



Snapshot of Incidents¹

- The United Muslim Party leader was verbally harassed by a Justice for All (JFA) supporter outside the compound of City Hall, July 26th;
- People's Progressive Party/Congress (PPP/C) flags, posters and billboards were destroyed by unidentified persons in New Amsterdam, Berbice, July 27th;
- PPP/C supporters advertised their meeting via loud speakers while the People's National Congress/ Reform One Guyana (PNC/R-1G) (PNC/R-1G)'s meeting was in progress at the corner of William and Queen Street, Kitty, August 2nd.
- PNC/R-1G supporters hurled objects at an NCN news team while they were covering the PNC/R-1G political rally in Linden, August 5th;
- PPP/C supporters disrupted PNC/R-1G meeting with the blasting of loud music at Bushlot Village Corentyne, Berbice, August 6th.

Fortnight Overview

Events

- The Working People's Alliance (WPA) announced on 25th July that it would not contest the elections because of dissatisfaction with the voters list;
- Political parties contesting the elections presented their list of candidates to the Guyana Election Commission (GECOM) on Nomination Day, July 26th;
- PPP/C supporters were heckled by crowd during Nomination Day Proceedings at City Hall, July 26th;
- PNC/R-1G supporters forced their way into the compound of City Hall on Nomination Day, July 26th;
- The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) held a meeting on July 27th in Vreed en Hoop about preventing election-related violence;
- PPP/C supporters/agents wrote the words "vote PPP/C" on the Public Road in front of the Alliance For Change (AFC) and PNC/R-1G office in New Amsterdam, Berbice, July 28th;
- GECOM held a public awareness meeting on August 5th which educated voters about the voting process;
- A Peacebuilders Network Meeting was held August 4th to discuss proposals and priorities for peace initiatives.

Rallies

- PNC/R-1G political rally at Golden Grove, East Coast Demerara on July 24th;
- PPP/C political rally at Poudreyn, West Coast Demerara on July 26th;
- PPP/C political rally at Tuschen on July 28th;
- PPP/C political rally at Uitvlugt on July 28th;
- AFC launched its elections campaign on July 28th at Parade Ground, Georgetown.
- AFC political rally in Linden on July 29th;
- PPP/C launched its elections campaign on July 30th at Albion, Berbice;
- PNC/R-1G launched its elections campaign on July 30th at the Square of the Revolution, Georgetown;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 1st at Goed Fortuin, West Bank Demerara;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 2nd at Caribbean Hill;

¹ Within the EVER framework, election-related violence refers to any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period. Election violence generally involves political parties, their supporters, journalists, agents of the government, election administrators and the general population, and includes threats, assault, murder, destruction of property, and physical or psychological harm. In the Snapshot section, "Incidents" of election violence must meet this definition, and must have been verified by Monitors using at least two different sources of information. Please contact the EVER team for methodological details and questions.

- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 2nd at Farm, East Bank Essequibo;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 2nd at William and Queen Street, Kitty, Georgetown;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 2nd at Eccles, East Bank Demerara;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 4th at Mocha/Arcadia, East Bank Demerara.
- PNC/R-1G political rally at Stabroek Market, Georgetown on August 4th;
- AFC political rally on August 4th at New Amsterdam, Berbice;
- PPP/C political rallies on August 4th and 5th at Linden;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 5th at Linden;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 5th at Mahaica, ECD;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 6th at Bushlot Village Corentyne;
- PPP/C political rally on August 6th at Kitty Market Square, Georgetown;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 6th at Charity Farmers' Wharf Area, Essequibo Coast;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 7th at Vreed en Hoop;
- PPP/C political rally on August 7th at No 19 Village Corentyne;
- PNC/R-1G political rally on August 8th at Edinburgh, East Bank Berbice;
- JFA held a walk-about in Sisters Village;
- JFA held a walk about in Uitvlugt, West Coast Demerara;
- PNC/R-1G political rally at Calendar and James Streets Albouystown, Georgetown.

Analysis

Incidents Increase During Campaign Period

Since Nomination Day, which marked the beginning of the official political campaign season, there has been a marked increase from previous weeks in political activity in general and in the number of political rallies in particular. During the reporting period the PPP/C, the PNC/R-1G, and the AFC launched their official campaigns, while the WPA declared that it was not contesting the elections because it believes that the voters list is not at an acceptable standard for the elections to be free of fraud.

This period also saw an increase in incident reports from Monitors – that is, from two over the first eight weeks (June 20 to July 24) to five during this fortnightly reporting period. It seems that once holding rallies and displaying posters commenced, some supporters have taken advantage of having concrete things – which were not available before – to target and disrupt. This indicates that some supporters have started using physical and sometimes violent means to express their political preference. Some examples of such forms of support during this fortnight are destroying campaign materials, disrupting the political rallies of other parties or harassing other party supporters/candidates, among other transgressions. Though such events have not involved physical violence between parties, there was physical violence against journalists during this period.

Of the five confirmed incidents of election-related violence, the PPP/C's agents/supporters were accused of committing three, the PNC/R-1G agents/supporters of one and JFA supporters of one; and, in one incident, monitors have been unable to determine the perpetrator thus far. It is important to note here that it is rather fortunate that these reported incidents did not result in any serious violence, as in many cases they were provocative, and in some cases inspired the desire to retaliate among victims. Other incidents were alleged, and are discussed below, and Monitors are following up on these. Monitors are still following up on the AFC allegations related to the Berbice Expo and the cutting of the United Force (TUF) phone lines.

Parties and their political leadership invariably send signals to their supporters about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. These signals go beyond explicit statements and include the tone of their rhetoric and even their body language. Whether targeted at competing parties or at journalists, even low intensity incidents can escalate into more threatening actions or actual physical attacks. Many parties have publicly eschewed violence in general, but sending a message to supporters and the public that specifically, the recent acts of harassment and intimidation are also unacceptable, could help reduce the tension that has been rising in the public sphere since the beginning of the campaign period. As the PPP/C has signed the peace pact promising to refrain from these and similar actions, and the PNC/R-1G has also made statements against intimidation, any failure by political leaders to eschew and denounce harassment and intimidation will amount to a failure to honor these public commitments.

Nomination Day

Proceedings during Nomination Day went smoothly for the most part, according to Monitor reports. There was one incident falling under the definition of election violence. A Monitor reported that a JFA supporter verbally abused the leader of the United Muslim Party accusing him of not being a “true Muslim”. As a measure to prevent their supporters or candidates from enticing violence, political parties should call on their supporters to desist from not only racist statements directed at opposing party supporters and candidates but also from making derogatory religious comments, or any such personal attacks, since they could lead to confrontations.

The crowds were enthusiastic and supporters chanted slogans, many accompanied by drums. The PPP/C supporters were walking up the road during the AFC nominations, and the chanting of each side increased as the PPP/C approached. Another Monitor witnessed one interaction in which PNC/R-1G supporters heckled a PPP/C supporter, alleging that she was paid to attend the proceedings, and this person eventually said that she was paid. This interaction was corroborated by another witness.

Later in the day, just before 6pm, monitors and witnesses reported that PNC/R-1G supporters/agents forced their way through the gates of City Hall when their party leaders were presenting their list of candidates to the Chief Elections Officer of GECOM. It should be noted that the City Constables manning the gate were only allowing 15 party supporters inside the compound during the presentation of the lists. However, the supporters did not heed this directive and pushed their way past a closed gate and the Constables, who moved out of the way to avoid being hurt. According to our monitor, executive members of the party tried to calm the crowd. If the Constables had attempted to secure the gate, they might have used force. In this situation, such action could easily have resulted in physical injuries since the crowd would likely have become agitated and/or frightened by any use of force.

Senior Party Officials of the PNC-R-1G and AFC Encourage Tolerance

On 28 July in New Amsterdam, on two occasions, PPP/C supporters were accused of writing the words “vote PPP/C” on the public road in front of the offices of the AFC and PNC/R-1G. On both occasions, members of the two parties wanted to confront those alleged to have painted the road, but were dissuaded by senior party officials. Since the AFC and PNC/R – 1G members considered responding to what they saw as a problem, it is evident that these occurrences could have escalated into confrontations had it not been for the presence of the senior party officials. The AFC and PNC/R-1G should be commended for their restraint in the tense pre-election period. While parties ought to make space for each other to have an equal opportunity to share their message with the electorate in an unfettered manner, they need to be mindful of the fragile political environment and refrain from engaging in campaign activities that are likely to be perceived as provocative.

In the wider context of improving the social and political climate, the EAB hopes that all Guyanese will lower the political temperature and remain open to the free exchange of views and ideas, and to differences of opinion and style. Citizens must bear in mind that we all have a part to play in creating an environment for open political debate.

Disturbances at Rallies

In the two incidents in which PPP/C supporters/agents were accused of being the perpetrators, they briefly disrupted the political meetings of PNC/R-1G by blasting PPP/C campaign music from the back of trucks. In the first incident at Bush Lot on the Corentyne Coast, the speaker stopped speaking for approximately 5 minutes until the truck drove off. According to the monitor on the scene, the police did not intervene. It is unfortunate that the police who were present during this incident did not attempt to remove the perpetrators since in an emotionally charged campaign the victims may retaliate resulting in the destruction of life and property. In the second incident, PPP/C supporters passed in a truck advertising a political meeting of the PPP/C via loud speakers while the PNC/R-1G political meeting was in progress at the corner of William and Queen Streets in Kitty, Georgetown.

On August 5th in Linden, a PPP/C rally and a PNC/R rally were both scheduled for the same day on opposite banks of the Demerara River. Monitors attended both and observed much tension as a result. The only confirmed incidents were those against NCN journalists present at the PNC/R-1G rally.

However, a Monitor is following up on the allegations of a PPP/C activist who informed the Monitor that she was with a group of PPP/C supporters who were driving on the road when they

encountered a PNC-1G march along Washer Pond Road. The march was to culminate at the Mackenzie Car Park where the rally was being held. According to the PPP/C supporters, they stopped their vehicle to allow the march to pass and as they began to leave, some PNC/R-1G supporters prevented them from moving on. During this time, PNC/R-1G members verbally abused and threatened the PPP/C activists. They also posted PNC/R-1G campaign material on the vehicle of the PPP/C activists. Although tempers flared on both sides during this confrontation, no physical contact occurred.

The Monitor also reported hearing statements among crowds at both rallies that disparaged the opposing party supporters or the opposing party, and some among the PNC/R supporters suggesting beating PPP/C supporters. However from the Monitor's account this was only talk.

Harassment of Media

In an incident reported by the *Kaieteur News* and *Stabroek News*, and for which monitors confirmed that a police report was filed, 2 NCN workers were verbally and physically abused while covering the PNC/R-1G march through Linden. The NCN press release stated that their cameraman was surrounded by a group of women while their reporter was struck with a bottle that was hurled from the crowd. The PNC/R-1G in a response to this allegation said that the reporter was not hit with a bottle but an orange peel, and that if it was a bottle, it was not thrown by their supporters. The police report filed states it was a bottle. Media reports indicate that the PNC/R-1G alleged that one or some journalists from the minibus were verbally harassing the crowd, and that this precipitated the throwing of the object. NCN later issued a statement in the media that their reporters will no longer be covering PNC/R-1G political rallies.

In a second altercation, for which only media reports are available, an Indo-Guyanese journalist stated that she was called racially charged names and told to go across to the PPP/C rally. The Monitor reports that police did not receive a report about this incident. These incidents represent a serious threat to press freedom.

Police Encouraged to Avoid Granting Permits for Simultaneous Rallies

It could be argued that those incidents and disturbances mentioned above, as well as the general tension among party supporters that occurred in Linden on August 5th were a direct result of police in Linden giving permission to the PPP/C and the PNC/R-1G to hold major rallies in that town on the same day and about the same time. It is our hope at the EAB that such situations will be avoided in order to prevent election-related violence. Any public gathering must be registered with the local police. The ability of police authority to approve the dates and locations of the permits is a good example of how they as a stakeholder can help prevent or mitigate election violence. Although the two rallies were separated by the Demerara River, they should not have been held on the same day since supporters from both parties had to cross the river to get to their respective party rallies. This schedule also prevented persons from being able to attend both rallies. The EAB urges the police to ensure that rallies are not held on the same day nor in close proximity, and also calls on party supporters to refrain from engaging in confrontational or intimidating behavior if they encounter gatherings of supporters of other parties.

Tone of Rallies

Overall the rhetoric coming from the political platforms of the parties was generally civil, and parties are all calling on supporters to be nonviolent before, during and after elections. However, there were some verbal personal attacks reported about opposing politicians. For example, it was reported by the media that a speaker at a PPP/C rally called the leader of another party a donkey, and he also said that another party leader should wear a dunce cap. The EAB is calling on all political parties to keep the campaign civil and peaceful by debating the issues and desist with personal attacks on opposing candidates.

Public Debate over Politics in Journalism and the Public Service

The subject of public servants standing for election in the up-coming National and Regional Elections has been raised in the letter columns and in articles in the media. In addition to current concerns, the involvement of public servants in partisan politics has been the subject of bitter debate in Guyana since independence. Therefore, it is the view of EVER that the presence of public servants and

staff of state agencies and institutions, especially senior functionaries, may serve to politicise the public service, and engender further tension in Guyana's already polarised society.

Another debate has arisen over journalists who are running for seats, and the EAB headquarters and Monitors have noted these concerns in Region 4. The Independent Media Monitoring Unit and the Media Referees have made statements about this from the perspective of the professional ethical standards. From the perspective of its impact on the political sphere, it seems that this fits into several broader debates about the politicization of the media, and with this week's incidents and alleged incidents against media personnel, public reaction and perceptions of the media will be monitored closely by the EVER team.

Institutions and Groups Engage in Public Outreach and Education

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) and GECOM each held meetings which sensitized the public on aspects of their respective mandates. At the ERC meeting, participants were shown practical ways how to prevent violence especially during the election period. On August 5th, GECOM held a public awareness campaign that educated the electorate on the voting process. Both organizations should be commended for providing critical information during this period. A Peacebuilders Network Meeting was held August 4th to discuss proposals and priorities for peace initiatives. Various groups, including the EAB, the ERC, University of Guyana, and the IMMU presented their work and next steps for the group.

Outlook

With the official launch of the campaign period, incidents of election violence have begun to occur, and political, business, and community leaders should all be aware of these trends. Looking ahead, to avoid escalation of low intensity confrontations that are evident thus far, such intimidation, harassment, and destruction of campaign materials should be clearly condemned. A lack of accountability and an absence of condemnation of the actions could lead to increasingly bold actions by party supporters against their opponents. As enthusiasm and investment in campaigns is only growing, it is likely that such low intensity incidents could continue especially as the date of elections nears – and so it is all the more important to address them now. Equally so, proactive measures to promote peace are increasingly important.

Outreach

During this period, EAB headquarters met with the GDF and attended the Peacebuilders Network meeting. The EAB team briefed about 300 soldiers of the GDF on the elections and the role of the EAB and EVER. Previously, EAB met with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to discuss EVER and election security information sharing. Following this discussion, the larger briefing was set up. The soldiers engaged the EAB on many issues, including Election Day procedures, the tests of the voters list, as well as election violence and security issues. The Peacebuilders Network meeting was a great opportunity to make more stakeholders aware of the EVER project and to encourage cooperation between various peace-focused efforts.

Recommendations

- The Police force should avoid granting permission to two or more political parties to hold political meetings at the same time and/or in the same locality.
- Party supporters/agents should desist from damaging campaign material of opposing parties.
- Parties are encouraged to immediately denounce all forms of harassment and intimidation that have taken place thus far, whether targeted at competing parties or at journalists, before such low intensity incidents escalate into more threatening actions or actual physical attacks.
- While acknowledging the fact that all parties have committed themselves publicly, to incident-free elections either by signing the peace pact or by their public statements, we encourage them to ensure that the message is reaching their supporters. In this regard, leaders of political parties should encourage their supporters to be civil during the conduct of their political rallies and admonish those supporters who verbally or physically abuse members/supporters of opposing parties or media representatives covering these events.
- Parties should remind their supporters publicly that journalists are not to be targeted and that their role in the democratic process is important and should be respected; any comment on that

role or the quality of journalism should be communicated through public statements, letters to the editor, or other nonviolent action.

- Speakers at political rallies should desist from making degrading comments about the character of their opponents.
- Public concern about the politicization of the media and public service sectors should be addressed by those institutions, either through actions taken by candidates or the parties, or in public fora in which these issues can be debated and addressed.
- Parties must make space for each other to have an equal opportunity to share their message with the electorate in an unfettered manner, but should refrain from engaging in campaign activities that are likely to be perceived as provocative.

About the Project:

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

In order to closely monitor the situation in the country, the EVER Project determined which regions were most at risk for conflict (2 through 7 and 10) and created a network of Monitors selected among active members of civil society and other sectors who would monitor the situation in these regions. Overall, 19 Monitors were trained and are engaged in the project and maintain continuous communication with project headquarters at the EAB office. Monitors are gathering information on major political meetings, rallies, and events ('events' meaning such things as the filing of election-related court cases or the resignation of a GECOM commissioner), peace initiatives, the general mood of their communities, and incidents of election-related violence. Within the EVER framework, election-related violence refers to any violence or threat of violence that is aimed at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period. Election violence generally involves political parties, their supporters, journalists, agents of the government, election administrators and the general population, and includes threats, assault, murder, destruction of property, and physical or psychological harm.

Monitors report to headquarters each week, and the EVER headquarters team analyzes the information collected, prepares recommendations for peaceful measures and violence prevention, and publishes a fortnightly EVER Report. The Analysis section of the Reports may discuss violence that is alleged to have happened or that is not necessarily election-related if either of these impacts the mood of a community or is clearly being discussed in a political context (such as the murders of Kaieteur staff). In the 'Snapshot of Incidents', only incidents of election-related violence which have been verified by two sources will be included.

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

The EAB is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organisation of citizens committed to promoting democracy in Guyana. IFES is an international, nonpartisan democracy-building organization. The EVER project is supported by IFES through funding from the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The EVER methodology was developed and tested by IFES in multiple countries in an effort to build local civil society capacity to monitor and mitigate election violence in their countries, and to contribute to better understanding and mitigation of election violence worldwide.

Comments and Questions:

We welcome, and we need, your input on the EVER Reports. Please let us know any feedback, comments, or questions you may have by contacting: **Karen Pratt, Project Coordinator at krenpratt@yahoo.com or 225-4145.**

Managing your subscription:

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

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