



TERMS OF REFERENCE: GLOBAL RESEARCH CONSULTANCY

RESEARCH ON THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF ELECTIONS: AFRICA, ASIA, AMERICAS, MIDDLE EAST

I. BACKGROUND

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action. Drawing on continuing spiritual insights and working with people of many backgrounds, we nurture the seeds of change and respect for human life that transform social relations and systems. AFSC works internationally and in the US in contexts characterized by high levels of polarization, violence, and democratic backsliding.

AFSC has been concerned with electoral violence prevention for several years. In 2018, it commissioned the first research on electoral violence prevention, examining specific case studies in Africa and Asia.¹ AFSC recognizes elections and electoral processes as growing flashpoints for violence, exclusion, and repression, especially where civic space shrinks, and the narratives around political competition are increasingly violent and polarizing.

In 2026, AFSC commissions this research to update and further contextualize prior research and to gain insights into the latest research, policies, and best practices for understanding electoral violence within current geopolitical realities globally and in and across focus areas in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East. AFSC's ultimate aim is to draw lessons from good practices in electoral violence prevention for its own work.

II. CONTEXT

A key principle of democratic systems is free and fair elections, next to other principles such as the protection of human rights, freedom of expression, checks and balances, and active citizen participation. Democracy is increasingly threatened by autocratic leaders, shifts, or tendencies that centralize power among individuals or political elites. These dynamics can result in repressive systems that are not representative. Recent data from [Freedom House](#) and [V-Dem](#) (2025) reveal that over 70% of the world's population now lives under autocratic or non-democratic regimes, highlighting the global scale of this challenge. According to this data, 88 countries are democracies, compared with 91 that are autocracies. This is notable because autocracies now slightly outnumber democracies for the first time in more than 20 years.

Electoral processes, by their competitive nature, can be accompanied by tensions and electoral violence, including intimidation, coercion, and the misuse of state authority (e.g., by its security forces, voter suppression through legislation, or systemic disenfranchisement), as well as violence expressed digitally

¹ Full report: [Report Final formatted](#), and a two-pager: [election-violence-one-pager-back](#)

through various technologies. In some contexts, non-state actors, such as organized crime groups or paramilitary forces, commit electoral violence. Electoral violence impacts different population groups in different ways. For example, while women's participation in politics as voters, candidates, or electoral managers may have increased over the years, gender based electoral violence continues to be a major challenge preventing women and other minority and vulnerable groups from exercising their rights. At the same time, youth-led campaigns have played meaningful roles in strengthening electoral processes in a variety of countries, e.g., countering misinformation or advocating for peaceful participation.

The above has been documented across a **spectrum of political contexts**. This research adopts a **global, comparative perspective**.

In Africa, electoral violence remains especially severe. Kenya's 2007–2008 post-election crisis led to more than 1,100 deaths and the displacement of 600,000 people, while countries such as Burundi, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Uganda continue to face intimidation, militarization, and restrictions on opposition actors. ACLED (2025) data documents thousands of election-related violent incidents across the continent during major electoral cycles. The early 1990s marked a pivotal turning point in Africa's political landscape, as numerous countries shifted from one-party and military regimes to multi-party systems. This transformation was fueled by internal demands for accountability from civil society, faith leaders, and grassroots movements, as well as by external pressures stemming from post-Cold War geopolitical changes and donor requirements for governance reform. Although multipartyism created opportunities for broader political participation, its implementation in many contexts lacked the necessary institutional, legal, and cultural frameworks for authentic democratic competition. Consequently, many political transitions proved superficial, enabling incumbent regimes to maintain power by controlling state institutions, electoral processes, and security forces. This has perpetuated a gap between the outward appearance of democratic structures and the meaningful achievement of accountable, inclusive governance. Closing this gap is essential to building democratic resilience across the continent. To achieve this, targeted investments are required to strengthen civic space, independent institutions, electoral integrity, and citizen-led accountability mechanisms, ensuring that multi-party democracy delivers genuine political inclusion and sustainable peace.

In Asia, forms of electoral violence range from physical force and inter-party clashes to judicial harassment and state repression in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, such as Cambodia. Increasingly, states across the region are leveraging digital technologies to shrink civic space, which makes election monitoring and reporting difficult. While Bangladesh has witnessed deadly election confrontations, Myanmar and Pakistan continue to exhibit strong military influence and political exclusion. The mass arrests of opposition leaders marked the most recent elections in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In India, elections are occasionally marked by communal violence, intimidation, and concerns over disinformation. In Cambodia and Thailand, we have witnessed the use of judicial harassment or the weaponization of the court system to silence opposition. Some countries, such as Pakistan or Myanmar, are using violence as a tool to consolidate power and subvert the popular will.

While large-scale election violence in the **Middle East** is less common than in other regions, there have been assassinations of candidates (i.e., Iraq 2025), attacks linked to campaigns, intimidation (i.e., in Jordan), and clashes around elections (i.e., 2022 in Lebanon). Elections frequently get postponed or canceled due to armed conflict (i.e., in Lebanon and Palestine). In Iran, there have been decades of repression around political mobilization and protests tied to elections and regime legitimacy. Other forms

of electoral violence include Judicial harassment of candidates and arrest of political opponents (i.e., Tunisia and Egypt).

In the **Americas**, political violence related to elections takes different forms.

In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, electoral violence is frequently tied to organized crime (i.e., in Mexico). At the same time, Haiti and Colombia have grappled with armed group violence, assassinations, and threats targeting candidates and community leaders. Several Central American states have experienced election-related unrest or contested results, including Honduras and Guatemala. While there was no widespread violence related to the recent election in Costa Rica, the election took place amid a tense security situation and a significant surge in crime and drug-related violence. El Salvador represents a case of institutional violence where the executive branch has concentrated power and changed the electoral rules to stay in power. A permanent state of emergency has been in place since 2022, suspending constitutional guarantees. This makes it difficult to measure electoral violence, as the opposition has been eliminated and institutionalized violence prevents free and fair elections altogether.

Electoral violence in the **United States** over the past several years has largely taken the form of political intimidation, threats against election officials, harassment of poll workers, and isolated violent incidents linked to contested election narratives. The most significant episode was the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, when supporters of President Donald Trump attempted to disrupt the certification of the 2020 election results. Since then, election administrators, local officials, and poll workers have reported a sustained rise in death threats, doxing, and intimidation, which has contributed to resignations and recruitment challenges in election administration.

Electoral violence in **Europe** in recent years has also occurred. It is generally sporadic and low-intensity, usually involving attacks on candidates (e.g., in Slovakia in 2024 or during the EU election in Germany in 2024), clashes between supporters (e.g., in France), intimidation of campaigners, or unrest linked to disputed elections, rather than systematic violence at polling stations.

The patterns above suggest that electoral violence is associated with a range of **structural factors**, including weak institutions, impunity, identity-based or geographic fragmentation, socioeconomic inequalities, electoral-related suppression, hate speech, or the involvement of armed actors in electoral processes. Yet, existing data remains limited and disproportionately focused on sub-Saharan Africa, leaving significant gaps in cross-regional comparative analysis.

This study adopts a **comparative cross-regional perspective**, focusing on Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas (with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean, with the US context being an important comparative factor in the analysis), to generate evidence-based insights that can inform global and regional policy and practice, rooted in local and regional realities.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE ASSIGNMENT

AFSC intends to engage a research consultant/a research consultant team (see requirements below) to conduct a cross-regional study that analyzes the current research and contexts of electoral violence in Africa, Asia, the Americas (with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean), and the Middle East over the last few years, with a focus on distilling **lessons** and **best practices**. We aim to have a cross-regional, comparative perspective and higher-level analysis of electoral violence patterns across geographies, while

also providing more in-depth insights into specific contexts within Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East.

The objectives of the research are the following:

- i. Provide a **brief, high-level overview of the current state of electoral violence prevention research**, with a focus on how it has evolved and shifted in the last 5-7 years. This should include a brief reflection on how the **conceptual framing** of ‘electoral violence’ and related **terminology** has shifted, as well as on the types of electoral violence observed across different geographies. This overview should highlight any **gaps in research** from a methodological and/or geographical perspective.
- ii. Identify **trends** and **patterns** in relation to electoral violence across regions, also analyzing how the overall conditions of democratic governance in specific states and regions influence how electoral violence dynamics play out. What are the new **trends** and **patterns** in the last few years of **how electoral violence manifests** (i.e., direct/physical, psychological, cultural, digital, and structural violence)? What is the role of **emerging technologies** (LLM, deepfakes, bots, etc.) in both inflict/mitigate election violence?
- iii. Assess the roles of **different stakeholders** (domestic actors, regional and international actors that influence the situation) in relation to electoral violence, including **new actors** and **new players** (playing both positive and negative roles) that shape electoral violence dynamics. What are specific **gender** and **youth-related dynamics** that are important to analyze and understand in this regard, or dynamics related to vulnerable groups (i.e., indigenous people in Latin America)? The assessment should cover two perspectives: (1) How are these groups affected in different ways, and (2) What are their distinct roles in preventing electoral violence?
- iv. Analyze the **types of engagement strategies** across different contexts that peacebuilding, governance, and human rights organizations have applied to prevent and respond to electoral violence:
 1. Distill **best practices**: Assess what has worked and why. What types of changes were the most promising and sustainable? What can we learn from success stories to prevent electoral violence?
 2. Provide a **deeper look into specific contexts in each region**
 3. Analyze if/how the **shifts in global financing for civil society organizations** have had a demonstrable impact on the prevention of electoral violence, most recently.
- v. Analyze **implications of the research for AFSC** and organizations like AFSC and partners with a focus on non-violent action and peacebuilding, human rights and justice, and develop **policy recommendations** for how to strengthen efforts for nonviolent, inclusive, and accountable democratic systems.

IV. SCOPE AND OVERALL APPROACH

The scope of the work is to review regional patterns of electoral violence over the past few years in Africa, Asia, the Americas (with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean), and the Middle East, with a deeper

dive into particularly relevant contexts (case study approach). The research team is expected to suggest the specifics of these deeper dives/case studies during the inception period. “Relevant contexts” in this regard are defined as contexts with contested and violent elections during the period of review, possibly linked to more fundamental political shifts, authoritarian trends, or other contextual developments that are particularly interesting for AFSC learning. **Particularly relevant are cases where there have been documented approaches and best practices to prevent electoral violence, to understand what has worked and why.**

This comparative cross-regional study will be based on a desk-based review of the available literature, combined with long-distance key informant interviews and focus group discussions (no travel to the regions is foreseen).

The consultant (s) will analyze qualitative and quantitative data to identify trends and patterns, comparing them to highlight similarities, differences, and transferable lessons. During the inception period, the research team is expected to develop a specific methodology to analyze relevant patterns across regional contexts, enabling broader conclusions. Please see the section below, Expected Qualifications of the Research Team, for insights into AFSC’s expectations for cross-cutting aspects in the methodology.

Key steps during the research process include:

- An inception period during which a research approach and detailed methodology for comparative analysis will be developed, and decisions on focus sub-regions and countries will be taken, in consultation with AFSC.
- Document review, interviews, and focus groups.
- Data analysis, data triangulation, and identification of key patterns that emerge across the regions.
- Development of a draft report.
- Incorporation of inputs and comments from AFSC.
- Presentation of findings to a larger group of AFSC staff.
- Finalization of the report.

V. DELIVERABLES

- **Inception Report:** Outlining the overall approach and a detailed research methodology, including an outline of the final report and a structure and focus for the regional case studies.
- **Draft research report:** A concise, evidence-based report synthesizing cross-regional insights across regions. The report will include key findings, comparative analysis, and actionable recommendations tailored for AFSC and its partners.
- The draft research report will include **regional case studies** as agreed during the inception phase, including specific **policy recommendations** for each region/case study.
- **Executive Summary:** A concise summary capturing the study’s main findings, strategic recommendations, and implications for peacebuilding and advocacy, designed for high-level stakeholders and donors.
- **Presentation Materials:** Visual presentation materials (slides, infographics, and summary charts) for sharing findings and recommendations with stakeholders, partners, and donors.

VI. DURATION, MANAGEMENT OF THE ASSIGNMENT, AND ESTIMATED COSTS

This consultancy assignment is expected to be conducted between May and September 2026. The overall point of contact for this consultancy is AFSC's Director of International Peacebuilding.

A **reference group** comprising select staff from each of the researched regions will serve an important function by guiding the research team, contextualizing findings from an AFSC organizational perspective, and providing input on draft deliverables. This reference group will also serve as an important sounding board for an ethical, trauma-sensitive, conflict-sensitive, and decolonial research approach.

This consultancy will be remunerated at approximately USD 30,000 - 50,000. The final financial package will depend on the final approach and methodology. A payment schedule will be agreed upon during the contracting process.

VII. DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH TEAM

AFSC foresees this as a research project ideal for 1-2 consultants, but we are open to proposals regarding team set-up.

Complementary skills and geographic experience will be expected. Consultants can work fully remotely, but are expected to show flexibility in coordinating with AFSC teams working globally and across time zones for key informant interviews and focus groups. Consultant teams are expected to demonstrate experience with **conflict-sensitive**, **trauma-sensitive**, and **ethical** research approaches, in line with AFSC and Quaker values.

A research approach that takes into account **Do No Harm/conflict sensitivity** considerations is critical. Much of AFSC's work globally occurs in contexts marked by shrinking civic space and rising authoritarianism. Potential security risks of key informants, including AFSC staff and partners, need to be considered. We are also looking for a consultant team that applies a **decolonial perspective** to research, not only asking what we study but also how we do it and who defines knowledge and whose voices count, in line with AFSC's commitment to ground its work in the perspectives of local partners.

The research team is expected to combine the following experiences and skills.

Professional experience:

- Graduate degree in a relevant discipline such as political science, law, or any relevant social science discipline.
- Minimum of 10 years' experience in analyzing complex governance and conflict contexts; practical lived experience in transitional and conflict-affected contexts is an asset.
- Deep understanding of global geopolitical realities, and elections and electoral governance in transitional, conflict-affected, and/or authoritarian contexts. Solid understanding of the role of various relevant stakeholders and groups in electoral violence prevention.
- Prior global comparative applied research experience on issues of election violence, peacebuilding, and democratic governance.
- Experience with mixed-methods applied research approaches, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis; experience with pattern analysis across themes and regions.

- A systemic and in-depth understanding of peace, conflict, and governance dynamics across Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East, and the particular role of elections.
- Demonstrated experience with applying ethical, trauma-sensitive, conflict-sensitive, and decolonial research approaches.

Key skills and competencies

- Demonstrated qualitative and quantitative research skills;
- Experience collecting and analyzing vast amounts of data from a comparative perspective;
- Strong oral and written communication skills;
- Ability to work independently within clearly agreed-upon timelines
- Flexibility to adapt the approach and deliverables as agreed with AFSC as needed.

VIII. EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Proposals may be submitted by individuals, consultancy firms, or research organizations, and should include the following:

1. A short (5 pages max) technical proposal including:
 - A brief analysis summarizing the understanding of the assignment and its expected focus and outputs;
 - A budget outlining the budget requirements for the different components of the work;
 - Relevant complementary experiences of the research team with similar assignments, and a proposed division of labor.
2. CVs of the proposed researchers
3. Contact details of 2-3 references who can speak to the quality of similar assignments led by the consultants.

Interested individuals should submit their proposals to internationalhr@afsc.org by April 24th, 2026.
Subject line: *Consultancy Electoral Violence Prevention*