MONITORING AND MITIGATING
ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

THROUGH NONPARTISAN CITIZEN ELECTION OBSERVATION

SAFEGUARDING THE SAFEGUARD: OBSERVER SECURITY

Citizen observers engaged in conflict mitigation and violence monitoring can face serious risks to their safety. Tracking violent incidents and surveying potential warning signs may put monitors in volatile situations and flashpoints prone to violence. Moreover, particularly in corrupt or authoritarian environments, investigating and reporting incidents may be politically sensitive and could make monitors targets for perpetrators. Citizen election monitoring groups should ensure that volunteers understand the risks involved before they commit to participate in efforts related to violence monitoring and mitigation. Such risks could be stated in the observer Code of Conduct or other commitment documents that observers are asked to sign.

At the same time, there are a number of steps that citizen groups can take to protect monitors while still achieving their organizations' goals. In contexts where observer security is a major concern, groups could form an internal committee focused specifically on observer security strategies, plans and measures. Like all aspects of planning, security policies should take into account the political context, each aspect of the electoral process, and each region of the country. Some aspects of the electoral process may be considered more dangerous than others, or some areas of the country may be more volatile, in which case organizations may adjust the level of security for those periods or locations.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most powerful ways to ensure the safety of monitors is to develop relationships within the communities in which they work, including building constructive relationships with local-level security forces and legal authorities. By ingratiating themselves with a community, monitors will be viewed as an ally instead of a threat, and key contacts will be more likely to provide avenues for rapid response if problems do arise. Moreover, monitoring group leadership should maintain dialogue with the party leaders, government, election management body and central-level security forces in order to respond to less

Social Networking and Security

New media and social networking websites can enhance security for monitors. Social networking platforms such as Facebook can be used to contact large numbers of monitors and other volunteers quickly and easily if potentially violent or dangerous situations arise. However, information on social networking sites is relatively public and can easily be shared, so citizen monitoring groups should be careful about what they post. Groups should refrain from posting anything too politically sensitive or that could place observers in compromising positions. Sites such as Twitter can allow observation leadership to monitor developing situations quickly and to take any necessary security measures in a timely manner.

isolated incidents. Strong relationships with the international community can also help deter and/or react to targeted violence against monitors.

DEVELOPING SECURITY PLANS

It is critical that citizen election monitoring organizations develop security and contingency plans for all their monitoring efforts well before they are executed. This includes creating basic security policies, clear communication structures and phone trees, as well as crisis scenario plans. When developing security plans, groups should consider any additional challenges women or minority observers may face in different scenarios. Monitoring organizations should also have legal support, such as volunteer or staff attorneys, available if a problem arises. In places where security is a significant concern, organizations should develop deployment plans that place long- and short-term observers in teams of two.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Communication policies and tools should be designed to ensure that information can be transmitted securely and with as little burden as possible. This means using secure phone lines and protected Internet connections when possible. In addition, the group's leadership should define a limited number of staff that will have access to the organization's aggregated observer data (for instance, the database), and all monitoring offices should have adequate security to protect information and property. This often includes hiring private security providers.

Generally, no personal information about monitors should be released unless the government requires it for accreditation purposes. In some extreme scenarios, groups may need to take extra precautionary measures to protect the anonymity of their monitors. This could include, for example, using identification numbers instead of personal details. In some cases, it may be appropriate for monitors and monitoring groups to maintain a "low profile." It is up to the monitoring organization to determine if and when these situations occur.

TRAINING

Security should be a part of every citizen observer's monitoring training. Monitors should be clear on who they should contact and how in the case of an emergency. In addition, all monitors should be taught basic precautionary measures they can take, including:

- **Remove oneself from a dangerous situation**: if a monitor feels as though her/his life is in danger, that person should leave the situation immediately. Even though violence monitors seek to collect complete and accurate information on violent incidents, this information can be collected through interviews after the incident is over.

- **Remain neutral in all disputes**.

- **Always carry an identification document** and monitor accreditation, if one is issued.

- **Take every threat seriously**: any and all threats to monitors should be reported immediately to the headquarters.

- **Act professionally and remain calm**.

RELEASING REPORTS AND DISSEMINATING INFORMATION

Citizen monitors often collect and report sensitive information, and public statements and reports issued by monitoring organizations can have a social and political impact. It is important that the entire monitoring network, including regional and local branches, as well as all monitors, are made aware when reports are released from headquarters. This can allow them to prepare for any adverse reactions that may occur. Many groups only issue reports from the central, headquarters level, in part as a way to help protect staff and monitors outside of the capital.

Given the complex and sensitive information that monitoring groups are in possession of, they should develop plans for how to release information and what to release in different scenarios. Monitoring group leadership should always assess the security situation before releasing data, and in some cases not all data may be appropriate for public consumption. If there is a high probability that findings could provoke tensions, groups may consider informing stakeholders and authorities of some of their findings before releasing them publicly.

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