

Understanding electoral violence

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THE number of electoral democratic countries has increased significantly from the year 1989 to 2011. It was 69 in 1989 and has become 117 in 2011. Now, 60% countries of the world have electoral democracy. In the year 2001, elections were held in 57 countries, and violent conflicts were witnessed in 14 countries -- violence is known to affect from 19 to 25% of elections in the African countries.

In recent years, news about electoral conflicts and violence has become a prevalent phenomenon, which we witness almost every day through the media. But many people do not understand 'what electoral violence is?' and many question 'why electoral violence?'

Unfortunately few researchers and practitioners have made an effort to define and conceptualise electoral violence. IFES defines "election violence is any harm or threat of harm to any person or property involved in the election process, or to the election process itself, during the election period."

Liisa Laakso defined it as "an activity motivated by an attempt to affect the results of the elections either by manipulating the electoral procedure and participation or by contesting the legitimacy of the results. It might involve voters' and candidates' intimidation, killings, attacks against their property, forceful displacement, unlawful detentions and rioting."

According to UNDP, election-related violence refers as "acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arise in the context of electoral competition. When perpetrated to affect an electoral process, violence may be employed to influence the process of elections, such as efforts to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll-and to influence the outcomes-the determining of winners in competitive races for political office or to secure approval or disapproval of referendum questions."

The features of electoral violence have made it distinct from other type of political

violence. It might occur in the pre-election period, on the Election Day and during the post-election period of the electoral process. And, involves different actors like government forces (police and military), political parties (leaders, members and sympathisers) and non-state armed groups (militias, rebels and paramilitaries).

Importantly, it has specific targets and these include electoral partakers (like electorates, candidates, election officers, observers and media groups), electoral materials (like ballot boxes, campaign related stuffs, registration data, polling results), electoral facilities (like voting and tallying stations) and electoral events (like campaign meetings and demonstrations, journeys to voting stations). It includes various activities such as threats, coercion, abduction, torture and many more.

The nature of politics, participating actors, elections, and design of electoral institutions are important factors to determine whether election will be free-fair and violence-free. In 'Patrimonialism' politics where the right to rule is ascribed to a person rather than an office, and the distinction between public and private domain is absent, a significant portion of a society is marginalised, and there lies more emphasis to loyalty than competence.

Thus promoting corruption, neglecting the rule of law and can trigger electoral violence.

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'patron-client' relations, and the client is expected to give political support for a particular patron or politician in order to secure personal benefits such as land, office etc. In 'patronage,' also part of neo-patrimonialism, relations is more than personal, 'high-level politics' and the clients are required to provide political support for a specific political party or a government in return for public utilities like roads, schools etc.

Politicians of clientelism politics use money to buy vote and use ethno-religious appeal for securing political support and electorates use their vote as a means of obtaining material rewards in patronage politics. This kind of politics could be the cause for violent conflict and may risk to peaceful political transitions.

In post-conflict societies it is found that

mainly on what make them distinct from others and use strong nationalistic and ethnic appeals to secure political support. The opposition party and their supporters, who lost via competitive election, may consider violent alternatives to assume state power and to resolve their long standing demands or grievances.

The design of electoral institutions like electoral systems, electoral rules and regulations and election administration can also be the source of electoral violence. Electoral system can be divided into plurality-majority, proportional representation, and semi proportional systems.

Studies have shown that in post-war transition period, powerful groups chose the electoral system, from which they will get maximum benefits or will ensure their victory. In countries, where ethnic-based

political parties are predominant and the political arena is less tolerant of opposing views, plural-majority systems or winner-take-all system can facilitates a zero-sum game and builds a risk of electoral conflict and violence, which we can see in many African countries.

The nature of electoral management bodies can also be instrumental in facilitating the conditions for election related violence. These bodies can be divided into partial-partisan and independent-non partisan models. In many developing countries, where partial-partisan model follows a lack of the required impartiality, independence and competence is observed, resulting in high-level mistrust and creating divisions among political parties, ultimately heightened the risk of electoral violence.

Formal and informal rules of electoral game, like the rules of electoral competition and rules of electoral governance can facilitate conditions conducive to containing electoral conflict and violence. Rules of electoral competition consist of issues such as electoral formulas, district magnitude and boundaries, assembly size etc.

And rules of electoral governance cover areas like party, candidate and voter eligibility and registration, vote counting, tabulating and reporting techniques, election monitoring and conflict resolution mechanisms and campaign financing etc.

Authoritarian regimes of many newly democratising countries adopt and practice different sets of informal rules that make electoral competition undemocratic. These rules include, different kind of restrictions imposed on the political rights and civil liberties of citizens, limiting the rights of different social and political organisations to assemble for their own cause, control of the state as well as private print and electronic media, keeping political opponents or figures away from electoral competition etc. And often such regimes use electoral fraud to secure public office.

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First 1,000 days last forever: Scaling up nutrition for a just world

ANTHONY LAKE and TOM ARNOLD

IT is entirely fitting that Ireland has hosted the April 15-16 International Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Climate justice in Dublin.

Fitting because it was here, in Ireland, that an historic injustice took place -- the Great Hunger of 1845-52, in which one million human beings died, many of them children.

And fitting because Ireland has been and is a leader in the global fight against another great social injustice: stunting.

If you have never heard of stunting, you are by no means alone. A vast human tragedy, it is one of the least reported, least recognised, least understood issues before us.

Stunting, caused by chronic under nutrition early in a child's life, blights the lives of some 165 million children around the world. It is far more than a problem of inadequate growth / height for these children. It can trap them in a life-time cycle of poor nutrition, illness, poverty and inequity.

Why? Because stunted growth in the first months of a child's life means stunted development of the brain and thus, of cognitive capacity. Permanently.

Stunting hampers not only the future ability of an individual child to learn and earn, but also the social and economic progress of the countries in which they live. In real terms, it cuts school performance, translating into a reduction in adult income by 22% on average. It also leads to increased risk of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease in adult life.

In 2011, it was estimated that more than one in every four children under five in the developing world were stunted, or 28% -- an estimated 160 million children. 80% of children globally live in just 14 countries. Stunting continues to be highly prevalent in

sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and is highest among low-income countries1.

High stunting rates are part of the reason why the world is not on track to reach most of the Millennium Development Goals, notably on extreme poverty and hunger, child and maternal health, and combatting HIV and AIDS. Under nutrition contributes to

omists, including five Nobel Laureates, in the so-called Copenhagen Consensus, recommended priorities for confronting the top ten global challenges. They ranked providing young children with micronutrients the number one most cost-effective way to advance global welfare. And in 2012, they reached a similar conclusion.

More good news While stunting may be under-appreciated as a global challenge and opportunity, there is a growing international response, to which the conference in Dublin will contribute. A major global initiative called the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement is bringing much needed investment in and focus on nutrition for children and women in numerous countries.

Indeed, more and more countries are scaling up nutrition programmes to reach children during that critical first 1,000-day period and in a child's life. And as a new report on child and maternal nutrition by UNICEF shows, countries as diverse as Ethiopia, Haiti, Peru and Rwanda have already markedly reduced stunt-

ing levels in recent years, showing that progress is possible.

Ireland has been a strong supporter of these efforts and during its EU presidency can press forward a bold agenda to address hunger, nutrition and climate justice.

No child, no mother, no country -- should ever have to suffer the injustice of a lack of nutrition in the 21st century. What is more unjust, more cruel, than condemning a child, in the womb, to a life of deprivation -- especially when we know how to prevent it?

Surely, if we know how to do so, and have the means to do so, there can be no reason not to do so -- urgently.

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one-third of child deaths and around one-fifth of maternal deaths.

The good news is that it does not have to be this way. In fact, attacking stunting is a huge development opportunity; and a cost-effective one.

We know what works. Expectant mothers need vital nutrients like iron and folic acid; new born babies need that natural 'superfood' -- breastfeeding, in that first fragile hour after birth and then for the next six months. Adequate solid foods need to be introduced at the right time. Throughout, adequate health care and good hygiene and sanitation are vital. Poor sanitation and thus repeated bouts of diarrhea contribute to stunting.

In 2008, eight of the world's leading econ-



Tiger befriends his lunch

A tiger has turned pacifist. Provided with a live goat for his dinner, the big cat befriended it instead of eating it. Tiger and goat played in the enclosure's pool together.

Evil wicked zookeepers decided to starve the tiger to give him no choice but to chow down on his new buddy.

But the new two friends fasted together instead.

After two days, staff rescued the goat and provided the tiger with a portion of raw beef instead, said the report in the Times of India.

The zookeepers at the Bor wildlife sanctuary in Maharashtra, India, insisted they were not being horrible, but were doing a scientific experiment to see whether the tiger was ready to be released back into the wild.

I think the goat should have been given some sort of medal for its ordeal, spending a long time trapped in a small space with a hungry tiger. (This could make a good book or a film: wonder if anyone has thought of it yet?)

It strikes me that the same "I-lived-with-a-dangerous-animal" award should go to anyone who has ever shared a home with:

1. Charlie Sheen
2. Britney Spears
3. Ike Turner
4. My children

The goat's miraculous story of survival could have made the zoo world famous. So what did the idiotic staff do?

They threw the goat into a nearby cage occupied by the tiger's two sisters, who immediately ate it.

Zookeepers appeared surprised that the female of the species was tougher and more ruthless than the male.

These monstrous people seem to know nothing at all about basic biology. Do they not have wives or girlfriends?

In other news: Chinese TV is now so bad that producers have to pay audience members to laugh or cry. The going rate is 100 to 300 renminbi (US\$16 to US\$48) per day.

If you can make yourself weep uncontrollably or roar with hysterically laughter, you can get your fee banded up to 700 renminbi.

The system was exposed by the Yancheng Evening News, whose reporters found job adverts offering people cash to be TV audiences.

Among the shows which pay for fake emotion, the report said, was a Hunan TV series about singers called "I Am A Singer". The creativity level of the title says it all.

To be frank, watching five minutes of any mainland China TV channel, especially the news ones, makes me want to cry, fall wailing to the floor or throw myself out of the hotel window.

For more curious nonsense, visit our columnist at: www.mrjam.org

