

MITIGATING ELECTION VIOLENCE IN THE 2021 ELECTIONS IN UGANDA: LESSONS FROM THE DISTRICTS OF ARUA, KOBOKO AND NEBBI IN THE WEST NILE REGION

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Acknowledgments

Non-partisan election observation and programs for mitigating election violence are important for organizing and holding peaceful, genuine, free and fair elections. This report draws on the election violence monitoring project which Women's Democracy Network-Uganda Chapter (WDN-U) and her civil society organization district partners Youth Development Initiatives-West Nile (YDI-WN) in the Arua district, Teremunga Youth Action Forum (TAYOF) in the Koboko district and Community Uplift for Welfare and Development (CUWEDE) in the Nebbi district implemented in the districts of Arua, Koboko and Nebbi in the West Nile region and at national level. The report draws on lessons and best practices that WDN-U and her CSO partners learned as a result of implementing the election violence monitoring project. The report also makes recommendations based on the project implementation.

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The project and the development of this report was made possible with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The document complements other resources available on election violence mitigation and provides much needed information on early warning signs for election violence and strategies for mitigation prior to and during an election. This report and other resources produced by WDN-U on elections are available at www.wdnuganda.org

We hope that those who use this document will contact WDN-U with any comments, suggestions and requests.

The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of NED.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	4
Section One: Introduction	6
What is Election Violence?.....	6
Section Two: Understanding Early Warning Signs for Election Violence	8
Section Three: Best Practices and Recommendations from the Actions of WDN-U and CSO Partners in Arua, Koboko and Nebbi districts and at national level on Election Violence Mitigation	12
Recommendations.....	16
References.....	18

Section One: INTRODUCTION

In February 2020 Women's Democracy Network – Uganda Chapter (WDN-U) with financial support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) implemented a one year election related project which focused on pre-election monitoring and information-sharing campaign to prevent and report on violence and human rights abuses ahead of Uganda's national elections in 2021. WDN-U designed the project in response to conclusions from a research report it authored and published with a youth organization, titled "Early Warning Signs for Violence in Uganda's 2021 Elections: Strategies and Structures for Mitigation".¹ WDN-U engaged at-risk communities in the districts of Arua, Koboko and Nebbi districts in monitoring missions, information sharing sessions with local and national institutions, citizen forums, and radio programs that sought to promote peaceful, free, and fair elections. WDN-U selected and trained citizen monitors from local women's groups, youth groups, and older persons' groups to encourage the interest groups to overcome their divisions and combine their comparative advantages towards strengthened community-led advocacy strategies to mitigate election violence.

In terms of methodology, WDN-U conducted three two-day workshops for local citizens in Arua, Koboko, and Nebbi districts to monitor, identify, and document precursors to and incidents of human rights violations and violence during the 2021 election period. The monitors were chosen from local organizations and associations representing the interests of women, youth, and older persons and with experience in working on democracy and governance programs. WDN-U contracted experts from the Electoral Commission of Uganda and also used the expertise of the WDN-U Executive Director to train the monitors on the electoral process and how to identify indicators of potential violence, monitor and document abuses, mitigate and react to violence, and present findings and recommendations to public officials. WDN-U developed and provided monitoring forms to guide the participants on documenting and reporting.

The district teams organized bi-monthly citizen forums in counties within the focus districts that were hot spots for election violence in previous elections including political party primary elections in preparation for the general elections in 2021. WDN-U worked with local CSO partners and representatives from the Electoral Commission and the police to hold community meetings to educate citizens on the electoral process, the nature of election violence, penalties for perpetrators of violence, how to seek redress for abuses, and the role of citizens in ensuring that the elections are peaceful. The meetings allowed the communities, Electoral Commission, Police and WDN-U's partners to identify and discuss existing election related tensions in the communities. For each meeting, about 50 citizens were invited based on their influence in their community and ability to spread information, including vendors, religious leaders, farmers, media professionals, local council leaders, influential youth and women in the community and political party representatives. The participants with guidance from the WDN-U CSO partners in the districts developed and used action plans to ensure peaceful, free, and fair elections in their communities. WDN-U used the action plans to track their progress and contributions to an improved election environment.

The report highlights the lessons, best practices and recommendations that emanated from the actions that the WDN-U CSO partners Youth Development Initiatives-West Nile (YDI-WN) in Arua city and Teremunga Youth Action Platform (TAYOF) in Koboko district undertook to mitigate election violence in their communities. The report further documents how WDN-U used the reports from the districts of Arua city, Koboko and Nebbi to highlight the issues affecting the elections and the best practices that stakeholders adopted to ensure peaceful and fair elections. It further shows how the WDN-U CSO

1 Early Warning signs for Violence in Uganda's 2021 Elections: Structures and Strategies for Mitigation accessible on www.wdnuganda.org

partners integrated election observation in their work and ultimately contributed to national reports released by CSO election observers on the political party candidate selection processes and the election processes in the general election.

What is Election Violence?

Elections provide the means by which competition in society can be channeled into a constructive process with common rules to choose representatives of the people. However, since electoral processes are intrinsically about the attainment of political power, often in high-stake contexts, elections — as a process of competition for power — can be catalysts of conflict².

Election violence is a sub-type of political violence, but distinguished by its timing (close to elections) and its goals (to impact elections, either by changing outcomes or to disrupt the elections themselves)³. Election violence can be physical but can also include intimidation and threats⁴. Election violence can be aimed against people (candidates, voters, election officials) or objects (for example, ballots or electoral facilities)⁵.

The State has the primary responsibility for preventing and managing election violence⁶, especially through its security forces⁷. In order to do this, the role that security forces play in preventing violence should be clearly defined in the election laws of a country.

2 European Commission, United Nations Development program and International IDEA (2011)

3 Ibid 1

4 Ibid 1

5 Ibid 1

6 WDN-U and IDEA research report on Early Warning Signs for Violence in Uganda's 2021 Elections and Structures and Strategies for Mitigation-page 36

7 Article 212 provides for the functions of the Uganda Police Force which includes protect life and property, preserve law and order, prevent and detect crime and to cooperate with the civilian authority and other security organs established under this Constitution and with the population generally

Section Two: UNDERSTANDING EARLY WARNING SIGNS FOR ELECTION VIOLENCE

The root causes of election violence can be detected from illustrative early warning sign indicators. They include:

- Identity politics and clefs based on religion, sect, class, tribe or ethnicity.⁸ This refers to a pervasive culture of identity based rivalries and violence.
- Tension over control of state or private resources⁹: History of violence, civil war, and or the existence of militias and/or prevalence of small arms, disputes over land or other state resources such as oil or water, disputes over private resources such as livestock and high income inequality or unequal access to social resources can be illustrative early warning sign indicators for election violence.
- Insufficient or corrupt security and policing¹⁰: Politicized security forces and/or security forces used for repressive purposes instead of protection and safety of all candidates and citizens; weak insufficient and/or inactive security forces and existence of illegal elements or violent actors can be illustrative early warning indicators of election violence.
- Weak rule of law¹¹: High levels of corruption and/or lack of rule of law can disproportionately impact different segments of society and political factions.
- High degree of uncertainty about the outcome of the election¹².
- Perception of certainty or of unfair or illegitimate outcome of the election¹³.
- High stakes, “zero sum” electoral system¹⁴.

Unlike the 2016 elections where there were limited interventions to understand early warning signs for election violence in Uganda and to mitigate it, WDN-U and her CSO partners through the project on mitigating election violence in the three districts of Arua, Koboko and Nebbi in the West Nile region focused on ensuring that this did not happen. WDN-U and her CSO partners analyzed the following issues as they attempted to understand the indicators of early warning signs of election violence and election violence in the three districts, and to devise mitigation strategies.

Perpetrators: Through organizing quarterly and later bi-monthly community dialogues in communities that showed early warning signs for election violence, which communities were identified by EVMs in the districts, communities identified the perpetrators of election violence. For example, in Arua city Orphanage cell, Pangisa Lower Upper Ward, Arua Central division is one of the places which failed to hold the NRM primaries as scheduled partly due to election violence. It therefore featured as an area for possible election violence in the general election. During the community dialogue in the cell, the major perpetrators of election violence according to the youth were military men. The youth complained that the military regularly visited their “boda boda” stage which had a banner of Presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi and intimidated them.

Article 208 (2) of the Constitution of Uganda states that “ The Uganda Peoples Defense Forces shall be non-partisan, national in character, patriotic, professional, disciplined, productive and subordinate to the civilian authority as established under the Constitution”. The complaints by youth in Orphanage cell during the dialogue affected the non-partisan and professional character expected of the UPDF. The politicized actions of the security forces in this regard was an illustrative early warning sign indicator for

8 NDI Guidance document for the Global Network of Election Monitors (2014)

9 Ibid 8

10 Ibid 8

11 Ibid 8

12 Ibid 8

13 Ibid 8

14 Ibid 8

election violence. According to the youth at the dialogue at Orphanage cell the behavior of the army also affected their freedom to associate with a candidate/party of their choice without fear.



Community meeting in Orphanage cell, Pangisa Lower Upper Ward, Arua Central division in Arua city-November 18 2020

In Koboko district the community dialogues identified the major perpetrators of election violence as some local councilors whom the community claimed were biased and denied candidates/ parties that they don't support an opportunity to campaign in their villages. This caused resentment within the population against the said officials. Identity politics was therefore an early warning indicator for election violence in the affected communities.



Community dialogue in Dikasinga cell, Ombaci ward in Koboko Municipality- December 12 2020

Lesson: That incumbents are perpetrators complicates both prevention and identification of programmatic responses because effective prevention depends largely on whether external or internal actors can influence government leaders. The security agencies are key in prevention of election violence. In cases where they were mentioned as perpetrators, it makes it difficult to address election violence.

2. Targets or victims of election violence: The major targets of election violence according to the communities in Koboko district were candidates whom some biased LCs did not support. In Arua city, youth stated that they were the main targets of election violence especially from the army. Women

and the elderly accused the youth of threatening them with words like: “do not spoil the election”. In Nebbi district, EVMs noted that some opposition candidates specifically from the Forum for Democratic Change and their supporters were victims of election violence. EVMs were not allowed to interview candidates and their supporters who were arrested and detained at police stations in Nebbi district. It should be noted that election violence can skew the playing field in favor of the candidate who is able to campaign without violence.

3. Intensity of violence: Physical violence was mentioned by EVMs as a major form of violence in Arua city. The matter was raised by opposition candidates to the Electoral Commission and security agencies in Arua city during the harmonization of the candidates’ program meeting in November 2020. WDN-U CSO partner YDI-WN attended the meeting. Opposition candidates accused security agents of abducting some of their colleagues and supporters simply for belonging to registered political parties which are not the ruling party. Details of the persons who were allegedly abducted by security forces were not provided to EVMs. Fear by victims was mentioned by WDN-U CSO partners as a major hindrance to gathering information in this regard. The lack of details of the particulars of persons affected by physical violence and the offences affects the quest for justice by affected persons and limits support from legal aid service providers. It also affects actions that can be taken by duty bearers including Electoral Commission and Uganda Police Force to address the disputes or crimes.

4. Motives for election violence: During the community dialogues in Arua city¹⁵, the community identified the major driver of election violence as intolerance between supporters of different candidates and the partisan role that some security agents played in the election. Intolerance causes mistrust between candidates and their supporters. The motive is to prevent some candidates from conducting their outreaches to voters. This can skew the playing field and affect the outcome of an election.

5. Triggers of election violence: In the Arua district, the EVMs noted that the blocking of roads during the campaign of Presidential Candidate Robert Kyagulanyi (NUP) in Arua city on November 10 2020 may have degenerated into violence if the situation was not contained by the Resident District Commissioner. The EVMs praised the manner in which the RDC handled the impasse that was created by security forces. The youth according to the EVMs who attended the campaign meeting which was met with several hiccups expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which the candidate was treated by security forces.

6. Causes and enabling conditions for election violence: in Arua city, the major causes of violence in the community included lack of knowledge on the rights and roles of citizens in an election, lack of knowledge on the roles of candidates and elected leaders, substance abuse by youth, lack of opportunities for livelihoods in the community, and intolerance between supporters of different candidates partly caused by lack of appreciation of multiparty politics. The youth also complained about the regular visits by military men to their “boda boda” stage which had a banner of Presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi and the mistrust they have for armed forces.

In Koboko district the major cause of election violence was lack of civic education. According to the community this led to intolerance in the community due to differences in party affiliation of community members.

In Nebbi district the EVMs reported that there was limited cooperation between the EC and opposition candidates. Majority of the complaints raised by opposition were not addressed. This caused mistrust and apprehension between the EC and the affected opposition political parties/candidates.

15 November 18 2020, Pangisa cell, Arua city

In Nebbi district, the opposition candidates also accused the security agents of stifling their participation in the election. For example on January 14 2021, Candidate Onega Robert (FDC). was escorted by security personnel to go and vote, and later put under house arrest for 24 hours. This caused resentment from the candidate's supporters and is a form of election violence. Though not physical, intimidation can cause fear among those affected and affect the outcomes of an election. The failure by the leaders of the institution of the police and army to hold their errant officers accountable contributed to the failure to address the shortfalls in policing during the election.

Youth in Arua city complained about the lack of opportunities to earn an income and idleness as some of the major enabling conditions for election violence.

The high levels of poverty in the districts of Arua, Koboko and Nebbi led to violence among supporters of candidates especially in Arua city as they fought for the bribes that were dished out by candidates to voters as they sought for votes.

7. Triggers: In the districts of Arua, Koboko and Nebbi, tension was majorly evident when the citizens felt the election laws were being applied unfairly. In Koboko district for instance, NRM primary election campaigns, supporters of candidate Charles Ayume resorted to organizing a procession on August 9 2020 which police attempted to stop. The citizens at the procession used the demonstration to express their anger at the Police. They argued that the Police had allowed Hon. Evelyn Anite's supporters to hold a procession with no interference even when processions were banned by government to prevent the spread of COVID19. The supporters of Hon. Charles Ayume confirmed the research by NDI on Monitoring Election Violence and WDN-U and IDEA which inter-alia states that Weak rule of law¹⁶: High levels of corruption and/or lack of rule of law can disproportionately impact different segments of society and political factions¹⁷.



Photo credit: WDN-U CSO partner Koboko district: August 9 2020: in the background Hon. Anite Evelyn's billboard burning in Koboko Municipality

8. Effects: The effects of the election violence in Arua and Nebbi districts was fear and apprehension for elections by citizens who were affected by violence and therefore felt that their voice and choice is not respected. During the NRM primary elections in Koboko municipality in August 2020, election violence led to physical injuries of 25 citizens¹⁸ and destruction of billboards of Hon. Evelyn Anite.

Opposition candidates felt unprotected from law enforcement agencies and some did not campaign due to intimidation and threats against their candidature. The intimidation also deepened mistrust between supporters of the different candidates from the ruling and opposition political parties. Mistrust also deepened for the security forces especially by the opposition in Nebbi district.

¹⁶ Ibid 6

¹⁷ Ibid 8

¹⁸ The figure of 25 injured persons was confirmed to the EVMs in Koboko district by the Police in the district

Section Three:

BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACTIONS OF WDN-U AND CSO PARTNERS IN ARUA, KOBOKO AND NEBBI DISTRICTS ON ELECTION VIOLENCE MITIGATION

1. Election Violence Monitors must be trained on their roles to ensure their effectiveness

WDN-U conducted training for Election Violence Monitors in July 2020. Due to the COVID19 pandemic, the training was conducted on line via Zoom. WDN-U contracted services of an election expert from the Electoral Commission to conduct the training on the legal framework for the elections, what amounts to election violence in Uganda's electoral laws and the code of conduct expected of election observers.

Lesson: It is important to partner with the Electoral Commission on election related programs because they have firsthand information on the laws and guidelines relevant to each election. Electoral Commission can also share practical experiences which can inform the work of election observers including election violence monitors.

The EVMs during the training received information on the Roles of Citizens, Security Agents, Political Parties, Electoral Commission, Media and Non-Governmental Organizations in the elections. EVMs discussed the roles of various actors in an election; ingredients of a peaceful, free and fair elections; factors and flash points for violence at each stage of the electoral process; roles of various stakeholders in ensuring peaceful, free and fair elections. WDN-U provided information on the concept of election violence, early warning signs for election violence and ways in which CSOs can complement the efforts of the Electoral Commission and Police to mitigate election violence.

The last session of the training for EVMs focused on the election violence monitoring tool including how to use and complete the tool; When, how often and where to submit the tool and roles of election violence monitors apart from monitoring election violence and human rights violations and reporting-Community dialogues and radio programs on election violence monitors reports.

Lesson: EVMs must be provided with accurate knowledge on the elections and understand their roles in the election to enable them perform their mandate from an informed perspective.

1. EVMs must build and strengthen relationships with key decision makers and stakeholders in the electoral process in their respective districts

The EVMs partnered with the Electoral Commission and Police to engage the citizens in violence prone areas on issues that would have led to violence and also discussed strategies for mitigation. The engagements were in form of community dialogues and radio programs. Through the community dialogues, the police in Arua city received firsthand information on the fears of the community regarding the election and the issues that needed to be addressed to ensure peaceful and fair elections. The community dialogues enhanced trust between the police and citizens. This was evidenced by the low turn up at the beginning of some of the dialogues and an increase in attendance of the community in places like Orphange cell in Central division, Arua city as the community dialogue progressed on November 18 2020.

The community dialogues were followed by radio talk shows which WDN-U sponsored on the most popular radio stations in Arua city and Koboko districts respectively. Arua FM and Spirit FM in the two districts respectively provided an opportunity for the Electoral Commission and Police to educate voters about the electoral process, the complaints process and how citizens can participate in the elections

albeit the shortcomings that may affect the election process. The successes registered by the community dialogues which was a peaceful election process in previously violence prone communities, indicated the importance of engagement between duty bearers with citizens during the election. Dialogue



Community Liaison Police Officer Arua city (left) and Regional Supervisor of the Electoral Commission (right) at a WDN-U sponsored radio talk show in Arua city

between EC, Police and citizens built trust which is a key component for diffusing mistrust and tension between citizens and the EC and the Police. The strategy also proved that it may be more effective to first notify individuals that can have an impact on a warning sign rather than publicly releasing the information about the issue.

The lessons from the districts where WDN-U implemented the project provided it with information that she used at national level discussions on the elections and mitigation of election violence.

As a result of the working relationship which WDN-U district CSO partners had established with the Electoral Commission officials in the districts, it eased their work. For instance, on January 13 2021, the Electoral Commission Returning officer in Koboko district invited and trained WDN-U EVMs/election observers in the district. The Electoral Commission provided the observers with the legal framework and guidelines for observers for polling day. This enabled the observers to perform their roles from a point of knowledge. In addition, the Electoral Commission district returning officers accredited all the WDN-U EVMs in Koboko, Nebbi and Arua districts. The process of accreditation was eased for WDN-U EVMs because of the working relationship which they had built with the Electoral Commission and the WDN-U accreditation letter from the national Electoral Commission.



Picture taken by WDN-U CSO partner in Koboko district during the training for EVMs/Observers by the Returning Officer of Koboko Electoral Commission-January 13 2021

Lessons:

1. Engaging civil society groups in target areas for election violence mitigation provides a powerful partner for peace and conflict prevention in violence prone areas.
2. The EVMs must have an action plan on how to address early warning signs of election violence in order to work with the relevant duty bearers and citizens to mitigate it.
3. By sharing information on the election and responding to questions raised by citizens, the EC can increase its credibility and enhance respect for the outcome of an election.
4. WDN-U EVMs facilitation of community dialogues encouraged the youth especially in Arua city to speak to the police about their grievances against some security forces; and communities in Koboko district which previously mistrusted some of their local leaders due to partisanship exhibited by their conduct towards various candidates were encouraged to speak to one another. The meetings enabled the communities and stakeholders in the election to build consensus and agree on the way forward on the issues discussed. Further, dialogue enabled the citizens and duty bearers to better understand the mandate of each other and built some level of trust. It therefore played a part in eliminating misunderstandings that were creating tension in the community and that may have led to election violence.
5. The participation of the Electoral Commission and Police in activities of EVMs is important because they can address the warning sign before it escalates into election violence.

At national level, WDN-U Executive Director was invited to a number of radio and television talk shows and as a panelist by organizations like Alliance for Campaign Finance Monitoring (ACFIM) on December 3 2020 to reflect on electoral democracy in Uganda. The discussions enabled WDN-U to confirm some of the findings of the report WDN-U and IDEA compiled in 2019 titled “Early Warning Signs for Election Violence and Structures and Strategies for Mitigation” and to identify what had changed since then with regard to election violence in elections in Uganda. The discussants at the ACFIM dialogue also identified some of the steps that should be taken to address the emerging issues as Uganda prepares for the 2021 elections. Some of the proposals include rethink holding elections in emergencies; Ensure that laws made to guide elections during pandemics and other emergencies do not infringe on the fundamental rights of candidates, voters and media to participate; Enforce the Public Order Management Act as it was initially envisaged, EC should be given powers by law to reign in on anomalies committed by police and other security agencies during elections.

The information from the districts also provided information to WDN-U engagements on various national discussions on the election especially on the media. This enabled the issues and best practices at the district levels on election violence mitigation to receive national attention.



*Radio One studio: September 10 2020
(WDN-U Executive Director extreme right)*

On December 9 2020, WDN-U Executive Director was invited by Defend Defenders a human rights defenders organization and participated on a panel discussion on elections together with representatives from the Uganda Human Rights Commission, Uganda Police and Uganda Communications Commission. The Commissioner from the UHRC emphasized the importance of knowledge of citizens on the Human Rights Enforcement Act in order to hold individual security agents who abuse the law.

The discussion can be accessed on: [https://www.facebook.com/defenddefenders/videos/796134187779612/?__cft__\[0\]=AZXo0lvfglBxKnGmzhSqmWPowPhu uR4MAIsuN-NR3lOsSU7_ UNarnTzZexaUuQjKKlGnoodFOdqB5QspclFrIziITE GqsPWFwabHmWwuEMb3rzDljYA6Q2HPw2PNlkmcW35-fYQWbEJDMbnNPq2nlsilb3SJZ7sLBYfzBIYkFIJ2FTgK3na50d_etCPnR6x7GNAaWzcfuivanWW-l8AZRvvg G6cqtQ7VldZVfolHQRto5cCl0zMWZ7w2RURgen_qK3QuC46tiC0YmtfRn6mlvDM&__tn__=-UK-R](https://www.facebook.com/defenddefenders/videos/796134187779612/?__cft__[0]=AZXo0lvfglBxKnGmzhSqmWPowPhu uR4MAIsuN-NR3lOsSU7_ UNarnTzZexaUuQjKKlGnoodFOdqB5QspclFrIziITE GqsPWFwabHmWwuEMb3rzDljYA6Q2HPw2PNlkmcW35-fYQWbEJDMbnNPq2nlsilb3SJZ7sLBYfzBIYkFIJ2FTgK3na50d_etCPnR6x7GNAaWzcfuivanWW-l8AZRvvg G6cqtQ7VldZVfolHQRto5cCl0zMWZ7w2RURgen_qK3QuC46tiC0YmtfRn6mlvDM&__tn__=-UK-R)

Lesson:

Lessons: State instigated violence against citizens usually designed to skew the playing field to the benefit of incumbents is difficult for the Electoral Commission to address. Mechanisms for dialogues if not set up and used by EC to discuss issues of contention regarding the election can be recipes for violence.

Resident EVMs in target districts are important for any election violence programing because they build relationships with duty bearers in elections including Electoral Commission and the Police and Resident District Commissioners and they provide firsthand information on the issues and trends in an election. Regular reports from EVMs inform national advocacy for election violence prevention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Local Election Violence Monitors should be nurtured and encouraged because EVMs understand the communities and context in which they live better, are more informed about the violence triggers and risks and better placed to mediate.
2. EVMs should develop relationships within the communities in which they work including building constructive relationships with local level security forces. As this report on the work of EVMs in the districts of Arua and Koboko especially has shown, this enables the EVMs to be viewed as allies instead of threats, and key contacts who will be consulted by duty bearers for solutions when early warning signs for election violence and violence erupts.
3. Government of Uganda should prioritize funding for civic and voter education and ensure that Uganda Human Rights Commission, Electoral Commission and Civil Society organization conduct civic and voter education.
4. Government should invest in youth economic empowerment and poverty alleviation.
5. The rule of law should be strengthened and be seen to be applied equally to all perpetrators of election violence. Impunity is a driver of electoral violence, depresses turnout and increases opportunities for election rigging. After elections, communities remain bitter especially those who may feel they were unfairly targeted with violence during the election and do not get justice.
6. The Electoral Commission should be allowed to organize, conduct and supervise the election without interference from any stakeholder as enshrined in Article 62 of the Constitution of Uganda¹⁹. This will enhance the credibility of the EC and ensure that elections experience less violence due to the trust that candidates/parties and citizens will have in the EC.
7. Police should apply the election laws and guidelines on election campaigns equally to all candidates and political parties to ensure a level playing field for all candidates and to prevent election violence.
8. All stakeholders in government should seek to understand the role of civil society organizations in elections in order to enable them play their role in enhancing democracy.
9. CSOs should focus on establishing a nationwide network of observers to enable them to assess the elections and complement the work of the Electoral Commission as it seeks to organize, conduct and supervise elections in Uganda. A network of professional CSOs can play a role in mitigating tensions by better coordinating their efforts in different parts of the country and providing credible, systematic information on the election process.
10. Holding elections during pandemics should be revisited. A number of human rights violations were committed against candidates and voters by security agents under the guise of enforcing COVID19 guidelines amidst election campaigns.
11. The Resident District Commissioners (RDC) of Arua and Koboko and the District Police Commander (DPC) of Koboko district during the general election should be emulated by other RDCs and DPCs. They used their authority to mitigate potential violence.

¹⁹ Article 62 of the Constitution of Uganda states that: “ Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the Commission shall be independent and shall, in the performance of its functions, not be subject to the direction or control of any person or authority”

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12. The returning officers of Arua and Koboko used their offices to facilitate dialogue with candidates, observers and other stakeholders on emerging issues that may have affected the elections. The ROs in the two districts respected the law on the election, served the candidates/parties equally and responded to questions raised by different actors. This promoted trust between the candidates/parties, observers and the EC. The EC in Koboko district ensured that WDN-U observers were part of the EC training to enable them understand the laws and guidelines for polling day. The two ROs also gave the WDN-U affiliated observers accreditation without hesitation. This eased the work of the observers. The two ROs should share the skills and knowledge that they used to address emerging issues with other districts to enhance collaboration among all stakeholders during the election. The effective management of roles plays a major part in mitigating election violence during elections.

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