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Mitigating election violence locally: UN peacekeepers' election-education campaigns in Côte d'Ivoire

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Abstract

False information, rumours and hate speech can incite violent protest and rioting during electoral periods. To counter such disinformation, United Nations peacekeeping operations (PKOs) routinely organize election-education events. While researchers tend to study how PKOs affect armed group and state behaviour, this study shifts the focus to civilians. It argues that PKOs' election education reduces violent protest and rioting involving civilians during electoral periods via three pathways. First, learning about PKOs' electoral security assistance during election-education events may convince people that political opponents cannot violently disturb elections, thereby mitigating fears of election violence. Second, election-education events provide politically relevant information that can strengthen political efficacy and people's ability to make use of peaceful political channels. Finally, peace messages during election-education events can change people's calculus about the utility and appropriateness of violent behaviour. Together, these activities mitigate fears, reduce political alienation and counter civilians' willingness to get involved in violence. To test these expectations, I combine survey data on people' perceptions and attitudes, events data on violent protest and rioting, and a novel dataset on local-level election-education events carried out by the PKO in Côte d'Ivoire before four elections held between 2010 and 2016. The results show that when the PKO is perceived to be an impartial arbiter, its election-education events have violence-mitigating effects at the individual and subnational levels.

Keywords

civic education, Côte d'Ivoire, elections, election violence, peacekeeping

Introduction

Holding credible elections can serve as a stepping stone to democratic governance in war-torn countries. Yet, elections also heighten political competition and set incentives for politicians to mobilize voters using disinformation campaigns. Such disinformation campaigns, used here as a shorthand for false information, rumours and hate speech, may cause fear and legitimize violence, and contribute to escalating pre-existing tensions into violent protests and riots, for example coercive collective actions directed towards members of other distinct groups or government authorities (Human Rights Watch, 1995; Snyder, 2000: 37; Wilkinson, 2004: 23–26; Burchard, 2015). Civilians often have agency in executing or preventing violent protests and riots (Krause, 2017; Varshney, 2002). But it is important to note that politicians also use 'violence specialists' to establish 'institutionalized riot systems' (Brass, 1997: 15–16), and the behaviour of state security forces helps prevent or provoke rioting, too (Wilkinson, 2004).

The United Nations recognizes that disinformation poses an obstacle to peaceful elections. As Figure 1 shows, election education to counter disinformation has become a prominent election violence prevention tool for United Nations peacekeeping operations (PKOs) (cf. Blair & Smidt, 2019, for data in Africa). Election-education events combine civic and peace education

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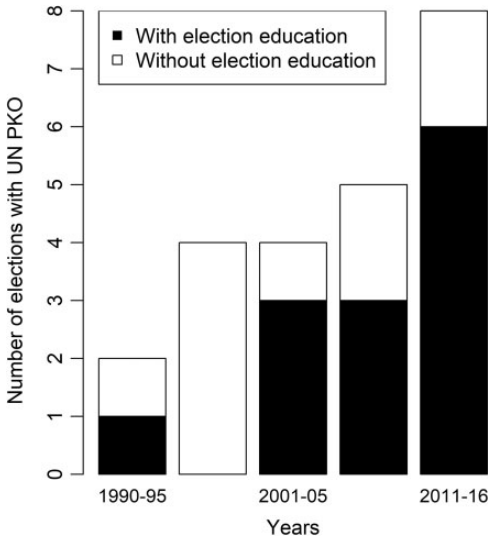

Figure 1. Number of elections in Africa with a PKO (not) engaged in election education

focused on elections. They are organized by PKOs' civilian personnel and provide ordinary people and local leaders in specific towns and villages with information on PKOs' mandate and the viability, utility and appropriateness of peaceful political behaviour. But do election-education campaigns contribute to peaceful elections in war-torn countries?

I argue that election-education events help people resist disinformation campaigns and, consequently, reduce election violence in the forms of violent protests and riots. First, learning about PKOs' mandate to secure elections may convince people that opponents cannot violently disturb elections, thereby reducing fear and related motives for violence. Second, information on the viability of *peaceful* political participation can increase political efficacy, lowering incentives for political violence. Third, peace messages highlighting the utility and appropriateness of nonviolence introduce an alternative framing that contradicts disinformation campaigns and discourages the use of violent means. However, only if PKOs are perceived to be impartial will their interventions change people's attitudes and reduce violent protest and rioting.

The argument is explored using novel data on PKOs' election-education events in 107 departments (third-tier administrative units) in Côte d'Ivoire between 2010 and 2016. Matching methods address the non-random location and timing of election-education events. Survey and event data analyses provide evidence for the argument: if the PKO is perceived to be impartial, election education decreases protests and riots during electoral periods and mitigates people's fear, strengthens their political efficacy and reduces their intention to use violence.

Côte d'Ivoire fulfils the scope conditions of the argument and thus serves as an ideal case to study it. First, different forms of election violence – including violent protests and riots – have accompanied elections since the introduction of multiparty politics in the West African country. Importantly, while militias and security forces often play a decisive role in the violent escalation of protests, civilians such as party members and youths are also involved and have agency in violent protests and riots in Côte d'Ivoire. If 'violence specialists' were solely responsible for this violence, election-education events – aimed at civilians – would remain ineffective. Second, grievances associated with contested land ownership, political discrimination and socio-economic group inequalities, among other factors, are underlying determinants of violent protests and riots. Yet, these grievances are attenuated by politicians' disinformation campaigns during electoral periods (Akindes, 2004: 34–40; Langer, 2005: 32). Therefore, election-education events may address one specific source of election violence.

The article contributes to the literature on peacekeeping and election violence. First, effective peacebuilding requires a transformation of the attitudes and behaviours of people locally (Stedman, 2002: 20). Yet, case studies suggest that peacekeepers often remain ineffective at transforming attitudes and behaviours because they lack sensitivity to local contexts (Autesserre, 2014; Pouligny, 2000). Specific activities of PKOs have, however, received little systematic scrutiny. Evaluating election-education events locally may add nuance to the debate on the local turn in international peacebuilding. Second, previous works have presented mixed results on *whether* PKOs build peace and foster democratization simultaneously (Steinert & Grimm, 2015; Doyle & Sambanis, 2006; Heldt, 2011; Fortna, 2008; Paris, 2004). By focusing on election education, this article examines one possible mechanism of *how* PKOs contribute to peaceful democratization. Third, we know that election education can have security-enhancing effects in usually peaceful environments (Collier & Vicente, 2014). This study investigates whether this finding translates to war-torn countries.

Information, election violence and peacekeeping intervention

Civic education plays a crucial role in ensuring fair elections in usually peaceful countries (Pande, 2011, for an

overview). However, we know little about whether education also assists the peacefulness of elections in countries emerging from war. This is surprising given the education interventions in many UN peacekeeping curricula (Mvukiyehe & Samii, 2017), the debate about the local turn in peacebuilding practice (Autesserre, 2014) and the discussion on *whether and how* international interventions can achieve peaceful democratization after war (Fortna, 2008; Heldt, 2008).

In non-consolidated democracies, voters often lack access to independent information. Not only are literacy rates and schooling years below the global average (Pande, 2011), also political elites manipulate information to mobilize voters. Election-related violence can be a deliberate or unintended product of their false information, threats, rumours, hate speech, etc. (Human Rights Watch, 1995; Snyder, 2000: 37; Wilkinson, 2004: 23–26; Boone, 2011: 1327; Burchard, 2015). Given the salience of information for peaceful elections, it is not surprising that scholars explore the impact of civic education interventions. Collier & Vicente (2014) demonstrate that an election-education campaign in Nigeria reduced vote shares for violent candidates, increased turnout and even reduced actual political intimidation. Existing research shows that education interventions have security benefits in usually peaceful countries (Vicente, 2014; Fujiwara & Wantchekon, 2013; Birch & Muchlinski, 2017: 4). Yet, as Finkel, Horowitz & Rojo-Mendoza (2012: 64) write: '[t]he impact of civic education in more chronically inhospitable contexts is still very much an open question' (for exceptions, cf. Mvukiyehe & Samii, 2017; Mvukiyehe, 2018).

A violence-reducing effect of civic education efforts is not obvious. The influence of *civilian*-focused education might be limited because it fails to target the main organizers and perpetrators of violence: state and non-state elites and violence specialists, respectively (Claes, 2016). Especially in war-torn countries, the incentives of armed actors rather than the behaviours of voters may explain election violence (Birnir & Gohdes, 2018; Staniland, 2015). Moreover, von Borzyskowski & Kuhn (2020) show that politicians use more violence against 'informed' participants. Although their study looks at the effects of media exposure, security-enhancing effects of education interventions could be offset when politicians target the informed. This article empirically and theoretically explores this possibility of null or even positive effects of election-education interventions on violence.

More generally, scholars debate whether any type of local-level intervention by international peacekeepers can help establish peaceful relations in war-torn countries. Some case studies are pessimistic about external peacekeepers' ability to meaningfully engage with local communities because they may lack sensitivity to and knowledge about local contexts (cf. Autesserre, 2014; Pouligny, 2000). In contrast, others assess the local turn in international peacebuilding more positively. Mvukiyehe & Samii (2017) provide experimental evidence that local education campaigns implemented by peacekeepers together with a Liberian civil society organization increased peaceful political participation and encouraged people to report election violence (cf. Mvukiyehe, 2018). Evaluating local election-education events contributes evidence to this debate.

Finally, analysing a specific type of peacekeeping activity, such as election education, provides an avenue for engaging with the puzzle of whether peacekeepers can simultaneously build peace and democracy (Paris, 2004). So far, the empirical literature has presented contradictory findings. Some works suggest that peacekeeping promotes peaceful democratization (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006; Grimm, 2008; Heldt, 2011). Others show that positive and negative effects cancel each other out, for example because internationally sponsored democratization introduces instability (Fortna, 2008; Paris, 2004). Thus, we need to empirically unpack peacekeepers' positive and negative effects and study their *specific* activities – for example, by exploring election education and its consequences for the peacefulness of elections.

Disinformation campaigns and violence in elections

During electoral periods, politicians frequently employ violence-inciting disinformation campaigns (Snyder, 2000). Disinformation campaigns spread fears and exacerbate threats posed by out-groups, increase political alienation by emphasizing the ineffectiveness of institutions, and approve violent action (Human Rights Watch, 1995). The causes of violent protest and rioting are complex, involving 'real' economic and political grievances, but also militia networks and biased state responses to public displays of violence (Wilkinson, 2009). Yet, disinformation campaigns play a role in activating grievances and mobilizing civilians for violent action in Côte d'Ivoire (Klaus & Mitchell, 2015) and elsewhere (Human Rights Watch, 1995; Snyder, 2000: 37; Varshney, 2002; Wilkinson, 2004: 23–26; Boone, 2011: 1327). Disinformation is likely to be particularly impactful in divided and war-torn countries, where countervailing forces to neutralize it are weak. War can

harden social boundaries, reduce information exchange between 'rival' groups and politicize the media (Belloni, 2008: 187–188). Education events thus serve as an important information source to counter disinformation.

Subnational patterns: Election-education effects

I argue that peacekeepers' election-education events provide civilians with information that helps them resist violence-inciting disinformation (Blattman, Hartman & Blair, 2014; Collier & Vicente, 2014; Mvukiyehe & Samii, 2017; Mvukiyehe, 2018; Sharma, 2019). This information may mitigate fears, reduce political alienation and counter political elites' approval of violence. In so doing, election education may reduce civilians' inclination to participate in violent protests and riots and, consequently, reduce the frequency of their occurrence.

Though not directly targeted, election-education efforts may also influence politicians' electoral strategies as civilians start opposing violent politics (cf. Collier & Vicente, 2014). Worrying about their electoral fate, politicians may abandon disinformation campaigns and refrain from hiring 'violence specialists' from organized armed groups. However, these effects are likely limited. Politicians and armed groups pursue their own agendas (Staniland, 2015) and usually do not participate in education interventions (Claes, 2016: 203). While positive indirect effects on 'top-down' election violence are possible,[1] the impact of election education should be most visible in relation to violent acts that are aided or abetted by civilians.

> *Hypothesis 1:* There are fewer violent protests and riots in localities where peacekeepers have organized more election-education events.

Mechanisms: Protection, political efficacy and peaceful behaviour

Three mechanisms plausibly connect PKOs' election-education events to fewer violent protests and riots during electoral periods, each one highlighting a specific informational aspect and effect. First, learning about PKOs' support for peaceful elections during election-education events can augment people's perceptions that political opponents cannot target them with violence. Peacekeeping research supports the idea that deploying peacekeepers reduces violence associated with elections (Brancati & Snyder, 2013), for example, by implementing electoral security plans or advising the election commission (Smidt, 2017). But only if citizens know about PKOs' security-enhancing activities can these activities affect civilians' perceived security. By informing people about peacekeepers' mandates, election-education events can reduce insecurity. This argument resonates with the research on election monitoring. Receiving information on election monitors affects people's beliefs about the incumbents' ability to cheat in elections (Bush & Prather, 2018: 663–664; Brancati, 2014). Reinforcing this learning effect, election-education events signal the PKO's interest in a specific locality. For instance, in Liberia, seeing a military patrol signalled protection and made civilians less afraid (Mvukiyehe, 2018). In contrast to patrols, however, unarmed civilian peacekeepers who organize the election-education events may signal interest but not necessarily protection. Instead, education mitigates fears by *informing* people about the PKO's efforts in securing elections. By reducing people's fear, election education mitigates a powerful incentive for violent self-defence, potentially discouraging approval and support of violent acts against political opponents in protests and riots.

> *Hypothesis 2a:* Greater exposure to election education makes people less afraid of election violence.

Second, election education provides people with politically relevant information. Civilian peacekeepers emphasize the viability of peaceful political participation. Extant research shows that such information stimulates participation in national politics, such as voting (Collier & Vicente, 2014) or contacting government officials (e.g. Mvukiyehe, 2018). The provision of politically relevant information via election-education events should generally increase people's political efficacy. Micro-level empirical evidence supports Gurr's (2000) proposition that the perceived availability of political action channels to attain political goals can mitigate individuals' incentives for violence (Finkel, Horowitz & Rojo-Mendoza, 2012).[2]

[1] Online appendix K: Election education reduces violence by non-state armed actors.

[2] Young (2020) suggests that general self-efficacy, for example the confidence in one's ability to control one's environment, heightens people's willingness to attend opposition rallies in response to state repression. If election-education events also increase people's self-efficacy, then protest could be more likely. As protest may escalate into violence, this effect could make it harder to find the expected negative effect of election education on violent protest.

Hypothesis 2b: Greater exposure to election education increases people's political efficacy.

Election education also includes peace messaging. Peacekeepers highlight the utility and normative value of peaceful political behaviour. These messages are often reiterated by local leaders, for example customary authorities and state officials, and 'practised' through common activities, for example football matches. New information can lead people to resist the initial framing of an issue (Druckman, 2004). Thus, peace messages may motivate people to question violence-inciting disinformation (Kaufman, 2006). In Northern India, antiviolence appeals by local religious leaders made Sunni followers more likely to adopt peaceful behaviours, though these appeals were less effective in the victimized Shia group (Sharma, 2019). A citizen from Côte d'Ivoire has put it this way: 'The politicians, they come to incite this thing [violence], but it just needs a good understanding, we will live in perfect harmony' (Piccolino, 2018: 12). Overall, peace messages may make people less inclined to use violence.

Hypothesis 2c: Greater exposure to election education reduces people's willingness to use violence.

Caveats: Local perceptions of UN peacekeepers

Election-education events cannot impose behavioural change. Their effects hinge on PKOs' power of persuasion. However, election-education events are short (usually one day) and are organized by international peacekeepers who may lack relevant local knowledge and sensitivity to local contexts (Autesserre, 2014; Pouligny, 2000). Election education also does not physically change the security, material and political conditions. Yet, as argued above, by influencing people's perceptions of these conditions and their attitudes to violent conflict and politics, even short-term information campaigns sponsored by international organizations may change political behaviour (Blattman, Hartman & Blair, 2014; Collier & Vicente, 2014; Mvukiyehe & Samii, 2017; Mvukiyehe, 2018).

A possibly more severe constraint is that the success of election education hinges on the trustworthiness of the messenger. If people do not trust the PKO, they may refuse to attend its education events and likely discount its message. Concerns about impartiality undermine trustworthiness. Bush & Prather (2018) show that election monitors in Tunisia only improved perceptions of electoral credibility if people viewed them as impartial. Another study in Bangladesh concludes that 'given the widely held perception that the commission [the sender of peace messages] was a partisan tool, the [peace] messages seemed to have a limited effect' (Macdonald, 2016: 47).

If people feel victimized at the hands of peacekeepers, they likely view them as partial and untrustworthy (Gordon & Young, 2017). Moreover, elite persuasion may influence the trustworthiness of peacekeepers. Piccolino & Karlsrud (2011) find that state officials in Côte d'Ivoire effectively mobilized popular opposition to the peacekeepers by publicly discrediting their efforts as 'neo-imperialist' and harmful. Overall, perceived victimization and elite persuasion buttressing this perception may reduce people's trust in PKOs. Yet, only if a PKO is perceived to be trustworthy can election-education campaigns sooth fears, alleviate political alienation, mitigate people's willingness to use violence and reduce violent protest and rioting.

Hypothesis 3: Variation in the effectiveness of election education depends on whether people perceive the PKO to be trustworthy.

Elections and peacekeeping in Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire is a West African country of roughly 23 million people. Economic recession, horizontal inequalities and growing anti-immigrant sentiments, among other factors, precipitated the outbreak of civil war in 2002 (Langer, 2005: 29–42). Several peace agreements were signed and, after a series of delays, elections were held in 2010 (Bekoe, 2018). Yet, then-president Laurent Gbagbo refused to accept the internationally recognized election victory of his long-time rival Alassane Ouattara. Post-election violence ensued, causing the deaths of over 3,000 people (Bassett, 2011).

In April 2011, the peacekeeping operation UNOCI (deployed since 2004) intervened in the post-electoral crisis and it helped the French military and Ouattara-loyal forces to arrest Gbagbo. At least since this intervention, many supporters of Gbagbo's party, the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI), doubt the impartiality of UNOCI (Piccolino, 2018: 12–13).[3] As the FPI speaker explained, '[w]e have no interest [in meetings with UNOCI]. This is because for creating trust, one must have trust in the body that seeks to create trust.'[4] In contrast, the PKO likely enjoys more trust among people without any party identification and people who support

[3] Interviews with members of the FPI party in October 2015.
[4] Interview with Boubakar Koné in Abidjan, September 2015.

the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR) of Ouattara and its coalition partner, the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) (Piccolino, 2018).

UNOCI engages in various election-education efforts to counter disinformation during electoral periods. Surprisingly, even after the 2011 electoral crisis, the content of its election-education events has not visibly changed (see Online appendix J for an assessment of varying effects over time). UNOCI also disseminates civic education through its radio. While UNOCI radio may have reduced violence nationally, its *nationwide* broadcasting cannot explain subnational variation in violence.

The origins of election violence in Côte d'Ivoire, in the form of protest and rioting and other forms, are complex, including socio-economic inequalities, migration and insecure land tenure (Akindes, 2004). Disinformation is one among many determinants of election-related protest and rioting. Pre-existing tensions between politico-ethnic groups are exacerbated by politically orchestrated false information, rumours and hate speech during electoral periods (Piccolino, 2018: 11–12; Klaus & Mitchell, 2015). For example, Human Rights Watch (2011: 5) reports how xenophobic rhetoric incites violence after the 2010 elections: 'Gbagbo's mouthpieces went further, comparing Ouattara supporters to "rats" and "culled birds" and exhorting followers to set up roadblocks and "denounce foreigners" – a call followed immediately by gruesome, targeted violence'. Politicians' disinformation campaigns also stoked violence by emphasizing election-related threats of violent eviction from ancestral land (Klaus & Mitchell, 2015: 4).[5] In the run-up to the 2011 legislative elections, 'media continued to air inflammatory statements' (United Nation Security Council, 2011: 12). For example, FPI-leaning *Le Nouveau Courrier* (2011) spread accusations that ex-president Gbagbo was facing torture in prison. Around the 2013 local elections, violence-inciting disinformation campaigns persisted (United Nations Security Council, 2013). And as the 2015 presidential polls drew closer, the opposition renewed its anti-immigration rhetoric and fuelled longstanding doubts about whether Ouattara is Ivorian by birth and eligible to contest elections. This disinformation campaign led to violent demonstrations against the Constitutional Council's decision to validate Ouattara's candidature (Piccolino, 2016). Interviews carried out by Piccolino (2018: 12) in 2015 show that Ivorians see 'elections are a cause of fear and insecurity' and that 'politicians are accused of instrumentalizing ethnic sentiments'.

In the 2010 electoral period, violent protests and riots account for a small portion of violent events. The large share of election violence occurs in the form of repression by Gbagbo-loyal special military units and armed militias in urban areas and, in rural areas, intimidation by Ouattara-loyal soldiers and 'tit-for-tat' violence committed by politico-ethnic militias (Straus, 2011). Following the post-electoral crisis, violent protests and riots make up a higher proportion of violent events across the 2011, 2013 and 2015 electoral periods. Coercion by 'violence specialists' is relatively less frequent, and elections are overall less contentious because the FPI's boycott has reduced electoral competition and opposition groups have maintained less coercive capacity (United Nations Security Council, 2016: 2). Nevertheless, the PKO continues to report violent demonstrations, street fighting between supporters of Gbagbo and Ouattara and intercommunal riots around elections (United Nations Security Council, 2011: 2; 2013, 2015).

The discussion suggests that Côte d'Ivoire is an ideal case for examining the consequences of election education because the politics and violence in the country match the scope condition of the argument. First, the behaviour of civilians – the main target of election-education events – shapes violent protests and riots during electoral periods, though 'violence specialists' commit violent acts too. Second, disinformation incites violent protests and riots. Therefore, election-education events target one source of electoral insecurity. The findings of this study might be generalizable to other countries where these scope conditions – civilian agency in election violence and disinformation as a source of election violence – hold: for instance, in Kenya (Boone, 2011: 1327) and Nigeria (Ikeanyibe et al., 2018).

Côte d'Ivoire is not an easy case for finding evidence of effective election education, which strengthens the plausibility of generalizing the results to other cases. First, both civilians and 'violence specialists' are responsible for violent protests and riots in Côte d'Ivoire. 'Violence specialists' could potentially offset the impact of civilian-focused education. Thus, if election education 'works' in Côte d'Ivoire, it may also help reduce violent protests and riots in other cases where violent acts are executed by both civilian and non-civilian actors. Second, peacekeepers helped mitigate but did not prevent the large-scale violence related to the 2010 elections.

[5] Klaus (2020) finds that land allocation before the 2017 elections in Kenya heightened fears of election violence by augmenting the perceived stakes in elections. Disinformation on land allocation, including threats of evictions from land, also potentially augments perceived stakes in environments where property rights are weak and governments possess the power to change land titles.

Consequently, Ivorians may mistrust UNOCI's promise to secure elections.[6] Thus, the results potentially hold in other countries where peacekeepers do not possess an unblemished civilian protection record.

Research design

The subnational relationship between election education and violent protest and rioting (Hypothesis 1) is explored across 107 departments (third-tier administrative units) and four electoral periods.[7] The electoral periods include the three months before and after the second round of the 2011 presidential elections, the 2011 legislative election, the 2013 local election and the 2015 presidential election. The micro-level mechanisms (Hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c) are explored using survey data from 2013 and 2014. The impact of peacekeepers' perceived trustworthiness (Hypothesis 3) is explored at both the subnational and the individual level. Both analyses employ ordered logit regression with region dummies. Standard errors are clustered by department.

To capture election-education activities at the local level, I collected novel data from 8,454 French and English press releases published on the UNOCI website (UNOCI News, 2017). Because of the large number of articles, I combined manual coding with an automated coding procedure (see Online appendix B). Between January 2009 and May 2016, UNOCI reportedly organized 598 election-education events.[8] Election-education events are community-based events in specific towns and villages. They invite local leaders (including customary authorities, civil society representatives, youth leaders and local government officials) and ordinary citizens from different political and ethnic groups. During the event, civilian peacekeeping personnel explain the PKOs' mandate and emphasize the viability, benefit and moral value of peaceful political participation. Theatre, football matches and other activities are sometimes used to put peaceful behaviour 'into practice'. The following is an example of a press release about UNOCI's election education:

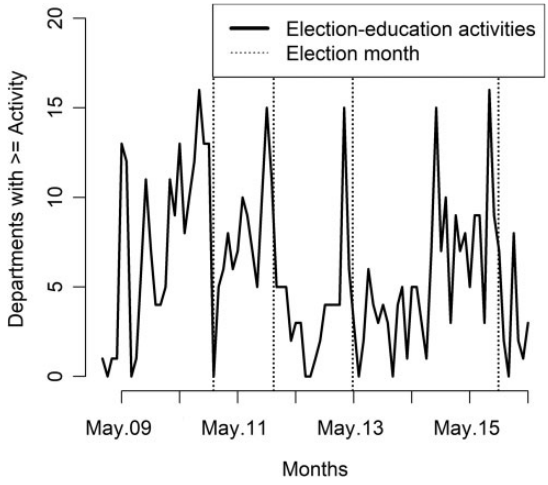

Figure 2. Temporal distribution of election-education activities

> UNOCI encourages Dabrouza inhabitants to promote peaceful presidential election in 2015: [...] The UNOCI delegation to the event was led by Said Bacar Husseine of the Civil Affairs Office in Daloa who encouraged the population to continue their efforts to bring Côte d'Ivoire to a lasting peace. 'Peace will not be effective unless you forget your grudges and exercise forgiveness,' he advised. He called on them to work towards a peaceful presidential election that would be free of violence in 2015. 'Elections are like a game. Your choice should be based on the candidate whose programme convinces you and avoid the use of violence for whatever reason,' he cautioned. Other UNOCI staff took turns to educate the population about the mandate of their different sections and stressed the need for peaceful coexistence as the sole guarantee for the development of their village. (UNOCI News, 2014)

Main independent variables

For the subnational analyses, I create a count of election-education events in each department within the six months prior to the start of an electoral period. For the individual-level analyses, I calculate each survey respondent's weighted exposure to election-education events. That is, I take the inverse of the distance from an election-education event in a specific (precisely geolocated) village or town to a respondent location. I disregard events more than 10 km away from respondents and total the remaining inverse distances in the period of six months before the survey was administered.

Figures 2 and 3 plot election-education activities over time and the geographic spread of these events between

[6] But, government sympathizers may give credit to UNOCI for allowing Ouattara to take power.

[7] The sample excludes the capital Abidjan. Because Abidjan is home to more than four million people, a much smaller proportion of its residents participate in election-education events compared with other departments. Finding a spatial effect is thus unlikely.

[8] Note that only events in the 9th to 4th month before election day are included in the independent variable.

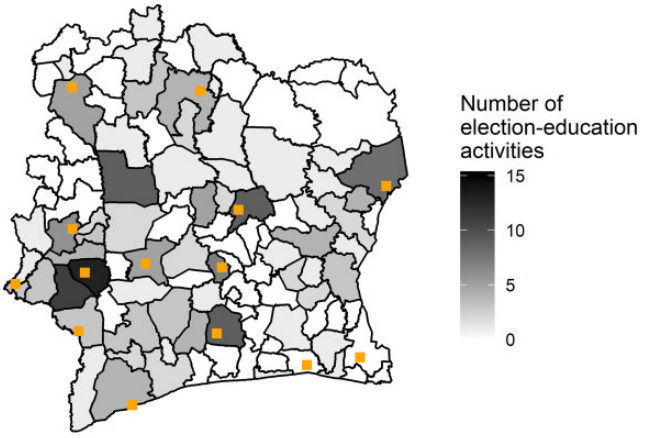

Figure 3. Spatial distribution of election-education activities

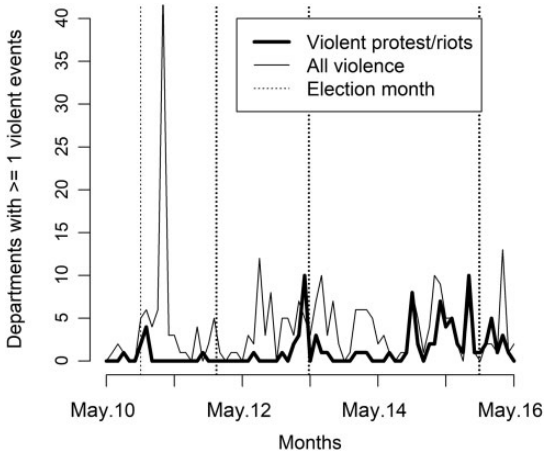

Figure 4. Temporal distribution of protests and riots compared to other violence

January 2009 and May 2016, respectively. The temporal pattern reveals an increase in election education in the months before an election. The spatial pattern shows that interventions cluster in departments located in the violence-prone western part of the country and in departments with UN Human Rights Offices (light squares). International and domestic civil society organizations also organize election-education events, which are not captured in the data. Given UNOCI's superior personnel and material resources, however, UNOCI-sponsored events are likely more prevalent. Thus, it is unlikely that a statistical effect of UNOCI's education events results from omitted education efforts by others, though I cannot rule out this possibility.

As explained above, Gbagbo-loyal opposition party supporters tend to mistrust the PKO. To test Hypothesis 3, the subnational analysis includes the interaction between the count of election-education events and an indicator for the departments that are strongholds of Gbagbo's FPI. The individual-level analyses include the interaction between the respondent's exposure to election-education campaigns and an indicator for whether she supports the FPI.

Dependent variables

The dependent variable for testing Hypothesis 1 is the count of violent protests and riots in a department over an electoral period. The information is taken from an integrated version of the Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD) (Salehyan et al., 2012) and the African Conflict Locations and Events Dataset (ACLED) (Raleigh et al., 2010). Duplicate events are discarded using an automated and reproducible methodology developed by Donnay et al. (2018). A total of 49 events are recorded in the four electoral periods.

Instead of identifying *election-related* violence by the event's issue, I identify relevant events according to their timing, for two reasons. First, violent protest and rioting in Côte d'Ivoire before and after elections likely stem from electoral dynamics (Klaus & Mitchell, 2015). Second, existing events datasets that identify election violence according to the event issues are not suitable. The VECO dataset by Fjelde & Höglund (2018) does not capture low-level violence but lethal violent conflict that causes at least ten fatalities per calendar year. The SCAD dataset records only six department-months with election-related violence between 2009 and 2016. To alleviate concerns regarding operationalization, the robustness tests show similar results for Hypothesis 1 if the analyses use the Electoral Contention and Violence (ECAV) dataset by Daxecker, Amicarelli & Jung (2019) available for the 2010 and 2011 elections. Figure 4 shows the temporal distribution of all violent protest and riots compared to all other types of violence, and Figure 5 shows their spatial distribution.

The individual-level measures to test Hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c come from the geocoded Afrobarometer surveys from March 2013 (round 5) and September 2014 (round 6) (BenYishay et al., 2017). To capture the perceived threat of violence during the election campaign (Hypothesis 2a), survey respondents were asked: 'During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?' (Afrobarometer Data, 2018). The answers range from not at all (0) to a little bit (1), somewhat (2) and a lot (3). To capture political efficacy (Hypothesis 2b), I use a survey item related to contact with the government. Respondents were asked: 'During

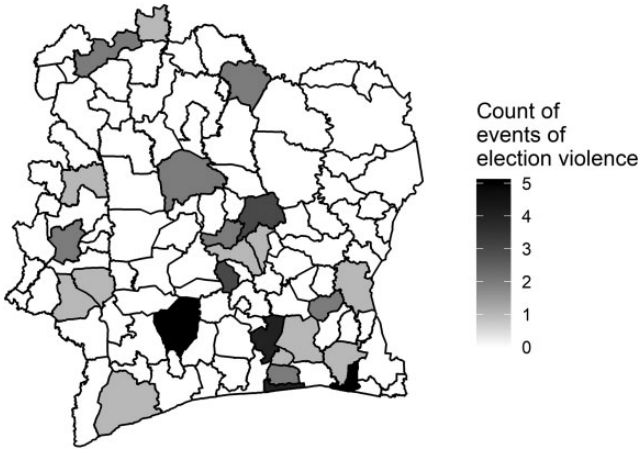

Figure 5. Spatial distribution of violent protests and riots during electoral periods

the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: Official of a government agency' (Afrobarometer Data, 2018). The answers range from never (0), to only once (1), a few times (2) and often (3). Finally, the survey round 5 in the Afrobarometer provides a proxy for people's willingness to use political violence (Hypothesis 2c): 'Please tell me if you have personally done one of these actions in the last twelve months: Use coercion or violence for a political cause.' The answers range from 'I would never do it' (0) to 'I would do it if I had the chance' (1), 'one or two times' (2), 'a few times' (3) and 'often' (4).[9] Figure 6 depicts the spatial distribution of the three variables by survey round, with the size of the circles indicating the number of respondents in specific locations.

Control variables

Both the subnational and individual-level analyses control for potentially confounding factors. First, subnational deployment of police and military (*UN police* and *UN military)* may decrease violence and, consequently, enable election-education activities. I collected personnel data myself using the methodology developed by Ruggeri, Dorussen & Gizelis (2017).[10] Second, the analyses add a measure for *Competitiveness*.[11] Balcells (2017) observes that violence in Côte d'Ivoire is positively related to parity between government and opposition. Electoral tensions should attract education interventions. Third, geographical features should influence both peacekeepers' ability to organize election-education events and violence (Ruggeri, Dorussen & Gizelis, 2017). Thus, I include *Travel time*, which provides the average travel time (in minutes) to get from a department to the nearest major city of over 50,000 inhabitants by land.[12] Fourth, I add *Border distance*, which is the distance from the centre of each department to the border of the nearest neighbouring country (in kilometres).[13] Places closer to borders tend to be more violence-prone due to the influx of violence specialists from neighbouring countries, thereby attracting more peacekeeping deployment and potentially also election education. Fifth, the analyses control for the departmental *Infant mortality rate* to approximate socio-economic development, which may influence the risk of violence and, in turn, PKOs' activity.[14] *Infant mortality rate*, *Border distance* and *Travel time* come from the PRIO-GRID data frame (Tollefsen, Strand & Buhaug, 2012). Finally, the number of people living in a department should determine the likelihood of election-related violence and efforts by UN peacekeepers (*Population size*).[15] The subnational analyses also include the cumulative count of violent events in the twelfth to seventh month before the start date of the electoral period (*Baseline violence*). The individual-level analyses control for party affiliation – that is, the RDR (the party of the president), the PDCI (the government coalition partner) and the FPI (the main opposition party), with no party affiliation as the baseline – as well as gender and education.[16] This information is obtained from Afrobarometer. Summary statistics are provided in Online appendix A.

Endogeneity

If election education targets violence-prone departments, the statistical analysis underestimates its effectiveness in

[9] The item may underestimate the true willingness to commit violence due to response bias (e.g. social desirability). Thus, the findings are preliminary and require further research.

[10] Information taken from the deployment maps of Secretary-General reports on UNOCI.

[11] For August 2010 through December 2013, I calculate the departmental margin of victory between Ouattara and Gbagbo in the second round of the 2010 presidential elections. For January 2014 to May 2016, I use the difference between Ouattara's vote share and the share of abstentions from the 2015 elections due to the boycott of Gbagbo's party.

[12] Uchida & Nelson (2009).

[13] Weidmann, Kuse & Gleditsch (2010).

[14] Storeygard et al. (2008); CIESIN (2005).

[15] Data are obtained from the Institut National de la Statistique (2014).

[16] Education is measured on a ten-point scale from 'no formal schooling' (0) to 'post-graduate education' (9).

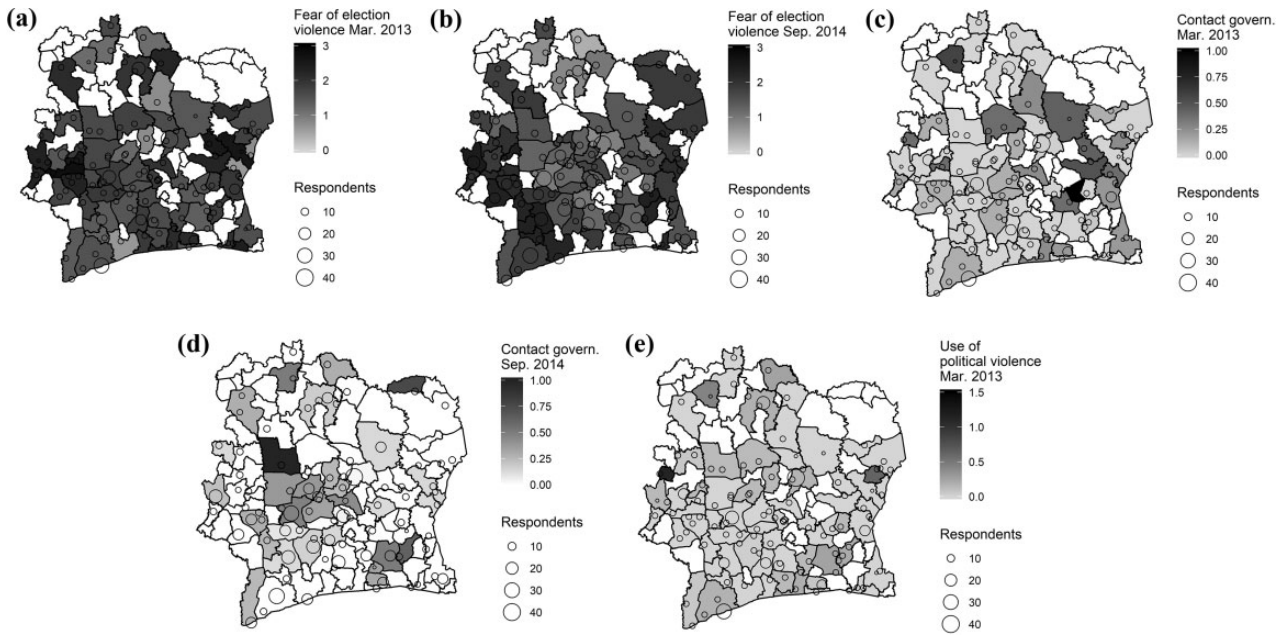

Figure 6. Spatial distribution of survey measures

reducing violence. To examine this possibility, I fit models of election-education events in the past six and three months, respectively. Table I shows that election education is indeed more prevalent in more violence-prone locations. *Baseline violence* and *Population size* have positive and significant effects in Models 1a and 1b. In Model 1b, travel time to the next biggest city and UN troops also have significant effects. As troops are present in places at higher risk of violence, election-education events target the hard cases (Ruggeri, Dorussen & Gizelis, 2018).

Next, I pre-process the sample to create a more balanced distribution of covariates with coarsened exact matching (CEM) (Iacus, King & Porro, 2011). CEM creates a quasi-experimental sample in which the matching variables are similarly distributed across departments with and without election-education events. CEM discards control observations that are too drastically different from treated observations. For the remaining cases, CEM produces weights that adjust remaining imbalances in the distributions of the matching variables. I use *Baseline violence* and *Population size* as matching variables because of their strong correlation with election education.[17]

As Table II shows, the balance on all matching variables significantly improves after matching. The overall imbalance measure $L1$ shrinks from 38.9 to 16.3. $L1$ represents the percentage of observations with election education that do not have a 'matching' control observation without election education. While pre-processing the sample with matching will not recover the exact causal effect, due among other things to unobserved confounding, it should help to better approximate the impact of election education on election violence.

Analyses and results

The statistical analyses support the argument that PKOs' election-education events can mitigate violent protest and rioting (Hypothesis 1) by soothing fears of election violence (Hypothesis 2a), reducing political alienation (Hypothesis 2b) and delegitimizing violence (Hypothesis 2c). Yet election education makes little difference in opposition strongholds and among opposition supporters, who tend to perceive the PKO as biased (Hypothesis 3).

Subnational impact of election education

Table III presents the analyses of violent protest and rioting across electoral periods and departments. Supporting Hypothesis 1, election-education campaigns in the six months prior to an electoral period have a negative effect coefficient in Model 1. When excluding FPI strongholds in Model 2, however, the coefficient

[17] To avoid post-treatment bias, baseline violence captures violent events in the 12 to 7 months before the start of the electoral period.

Table I. Analyses of election-education campaigns

	Elect. educ.	*Elect. educ.*
	6 months lag	*3 months lag*
Variables	*Model 1a*	*Model 1b*
Competitiveness	–0.252	0.477
	(0.512)	(0.554)
UN Police	–0.131	–0.153
	(0.172)	(0.186)
UN Military	0.118	0.466†
	(0.218)	(0.238)
Travel time	0.153	0.260*
	(0.148)	(0.129)
Border distance	0.0306	–0.254
	(0.180)	(0.261)
Infant mortality	0.0293	0.0518
	(0.106)	(0.122)
Population size	0.787**	0.727**
	(0.116)	(0.119)
Baseline violence	0.330*	0.318+
	(0.160)	(0.163)
Constant	–1.180**	–2.292**
	(0.275)	(0.325)
Observations	428	428
Log-likelihood	–208.4	–159.3
BIC	471.3	373.2
AIC	434.8	336.7

Robust standard errors in parentheses; $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$.

Table II. Pre- and post-matching imbalances

	Pre-matching sample		*Post-matching sample*	
	L1	*Mean diff.*	*L1*	*Mean diff.*
Population size	0.356	0.254	0.065	0.007
Baseline violence	0.134	0.241	0.039	0.062
Sample size	N = 428 (104 treated)		N = 419 (99 treated)	

becomes larger and turns significant. Model 3 includes the interaction between election education and FPI strongholds. Election education maintains its negative effect coefficient, while the coefficient on the interaction is positive. On average, election education correlates with lower levels of violent protest and rioting in competitive districts and government strongholds, but not in the 22 FPI strongholds. Models 4 to 6 are estimated based on the post-matching sample and yield substantively the same results. The average probability of violent protest and rioting outside FPI strongholds decreases from 7.3% to almost 0 with an increasing number of election-education events (Figure 7).[18]

The effects of the control variables match prior expectations. Deploying more *UN military* and *UN police* negatively correlates with violence, though only the coefficient on police is statistically significant. Electoral *Competitiveness* has the expected positive effect. *Travel time* and *Border distance* have no effects. *Infant mortality* is negatively related to violent protests and riots, suggesting that these events take place in less socio-economically marginalized places. Finally, violence occurs more often in populous departments (*Population size*) with a history of violence (*Baseline violence*).

Individual-level impact of election education

The survey data analyses provide support for all three mechanism hypotheses. Table IV presents the ordered logit regressions on fear of election violence. Supporting Hypothesis 2a, the coefficient on election-education exposure is negative across all models. When the analysis excludes respondents who support the FPI (Model 8) or includes the interaction between election education and FPI support (Model 9), the coefficient on election-education exposure becomes significant. This finding supports Hypothesis 3. Table V presents the analysis of contact with government officials. Supporting Hypothesis 2b, the coefficient on election education is positive and significant across all models (Models 10 to 12). Again, as expected by Hypothesis 3, the effect is larger among non-FPI supporters (Model 11). Finally, Table VI shows the analysis of the intention to use political violence. While the coefficient on election education is negative, as expected by Hypothesis 2c, it never turns significant at conventional levels (Models 13 to 16). Moreover, the size of this coefficient gets smaller when the sample excludes FPI supporters (Model 14). One explanation is that election education only affects party supporters. The interaction between FPI support and election education in Model 15 and the interaction between support for any political party and election education in Model 16 have very similar effects (full tables with control variable results are in the Online appendix M).

To interpret these results, I calculate the predicted effect of election education on an average respondent. As expected by Hypothesis 3, election education is not correlated with fear and political efficacy among FPI supporters. Yet election-education exposure, on average,

[18] The graph illustrates the predicted probability of one violent event.

Table III. Analyses of protest and rioting in the electoral period

	Pre-matching			*Post-matching*		
	Model 1 Full sample	*Model 2 No FPI str.*	*Model 3 Interaction*	*Model 4 Full sample*	*Model 5 No FPI str.*	*Model 6 Interaction*
Election educ. (past 6 months)	–0.574	–1.398**	–1.198**	–0.957**	–1.706**	–1.122**
	(0.503)	(0.463)	(0.409)	(0.302)	(0.555)	(0.332)
Stronghold Gbagbo (FPI) = 1			1.099			1.228
			(0.869)			(1.478)
Election educ.* Stronghold			2.076**			1.277
			(0.749)			(1.054)
Competitiveness	2.495	–1.499	2.975*	1.004	–1.476	1.578
	(1.546)	(2.575)	(1.429)	(2.018)	(3.340)	(1.772)
UN Police	–0.572†	–1.388**	–0.520	–0.609†	–1.543**	–0.634†
	(0.345)	(0.492)	(0.321)	(0.347)	(0.564)	(0.332)
UN Military	–0.355	0.231	–0.246	–0.0646	1.393	0.0213
	(0.563)	(0.924)	(0.602)	(0.685)	(1.202)	(0.714)
Travel time	–0.814	–0.538	–0.375	–0.340	1.076	–0.0255
	(0.540)	(0.839)	(0.574)	(0.748)	(1.088)	(0.572)
Border distance	0.511	0.604	1.160	1.855	0.833	2.172†
	(0.738)	(0.978)	(0.789)	(1.147)	(1.081)	(1.111)
Infant mortality	–0.581†	–1.130	–0.916*	–0.616†	–2.226	–0.776†
	(0.320)	(0.691)	(0.429)	(0.342)	(1.528)	(0.441)
Population size	3.132**	4.736*	3.986**	3.888**	6.957**	4.213**
	(1.064)	(1.935)	(0.962)	(0.897)	(1.809)	(0.925)
Baseline violence	0.727*	0.907**	0.945**	1.330*	1.426	1.432**
	(0.304)	(0.285)	(0.359)	(0.645)	(0.924)	(0.552)
Constant cut 1	3.720**	–0.202	5.205**	9.327**	18.80**	11.11**
	(1.290)	(2.406)	(1.432)	(2.273)	(4.963)	(3.261)
Constant cut 2	4.891**	1.481	6.449**	10.25**	22.01**	12.03**
	(1.224)	(2.486)	(1.360)	(2.189)	(4.976)	(3.060)
Constant cut 3	6.036**	3.660	7.714**	4.993**		6.674*
	(1.237)	(3.282)	(1.415)	(1.861)		(2.744)
Constant cut 4	6.765**		8.566**	7.286**		9.012**
	(1.172)		(1.299)	(1.918)		(2.822)
Observations	428	340	428	419	329	419
Log-likelihood	–96.4	–56.6	–91.4	–85.6	–44.5	–84.5
BIC	459.4	352.3	461.6	437.0	170.2	446.8
AIC	280.8	195.3	274.9	259.3	117.0	261.1

Robust standard errors in parentheses; $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$.

tends to reduce fears of violence (Figure 8) and increase the frequency of contact with the government (Figure 9) among respondents without party identity (43% of the sample) and supporters of the government coalition (31% of the sample). Election-education exposure negatively relates to the predicted willingness to use political violence among *all* respondents (Figure 10). One explanation might be that peace messages speak to *universal* values of nonviolence rather than the PKO's security efforts. Therefore, FPI respondents' predisposition to the PKO may matter less in determining whether they heed this message.

For the control variables, while departmental characteristics have no impact, the effects of respondents' characteristics fit prior expectations. Support for the government parties (RDR and PDCI) is associated with less fear and more contact with officials. RDR supporters are more likely to say that they intend to use violence. An average female respondent exhibits greater fear, feels less politically empowered, and is less inclined to use violence than an average male respondent. Finally, formal education correlates with lower fear, greater political efficacy and lower support for violence.

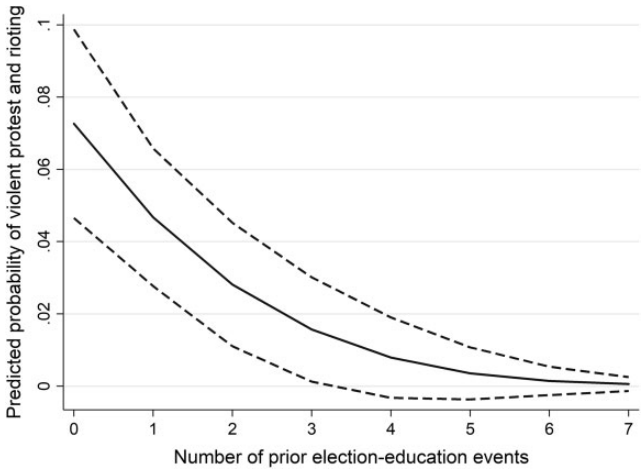

Figure 7. Predicted probability of violent protest and rioting

Table IV. Analyses of fear of election campaign violence

	Model 7	*Model 8*	*Model 9*
Variables	*Full sample*	*Without FPI*	*Interaction*
Election-education exposure (10 km)	–0.175 (0.109)	–0.333** (0.125)	–0.259* (0.121)
Party: FPI	0.110 (0.120)		0.0567 (0.124)
Election-education exposure (10 km) * FPI			0.357 (0.222)
Observations	1,879	1,522	1,879
Log-likelihood	–2,419.9	–1,947.9	–2,418.6
BIC	5,194.1	4,232.9	5,199.0
AIC	4,933.8	3,987.8	4,933.1

Standard errors in parentheses; $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$.

Robustness tests

The results of the individual-level and subnational analyses are robust to various alternative model specifications and tests. Online appendix C shows that election-education exposure has a similar effect when 5 km or 25 km cutoff points are used, or no cutoff is used. Online appendix D replicates the main results with multilevel models accounting for unobserved differences between respondents in different departments. Online appendix E shows that the violence-reducing impact of election education is not due to a spatial displacement effect. Online appendix F provides substantively similar results for the effect of election-education events within three rather than six months prior to the electoral period. Online appendix G shows that the results remain robust for the separated pre-electoral and post-electoral periods. Online appendix H uses data from the Electoral Contention and Violence (ECAV) dataset (Daxecker, Amicarelli & Jung, 2019) and results lend support to the argument and Hypothesis 1. Finally, Online appendix J shows that election-education events had a stronger impact on reducing violent protest and rioting around the 2013 and 2015 elections than around the 2010 and 2011 elections,

Table V. Analyses of contacting government officials

	Model 10	*Model 11*	*Model 12*
Variables	*Full sample*	*Without FPI*	*Interaction*
Civic education exposure (10 km)	0.707** (0.243)	0.950** (0.289)	0.885** (0.256)
Party: FPI	0.364 (0.301)		0.609† (0.313)
Civic education exposure (10 km) * FPI			–103.5 (7,817)
Observations	1,883	1,525	1,883
Log-likelihood	–503.3	–402.7	–499.4
BIC	1,360.9	1,142.6	1,360.7
AIC	1,100.5	897.4	1,094.8

Standard errors in parentheses; $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$.

Table VI. Analyses of intention or experience of using violence for a political cause

	Model 13	*Model 14*	*Model 15*	*Model 16*
Variables	*Full sample*	*No FPI*	*Interaction 1*	*Interaction 2*
Civic education exposure (10 km)	–0.634 (0.448)	–0.283 (0.549)	–0.466 (0.460)	–0.215 (0.466)
Party: FPI	0.782 (0.538)		0.869 (0.547)	
Civic education exposure (10 km) * FPI			–9.734 (1,635)	
Any party identity				0.772* (0.393)
Civic education exposure (10 km) * Any party				–9.593 (1,162)
Observations	952	778	952	952
Log-likelihood	–167.3	–120.4	–166.9	–166.6
BIC	657.0	540.5	663.0	648.7
AIC	428.6	330.9	429.8	425.2

Standard errors in parentheses; $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$.

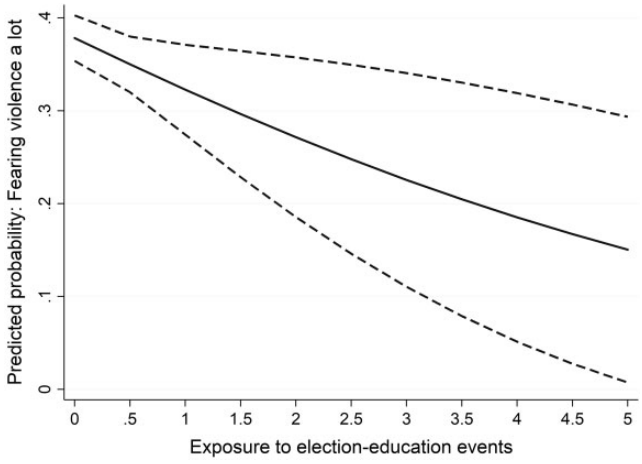

Figure 8. Predicted fear of election violence

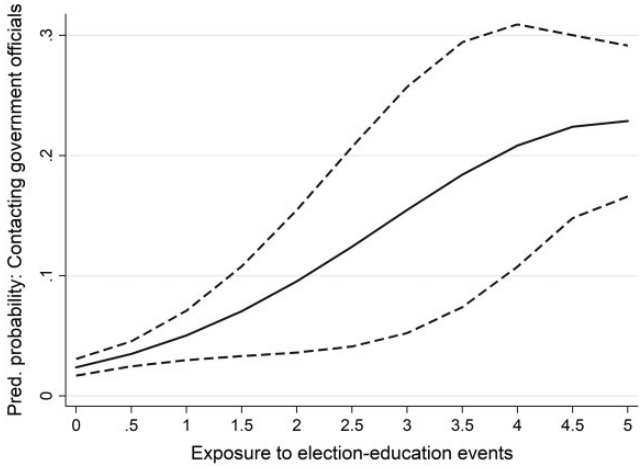

Figure 9. Predicted contacting of government officials

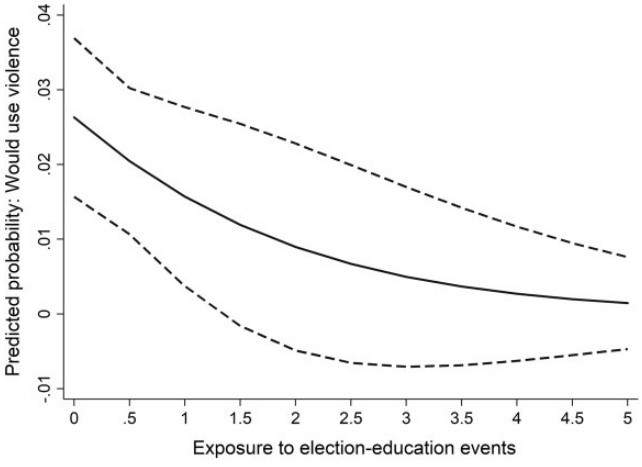

Figure 10. Predicted intention to use political violence

where the effects of election-education events are negative but not significant at conventional levels. A plausible explanation is that civilians – the main targets of election education – had less agency in violent protests and riots in the 2010 and 2011 elections and more agency afterwards when militias were mostly demobilized.

Conclusion

The analyses provide evidence that election education sponsored by the PKO in Côte d'Ivoire helped support the peacefulness of election processes in the war-torn country. Across subnational locations, election education is associated with fewer events of violent protests and riots. On the individual level, election education correlates with less fear of election violence, greater political efficacy and a reduced propensity to use political violence. However, UNOCI's election education does not seem to affect fears and political efficacy among opposition supporters who tend to mistrust peacekeepers. Correspondingly, the estimated effect of election education on violent protest and rioting is smaller in the opposition's electoral strongholds.

Evaluating external validity is difficult because we lack subnational data on election-education programmes for other countries. In principle, election education could be useful beyond Côte d'Ivoire because civilians have agency in violent protest and rioting elsewhere (Varshney, 2002) and disinformation campaigns trigger these events during electoral periods in other emerging democracies, too – for instance, in Kenya (Boone, 2011) or Nigeria (Ikeanyibe et al., 2018). However, further research on specific interventions is needed to establish generalizability.[19] In addition, domestic and international civil society actors sponsor similar election-education campaigns. It is imperative to evaluate their potentially complementary effects.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that election education is a worthwhile addition to the peacekeeping curricula. With the data at hand, however, we cannot assess the relative benefits of election education compared with other election-assistance activities. If election education becomes part of the peacebuilding repertoire, this study should prompt policymakers to remain attentive to three caveats: first, only if people trust the PKO can election education fulfil its full

[19] Some scholars also suggest that peace messaging can be harmful to democracy by demobilizing dissent (Lynch, Cheeseman & Willis, 2019).

potential. Second, election education targets civilians who are usually not the main perpetrators of election violence. Third, election education mitigates election-related protests and riots but not election violence in other forms such as repression and intimidation by security forces.

The results have several implications for extant research on election violence prevention and postwar peacebuilding. First, the positive impact of peacekeepers suggests that outside interveners can sometimes overcome the many obstacles to meaningful local engagement (see also Mvukiyehe & Samii, 2017; Mvukiyehe, 2018). Yet, peacekeepers' election-education efforts have largely failed among a crucial constituency: politically alienated opposition supporters. Thus, the results also highlight the importance of local perceptions for peacekeeping success (Autesserre, 2014). Second, the study speaks to the debate on whether peacekeepers can simultaneously build democracy and peace (Brancati & Snyder, 2013; Fortna, 2008). The findings suggest that peacekeeping operations may assist peaceful war-to-democracy transitions when they invest in election education. Third, the analyses provide a positive answer to the question posed by Finkel, Horowitz & Rojo-Mendoza (2012) on whether educating citizens works in chronically inhospitable environments. Finally, the findings show that civilian agency plays a role in election violence. The study therefore adds to the recent body of research exploring the spatial patterns and micro-foundations of election-related contention (Fjelde & Höglund, 2018; von Borzyskowski & Kuhn, 2020).

Replication data

The dataset, codebook and do-files for the empirical analyses, along with the Online appendix, can be found at http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets. The analyses were conducted with Stata, version 13. The data preparation was carried out in R, version 3.4.3 (2017-11-30).

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