

An Integrated Approach to Elections and Conflict

Lisa Kammerud

April 2012



Global Expertise. Local Solutions.
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IFES White Paper

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This white paper draws on the following publications:

Bardall, Gabrielle. "A Conflict Cycle Perspective on Electoral Violence." *Monday Developments*. Interaction. Vol 28. No. 3. March 2010.

Kammerud, Lisa. "Merging Conflict Management with Electoral Practice: The IFES Experience." in *Elections in Dangerous Places: Democracy and the Paradoxes of Peacebuilding*. David Gillies (ed). McQueen University Press, October 2011.

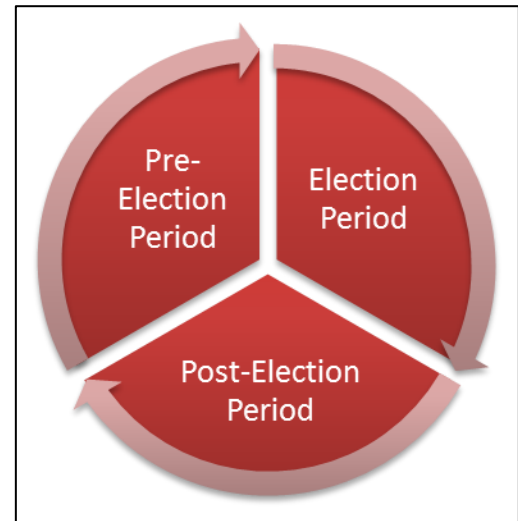
Introduction

Elections provide an opportunity for peaceful competition between political ideas and personalities and for political and social debates to play out in an arena of constructive conflict. Maintaining this opportunity for constructive conflict requires attention to the election process beyond Election Day. Voting is only a single event within a cycle of activities and processes that connects one Election Day to the next. Thus, most practitioners and donors have adopted an electoral cycle approach to provide adequate assistance and proper planning (Figure 1). Yet, this approach may not be sufficient in addressing certain challenges that impact the credibility of an election.

Electoral violence is just such a challenge. It requires electoral practitioners to look beyond the lens of the electoral cycle to formulate effective strategies for analyzing, mitigating and resolving electoral violence. IFES argues that current approaches to electoral violence are hampered by compartmentalization of information and perceptions. This compartmentalization results in an explicit or implicit separation between the objective of assessing and addressing possible conflict triggers and the objective of holding a technically correct election.

IFES believes that effective electoral planning can and should merge technical expertise with a multi-stakeholder approach to election conflict, with the election management body (EMB) at center stage. This can best be accomplished when electoral practitioners and other stakeholders supplement the electoral cycle approach with a conflict cycle approach to address electoral violence.

Figure 1: Electoral Cycle



Gaps in Current Approaches

Although technical election assistance encompasses a range of donors, implementers, activities and priorities, certain patterns emerge. Specifically, it is common for election management support to be separated from the management of political tensions and conflicts that commonly arise during the electoral period. That is, donors, organizations and individuals compartmentalize their work – elections on one hand or conflict and peacebuilding on the other. For instance, the United Nations (UN) has several bodies who may become involved in or whose work touches on the electoral cycle, including the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS). Often, more than one body is present within a given country, and within each, more than one program may focus on democracy or electoral issues. In light of the variety of actors involved, the UN Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD) was created within DPA to “ensure coherence and consistency” in UN involvement in elections.¹ To make matters more complicated, in most countries, each of these bodies would have its own offices, objectives, funding pools and partnerships with local organizations and institutions. While the challenges

¹ UN Department of Political Affairs, “Who provides UN electoral assistance,” <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/main/issues/elections/actors>, and “Electoral Assistance,” <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/main/issues/elections>, both accessed on April 17, 2012.

of internal UN information sharing have been frequently discussed, this issue also exists in other organizations in relation to elections and conflict.

International humanitarian organizations, such as Mercy Corps, CARE and Oxfam, that may be heavily involved in peacebuilding activities either maintain separate divisions for electoral assistance or do not focus on that area of work.² In a notable exception, Oxfam partnered with IFES in its Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) program and accompanying conflict prevention efforts in Burundi in 2010. While there is nothing wrong with specialization among donors or international organizations, the lack of vision in sharing information and addressing what is clearly a cross-sector issue limits our efforts to address electoral violence.

The post-election crisis in Kenya in 2007-08 was, in part, due to these limitations. Before the election, property and ethnic conflicts were simmering in the lead-up to a winner-take-all election. Unresolved political and land conflicts in the Rift Valley over the last two decades had been characterized as government-supported by human rights groups and researchers. While the elections in 2002 were relatively peaceful, as was (to a lesser degree) the 2005 referendum, political inequities and underlying conflicts were not resolved. The proposed constitution was voted down in the referendum. The government associated opposition parties with ethnic rivals involved in ongoing land conflicts in the Rift Valley. The president replaced 19 of 22 election commissioners in the lead-up to the election. There seemed to be reluctance among the international community to assess and react to the possible risks of conflict and outright violence as Election Day approached, and the outcome promised to be extremely close. The perception among some development sectors that their work had paid off with a stable system was not shared by many of the grassroots and conflict-focused groups who noted the increase of inflammatory rhetoric and hate speech on local radio stations and growing frustrations with the incumbent party during the pre-election period.³ It was only after the violence erupted that this gap in information and perceptions began to be addressed.

An Integrated Approach

Bridging this gap requires reframing elections and conflict. It starts with looking at the electoral cycle and the conflict cycle as the bases of two different types of programming. The electoral cycle (as described above) allows for an expanded view of all electoral processes and related programming that incorporates the social and political context during and between elections. It also extends to such activities as analyzing election results, the formation of government, preparation of reforms and procedures for the next set of elections and supporting education and advocacy activities related to election and election reform. The conflict cycle (in which a country experiences cyclical periods of latent violence, escalation of tension, violent outbreaks and de-escalation of conflict) is the source of common conflict programming responses (Figure 2 and 3), just as the electoral cycle approach helps frame electoral assistance activities. The conflict cycle helps us situate visible violence as a part of a longer process, just as Election Day is but one point in the electoral cycle. While violence appears to erupt suddenly, it is simply one stage in the cycle. Thus, electoral violence has its roots in each cycle and the most efficient responses to electoral conflict will also be rooted in both cycles.

² This draws in part from the author's interactions with humanitarian organizations in the field during EVER projects in relation to information sharing and other issues surrounding electoral violence risks and prevention. One humanitarian organization country director in Sudan specifically noted that there was not a way for its voter education work to contribute, when asked what the organization might be able to do regarding disseminating information on peaceful electoral competition or identified risks in communities.

³ Brown, Stephen, (2009) "Donor responses to the 2008 Kenyan crisis: Finally getting it right?" *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 27:3 389-486. Brown, Stephen, "Quiet Diplomacy and Recurring "Ethnic Clashes" in Kenya," in *From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict*, Sriram, Chandra Lekha, Ed. 2003.

To deal with the particular dynamics of elections and conflict, the electoral cycle approach alone is not sufficient. Electoral conflict (and violence) can be better understood when placed within the conflict cycle, and better addressed when practitioners look at what conflict programming would be most relevant. Understanding the connection and overlap between the conflict cycle and the electoral cycle will help develop and deliver technical assistance programs to EMBs that address conflict more explicitly, consistently and effectively.

Figure 2: Conflict Cycle

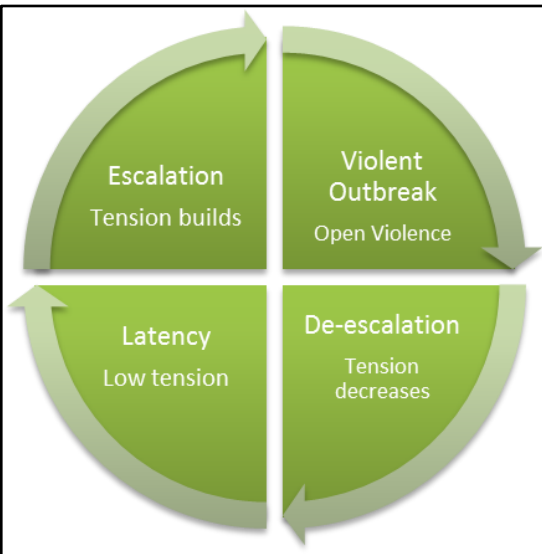


Figure 3: Conflict Response Cycle



A wide variety of conflict dynamics and triggers exist during the electoral process in countries in which election assistance programs operate. Many transitional democracies have socio-economic, ethnic, political or religious cleavages that may be aggravated by elections (e.g., Kenya, India, Guyana and Kyrgyzstan). There may be insurgent groups that threaten the integrity of the electoral process (e.g., Iraq, Afghanistan and Bangladesh). There may be a dominant party or state actor(s) that routinely harms, intimidates or influences participants in the electoral process (e.g., Azerbaijan and Zimbabwe). This range of conflict triggers means facilitating a credible, peaceful electoral process requires much more than simply addressing technical election issues. It requires understanding conflict dynamics and explicitly working to analyze, prevent, mitigate and resolve conflicts while supporting an electoral process.

In recognition of the limits of current approaches, there has been a surge of interest in elections and conflict and how to “mainstream conflict prevention.”⁴ Although recent research has bolstered the argument that electoral

⁴ See in particular, Bardall, G., “A Conflict Cycle Perspective on Electoral Violence: Taking the Long and Broad View on Electoral Violence”, *Monday Developments*, March 2010, accessed at <http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/Articles/2010/A-Conflict-Cycle-Perspective-on-Electoral-Violence.aspx>; *Elections and Conflict Prevention*, UNDP, 2010; and Alston, P., *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions: Addendum, Election-related killings*, A/HRC/14/24/Add.7, 21, UN, May 2010; “Background information on the Chamber’s process of ruling on summons to appear or warrants of arrest,” International Criminal Court, December 16, 2010, available at <http://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/exeres/C3D48F4D-8132-46AC-A84D-94D87F3C64C4.htm>; and “Insight into the ICC’s Investigation of Election Violence in Kenya,” <http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/Interviews/2010/Insight-into-the-ICCs-Investigation-of-Election-Violence-in-Kenya.aspx>, May 2010).

violence in many countries is rooted in existing cleavages which may be escalated by procedural or political triggers, the divide between conflict-related programming and election-related programming is still wide.⁵

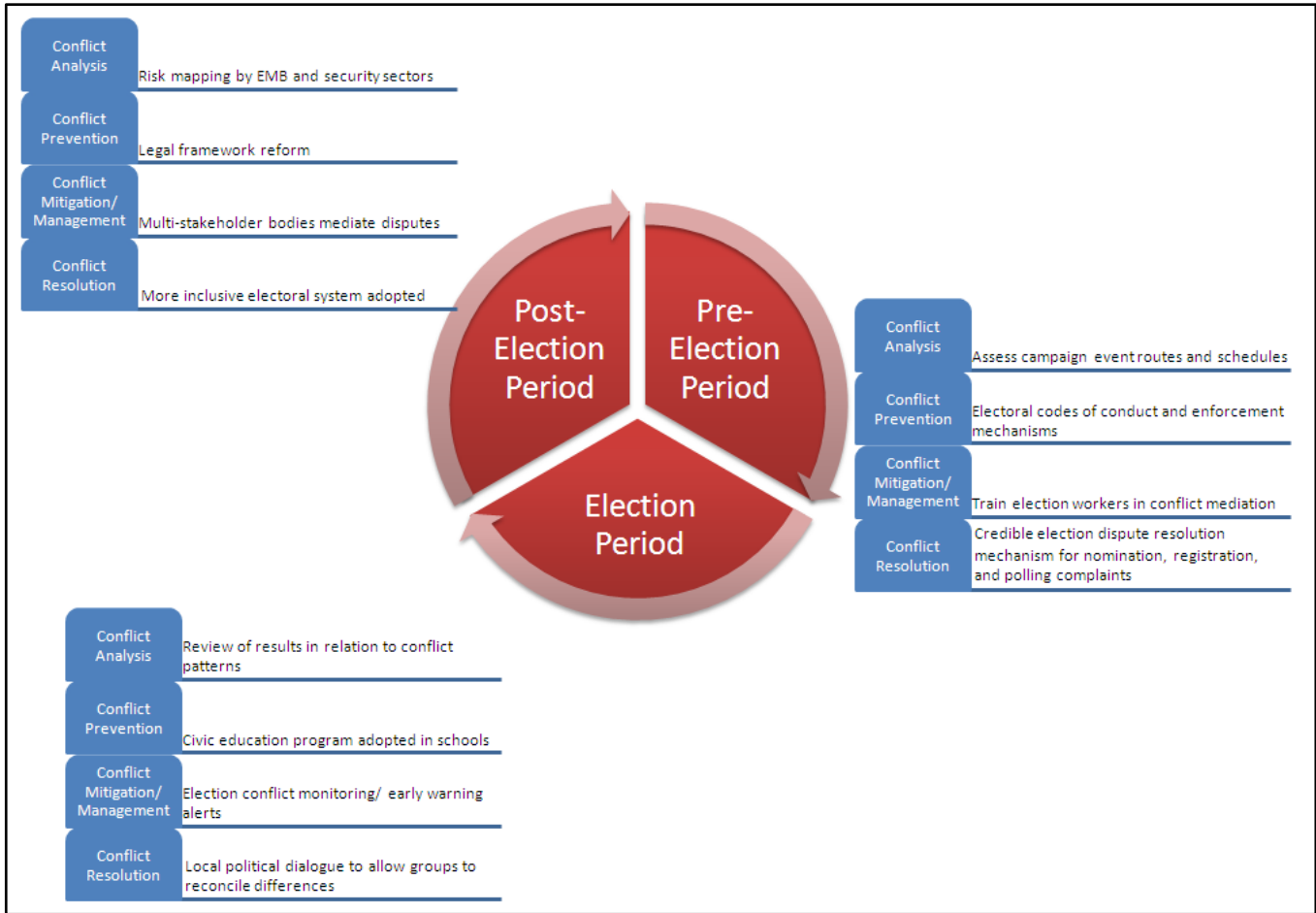
However, through the addition of this relatively simple framework of common conflict response programming (Figure 3), it is possible to create a phased approach to understanding and dealing with election conflict through analysis, prevention, mitigation/management and resolution. The resulting approach, known as integrated conflict and elections programming (ICEP), could help improve country analysis and cross-sector cooperation. ICEP explicitly maps the electoral cycle to conflict-response programming, resulting in a holistic perspective that addresses the country context and conflict dynamics (Figure 4). This approach helps to clearly delineate responsibilities across sectors and accentuate the importance of an effective and joint strategy for reducing the risk of electoral violence.

Aided by this approach to addressing electoral conflict, practitioners can readily identify opportunities to analyze, prevent, manage or resolve conflict in each phase of the electoral cycle. Next, these can be used to identify steps each stakeholder group should take, with a view toward cooperating across sectors to meet identified conflict and electoral management goals.

As seen in Figure 4, if one maps election assistance activities to conflict-cycle program objectives, every stage of the electoral cycle could support various conflict responses (analysis, prevention, mitigation and/or resolution) through elections-based programming. If we look at each conflict response area, we can identify election assistance activities that already exist and new approaches that could further integrate conflict and elections programming.

⁵ On causes of election violence, relevant publications include Sharma, R. and Kammerud, L., "Election Violence: Causes, Trends, and Mitigation," conference paper the April 22, 2010 Electoral Symposium, IFES and Ahrm Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPS), April 22, 2010; Fischer, J., "Electoral Conflict and Violence: A Strategy for Study and Prevention," Chaturvedi, A., "Rigging Elections with Violence", *Public Choice*, 125: 1/2, 189-202, 2005; Collier, P. and Vicente, P.C., 'Violence, Bribery, and Fraud: The Political Economy of Elections in Africa', Oxford University, Working Paper, 2009. Regarding the gap between conflict and election work, it should be noted that several initiatives focusing on election violence are underway, such as those programs at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University, Switzerland (<http://www2.pcr.uu.se/index.htm>) and the United States Institute for Peace (USIP). USIP also has a programming side and launched workshops on elections and violence in Sudan in 2009 to generate dialogue (see <http://www.usip.org/programs/projects/preventing-electoral-violence-sudan>). Though we are in communication with these and similar initiatives, more can be done to increase their interaction with election practitioners

Figure 4: Electoral Cycle plus Conflict Response Cycle – Illustrative Activities



Conflict Analysis

Currently, conflict analysis receives less program emphasis than conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution. However, a conflict cycle perspective demands proportional emphasis on analysis. This means that at each phase of the electoral cycle, different types of analysis can be employed to help understand conflict dynamics in a given country and how they affect the electoral process. Well before tensions and triggers of electoral violence appear, stakeholders can better position themselves by studying the causes and historic patterns of electoral violence in their country.

In any transitional country, a variety of assessments are often undertaken by various implementers to meet various objectives. These are often well-tested and trusted methods for accomplishing those objectives. For example, election assistance providers routinely use pre-election technical assessments (PETAs) to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in electoral procedures, administration, logistics, legal frameworks and other electoral processes. Generally PETAs discuss the risk of violence if it is present, but usually in a very direct relationship to electoral processes and procedures. Other organizations may undertake conflict mapping or conflict analysis exercises as part of their ongoing work. Security agencies and EMBs may also produce assessments of the risk of electoral violence in pre- or post-election periods, and on Election Day. These separate assessments generally focus on physical threats and harm to political stakeholders or processes, but do not generally include analyses of voter intimidation, economic pressures, land disputes or ethnic/religious divisions and how these might affect the electoral environment other than in clashes at political rallies or voting booths. Given that the assessments are conducted separately, they are likely to prioritize different types of issues and develop different solutions and action plans. This results in multiple risk assessments that include vital, but incomplete, analysis and recommendations.

In other words, it is neither common practice to conduct joint analysis, nor to share findings from conflict analysis or electoral security risk assessments across sectors. This means that while each individual assessment can be very useful, there will be missed opportunities to better assess and program for the risks of electoral conflict. In recognition of this, IFES has incorporated a wider conflict assessment lens to our PETAs, as was done in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. It is important to keep in mind that conflict analysis is not an activity done only during the pre-election period. It can and should be done in longer or shorter iterations to inform choices between elections and in the post-election period as well. Many programs are also beginning to emphasize coordination in information gathering, analysis and planning throughout the electoral cycle.

Without such coordination, gaps in analysis and information sharing can allow openings for conflict or increase its likelihood. For example, such gaps can foster conflict in the design or reform of the electoral system or legal framework. Reforms are often an important part of the between-elections period in countries, and system design happens well in advance of many post-conflict elections. Conflict analysis should complement legal, political, cultural and other considerations in electoral system design. Many analysts pointed out that the system designed in Afghanistan, in the 2000s, was not sensitive to the long-term goal of conflict management, and did not take into account all possible conflict triggers that the chosen system could create. Conflict analysis and electoral and political assessments contributed to positive changes in the electoral system in Iraq, when it changed from the system chosen in 2005.⁶

⁶ See Reilly, Ben “Understanding Elections in Conflict Situations” and Lemieux, Marc “Iraq’s Conflicted Transition to Democracy: Analyzing Elections in a Violent Society” in *Elections in Dangerous Places: Democracy and the Paradoxes of Peacebuilding*. David Gillies (ed). McQueen University Press, October 2011.

When greater coordination is present, conflict risks can be identified earlier and better managed, or avoided altogether. Conflict analysis can be integrated into risk assessments throughout the electoral cycle, with great benefit to security planning and stakeholder decision-making. In Lebanon, a methodology was designed by IFES and local partners to explicitly support capacity for risk assessment in the lead-up to the 2009 elections and maintained throughout the process. The Lebanon Election Violence Risk Assessment (LEVRA) project was designed in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and Municipalities to be an integrated part of the ministry's risk assessment tools.⁷ The project drew upon expert assessments of three types of violence: political, confessional and electoral. Each constituency was given a risk rating of high, medium or low for each type of violence. Data was continually collected to update the rating (Figure 5). The ministry used the information as it worked with the Lebanese Armed Forces to draft an election security plan. Once accepted by all, the ministry and the Armed Forces, along with the EMB, established a security operations room as the plan was implemented.

Throughout the election period, risk levels were updated and the results were used for ongoing security arrangements and responses. The results were also shared with a key group of stakeholders including political parties and local organizations throughout the election period. LEVRA data was essential in identifying key hotspots for appropriate deployment of security personnel and ensuring additional sensitivity for the management of campaign events, the conduct of polling and increased risks during the results period. Overall, this approach increased the quality of information gathered and the amount of cooperation and information sharing between election officials, security agencies and local government. There was also a distinct decrease in the number of violent incidents recorded by the LEVRA project following the adoption of the security plan. Though this model involved constituency-level analysis, it could be easily modified according to resources and needs by scaling up the geographic level of analysis, simplifying the map and graphics and/or leveraging the resources of local actors who are already gathering information. At a minimum, indicators could be developed and shared among local actors, such as security agencies and election officials, to provide a standard information-gathering process.

In general, tips for better analysis across the stages of the electoral cycle include:

- **Between elections**, actors should come to a consensus and agree on the coordination of assessments and analysis. This way cross-sector cooperation will already be in place and the plan of action is clear as the pre-election period approaches.
- Legal framework analysis **between elections** can better incorporate conflict sensitivity. Justice sector officials, local organizations and others must analyze the legal and regulatory framework for potential friction points that could create or aggravate conflict.
- Greater emphasis on country context and analysis of conflict dynamics **between elections** can yield more informed election-related planning and assessments. Conflict analysis tools can be used to understand past conflict dynamics and to assess risk in upcoming electoral process.
- Identify appropriate technologies and tools for gathering, visualization and sharing of information more effectively. In **any phase of the election cycle** risk assessment methodologies and conflict mapping software can be used to map, track and analyze data on structural tensions, social divides and friction points throughout the country.
- Public opinion and knowledge can also be analyzed as part of conflict analysis. Through various outreach and activities, such as public meetings and conflict mapping exercises, in the **between-election and pre-**

⁷ IFES, "Background on the Lebanon Election Violence Risk Assessment Project," 2010, <http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/Papers/2010/Background-on-the-Lebanon-Election-Violence-Risk-Assessment-Project.aspx>, accessed on April 12, 2012.

election phases, civic actors and political parties can gain key insights into their constituencies, in terms of conflict dynamics, voter education needs and constituents' policy priorities.

- During the **election and post-election period**, conflict analysis should identify immediate threats to particular processes, such as political primaries, voter registration, movement of sensitive materials, polling station logistics, vote counting transportation and facilities or victory rallies.
- **Overall**, practitioners should work together to create a standard for ensuring conflict analysis is included in the design of electoral assistance programs. This standard should demand that (1) electoral assessments such as PETAs and legal/procedural reform explicitly include conflict assessment and (2) conflict analysis and risk assessment capacities are integrated into security planning and strategic planning exercises.

In many countries, resources for analysis by all groups are limited. While this issue deserves to be the focus of its own paper to advocate for more funding attention, it is important to focus on what can be done with limited resources to move toward the standard noted above.

In any effort to share analytical information, the EMB can serve as a natural central repository for information and for convening dialogues. Ideally, if stakeholders agree on an ICEP approach well in advance of the elections, consultative meetings could be held with increasing frequency during each phase of the electoral cycle to discuss conflict programming issues raised in this paper. Of course, in many countries, consultative bodies, donor coordination meetings or joint operation centers already exist. In these cases, improvement could be made in discussing ICEP as an explicit tool, which builds and maintains momentum and coordination on conflict-sensitive electoral assistance.

While no conflict analysis is ever exhaustive, when all the primary stakeholders do their own research and communicate results at each phase it can foster a deeper understanding of the dynamics that cause conflict in all parts of the electoral process.

Conflict Prevention

There is already much dedication and awareness of the need for electoral conflict prevention as seen in a variety of efforts by EMBs, local organizations and other institutions.⁸ However, challenges remain in systematically operationalizing many of the better practices that have been documented. This is particularly true in the emphasis placed on EMB credibility, cooperation, planning and training programs that are important for conflict prevention.

EMB credibility is important for conflict prevention as it has great impact on what UNDP has termed the ability of electoral processes to withstand shocks to the system.⁹ That is, while efficient election administration should prevent conflict, it is not a guarantee. One of the factors that can affect conflict around elections is the degree to which political groups and the public trust the EMB. EMB credibility and transparency can go a long way toward ensuring peaceful elections, even in the face of irregularities or crises. This was the case in South Africa in 1994, when the actual polling process exhibited a number of irregularities and voters waited in extremely long queues, amidst other technical problems. However, the trust in the EMB and in the electoral process itself was extremely high. There was a great deal of political will to see the process through no matter the outcome. The irregularities and difficulties did not result in violence, although similar issues might have triggered conflict in other

⁸ Illustrative examples are noted in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) *Guide to Elections and Conflict*.

⁹ The *Guide to Elections and Conflict* notes the ability to withstand shocks to the system as a key to avoiding violence.

environments.¹⁰ This was also the case in Ghana in 2008, when polling in one region was postponed and the eventual national results of an extremely close election were hotly contested. Despite the bitterness of the dispute, the public and political parties waited for the electoral commission to follow its process and come to its decisions.

In contrast, in Kenya in 2007, one can see the impact of low trust in an EMB and state institutions. In the 2007 election, the casting of ballots went well, but ensuing irregularities (both real and alleged), bad communication strategies and underlying grievances combined to fuel violence. Following the election, rumors spread as allegations and conflicting reports from polling stations suggested that there were irregularities in the results process. The EMB, rather than addressing the issues head on, simply announced results. Then, to make matters worse, revealed it had been pressured to do so. The public and opposition groups were skeptical of the electoral process already and this confusion fueled anger among opposition supporters. The lack of a clear statement of the problem and possible solutions (e.g., election contests, mediation, results audit) left the situation vulnerable to escalating violence. The media blackout that followed only served to feed fear and violence. As Judge Johann Kriegler pointed out in *Elections in Dangerous Places*, weaknesses in the Kenya EMB were not evident on the surface of the 2002 election process.¹¹ Yet there were systemic issues and weaknesses that were not resolved with between-elections support. It is possible that increased attention to fundamentals and capacity building might have made a difference in the EMB's choices in response to political pressure and allegations of wrongdoing in 2007.

When election assistance programs and EMBs prioritize long-term professionalism, capacity building, inclusiveness and transparency in election administration, they are in effect prioritizing conflict prevention. The benefits of trust and transparency are most clear when things go wrong, not when they go well. This type of conflict prevention must take place at all phases of the electoral cycle and form an integral part of the EMB's list of priorities.

Election security planning and training are also key to electoral conflict prevention because they contribute to a system that can better absorb shocks. Planning and training must be inclusive, flexible and initiated early enough in the electoral cycle to be fully implemented. A coordinated approach between EMBs and the security sector makes a huge difference in the planning and training done within each institution. Forming a joint operations center manned by both EMB and security officials has proven instrumental in many elections in ensuring effective information sharing, timely decision making and level-headed responses at critical junctions.

While the need for training for poll workers and security agencies during elections is well-accepted, many conflicts still arise from disputes at polling stations and the role of security forces before, during and after elections. Holistic and joint approaches to training for EMBs and security forces could be helpful for EMB professionalism and for more effective electoral security.

Within EMBs, training of electoral staff and poll workers could involve more conflict resolution techniques and conflict awareness. In most cases, some attention to conflict management is paid in poll worker training materials. For example, many feature scenarios with a difficult voter(s) but do not provide guidance on strategies for diffusing conflict, clear protocols for engaging security or an awareness of potential ethnic or linguistic or other differences that could cause confusion or conflict in administering the polls. This type of guidance could be tailored to the conflict dynamics and likely triggers in a particular country, region or municipality. It could provide great rewards for a relatively small change in the current process.

¹⁰ Kriegler, Johann, "Electoral Dispute Resolution: A Personal Perspective," in *Elections in Dangerous Places: Democracy and the Paradoxes of Peacebuilding*. David Gillies (ed). McQueen University Press, October 2011.

¹¹ Ibid.

Similarly, the pool of permanent or long-term EMB staff may not receive training in conflict management or constructive dialogue. The well-known Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) methodology features a unit on electoral security, but interpersonal conflicts and dealing with political party or other stakeholder conflicts could be improved by incorporating mediation and conflict resolution training. If BRIDGE is not used, this type of training could be delivered within local training strategies.¹² The EMB leadership is the body that will be at the forefront of resolving tensions and conflicts that arise from alleged irregularities, delays and other process challenges. A basic understanding of negotiation and conflict resolution principles is seen as very valuable for political parties, businesses and local leaders. It is also crucial for the institution at the front line of an electoral process.

Security forces also face training gaps in preparation for elections. With the exception of certain post-conflict or ongoing conflict environments, the burden of day-to-day electoral security falls on domestic police services. In many transitional countries, the police force already faces enormous challenges in resources and capacities, and may not have the trust of the public, certain communities or political groups. Competence and credibility gaps cannot be filled in the short time usually available for training security forces in preparation for elections. However, these challenges could be better addressed through increased cooperation with EMBs.

Involving the EMB in security training preparation (to ensure the electoral process is explained clearly) and instituting joint sessions would improve Election Day coordination and resolution of problems. EMBs or electoral experts should have some input into training for security forces or hold high-level joint sessions to ensure that electoral procedures are clear to security forces. This will also help ensure that all stakeholders are on the same page in terms of rules of engagement in dealing with security challenges in pre-, post- and Election Day phases. Materials for training security forces can be difficult for those outside the security sector to retrieve from online libraries as well as on the ground. Yet, security officers' knowledge of electoral processes and the ability to work with poll workers at the community level and the EMB leadership at a high level is crucial for efficient and peaceful elections.

This gap in training cooperation is another example of the sector-specific focus mentioned earlier. That is, those donors and implementing partners who work with the security sector are often not well connected with those who work in other areas of development. A different group of donors and experts generally focuses on security reform and training, and this group is not always involved in donor coordination meetings or other joint programs that focus on elections. Even when the level of coordination for training and operations in the field is high, it often begins at the last minute.

Coordination was difficult to achieve in South Sudan in the lead up to the elections in April 2010, when a great deal of civilian and UN aid were directed toward the electoral process. The election security challenges were extensive. Security sector reform had proceeded slowly since 2005. The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) left the newly formed South Sudan Police Service (SPSS) with large numbers of marginally trained police involved in unresolved power struggles between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), one of the principle belligerents in the decades-long civil war. Ahead of the April 2010 elections, there were many examples of the SPLA and the public disregarding SPSS authority.¹³ Yet coordination and training on election

¹² BRIDGE is a modular professional development program with a particular focus on electoral processes. The five BRIDGE partners are the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), International IDEA, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD). For more information, see <http://bridge-project.org/>.

¹³ Much of the on-the-ground knowledge comes from interviews with local electoral and government officials across South Sudan conducted by IFES' electoral conflict assessment team in March 2009; for a review of the complexities involved specifically with reforming the South Sudan Police Service, see Alfred Sebit Lokuji, Abraham Sewonet Abatneh, Chaplain Kenyi Wani, Police Reform in Southern Sudan, NSI and CPDS, June 2009.

security did not begin until six months out. Once the issue was prioritized, an election security group was created, and eventually replicated at the state level in South Sudan.

The priorities for election security were joint meetings and workshops to establish agreement on the roles of the SPSS and the SPLA, and to coordinate resources and trainings. Joint operations centers led by electoral authorities to coordinate with security forces were set up at state and county levels. Donors provided an array of communications equipment to these bodies, though training had not been widespread as of March 2011. The police training program was also not projected to train the number of officers needed for deployment on Election Day. Despite challenges of resources and time, the mere existence of the JOCs and facilitated trainings and workshops contributed to a then-unprecedented level of collaboration between electoral officials, the SPSS and SPLA.¹⁴ However, this scenario does illustrate the need to start such coordination, training and planning far in advance of Election Day.

Training and planning is crucial for avoiding post-election conflicts that often center on results announcements. Ensuring a transparent electoral results system; paying extra attention to explaining how results aggregation and tabulation will actually work; and sharing timelines and results, by polling station level, at all steps of the process are crucial to achieve the required confidence in the results process by all stakeholders. The process is crucial, as are strategies for disseminating information, working with the media, issuing public statements and developing contingency plans for addressing conflicts or controversy. Having these processes and plans in place and in advance will build trust between the EMB and parties before results are announced – this trust is essential to reducing negative reactions at the first sign of problems.

It is also important that the public trusts and understands the results process and how the results translate into seats or winners. That is, it is important to educate voters – in advance – on the process, as well as minimum votes needed, seat allocation, run-off requirements, etc. For instance, tensions rose swiftly in East Timor in 2007 when the use of a complicated formula for seat allocation led to coalition-building that did not seem to properly reward the party that won the most votes. An extensive education campaign organized by IFES and other partners was critical in reducing tensions, but such post-Election Day campaigns do not always work. In terms of improving work using the ICEP lens, local and international organizations on the ground focused on non-election issues should closely monitor for escalating conflict and tension in all phases of the election, particularly in the waiting period for results. Warning signs should be communicated to appropriate authorities or through trusted networks. This communication loop could be another use of an ICEP working group or inclusion of conflict-related information sharing in existing, coordinated efforts.

Monitoring and watchdog initiatives, whether initiated by state institutions or civil society organizations, can provide accurate, continuous information on existing/increasing tensions, electoral violence or electoral violations. They can increase conflict prevention success because they address impunity, secrecy and rumors – problems that often foster electoral conflict in transitional democracies. Monitoring and watchdog mechanisms help limit the space and opportunity for fraud and corruption, reducing the potential for conflict. Such mechanisms range from transparency measures the EMB introduces, to political finance regimes, to conflict monitoring and early warning systems, to election dispute resolution (EDR) case monitoring to election observation, and many others.

The work of EMBs in identifying best practices and regulatory provisions to ensure integrity of an electoral process plays an important role in preventing conflict. This process includes developing auditable procedures that prevent or deter fraud and corruption based on a comprehensive fraud risk assessment, and measures to

¹⁴ Based on interviews with Lt. Gen. Gordon Kur Micah, Deputy Inspector General of Police, South Sudan Police Service, United States Government (USG) officials in Juba and Khartoum.

ensure transparency and inclusive participation in the election. While many EMBs do attempt to put such measures in place, the link between these measures and conflict prevention is not always made. In volatile electoral environments, showcasing efforts at accountability and transparency can be played up in public outreach and in dialogues with parties and other stakeholders explicitly for conflict prevention purposes.

Further, work on strengthening regulations, detection and enforcement in political finance can support the prevention of violence by reducing the resources that serve as incentives for winning elections and funding violence. Political and campaign finance regimes create avenues through which the electoral, legal and media sectors can better monitor, detect and sanction violations. Civil society organizations can monitor corruption, campaign spending, election dispute cases and other elements of the electoral process to contribute to increased information for stakeholder action and public accountability for wrongdoing. In Jamaica, where the link between corruption and electoral violence is well known, this has become one avenue for addressing violence. In 2011, the Election Commission sought to pass sweeping reforms to limit corruption, and the local coalition Citizens Action for Free and Fair Elections (CAFFE) ran a campaign called “Corruption Hurts.”

Non-governmental actors, including the media, local organizations and political parties, may be more recognized for promoting and implementing monitoring and advocacy efforts. Early warning mechanisms for preventing electoral violence as well as educational initiatives and campaigns that promote non-violent campaigning and legitimate means to resolve grievances, help establish people’s rights and responsibilities in a democracy, and what is and is not legitimate debate and disagreement. This context can help diffuse or channel tension to the appropriate dispute resolution forum before it triggers violence. These activities, using a range of messages, would also span each electoral phase.

Election conflict monitoring was recommended specifically as a successful strategy in the 2010 UN report on election-related killings.¹⁵ The most effective monitoring and reporting initiatives tie into intervention mechanisms, or include advocacy components, as IFES’ EVER program does. They also incorporate web-based and/or new media technologies to improve the speed and reach of information gathering and dissemination, enabling quicker response times. For example, in Burundi, as part of the *Amatora Mu Mahoro* early warning network, IFES used the EVER methodology with text-based reporting and online mapping via the Ushahidi platform to facilitate information exchange between partners, stakeholders and the public. International and local stakeholders followed the reports on an online portal where incidents of violence were mapped geographically and by type of incident (e.g., intimidation, physical harm, murder, etc.). One challenge to this type of program approach is that early warning and early response are often the focus of separate funding streams. In the long-term both should be priorities and neither can be mobilized as effectively if attention is only paid in the immediate pre-election period.

Overall, the international community could increase successful election conflict prevention efforts by investing in the basic building blocks of EMB capacity and credibility; security and election sector training; and civic education. Support to monitoring and reporting mechanisms would complement these efforts by offering independent sources of information.

In general, tips for better conflict prevention across the stages of the electoral cycle include:

- Inclusive **pre-election** security planning, including a conflict analysis component.
- In the **pre-election period**, political parties, EMBs and non-governmental actors can develop codes of conduct that establish parameters for appropriate standards of behavior during an election for specific

¹⁵ Alston, P., *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions: Addendum, Election-related killings*, A/HRC/14/24/Add.7, 21, UN, May 2010.

actors (candidates and political parties, media outlets and journalists, electoral officials and security forces).

- Starting in the **pre-election period and continuing throughout**, the establishment of regular meetings of a multi-stakeholder committee that works on dispute resolution and/or election security for information sharing and airing of disputes.
- In **pre- and post-election periods**, leverage conflict programming to discuss electoral risks and issues. For instance, holding joint workshops between a voter education organization and a community-focused dispute resolution organization, or a radio talk show on reconciliation featuring a discussion of electoral competition.
- In **pre- and post-election periods**, increase cooperation on information sharing between local organization monitoring efforts and security incident tracking.
- A **between-elections** initiative to design election modules for integration into existing security sector training academies.
- Provide the EMB with continuous attention and capacity building as is given to other state institutions during **all phases of the electoral cycle**, and, in particular, **between elections** if permanent staff are involved.
- In the period **between elections**, the judicial system and legislative bodies should seek to identify issues that could make conflict more likely while making necessary reforms to the electoral framework (e.g., legislative reforms and court decisions on boundary delimitation, composition of election management bodies, candidate and voter registration, and procedures governing election dispute resolution).
- Commitment to long-term civic education **between elections** to give citizens a greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities within a democracy, and a clear idea of their relationship to the state. Unrealistic expectations and inaccurate perceptions of government, political parties, political competition and citizen's rights can lead to frustration, anger or disenfranchisement, if not corrected.
- In the **post-election period**, transparent and efficient results transmission by the EMB, as well as careful monitoring and sharing of information among local organizations, security agencies and electoral officials can identify and prevent results-related disputes and rumors.

Conflict Management and Mitigation

When election conflict does erupt, stakeholders engage in a spectrum of mitigation and management responses at different points in the electoral cycle. Many common strategies could be enhanced through ICEP and a few new tactics could be added to the menu of possible responses. Impunity for perpetrators or supporters of electoral violence is a feature that many countries with recurrent electoral conflicts have in common. It is also one of those challenges that most requires cooperation as it cuts across the justice, security and electoral sectors.

Many conflict prevention activities encouraged above can evolve into mitigation mechanisms when necessary. Electoral conflict responses can be implemented in the form of official sanctions or actions by official agencies (law enforcement, the EMB or the government), from security/military channels (special police units, military or

private security) and from informal or civilian efforts (mediation between political parties, or actions by community leaders or dialogue committees). Effective conflict response strategies involve coordinated efforts by each sector. Responding to election conflict can be among the more challenging activities for all actors involved. This is why conflict analysis, prevention and resolution are so important.

Effective, practical and cost-effective conflict mitigation requires adequate EMB authority for clearly-defined integrity and enforcement mechanisms, cross-sector information sharing and public advocacy for peace. Enforcement and integrity mechanisms, often involving official channels, can ensure that parties adhere to codes of conduct, political finance regulations and other regulations and procedures. However, perceived bias, lack of enforcement power or lack of proportional sanctions can inhibit their effectiveness. Institutional capacity building in the period between elections can help alleviate these issues. Holding offenders accountable reduces the perception of impunity, which can lead to lack of hope among the public and can make violence a more attractive tool for resolving political disputes or influencing electoral processes.

In the security sector, responses can include investigation of incidents; arrests of perpetrators; guarding of materials and facilities; patrols of campaign convoys and rallies; and military operations to neutralize areas of open conflict. JOCs, as discussed in relation to conflict analysis and prevention activities in environments with heightened security threats, may consider their main function to be coordinating conflict responses. Ideally, as described above, a comprehensive and inclusive security plan has already been developed, and has set out rules of engagement, force deployments and other protocols that include actions for prevention as well as for mitigation and management of conflict.

Post-conflict countries or those experiencing armed conflicts will, of course, require very different responses than more stable environments. While international and domestic military forces may take the lead in the former, in the latter, it is generally domestic law enforcement that is the first responder. To ensure adequate implementation of security plans, planning should be done early (as part of conflict analysis and prevention) and should inform training programs, as mentioned above, for both EMB staff and involved security forces. However, planning cannot anticipate every conflict that may manifest. Good communication and coordination across sectors will ensure timeliness and flexibility in responses if conflict escalates.

The justice sector should be prepared to respond to electoral crimes and wrongdoing that may fall under criminal or civil law, and for the specific procedures required for resolving issues filed under the electoral complaints mechanism. The ability to indict, prosecute and convict perpetrators of violence is crucial, given the level of impunity which often accompanies electoral violence. In some countries, such as Guatemala, a special task force is created to deal with investigation and prosecution of electoral violence. Challenges with this include the ability to correctly identify acts of electoral violence and the overall level of trust between the agency, the public and political parties. The key is to identify weaknesses in the current system and move to correct them in the best manner for the country context, between elections, *before* violence erupts.

Informal or locally-driven responses include multi-stakeholder groups such as those described above, as well as mediation by community leaders, party leaders or others. Advocacy, promotion of nonviolence, and early warning and troubleshooting mechanisms can be organized by civil society groups. However, relationships with state, electoral and security sectors should be pursued to ensure that the information can be used for a timely response. The EMB or local government officials may have unofficial mechanisms to respond to unfolding conflict situations. Additionally, training election officials, political parties, candidate representatives and observers on how to gather accurate, credible information on electoral breaches as well as how to disseminate information in a non-inflammatory manner, can tip the scale against growing violence. Responsible media reporting can also help control flare-ups of violence by offering accurate information to counter rumors and hate speech.

In general, tips for better conflict management across the stages of the electoral cycle include:

- In the **pre-election period**, multi-stakeholder bodies for cooperation and information sharing should respond proactively to conflicts that arise.
- **Between elections**, adequate support should be given to the development of effective and efficient enforcement and integrity mechanisms of the EMB and related regulatory bodies to create accountability for violations.
- Through the **entire electoral cycle**, early warning and early response mechanisms should be developed.
- In the **post-election period**, violence can be mitigated with increased capacity of the security sector and trained mediators across sectors to intervene in escalating conflicts.
- **Between elections**, opportunities for reducing impunity in the justice sector should be sought. Wider security sector reform or justice sector reform processes may offer opportunities to bolster capacity to address criminal acts of electoral violence. The creation of special units or task forces as noted above should be carefully considered.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution, in the electoral cycle, may refer to resolution of short-term election complaints, prosecution of perpetrators of electoral violence or resolution of deeper grievances that often drive election-related violence. The latter is less often a focus of electoral programming, though issues of corruption, representational inequities, exclusion of certain groups or geographical areas are often dealt with during the period between elections. However, socio-economic, ethnic or religious conflicts can also be addressed through electoral assistance activities such as civic education, political participation, gender participation or other educational, consensus-building or rights-based work. EMBs, political parties and government actors, as well as educational institutions and civil society actors can be involved in these types of efforts.

Institutional mechanisms such as electoral dispute resolution and other criminal and civil justice sector responses must be bolstered to function effectively throughout the electoral cycle. Formal legal adjudication processes are more likely to be effective if the groundwork has been laid by identifying, in advance, potential legal points of contention, educating political partisans on how to submit acceptable official dispute claims and training judges, lawyers and electoral administrators in dispute resolution and the investigation of alleged fraud. At the same time, alternative dispute mechanisms can also resolve tensions by focusing on negotiated resolution of electoral disputes (rather than punishment of one side or the other). The recommendations generated as government agencies and EMBs engage in lessons-learned processes add to improved performance in the future.

For example, in 2007 in East Timor, IFES implemented an assistance strategy focused on conflict prevention and resolution through partnerships with the EMB and local organizations. Support to the election complaints process resulted in new complaint forms, case management processes, and an extensive outreach and education component targeting various stakeholder groups. Local partners and IFES trainers met with citizens, political parties, journalists and dispute adjudicators to ensure all stakeholders understood their rights within the system, how and when to file complaints, and how to contribute to their resolution. Publicly releasing lists of resolved cases as complaints were heard proved highly beneficial. This unprecedented effort dramatically increased the effectiveness, credibility, accessibility and transparency of the system. It was also well-integrated

with EMB capacity building in political finance and other strategic areas, and support to local organizations in electoral conflict monitoring, early warning and peacebuilding efforts.

Unfortunately, there are many examples of long-term grievances that drive electoral conflicts. Electoral assistance may have fewer tools to address these issues, but can support partners in a variety of efforts. Media training, community dialogues, public awareness campaigns, political consensus building and other programs to build common ground and increase discussion of problems and solutions can be part of a comprehensive electoral cycle assistance program.

In Bangladesh, at the national level, the political will to reduce conflict, denounce violence or address old grievances is low. Recurrent electoral violence in Jamaican garrisons is deeply rooted in the corrupt relationship between money, patronage and politics that exists outside of the electoral process. An election-focused intervention, even if inclusive, community-led and effective, cannot resolve any of these long-term problems alone.

Long-term solutions require cooperative and innovative tactics. Monitors in the EVER program in Bangladesh in 2006 and 2007 reported that as monitoring went on, monitors learned that local political leaders in some constituencies did not want to be “caught” using violence and encouraged their supporters to avoid using violence. It is possible that ongoing intervention at the community level could capitalize on the gains noted by the EVER team. In other cases, local organizations that are active during elections can engage with the same stakeholders and push for resolution of long-term issues between elections. Seeking longer-term projects that emphasize dialogue, education, training and electoral reform could go a long way toward conflict resolution.

In general, tips for better conflict resolution across the stages of the electoral cycle include:

- In the **pre-election period**, promotion of legitimate means to resolve disputes can facilitate conflict resolution before issues become grievances.
- Throughout the pre-election period, but particularly in the **post-election period**, a credible and effective election complaints adjudication system can encourage parties to use this mechanism for addressing disputes rather than violence, and can lead to the resolution of conflicts rather than uncertainty and ongoing tension (which can fuel violence) over alleged irregularities.
- The development community should recognize that **between-elections** work on corruption, representational inequities, exclusion of certain groups or geographical areas can benefit from certain aspects of sustained electoral assistance, such as civic education, political participation, gender participation, or other educational, consensus-building and rights-based work.

Conclusion

Elections themselves will not resolve conflicts, but conflict-sensitive election assistance can contribute to effectively addressing these conflicts to foster a more peaceful election process. The backbone of a good, conflict sensitive approach is explicitly linking the conflict-response cycle and the election cycle. Merging conflict program approaches with the electoral cycle allows a better understanding of the inter-dependent roles that key stakeholders play in reducing violent conflict around an election. Bringing the two cycles together can help international and domestic electoral assistance practitioners not only better appreciate the range of activities which they already do that can be better focused on conflict-related goals, but also encourage innovation to fill gaps.

Integrating conflict analysis, prevention, management and resolution at all points of electoral cycle programming allows for a thematic approach to solutions to conflict, rather than one that is sector-based. This is a promising roadmap for streamlining conflict sensibilities with election assistance. This approach also allows for a more complementary implementation of what are otherwise separated as “hard” and “soft” approaches to security. All of this contributes toward increased effectiveness of election assistance as well as conflict management and transformation efforts.

About the Author

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