

## **Civic Education and Electoral Observation in Violent Elections**

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A majority of countries have adopted democratic elections as a mechanism for peaceful leadership selection, but political rivals in many democratizing countries regularly use violence to shape electoral outcomes (Hafner-Burton et al. 2014; Arriola and Johnson 2012). This project investigates whether the kind of democracy promotion programs typically supported by foreign donors — civic education and domestic election observation — can influence how citizens experience elections in countries where violence is widely anticipated. What effects do such programs have in such a context?

We examine this question in the context of Côte d’Ivoire’s October 2015 election. Multiparty elections in that country have been routinely tainted by violence since a democratic constitution was first enacted in 1990 (Beaulieu 2014). The last national elections, held in 2010, resulted in a political crisis when both the incumbent president and his main opponent declared themselves winners. The two candidates then sought to use violence to impose their victory. The opposition candidate was eventually installed in office with the military backing of former rebels and the United Nations. The October 2015 election we study is the first to be held in Côte d’Ivoire since the end of that violent political crisis.

The project mainly consists of a survey that uses two primes—one on civic education and one on electoral observation. We are working in the western part of the country where the Coalition of Civil Society for Peace and Democratic Development (COSOPCI) is running a civic education program across communities with considerable variation in prior history of political violence and partisan mobilization. Founded in 2004, COSOPCI is a coalition of NGOs committed to democracy and good governance. COSOPCI has been authorized by the Independent Electoral Commission of Côte d’Ivoire to conduct civic education programs prior to the upcoming election. We are working with them to randomize the neighborhoods in which they work in Abidjan. However, the level of organization required for randomization is not available in the countryside, so we will rely on the survey to randomize priming in those areas.

The random assignment will enable us to estimate the causal effects of these democracy promotion programs on potential voters’ perceptions of electoral credibility, their likelihood of voting, and their support for parties that perpetrate violence, among others. To assess the impact of the civic education, we will conduct a panel survey among randomly selected potential voters (1,800 respondents in each of the two waves). Conducting a panel survey with experimental components both before and after the election will enable us to assess whether citizen attitudes and behaviors vary systematically with exposure to these democracy programs as well as to gauge whether the treatment effects persist once the election has been concluded.

Our project has important innovations with intellectual merit that will help advance research on democracy promotion and electoral violence. First, in addition to the voter survey, we will also conduct a survey of all organizations carrying out such democracy promotion programs with international or domestic funding as authorized by the Independent Electoral Commission of Côte d’Ivoire. We plan to use the survey responses from these organizations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the types of activities carried out in the country, where they are carried out, and by whom they are carried out. This supplementary survey will enable us to examine whether the distinct strategies employed by organizations in different parts of the country can be systematically correlated with relevant observable outcomes such as voter

turnout, violent incidents, or election outcomes. Finally, we are also hoping to survey election observers again from organizations authorized by the Independent Electoral Commission of Côte d'Ivoire. This additional experimental treatment in the second wave of the panel survey to enables us to determine whether there are interactive effects between prior exposure to civic education and election observer reports on respondents' assessment of the election, including their willingness to accept the results—even if they were tainted by violence.

This study has potential for broader impact by providing policymakers with new insights for reevaluating democracy programs in violence-prone countries. To our knowledge, this study will be among the first to explicitly assess whether civic education and election observation interact in shaping voter behavior. And understanding how violence affects citizen behavior — and how such behavior might be influenced by civic education — may enable policymakers to craft interventions better suited to enhancing support for democracy in such countries.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Testable Hypotheses**

Our research design aims to investigate three sets of hypotheses concerning the impact of civic education, election observation, and their interaction.

### *2.1. Civic Education Programs*

Our study draws on insights from prior research showing civic education programs having large positive behavioral effects in new democracies. This scholarship generally finds evidence for the role of political knowledge as a causal mechanism in empowering citizens: those who better understand the democratic process appear to be more likely to actively participate in it (Finkel and Smith 2011; Gottlieb 2012). Evaluations of programs carried out under conditions of violence lead us to hypothesize that civic education should have strong positive effects on voters' democratic attitudes and behaviors. During Kenya's 2007-2008 election violence, Finkel et al. (2012) find that civic education participants were less likely to express negative attitudes about the political system, less likely to support ethnic violence, and more likely to forgive the perpetrators of violence when compared to non-participants. In Nigeria, Collier and Vicente (2014) find that an anti-violence field experiment not only increased voter turnout in the randomly selected locations where the campaign was implemented, but that there was also less violence reported by independent journalists in those locations. Relatedly, Fafchamps and Vicente (2013) find that the anti-violence campaign in Nigeria had spillover effects in the areas of voting behavior and violence perception, showing that participants transmitted program effects to non-participants through kinship ties and geographic proximity.

Beyond the political knowledge mechanism, we hypothesize that civic education may decrease the cost that potential voters associate with voting in a context of violence and intimidation through two pathways. The first concerns the individual's sense of ballot security: civic education may convince potential voters that their votes are secret and that they should not expect retribution for voting the way that they do. The second concerns common knowledge: the delivery of civic education—through public rallies and street theater—may lead voters to be less influenced by electoral violence because they perceive that their community as a whole received the message that the democracy requires peace and tolerance.

The following hypotheses constitute the main civic education effects to be assessed.

- H<sub>1</sub>: Participation in civic education should increase voter confidence in the electoral process.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Participation in civic education should decrease voter support for parties that use violence.
- H<sub>3</sub>: Participation in civic education should decrease voter approval of violent political tactics (e.g., opponent harassment).

H<sub>4</sub>: Participation in civic education should increase voter participation in election activities (e.g., rally attendance, voting).

In order to test this set of hypotheses, we will randomize treatment priming on a civic education campaign carried out across constituencies that vary in partisan alignment and violence history. All respondents will receive the statement, “Now we would like to ask you some questions about politics in Cote d’Ivoire. As you know, voters will go to the polls on October 25th to cast their vote for the President.” The treatment group will receive the additional statement, “On October 7th, an Ivoirian non-governmental organization launched a campaign to educate citizens about the right to vote secretly for any candidate they choose—freely and without fear of retaliation. In order to raise awareness among the population, that NGO has deployed agents throughout your community for this campaign.”

## 2.2. Election Observation

We also draw on scholarship concerning the impact of international and domestic election observers on electoral fraud and related elite behavior in defrauding elections (Hyde 2011; Ichino and Schundeln 2012; Asunka et al. 2014; Brancati 2014). The findings from this research suggest that the presence of observers should be generally expected to influence party behavior by deterring or displacing fraud, intimidation, and other forms of electoral irregularities. Observation may also shape voters’ behavior and attitudes by encouraging people to vote freely, increasing their confidence in the results, and, as a consequence, influencing post-electoral handling of complaints. Drawing on this literature, we posit that observation should improve citizen attitudes toward the electoral process, which, in turn, should increase the likelihood of supporting positive, legal behavior around elections and decrease the likelihood of supporting negative, illegal behavior.

It is possible that domestic election observers are viewed differently from international election observers and thus can have different effects on reducing potential costs to voting, as well as to increasing acceptance of votes. The research on recent elections in Tunisia certainly demonstrates this impact (Bush and Prather). Additionally, it may be the case that observers’ reports may have different effects depending on whether they match the experience of the voter in terms of the conduct and outcome of the elections.

The following hypotheses constitute the main civic education effects to be assessed.

H<sub>5</sub>: The presence of observers should increase voter confidence in the electoral process.

H<sub>6</sub>: The presence of observers should decrease voter support for parties that use violence.

H<sub>7</sub>: The presence of observers should decrease voter approval of violent political tactics (e.g., opponent harassment).

H<sub>8</sub>: The presence of observers should increase voter participation in election activities (e.g., rally attendance, voting).

In order to test these effects, we add an additional prime to be randomized across groups. First, in the pre-election survey, all groups receive the following statement, “The upcoming elections are rapidly approaching.” Treatment Group A also receives, “You may not be aware, however, that election observers from Ivoirian non-governmental organizations are to monitor the election with the approval of the Ivoirian government. The NGO observers plan to evaluate the elections for compliance with standards for free and fair elections.” Treatment Group B receives, “You may not be aware, however, that election observers from an international intergovernmental organization, like the U.N., is to monitor the election with the approval of the

Ivoirian government. The international observers plan to evaluate the elections for compliance with standards for free and fair elections.” Treatment Group C receives no additional statement.

In the post-election survey, these groups will then be re-randomized to receive either positive or negative statements (compared to no statement) collected from our survey of local election observers.

### *2.3. Interaction Effects*

One innovative aspect of our study will be its analysis of interaction effects between civic education and election observation. In general, we anticipate that the prime on observers, especially international observers, should make more credible the ideas in the civic education program that the costs of voting freely are truly lower.

## **3. Research Design**

The project centers on a panel survey that introduces experimental questions alongside standard questions concerning respondents’ trust in the democratic system, confidence in the election, participation in the electoral process, and concerns about violence. The same set of respondents will be interviewed twice: the first interview will occur in the 10 days leading up to the elections, and the second interview will occur after election results have been announced. This strategy allows us to measure the impact of the interventions on attitudes and behavior at distinct phases of the election. It will further allow us to capture the impact of election-related events on subjects who vary in their exposure to civic education. The survey will be administered by the Centre de Recherche et de Formation sur le Développement Intégré (CREFDI), which has conducted the Afrobarometer survey in Côte d’Ivoire and was selected through a competitive process among reputable firms. The research design and survey instrument have been approved by UC Berkeley’s institutional review board (IRB).

The first wave of the survey will deliver an experimental treatment that informs randomly selected respondents of either (1) the broad themes promoted during the civic education program, (2) the expected presence of election observers, or (3) a combination of both. The second wave to be conducted after the elections will repeat many of the same questions posed during the first wave to gauge how respondents’ attitudes may have been influenced by the election result, including the responses of parties. The second wave will also build on the project’s third component, namely, the survey of local election observers. This will provide randomly selected respondents with either positive or negative assessments provided by their local election observers. And since we will ask respondents if they have participated in a civic education program, or have been exposed to its information through others, we will be able to assess whether there are interactive effects between prior exposure to civic education and election observer reports on respondents’ assessment of the election, including their willingness to accept the results even if they were affected by violence.

To corroborate the findings from our civic education treatment, we plan to undertake two supplementary research activities that will allow us to gauge whether civic education and election observation are systematically correlated with electoral outcomes and behaviors. First, as noted above, we will conduct a survey of election observers fielded by local NGOs. Second, we will conduct a survey of all civil society organizations undertaking civic education initiatives across the country. We plan to build a geo-coded dataset of the country to estimate whether exposure to civic education, election observation, and their interaction are associated with distinct patterns of observable electoral outcomes such as incidents of electoral violence reported in the media, voter turnout, the vote shares of the competing parties, and post-election protests.

#### **4. Summary of Hypothesized Effects in First Wave Survey**

As noted above, we attempt to estimate the causal effects of democracy promotion programs by randomly assigning respondents to a civic education prime, an electoral observation prime, or a combination of the two primes (e.g., the interaction effect). The first-wave survey assesses the impact of these primes through a battery of questions designed to reflect respondents' experiences with several aspects of the October 25<sup>th</sup> presidential election. The questions are intended to reflect subjective attitudes as well as observable behaviors.

We generally expect both primes to increase the likelihood of respondents reporting positive perceptions of, and greater participation in, the electoral process. However, *a priori*, we have no theoretical or empirical basis for expecting the effects of one prime to be greater than the other. The existing literature offers no basis for such an expectation. Moreover, foreign donors have been increasingly funding both civic education and domestic election observation with the expectation that both will increase legal activity and decrease illegal activity around the elections. The theoretical expectations we detail below for key survey questions should therefore be understood as being applicable to both the civic education and election observation primes.

One nuanced expectation concerns the election observation prime. In this case, where we make a distinction between domestic vs. international observers, we draw on some case specific characteristics that may be scope conditions should one apply these findings to other cases. First, many domestic NGOs are viewed as partisan in this context, as Justine Davis has documented in pre-survey fieldwork, so domestic election observation may be viewed less positively than international election observation. However, international election observers may face different effects across partisan groups. Because the international community—and the U.N., in particular, which is mentioned in our prime—was involved in removing the country's 2010 incumbent president, Laurent Gbagbo, and protecting the incoming president, Alassane Ouattara, opposition supporters who still support Gbagbo's party, the *Front populaire ivoirien* (FPI), may be less positively influenced by the prime mentioning international election observers rather than Ivoirian election observers.

The following tables summarize the expected treatment outcomes associated with individual survey questions for our core hypotheses.

**H<sub>1</sub>: Participation in civic education should increase voter confidence in the electoral process.**

**H<sub>5</sub>: The presence of observers should increase voter confidence in the electoral process.**

The research on civic education and election observation suggests that respondents should be more likely to express positive attitudes toward democracy and their role in it. Beyond reinforcing the credibility of the election itself, we expect that exposure to such programmatic interventions will encourage respondents to express greater involvement in the democratic process by lowering perceptions of individual risk associated with voting or exercising other political rights. The survey's civic education prime, in particular, reminds respondents of the secret nature of their ballot without fear of retribution. Treated respondents should therefore be more likely to report actively engaging in the electoral process.

<b>Survey questions</b>	<b>Treatment expectations</b>
<i>Free to speak about politics</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to believe they are free to speak about politics
<i>Quality of democracy in Côte d'Ivoire</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to believe Côte d'Ivoire is a democracy
<i>Feels more Ivoirian or more ethnic in identity</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to express feeling more Ivoirian than ethnic
<i>Likelihood that the election will be free from fraud</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to believe the election will be free from fraud
<i>Confidence that fraud committed during the election will be punished</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to believe fraud will be punished
<i>Confidence that a complaint submitted to the Electoral Commission will be investigated</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to believe fraud will be investigated
<i>Importance of obeying elected government</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to express importance of obeying elected gov't
<i>Trust in political institutions: President, Electoral Commission, Opposition Parties, Police, Army, United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, Civil Society Organizations</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to express trust in political institutions

**H<sub>2</sub>: Participation in civic education should decrease voter support for parties that use violence.**

**H<sub>6</sub>: The presence of observers should decrease voter support for parties that use violence.**

Findings from prior research on civic education and election observation imply that respondents might be less likely to support the actors who perpetrate violence. However, the hypotheses above (H<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>6</sub>) cannot be fully tested in the first wave survey because many respondents will be surveyed before the end of the campaign period. They will therefore not have had the opportunity to fully observe which parties employed violence up to election day. As a result, we plan to systematically assess H<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>6</sub> during the second wave survey after the election by priming respondents on whether a particular party did, in fact, use electoral violence.

**H<sub>3</sub>: Participation in civic education should decrease voter approval of violent political tactics.**

**H<sub>7</sub>: The presence of observers should decrease voter approval of violent political tactics.**

The research on civic education and election observation suggests that respondents are not only less likely to approve of political violence, but may also be less likely to report experiencing it. The creation of common knowledge through a civic education campaign emphasizing peaceful elections may enable citizens to coordinate against politicians who might employ violence. Similarly, the expected presence of election observers might deter or displace violence if politicians expect negative observer reports to affect the legitimacy of election results. Either of these mechanisms could sufficiently pressure politicians to forgo the use of violent tactics when competing for office, thus influencing whether and how respondents might experience violence in their communities.

Survey questions	Treatment expectations
<i>Believes political violence can be justified</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to believe political violence can be justified

**H<sub>4</sub>: Participation in civic education should increase voter participation in election activities.**

**H<sub>8</sub>: The presence of observers should increase voter participation in election activities (e.g., rally attendance, voting).**

We anticipate that the treatments may increase political participation through a mechanism that simultaneously increases awareness of democratic rights and decreases perceptions of risk. Since both civic education and election observation are partly designed to ensure peaceful elections, treated respondents may be expected to report engaging in a broader array of public political activities when compared to their counterparts in the control group. At the same time, if civic education campaigns can create common knowledge in communities around democratic rights and peaceful competition, as the work of Collier and Vicente (2014) in Nigeria suggests, then treated respondents may also be expected to report experiencing fewer episodes of intimidation or violence or witnessing such episodes in their communities.

Survey questions	Treatment expectations
<i>Plans to vote in the Oct. 25th election</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to vote in the Oct. 25th election
<i>Feel safe enough to go vote</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to feel safe enough to vote
<i>Fear personally becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to fear becoming a victim of violence
<i>Feels that the 2015 national election overall will be peaceful</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to feel the election will be peaceful

<i>Political representatives in community known to support violence</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to report that their political representatives use violence
<i>Extent of participation in politics: Worked for a candidate/campaign</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to report working for a candidate/campaign
<i>Extent of participation in politics: Attended a political meeting</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to report attending a political meeting
<i>Extent of participation in politics: Attended a political rally</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to report attending a political rally
<i>Extent of participation in politics: Attended a peaceful political demonstration or protest</i>	Treated respondents should be more likely to report attending a peaceful demonstration
<i>Extent of participation in politics: Attended a violent political demonstration or protest</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to report attending a violent demonstration
<i>Feels personally pressure to vote a particular way</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to feel pressured to vote a particular way
<i>Witnessed payment offered to vote a particular way</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to report witnessing payments for votes
<i>Witnessed promise of good/service to vote a particular way</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to report witnessing promises for votes
<i>Witnessed threat to withdraw good/service to vote a particular way</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to report witnessing threats of withdrawal
<i>Witnessed threat of violence to vote a particular way</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to report witnessing threats of violence
<i>Witnessed actual violence to vote in a particular way</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to report witnessing actual violence
<i>Frequency of reports concerning violent groups or violent youth groups connected with politics active in neighborhood/village</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to report a high frequency of violent groups
<i>Frequency of reports concerning damages (vandalism) made to property in relation to elections or politics</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to report a high frequency of vandalism

<i>Frequency of reports concerning physical threats/intimidation made in relation to elections or politics</i>	Treated respondents should be less likely to report a high frequency of threats/intimidation
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We have identified the list of variables below as relevant controls for analyzing respondents' attitudes and behaviors during the electoral process.

- Age
- News source: radio, television, newspaper
- Political knowledge: voting requirements
- Political knowledge: length of term of office
- Voted in past election
- Registered to vote in current election
- Preferred presidential candidate
- Party best representing respondent
- Reporting of crime: where to seek help
- Extent of contact with civic education campaigns: face-to-face, rallies, etc.
- Perception of Ivoirian vs. international observers in detecting fraud
- Perception of institutional partisanship: Electoral Commission, Ivoirian NGOs, the U.N., ECOWAS, France, African Union
- Assets: radio, television, mobile phone, motor vehicle/motorcycle
- Occupation
- Personal economic condition: access to clean water
- Personal economic condition: access to cash income
- Education level
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Gender
- Shelter type
- Persons present during interview
- Security conditions in area: police present, army present, roadblocks present

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