keep a low-profile and closely follow organizational security protocols. Most importantly, observer groups should try to enlist the support of international actors on the ground that can help provide cover in vulnerable situations. This includes ensuring inter-governmental agencies, human rights and good governance NGOs and sympathetic diplomatic missions are aware and updated on findings and concerns.

Root Causes of Electoral Violence

Illustrative early warning sign indicators

Identity politics and clefs based on religion, sect, class, tribe or ethnicity

- Pervasive culture of identity-based rivalries and violence

Tension over control of state or private resources

- History of violence, civil war, and/or the existence of militias and/or prevalence of small arms
- Disputes over land or other state resources, such as oil or water
- Disputes over private resources, such as livestock
- High income inequality or unequal access to social resources

Insufficient or corrupt security and policing

- Existence of illegal elements or violent actors (narco-traffickers)
- Weak, insufficient and/or inactive security forces (i.e., police, military)
- Politicized security forces and/or security forces used for repressive purposes instead of protection and safety

Weak rule of law

- High levels of corruption and/or lack of rule of law can disproportionately impact different segments of society and political factions

Triggers of Electoral Violence

Illustrative early warning sign indicators

High degree of uncertainty about the outcome of the election

- Unclear or contested legal framework
- Poorly managed or poorly implemented election processes
- Lack of transparency, including lack of accessible, timely and relevant election data, as well as obstacles to election observation
- Lack of accountability, such as inadequate or partisan system for resolution of complaints and disputes
- Expectation of extremely close and competitive elections
- Evidence of or perception of fraud during the electoral process
- Rhetoric or behavior indicating public and/or political contestants' frustration with the above problems
 - Protests and rallies, behavior of crowd and/or security forces
 - Rhetoric of parties, candidates, media and community leaders (i.e., rejection of results, boycotts)

Perception of certainty or of unfair or illegitimate outcome of the election

- Exclusion of specific communities during electoral process
 - Perceived or actual systematic exclusion of certain ethnic, religious or tribal groups from participating as voters
 - Exclusion of identity-based party or candidate(s) from competing in elections
 - Exclusion of women and youth, including as party activists, candidates, election officials and/or voters
- Efforts to suppress freedom of expression, such as during campaigning, ranging from intolerance to viewpoints to active suppression
- Rhetoric or behavior indicating growing public, marginalized group, and/or political contestants' frustration with the above problems
 - Protests and rallies, behavior of crowd and security forces
 - Rhetoric of parties, candidates, media and community leaders (i.e., using divisive or inflammatory rhetoric and/or misinformation to mobilize groups)

High stakes, "zero sum" electoral system

- Presidential election with highly concentrated executive powers
- First past the post systems, particularly where polarity can overcome diverse historically marginalized populations
- Small district magnitudes, such as single-mandate districts
- Referenda with majority rule requirements and high stakes constitutional issues

Incidents of Electoral Violence

VIOLENT ACTS AND INCIDENTS

Effects of the root causes plus triggers

Pre-election Period

- Assassination or attempted assassination of opponents or potential electoral contestants
- Jailing of opponents
- Tensions and violence due to voter registration process concerns or complaints
- Violence between rival groups of supporters, which can reduce participation or create “no go” areas for campaigning
- Attacks on or threats against election officials
- Threats or intimidation of supporters, which can cause internal migration or fear of participating in elections

Election Day and Post-Election

- All of the above, plus:
- Threats or intimidation of voters
- Attacks at or near polling locations
- Destroying election-related materials
- Protests that turn violent, either due to protesters or authorities
- Perpetration of sectarian or ethnic violence

EXAMPLE

Monitoring Electoral Violence in Pakistan

For decades Pakistan's elections have been undermined by a range of electoral violence and broader political violence. To help mitigate and raise awareness of the causes of electoral violence, the citizen observer coalition Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability-Free and Fair Election Network (TDEA-FAFEN) has carried out extensive electoral violence monitoring efforts for more than five years, including the 2008 general elections. Based on this experience, for the 2013 general elections TDEA-FAFEN conducted long- and short-term observation focused on electoral violence. For pre- and post-election monitoring, TDEA-FAFEN trained and deployed 369 LTOs covering each district and constituency. On election day, the coalition mobilized more than 43,000 short-term observers. TDEA-FAFEN complemented its observer data by monitoring media reports of

electoral violence across 10 national and provincial newspapers. All incidents were reported using standardized forms (see sample incident form in Annex I) and entered into an online database. With this large amount of data, TDEA-FAFEN was able to provide the public with in-depth analysis of electoral violence, including by geographic area, types and tactics of violence, triggers of violence, and the party affiliation of victims and perpetrators. The group used this analysis to publicize detailed, targeted recommendations of reforms and measures to mitigate future violence and improve electoral integrity. Due in part to the tireless efforts of civil society groups such as TDEA-FAFEN, in 2013 Pakistan experienced its first peaceful transition of power from one civilian government to the next in the country's 66-year history.



DATA COLLECTION AND VERIFICATION

Data Sources

Citizen LTOs collect data on early warning signs and incidents of violence from a variety of sources. Even if observers do not directly witness an incident, they can report it if they have verified the event occurred (see verification subsection below) and have a sufficient amount of data on it. Observers may hear about incidents through reports from and interviews with citizens, the media, other NGOs, parties, candidates, government officials, election administrators or the police. LTOs should read and listen to the news for such stories. They should also cultivate relationships with government authorities, including police and security forces (when such forces can be trusted), so that they can gain access to official data, such as police blotters. Observers should attend as many electoral events, such as campaigns or rallies, as possible.

Verification

When LTOs identify an incident that they did not directly witness, they will need to verify the incident. This means finding compelling evidence that confirms the incident occurred and that it is politically related. This may mean consulting reliable news sources, official police documents and conducting interviews with victims, witnesses, perpetrators and security forces when possible to get complete facts before reporting it to headquarters.

Documenting and Reporting: How and When

Citizen monitors use categorization to simplify and standardize incident reports and early warning sign notifications. This means determining how incidents of violence or coercion will be described by **type** (for instance: arson, robbery, assault, attempted murder, coercion), **severity** (for instance, a ranking system for how many people were effected), **frequency** and whether the incident is **verified** or **unverified**. In order to support claims, observers may also want to collect photographic and/or video evidence of any incidents, damage or destruction, if and when possible.

LTOs should document their findings on standardized forms to report them back to their headquarters. In addition to the categorization information, violence monitoring forms should collect the date, time, place, victim(s), perpetrators(s), witness(es), gender(s), ages, any political affiliations and a brief description of

A black and white photograph of two women. The woman in the foreground is wearing a patterned headscarf and a patterned shirt, and is speaking into a microphone. The woman in the background is also wearing a headscarf and looking towards the right. A yellow banner is overlaid on the image, containing the title. A dark grey box is overlaid at the bottom, containing the main text.

Engaging the Right Actors for Early Intervention

In order for violence forecasting to be effective, citizen monitors must have plans of action if and when warning signs are identified. This includes having an established network of actors that may be able to address the large variety of early warning indicators. In some cases, it may be more effective to first notify individuals that can have an impact on a warning sign rather than publicly releasing information about it. LTOs will want to engage community leaders, local authorities, security forces, the electoral management body, the international community and local NGOs. When a warning sign is identified, monitors will need to decide who the most appropriate actor for resolving it is. For instance, if bribery and corruption are seen as increasing tensions, a group would likely engage political parties and the election commission to address the issue, rather than turning first to the police.

the incident.¹⁰

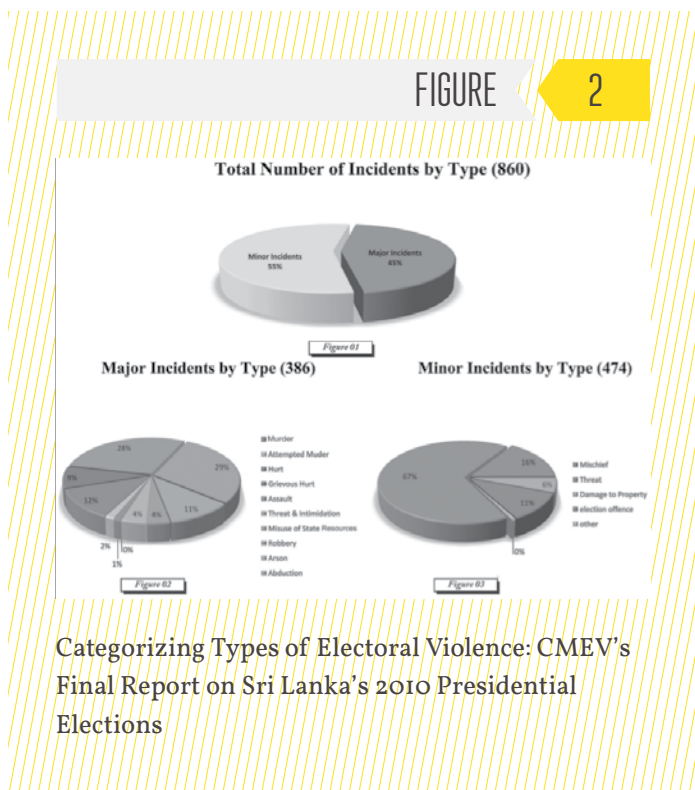
Reporting forms should use clear and unambiguous language and be organized logically to encourage concise answers with strong information. For clarity, groups should have separate forms for reporting early warning signs that would focus on violence indicators rather than confirmed incidents.

Reports of violent incidents should be prioritized and reported to headquarters immediately, while groups should develop a standard schedule – such as weekly – for reporting warning signs and long-term trends.

Incident reports should be centralized at headquarters and compiled in a database. Maintaining incident records in a computerized database allows observer groups to easily sort, code and analyze violence information, which can be shared with relevant actors (see figure 3) and through public reports. An incident database also facilitates easy updating after following up on incidents and/or new developments.

Follow-Up

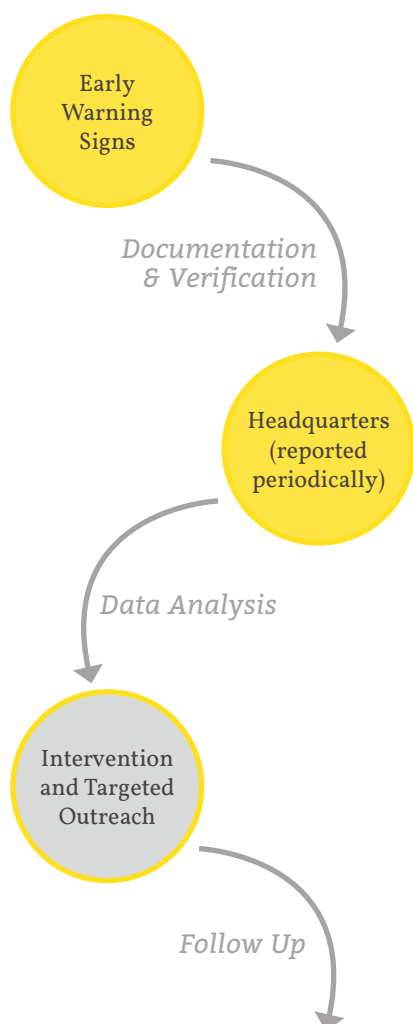
Citizen LTOs should always follow up on recorded incidents of violence and any warning indicators. Follow-up will help determine whether the problem was resolved and what authorities, if any, were responsible for addressing the issue. Incidents and warning signs that are not resolved should be tracked periodically and updated regularly in the database. If no action is taken on incidents considered significant, groups may want to register an official complaint with the election



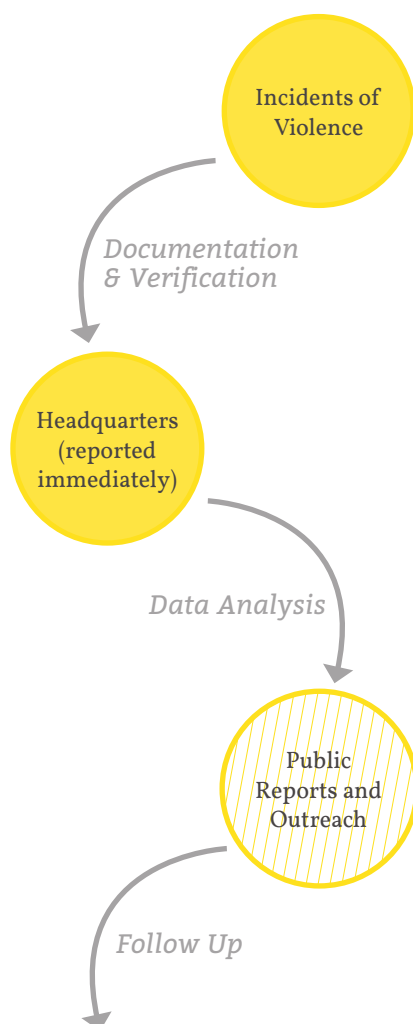
¹⁰. See Appendices I, II and III for sample forms.

Monitoring and Reporting Early Warning Signs vs. Incidents of Violence

Early Warning Signs



Incidents of Violence



commission or appropriate authority. Figure 3 illustrates different methods of follow-up depending on whether a group monitoring incidents of violence or early warning signs of violence.

RELEASING INFORMATION

In order to create an environment of public scrutiny and accountability and to increase potentials for reform, citizen monitors should release periodic statements regarding their data, particularly consolidated information and analysis on incidents of violence and violent behavior. Only confirmed and verified incidents should be analyzed and included in public reports.

Groups may also consider creating graphs, maps or other forms of data visualization to present their findings (see Section 4 for more detail). Monitoring organizations may want to be more strategic about information gathered on early warning signs. Some early warning data will have little relevance to the public at large or even may create an unnecessary sense of alarm among the public. Such data should be utilized internally for planning purposes and, more importantly, shared with the appropriate local and/or international actors to inform their work and prompt a timely response.

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