



**MONITORING AND  
MITIGATING**

**ELECTORAL  
VIOLENCE**

**THROUGH NONPARTISAN  
CITIZEN ELECTION  
OBSERVATION**

# THE ROLE OF CITIZEN OBSERVERS IN GRASSROOTS MITIGATION AND MEDIATION

Many citizen monitoring organizations have worked to mitigate potentials for electoral violence through a variety of strategies and methods, including, for example, voter education campaigns highlighting acceptance, tolerance and peaceful elections and other anti-violence messages. Because many citizen election monitoring efforts are broad coalitions, they are well-positioned to promote dialogue within communities by facilitating events such as community forums or roundtables surrounding elections to foster communication, information sharing and consensus building. Some monitoring groups may even train their LTOs in dispute resolution methods so that they can mediate local-level conflicts.

While this section highlights three methods groups have used to mitigate potentials for electoral violence, it is essential that groups undertake a strategic planning process to determine which strategies, methods and tactics are best-matched for the country context and available resources. This involves working through many of the steps outlined in the “Planning: Strategy, Scope and Duration” subsection of Section I, including assessing underlying tensions and causes of violence in the country, identifying potential electoral cycle triggers or flashpoints, identifying high-risk geographic areas and developing a strategy that takes all of this into account.

## ***VOTER AND CIVIC EDUCATION***

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Citizen monitors often conduct voter information and education campaigns surrounding elections. Voter information campaigns help ensure voters fully understand the basic facts, such as how, when and where to vote. Voter education campaigns are broader campaigns that, in addition to providing basic electoral facts, help voters understand the importance of voting and elections, as well as help prepare voters to make an informed choice. In situations where violence could emerge, equipping citizens with complete and accurate information about the electoral process and surrounding environment can help reduce confusion and counter destabilizing forces. Moreover, providing complete information can help build public confidence in elections and decrease tensions.

In contexts affected by the potential for electoral violence, observer groups may take a more direct approach to violence mitigation by incorporating and even featuring anti-violence messages and content in their voter education efforts. Through these efforts, citizens learn about the peaceful nature of elections and about what it means to have political competition that

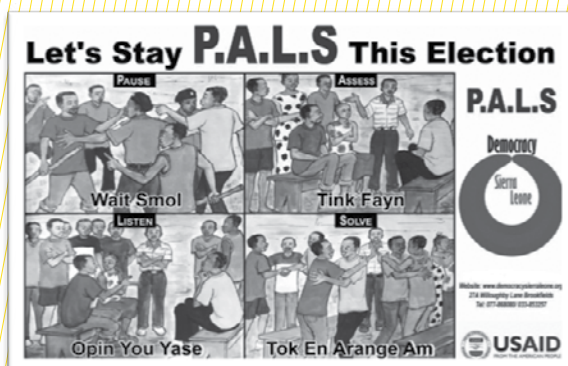
results in winners and losers in the electoral process. These discussions can help prepare the public to react calmly during potential flashpoints, such as during the release of preliminary election results.

Voter education campaigns that incorporate anti-violence messaging can go beyond education. They can help mobilize support for non-violence, encouraging citizens to move from a position of fear to one that is openly against violence. Such campaigns can be more effective in gaining broad community support when they not only involve passive activities, such as posters and flyers, but also more interactive and creative approaches.

Groups have used street plays, simulations and other community-engagement activities to better prepare voters for the electoral process. This may include role plays in which citizens learn how to handle a conflict at a polling station during voting or when results are posted. Community events, such as concerts for peace and candlelight vigils, can be effective ways of engaging and educating citizens in many contexts. Some groups have garnered the help of musicians and media outlets to play songs about peaceful elections or to run commercials and print ads promoting non-violence. Similarly, campaigns have involved prominent or famous people in promoting the message. Other groups have developed entertaining yet informative video clips and cartoons that can be easily disseminated on the Internet via social media.

FIGURE

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Democracy Sierra Leone's Civic Education Flyer on Mediating Conflict for the 2007 Presidential Run-off Election



# EXAMPLE

## *Youth Campaign for Peace in Kenya*

Following the disputed 2007 Kenya elections, civil society recognized the need for promoting dialogue and consensus building ahead of the 2013 elections. As part of this effort, graduates of the NDI-supported Youth Political Leadership Academy decided to launch an Inter-Party Youth Forum (IPYF). IPYF, comprising representatives from all major political parties, provided a forum for youth political party activists from across the political spectrum to collaborate on solutions to the most pressing issues

facing youth in the country. Ahead of the 2013 elections, IPYF organized a national youth peace conference in Nairobi, during which 950 youth leaders, representing all 56 registered political parties, from the 47 counties, pledged to uphold peace during the March 4, 2013 General Elections. The peace pledge formed the culmination of a nationwide peace campaign targeting youth leaders, which engaged more than 2000 youth in national and local outreach forums.





Monitoring groups have similarly engaged political parties and candidates on understanding these critical processes and peaceful avenues available for redress. There are a range of ways groups can engage parties. Monitoring groups can, for example, facilitate dialogue among parties in a neutral setting that focuses on concrete and less controversial policy issues. Groups can also cooperate with parties to develop and sign a Code of Conduct for peaceful campaign and electoral conduct. In the longer-term, monitoring groups can encourage and otherwise advocate that parties undertake intra-party reforms that mitigate the potential for violence, such as ensuring youth have sufficient channels and opportunities to rise up the party ranks and that parties engage through good faith efforts in election inter-party liaison committees led by election commissions or others.

## *COMMUNITY BUILDING AND DIALOGUE PROMOTION*

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Citizen election monitoring organizations are often large and diverse networks of citizens interested in safeguarding the election process and promoting peaceful elections. Their role as trusted and nonpartisan interlocutors means they can have significant convening power.

One way that monitoring groups have leveraged this power is by promoting dialogue and social cohesion through, for example, organizing forums or round tables on issues surrounding upcoming elections and hosting political debates or town hall meetings. Observer groups have also organized community events such as voter and civic education trainings, multi-ethnic or multi-faith public events, observer recruitment sessions and information dissemination gatherings that help bring people together.

The organizational structure of citizen monitoring groups is often based on coalitions and networks of civil society organizations. Thus, monitoring groups are often well-positioned to build sustainable coalitions during non-election years and to provide both local- and national-level platforms for dialogue and negotiation. Depending on the nature and degree of pre-existing tensions, violence mitigation can require integrated efforts across multiple sectors, including goods and service providers, women's engagement groups, environmental activists, academic advocates and institutions, law associations and commerce and labor organizations. Monitoring organizations should coordinate with these other organizations, both domestic and international, on conflict mitigation efforts surrounding elections – including those not directly involved with the elections. When possible, citizen observers should also engage the private sector to

discourage commercial influences in violent behavior and increase community participation. Building and leveraging these multi-sector relationships can help lead to better-informed, complimentary projects that address shared goals. Developing coordinated approaches to conflict mitigation can help mobilize collective action against violent behavior.

## ***MEDIATION TRAININGS***

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Citizen monitoring leadership at the national and local levels often hold community leadership roles that predispose them to playing a mediation role. At the same time, given their nonpartisan role in the electoral process, observers may be approached to mediate local-level conflicts. If observers are to respond to these situations, they must be equipped to play a more active role than simply observing and analyzing incidents and warning signs. Depending on the political context and goals of the group, monitoring organizations may consider incorporating training on dispute resolution methods into the core trainings for LTOs. Training on dispute resolution could include how to recognize and dissect a dispute, what to do in high-risk situations and what steps to take for either engaging an appropriate mediating authority or calming tensions and settling disagreements.

Training observers to be mediators can create additional safeguards for resolving disputes surrounding elections. However, depending on the goals, size and scope of a group's long-term monitoring effort, as well as the capacity of the LTOs, this additional mediator role may place too much burden on LTOs and, as a result, may hinder their ability to carry out their main responsibilities. One alternative strategy that groups may consider is to develop a separate mediation initiative that compliments the LTO effort without diverting resources from it. Another alternative is that groups may decide to partner with other organizations that have the capacity to deploy trained mediators alongside their LTOs.

Women can also play a unique role in conflict mitigation and mediation. Around the world women have been in the forefront of anti-violence efforts. In recent elections in Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe, for example, women's organizations, with the backing of UN Women, Open Society Foundations and other organizations, created women's "situation rooms" for peaceful, credible elections that monitored electoral violence against women while campaigning against violence. In addition to violence monitoring, citizen election monitoring organizations should consider the role that female observers in particular can play in violence mitigation, such as organizing women-only round tables and other community organizing activities that enrich anti-violence efforts.



# EXAMPLE

## *Conflict Mediation in Africa*

The Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) has long been incorporating local-level dispute mediation into much of its programming, particularly in conflict-prone countries. In 2005 and 2006, the organization trained and deployed specialized conflict mediators throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to help resolve disputes at

the grassroots level. In South Africa, the group worked with the South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to reestablish Conflict Management Panels for the 2011 local elections. These panels linked members of the community trained in mediation to IEC staff in order to build capacity within the IEC to diffuse electoral conflict when it arose at the local level.



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