



Guyana EVER Report 1

Review of June 20-July 11, 2006



*Produced by the EAB/IFES
Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) Project*

Welcome to the first issue of the fortnightly EVER Report. The Electoral Assistance Bureau (EAB) and IFES (formerly the International Foundation for Electoral Systems) have partnered in the EVER project to create a mechanism of monitoring, reporting and analysis of election-related violence, potential violence, and efforts for peace that can assist stakeholders and the public in effectively preventing and mitigating violence and diffusing conflicts. The overall goals of the project are violence prevention and the promotion of free, fair, and peaceful elections. The EAB and IFES EVER team have met with many of you in person, and appreciate your support and commitment to peaceful elections.

Within the EVER framework, election-related violence refers to any violence or threat of violence that is aimed at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period. Election violence generally involves political parties, their supporters, journalists, agents of the government, election administrators and the general population, and includes threats, assault, murder, destruction of property, and physical or psychological harm. The project has fielded 19 carefully selected and trained Monitors, supplemented by increasing numbers closer to Election Day, to gather data on actual and potential election violence by conducting interviews with election commission officials, leaders of community groups, local government officials, and law enforcement, as well as by researching media reports and attending campaign rallies and other political events. Their observations and documentation are sent to EVER headquarters at the EAB every week, and analytical reports with recommendations will be issued to stakeholders and the media fortnightly, with the aim of assessing trends and patterns that can help institutions and individuals in Guyana better address and mitigate violence and de-escalate conflicts.

The EVER methodology was developed and tested by IFES in multiple countries in an effort to build local civil society capacity to monitor and mitigate election violence in their countries, and to contribute to better understanding and mitigation of election violence worldwide. The EVER project was initiated in Guyana after examining the history and current political context, and in consultation with all of the major stakeholders, including political parties, Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), security forces, civil society, the media and the private sector. In the past, elections in Guyana have been associated with violence mainly because some stakeholders are dissatisfied with the election process, the results or both. In our stakeholder meetings, several factors emerged that indicated that the EVER project could have a large impact in Guyana: the lack of independent documentation of patterns of election conflict/violence, the polarization of politics along party and racial lines, the general increase in crime, demographic and political context changes, and indications that citizens are increasingly frustrated with the status quo.

We hope the fortnightly EVER Reports will contribute to increased public awareness of election-related tensions and violence, and therefore contribute to the ability of all Guyanese, in whatever position in society or politics they hold, to mitigate and prevent election-related violence. To that end, these fortnightly Reports will document efforts for peace, incidents of election-related violence, and issues related to potential for violence and the level of conflict/tension observed in communities around Guyana.

The first Report has been sent to organizations and individuals active in civil society, state structures and international organizations that we have met with or have compiled as key contacts, but we welcome you to forward this Report to any that may be interested (you may subscribe or unsubscribe from this mailing list as indicated at the end of this Report).

The first Report will contain a section on Political Context, and will not have an Alerts or Updates section. Generally, each will contain the following sections:

1. Political Context (first Report only)
2. Alerts: serious incidents which have occurred and require immediate action
3. Snapshot of Incidents: quick overview of problem areas, charts of patterns of incidents
4. Fortnight Overview: key political / peaceful developments
5. Analysis: implications of data and putting events and trends in context
6. Updates: developments related to incidents or issues previously mentioned in the Report.
7. Outlook: looking at future problems/positive actions that could be expected from observed incidents and trends
8. Recommendations: based on incidents and trends, suggestions for ways that stakeholders/the public can focus energies to prevent violence, address conflicts, or promote peace
9. Outreach: project headquarters activities and meetings that EAB/IFES have undertaken to introduce the project and build relationships with stakeholders

Political Context

As mentioned, in this first Report, we are adding an introductory section on the political context to present an overview of key political and social events and issues that have emerged in the period from 1 March through the Project launch of 8 June. Then we will move into the regular Report sections and discussion of the Monitors' findings.

One of the key issues in each election in Guyana has been the list of electors. Since the 2001 election, the combined opposition parties in Parliament (the People's National Congress REFORM (PNCR), Guyana Action Party (GAP)/ Rise, Organize and Rebuild (ROAR), and Working People's Alliance (WPA)) have made calls for further reforms of the constitution and of the electoral system, and have been calling for a house-to-house verification of the voters list. They claim that their concerns have not been satisfactorily dealt with. The ruling People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) has asserted that the 2001 voters list was accurate, and was also reviewed by international experts who deemed it satisfactory. Thus, as the 2006 elections approached, and GECOM announced that it would use the 2001 Official List of Electors (OLE) as the basis for producing the 2006 Preliminary List of Electors (PLE), without a house-to-house verification, arguments were put forward by the combined opposition parties about the validity and acceptability of GECOM's decision. The main actors questioning this move have been the opposition parties in Parliament, but others, such as the Alliance for Change (AFC), have expressed concern that the current voters list should be carefully evaluated.

The combined opposition's position is that the voters list is flawed, because according to them, it contains duplicate registrants, names of deceased persons and names of people who have migrated or are otherwise not at the residence under which they are listed. The One Guyana Platform has consistently been of the view that the list could only be corrected by house-to-house verification, notwithstanding the constitutionally due date. The ruling party asserted that the list was accurate to an acceptable standard and that the election should take place by the constitutionally due date.

Elections were constitutionally due by 4 August, 2006. As of now, the President has announced the election date as 28 August. Prior to this, there were several stages of uncertainty in the election date, and, as noted above, debate about the list was undertaken with this in the background. Initially the election was expected in March 2006, but constitutionally was due within 3 months of the disillusionment of Parliament, whose mandate expired on 2 May. However, in April, GECOM announced that it would not be ready for elections before 30 August. On 2 May, the Parliament voted to enact a constitutional amendment to extend the election due date to 4 months after disillusionment of Parliament. This allowed for a new deadline of 3 September, and was passed by a simple majority – but this move was not accepted as legal by all political parties. PNCR Executive Joseph Hamilton filed a lawsuit on 18 May challenging the legality of the amendment. As of 11 July, this action had not progressed beyond hearings to determine applications by the GECOM Chairman and some Commissioners to be removed as defendants (as of now, Hamilton withdrew his action against the applicants).

The PNCR also raised other concerns with the electoral process, arguing that there is not a level playing field. The PPP/C has argued that the opposition simply does not want to have elections at all, and that all of their issues are merely ways to avoid elections.

It is the particular divergence of views between the two major parties over list verification that has fuelled recent tension between the PPP/C and PNCR, and GECOM and PNCR. In conjunction with other opposition parties, the PNCR has engaged in periodic protests in front of the GECOM head office in Kingston, Georgetown. These protests have been peaceful. However, the positions of the two 'sides' here – the PPP/C and GECOM, and the PNCR and combined opposition parties, have seemed intractable, despite various international and domestic efforts to broker an agreement. This polarization and apparent unwillingness to compromise by both parties has been and continues to be a source of tension in the country.

Indeed, the PNCR's dissatisfaction with the list was cited as the reason it decided not to sign a peace pact and code of conduct for political parties during the 2006 elections initiated by the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO) of Guyana. Nine parties signed the peace accord on 2 May, including the PPP/C, AFC and Justice for All. However, given the history of violence in Guyanese elections, the absence of a major party as signatory to a code of conduct and commitment to peaceful elections could be seen as problematic.

Several groups protested outside Parliament during the signing of this accord, but this was also a day in which the Trade Union (Amendment) Bill No. 1, 2006 and the bill to amend the constitution and change the due date of elections were considered. Protestors waving "No Justice, No Peace" signs were seen at the protest, and according to media reports at the time, the rally was organised by the GTUC to protest the Trade Union (Amendment) Bill, but as it went on, PNCR supporters joined as the time for debating the constitutional amendment bill approached.

It is not only political events and protests which impact the electoral context. The increase in crime over the last couple of years, and the election season, have led to increasing levels of fear or apprehension among the general public. The high-profile murders of talk show host Ronald Waddle, a fierce critic of the

ruling PPP/C administration, and of the Minister of Agriculture Satyadeow Sawh, have likely contributed to further raising public concerns. While these murders are still under investigation and the motives and perpetrators are not yet known, there has been speculation that they could be politically motivated coming from different voices in the political spectrum and highlighting the divergent perspectives – and fears – of each.

Another issue that has an impact on public and political perceptions during the lead-up to the election is the theft of 30 AK-47 assault rifles and 5 hand guns from the stores of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF). This is of interest because speculation is rife over which individual or group may have stolen them and for what purpose. With Guyana's history of electoral violence, this matter should be looked at closely since it is likely that persons across the political divide would be suspicious of those who are in possession of these high powered weapons, and as such could be arming themselves as a precautionary measure.

The final issue that should be mentioned is the public utterances of Roger Khan, recently indicted by the US for drug trafficking. Khan was quoted as saying that members of the PNCr, the Guyana security forces and the United States government want to destabilise the present PPP/C administration. Even though these utterances should be treated as rumour since there is no corroborating evidence, it has no doubt lent credence to the belief that, given Guyana's elections history, violence is possible.

The issues mentioned above give a solid background to understanding the climate that surrounds the 2006 elections. While it is important to note that there have been no clear cases of election-related violence before the official period of monitoring, the foregoing context and developments should be taken into consideration when weighing the potential for violence and the level of tension during the 2006 General Election period.

Our first Report covering the Monitoring Period 20 June to 11 July follows. Future Reports will cover only 2 weeks.

Report covering 20 June to 11 July

Snapshot of Incidents

The One Guyana Platform parties held a demonstration at which they burned the preliminary list of electors (PLE) on June 20, 2006 in front of GECOM headquarters in Kingston, Georgetown. Monitors report that this symbolic act was characterized by a PNCr representative as an expression of its dissatisfaction with GECOM over alleged inaccuracies in the list. The burning of the PLE was classified as an incident of electoral violence because it was destruction of election materials.

Fortnight Overview

- PNCr political rallies on the East Coast of Demerara
- Commemoration of the sinking of the "Son Chapman" in Region 10
- AFC meetings in Region 3, Region 4, and Region 6
- One Guyana platform meeting Region 4
- Cabinet outreaches in Regions 4, 5 and 6
- PPP/C rally in Region 6
- Court case filed by PNCr executive, to, among other things, challenge the validity of the 2006 PLE, and argue for a residency requirement
- Uplifting of ID cards ongoing
- Voters continue to check their names on the RLE
- EAB report on audit of PLE and Election Office of Jamaica (EOJ) report on fingerprint check of voter registry issued
- PNCr-nominated GECOM Commissioners withdrew for the 2nd time, and GECOM said the next meeting would proceed without them if they were not present.
- Robert Persaud, Information Liaison to the President, wrote about election security in his 6 July weekly *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Chronicle* columns.

Analysis

The past three weeks Monitors reported only one incident of violence – and this was the destruction of election materials (voters list) in Region 4, in front of GECOM Headquarters. Otherwise, Monitors have reported that communities are peaceful, though apprehensive about the elections. There were several meetings held by political parties and some community events with political overtones, but all were calm events. The political developments of this reporting period, however, are significant.

The only reported incident of election-related violence is the burning of the PLE in front of GECOM headquarters. It could be said that the act of burning the PLE was a consequence of the PNCr and other opposition parties' frustration, mostly with GECOM, over what they consider an unacceptable voters list. This action, while a symbolic form of protest (with no injuries or arrests) to communicate the opinion that GECOM is unable to produce an accurate voters list, is cause for concern since this action could be perceived differently by various segments of Guyana's already divided electorate/society. For example, supporters of the ruling party and the electorate could perceive this as a sign of violent actions to come. Thus they might think of protecting themselves from the ensuing violence. Supporters of the parliamentary opposition, on the other hand, could perceive this action as a call by the leaders to be on the offensive.

One of the key political developments that occurred during this period of monitoring, and one which is also related to dissatisfaction with the current voters list, was the withdrawal of two PNCr nominated commissioners from GECOM. It should be noted that this was the second time that these commissioners withdrew because they were dissatisfied with GECOM's position on verification (and other issues). At the time, it was felt that this action could have increased tensions between the two major parties and their supporters. As of now, Haslyn Parris, one of the PNCr-nominated Commissioners, has resigned, and Monitors will be looking at the impact of this. Any major decision by GECOM without the PNCr commissioners could lead to further dissatisfaction, which could result in protests that might further increase tensions.

It did seem, however, that Monitors reported more of a focus by the public and political leaders on the voters list issues in Region 4 than in other Regions.

Other key events include the lawsuit filed by a PNCr executive, to, among other things, challenge the legality of using 2001 OLE as basis of 2006 PLE and argue that correct residence information is a requirement for eligibility to vote. This makes the 2nd major lawsuit against elements of this election process. These cases should be attended to as quickly as possible, but they might not be resolved until after the election – that such large issues are still subject to question could be a problem after the election and care should be taken that though they may proceed slowly, these cases proceed in manner that is perceived as fair, and that the public are aware of the necessary duration of the process.

Monitors reported that Cabinet outreaches were held in Regions 4, 5, and 6 before 4 July, and there was a PPP/C rally in Region 6 during the 3rd week of monitoring. PNCr rallies were held in Region 4 on the East Coast of Demerara, and many leaders spoke at the anniversary of the sinking of the "Son Chapman" launch, held in Region 10. A One Guyana Platform meeting took place in Georgetown on 6 July. AFC meetings were held in Region 3, Region 4, and Region 6. These meetings were all described as peaceful.

A Monitor in Region 4 reported that some questioned the use of public resources by the government to conduct Cabinet Outreaches around election time, when it could be seen as political campaigning. This has been echoed in the letter columns of the newspapers. The stated objective of the cabinet outreach was to ascertain the need of the communities visited.

In the Region 6, a Monitor reported that at the 8 July PPP rally, speakers touched on economic, health, and education issues, urged supporters to check the RLE, and remarked that the PNCr wanted to cancel the elections. Other Monitors noted that Robert Persaud, Information Liaison to the President, wrote on 6 July in his weekly *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Chronicle* columns, that the government has made election security a priority, and that it feels that the PNCr had organised past violence with criminal elements. There was no reported reaction to either of these, but if such characterizations are heightened further, they could worsen existing tensions.

The At the One Guyana Platform meeting on 6 July, Monitors reported calls for "no verification, no elections." This phrase is notable because it could imply that supporters should *stop* the election, or it could imply that supporters and parties should *not participate* in elections. This indicates that the extent of the divide between the two main parties and the need for better dialogue.

Additionally, Monitors reported that on the 6 July commemoration of the 42nd anniversary of the deaths of 43 people during the sinking of the "Son Chapman," the speeches and the small crowd's responses were politically charged, containing grievances against the PPP and Indo-Guyanese communities, mainly focused at the time of the incident. Monitors report that all speeches referenced racial differences, and some alleged that the sinking was a massacre. This event was not reported to have raised tension in the community, however. Further patterns of speeches will be closely watched.

Regarding procedural issues, Monitors mentioned that the uplifting of ID cards was proceeding slowly; one election official interviewed noted that many wait until the last minute to collect their cards. Some Monitors reported that voters have experienced frustration with the process of uplifting ID cards. Efforts should be made to ensure that voters are educated and properly assisted with complaints or problems.

According to reports from the field, overall, the situation is calm. Many people are reporting fears that violence might occur, however, and some report that people would prefer to be outside Guyana around election time. And, at least in Region 2, there are reports that businesses may close around election time. This could leave people essentially out of work and free during the days preceding and just following the

elections. Increased numbers of people out and about could change the way any protests or meetings close to Election Day play out.

In several regions, Monitors held good discussions about roles that various groups can play in preventing violence. For example, Monitors in Region 10 also mentioned that various parties have been planning violence prevention efforts and cooperation with police. In Region 3, a meeting was held with religious leaders about their role in preventing crime and violence in the election period. The leaders discussed that they could emphasize to their congregations that 1) all have the right to vote for whomever they choose; 2) if the party you support does not win, crime or violence is not the answer, 3) to report any crime/violence appropriately, and 4) to respect all people's views.

Outlook

Frustration could escalate over a number of issues mentioned in this fortnightly reporting period – particularly the continued impasse on the voters list and the withdrawal of opposition commissioners from GECOM. And, regarding the pending court cases, closer to the election, a decision on either of these issues could be a catalyst for protests or tension by the losing side (and a likely appeal), just as the lack of a decision could also spur those frustrated to action. Any protests undertaken by any group should be carefully watched, as past experience suggests mass protests are difficult to keep from escalation into violence. As official campaigning begins, existing tensions will likely be heightened, and it will be important to maintain a close eye on any changes in mood within communities as actions early in the campaign period could set the tone for its duration, and for the post-election period. As such, it is likely that peace initiatives have the potential to have a great impact if launched in the early stages of the campaign period.

Recommendations

- All parties and stakeholders should denounce violence and call on their supporters and constituencies to engage in nonviolent means of pursuing their objectives.
- To further send a strong signal to party supporters that no matter the grievance, violence is not the answer, all political parties should sign the commitment to peace, publicly state their opposition to violence for any reason, and call on their supporters to denounce violence. At the same time, the political parties who signed the peace pact should be reminded by civil society of the oath they took to desist from violence.
- To help address ongoing tensions, it is recommended that the reliability of the voters list should be clarified and confidence built immediately by GECOM possibly with the assistance from members of the international / donor community and civil society. The international / donor community and civil society must impress upon the contesting political parties that a compromise must be sought.
- Parties are encouraged to focus their speeches on the national issues at hand and not highlight past incidents which could aggravate tensions.
- Cooperation between law enforcement, civil society, and political parties is also urged, because ties that are forged now can help increase public discussion of the need for peaceful political period, and better communication and trust can increase the effectiveness of any actions to address conflict and violence.
- Continued engagement in the process by remaining opposition commissioners, and by the parties and their supporters in general, is crucial, and such engagement should be met in turn by constructive engagement and dialogue.
- Pending court cases on the legality of the 2 May constitutional amendment and on various aspects of the voter's list issue should be attended to as quickly as possible. If the cases remain pending after the election, this could be a major source of frustration and care should be taken that these cases proceed in manner that is perceived as fair, and that the public are aware of the necessary duration of the process.

Outreach

The EVER team began meeting with stakeholders to discuss the EVER project in March 2006. Further meetings were conducted in June. In June, the EVER team met with the PPP/C, the PNCR, GAP, non-parliamentary parties including the AFC, and all expressed interest in hearing the project's findings and expressed their support for such work to ensure peaceful elections. The ERC and EVER plan to collaborate, as the ERC will also field Monitors with different focus areas and resources. To build relationships with law enforcement, the EVER team attended the July meeting of the National Commission on Law and Order. The project will continue its outreach efforts and work to raise awareness of other groups' initiatives in preventing violence and promoting peace as we continue with the project. The project calls on all stakeholders and the

public to continue their commitment to peaceful, free, and fair elections, and ask all be open to EVER Monitors, or any institution's Monitors, if approached. Additionally, the EAB placed ads asking citizens (after contacting proper authorities as appropriate) to call the EAB hotline at 225-6799 or 6739 if you have experienced or know of any incidents that could be considered election-related violence, or you have information or concerns about conflict that seems likely to result in election-related violence.

Managing your subscription:

Please send an email to Karen Pratt, EVER Project Coordinator (krenpratt@yahoo.com), if you wish to add or remove your name from the EVER project mailing list.

About the Project:

The Electoral Assistance Bureau (EAB) and IFES (formerly the International Foundation for Electoral Systems) have partnered in the EVER project to create a mechanism of monitoring, reporting and analysis of election-related violence, potential violence, and efforts for peace that can assist stakeholders and the public in effectively preventing and mitigating violence and diffusing conflicts. The overall goals of the project are violence prevention and the promotion of free, fair, and peaceful elections.

In order to closely monitor the situation in the country, the EVER Project determined which regions were most at risk for conflict (2 through 7 and 10) and created a network of monitors selected among active members of civil society and other sectors who would monitor the situation in these regions. Overall, 19 monitors were trained and are engaged in the project and maintain continuous communication with project headquarters at the EAB office.

The EVER headquarters team analyzes the information collected, prepares recommendations for peaceful measures and violence prevention, and publishes a fortnightly EVER Report. The EVER methodology was developed and tested by IFES in multiple countries in an effort to build local civil society capacity to monitor and mitigate election violence in their countries, and to contribute to better understanding and mitigation of election violence worldwide.

Together we can help stop election violence. The EAB asks citizens (after contacting proper authorities as appropriate) to call the EAB hotline at 225-6799 or 6739 if you have experienced or know of any incidents that could be considered election-related violence, or you have information or concerns about conflict that seems likely to result in election-related violence.

The EAB is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organisation of citizens committed to promoting democracy in Guyana. IFES is an international, nonpartisan democracy-building organization. The EVER project is supported by IFES through funding from the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

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