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A Vicious Cycle of Violence, Disempowerment and Abuse of Authority *Explaining Election-Related Violence in Abra, Philippines*

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Introduction

A. Background and Rationale

Elections have always given Filipinos something to hope for. It is the time when the people themselves select and replace their leaders, and when issues that greatly affect them are analyzed and talked about. Hence, elections have always been viewed as an opportunity to make a difference and turn things for the better. But despite the potential for change, election laws in the Philippines have often been violated, and that the polls themselves have largely been mired with fraud, violence, deceit and empty promises.

Since becoming an independent Republic in 1946, the country's elections have been far from ideal—both at substantive and procedural levels. Substantively, elections have practically become an exclusive franchise of the rich and the powerful, mostly the landed elites that came to power during the colonial period. Those, on the other hand, who rose to power even though they were not connected to any of the known political families, were more of exceptions to the rule. This is the case despite the so-called democratic order in the country that upholds the mantra of rule by and for the people and equal opportunities for all.

Procedurally, electoral rules have been unable to provide order in the conduct of elections. And due to the many scandals it got itself into, the electoral commission has always had one of the lowest trust ratings among government instrumentalities. And this occurs despite the country's democratic system whose cornerstone is the rule of law.

The use of violence during elections is also another given in Philippine politics. People die during and because of elections—candidates, supporters, government officials, relatives of candidates, journalists and even spectators. This is one of the biggest ironies about democracy. Elections, which is a means for peaceful contestation of power, becomes a reason for violence.

In a study that investigated the effects of election violence on voting using experimental methods, study results showed that election violence systematically reduced voter turnout; it worked by lowering the turnout for other candidates, thereby increasing the share of the violent candidate (Collier 2008, internet material).

There are also anecdotal evidence pointing to cases of dagdag-bawas (padding and shedding of votes from one candidate to the other) in areas where there are problems in security and threats of violence resulting to none transparent counting of ballots. The accounts of some key actors would even point to a well-oiled machinery for dagdag-bawas that can be traced back to the central office of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) down to the Board of Election Inspectors (BEIs) in areas under COMELEC control.

Since 2001, official records state that there have been 181 consistent election hotspots. Election hotspots are categorized as election areas of concern (EAC) and election areas of immediate concern (EIAC). EIAC are towns, cities or municipalities where election-related violence are highly expected to occur, while EAC are areas where election-related violence are likely to occur or where election-related offenses were committed during previous elections.

Though election-related violence only occurs in certain parts of the country, it clearly has national implications. It may be argued that a locality's level of improvement is inversely related to the level of electoral violence. In fact, most of the areas that are considered hotspots are among the poorest provinces in the country. In addition, the top ten poorest provinces of the country, as shown in Table 1 (as per the 2006 NCSB poverty incidence data), also indicate number of towns that are consistent hotspots as of 2007. It is also where incidence of human rights violations are most frequently reported and documented. Among the ten poorest provinces in the Philippines, Abra is in ninth place with a poverty incidence of 50.1 % and an annual per capita poverty threshold of Php 17,900.

The province again came to public attention in 2007, due to the numerous incidents of poll-related violence, which claimed 16 lives while wounding seven others. The electoral violence in Abra became first high profile when Congressman Luis Bersamin Jr. was assassinated in Metro Manila in December 2006. Then outgoing governor, Gov. Vicente Valera, from the rival political family of the Bersamin in Abra, was blamed for the assassination.

But violence in Abra is not uncommon. The official report, for instance, points to 7 murders, 28 frustrated murders, two attempted murders, 22 frustrated homicides, six attempted homicides, and 11 homicide cases in 2006 alone. Meanwhile, the COMELEC is said to be taking a close watch over the political families in the province that are allegedly using private armies or hired assassins.

The preponderance of election-related violence in Abra begs several critical questions that must be answered if appropriate response by the government and the civil society is to be identified:

- What are the origins of election-related violence in Abra?
- Who are the actors involved in committing election-related violence? How do they publicly respond to electoral violence?
- Is the geographical location of Abra a factor in its proneness to election-related violence? Is the province's socio-economic make-up a factor?
- How do the people of Abra view election-related violence? Is there a clamor from the people of Abra to end electoral violence?
- Were there efforts from the civil society (i.e., non-government organizations, media, church, academe) to address it? What happened to these efforts?
- What are the State mechanisms that are supposed to prevent the occurrence of electoral violence? Is there a failure of these institutions? What factors contribute to these failures? What are the success factors that must be strengthened and worked out?

The answer to the above-cited questions would elucidate the causes of election-related violence in Abra that could become key inputs in developing a response to address election-related violence in the said province.

Table 1: Number of Towns that are Considered Hotspot in the Poorest Provinces in the Philippines

Province	Region	2000		2003		2006		# of towns that are consistent hotspots as of 2007
		Poverty Incidence	Rank	Poverty Incidence	Rank	Poverty Incidence	Rank	
Tawi-tawi	ARMM	52.4	8	34.6	31	78.9	1	0
Zamboanga del Norte	IX	47.0	17	64.6	1	63.0	2	4
Maguindanao	ARMM	59.3	2	60.4	2	62.0	3	1
Apayao	CAR	26.5	59	16.8	69	57.5	4	0
Surigao Del Norte	CARAGA	42.6	23	54.5	4	53.2	5	0
Lanao del Sur	ARMM	54.7	5	37.6	25	52.5	6	20
Northern Samar	VIII	39.8	31	33.8	38	52.2	7	2
Masbate	V	61.3	1	55.9	3	51.0	8	18
Abra	CAR	47.6	16	41.0	19	50.1	9	10
Misamis Occidental	X	46.8	18	48.1	7	48.8	10	3
Agusan del Sur	CARAGA	52.3	9	52.8	5	48.7	11	1
Surigao Del Sur	CARAGA	38.4	35	48.6	6	45.4	16	1
Mt. Province	CAR	48.4	15	46.7	8	45.0	17	0
Biliran*	VIII	33.3	44	46.5	9	31.4	49	0
Lanao Del Norte	X	49.3	12	46.5	10	44.1	19	2
Camarines Norte	V	52.7	7	46.1	11	38.4	37	4
Sulu	ARMM	58.9	3	45.1	13	46.5	14	2
Romblon	IV-B	52.2	10	37.5	26	41.9	25	0
Leyte	VIII	34.9	39	34.6	32	40.5	31	0
Camiguin	X	54.2	6	34.5	33	39.3	34	1
Eastern Samar	VIII	45.9	19	33.9	37	42.7	23	1
Ifugao	CAR	55.7	4	28.1	54	30.9	50	0

B. Research Framework and Objectives

The study is a cause-and-effect analysis on election-related violence in Abra, which focuses on three possible causal factors: historical, socio-cultural and institutional (See Figure 1). It is ideal to employ a cause-and-effect analysis in this study in order to have a broad look at the problem and trace how the different variables that explain the problem are linked and how they reinforce each other. It is however critical to limit the possible causal categories to provide depth to and emphasis of the study.

It is an action-research that aims to:

- to provide a rapid, outside-looking-in, and evidence-based assessment of the cause-and-effect of electoral violence; and
- to identify and define measures and mechanisms that can be supported or introduced to mitigate the problem of electoral violence.

Action research is the Ateneo School of Government's brand of research that utilizes research to address real-life problems and issues in politics and society. In other words, the research studies are useful to the practice of politics and governance. Action research acknowledges the immediate impact of research studies on the situation of the subjects being studied and ASoG takes advantage of this to already address the situation by engaging the actors and the situation; and becoming a participant observer that will monitor the actions and decisions of actors that will hopefully serve as positive reinforcement for actions and decisions that are according to rules and norms.

The study, as an action research, recognizes the importance of the opinions and analyses of those directly affected by the object of the study, i.e., election-related violence in Abra. While the study aims to provide an objective third-party analysis of the problem, it gives ample consideration to the inputs and recommendations of the stakeholders of the research, especially in developing the methods and tools of the study.

The reason ASoG is conducting this study is to guide action. It is our position that at the end of the day, whoever is affected knows best way to address the problem that they are confronting. But it is also value-added if there is an objective research to somehow inform them of how an outsider understands the situation. This serves as inputs to their reflection on what are the measures they want to undertake to mitigate the problem of election-related violence.

The study will utilize three analytical lenses or perspectives, namely institutional analysis, power analysis and socio-cultural analysis.

1. Institutional Analysis

Institutions are structures and mechanisms of social order and cooperation governing the behavior of a set of individuals (Uslaner, 1998, p102). They are identified with a social purpose and permanence, transcending individual human lives and intentions, and with the making and enforcing of rules governing cooperative human behavior (Moe, 2005, p216). They are commonly applied to customs and behavior patterns important to a society, as well as to particular formal organizations of government and public service. Particularly, institutions structure politics because they are able to:

1) define who is able to participate in the particular political arena, 2) shape the various actors' political strategies, and 3) influence what these actors believe to be both possible and desirable (Steinmo, 2001, p1).

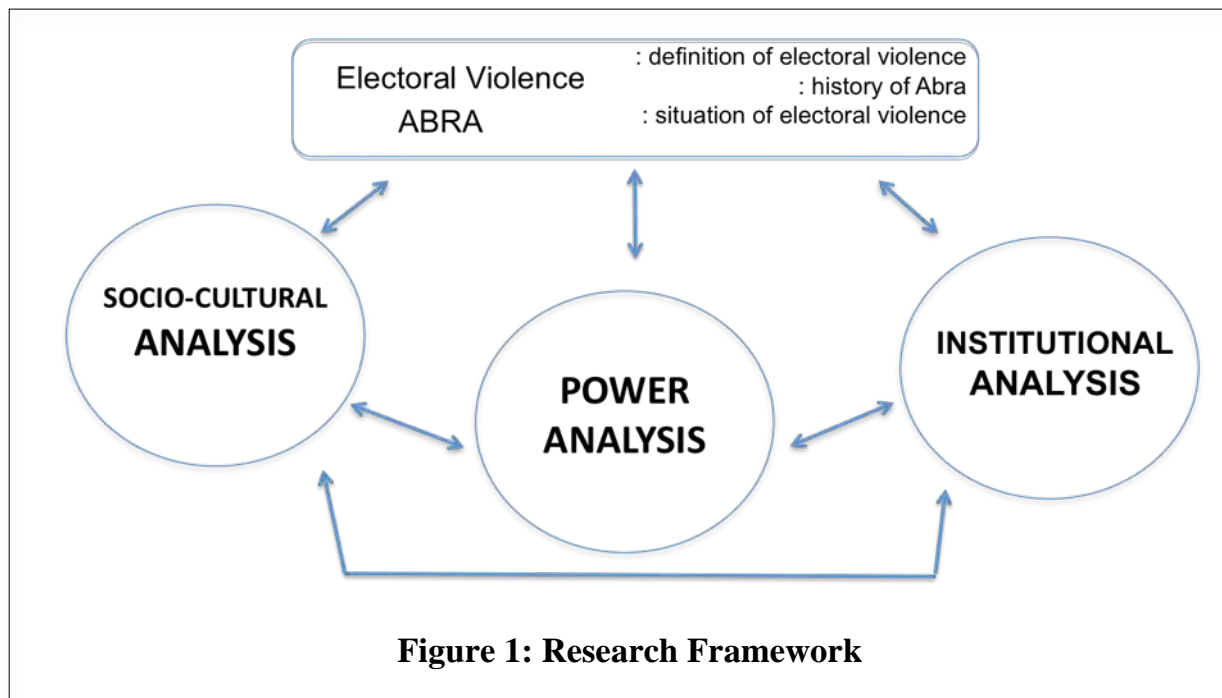
This perspective is informed by Institutionalism that argues that institutions determine the behavior of subjects and conduct of actions. Therefore, to affect change in the behavior of the latter, the former will also have to be changed.

Institutions function as blueprints that structure political events and thus either prevent or lead to democratic consolidation and deepening respect for human rights.

“Institutions discipline the actions of leaders, tie their hands, but on the positive side, they also lend order and routine meaning to these actions. Leaders are authoritative when they are constrained by institutions; they are authoritarian or draconian when they have no respect for institutions” (Khadiagala, 2009).

Election institutions put in place norms that allow peaceful and fair elections. Weak electoral institutions lead to:

- civil unrest and public distrust of the election process;
- extra-judicial processes and human rights violation; and
- a weak democracy.



Take, for instance, the cases of Kenya and Serbia. These cases both point to the failure of institutions to prevent election-related violence.

In Kenya, “the problem with the electoral process,” according to Ong’ayo, “did not start in recent years; the political competition that followed immediately after independence gave birth to the mechanisations, *manipulation of the institutions* responsible for electoral process and the blatant rape of the constitution to suit those in power” (Ong’ayo, 2008).

In the case of the Serbs on the other hand, “the failure-almost collapse-of the security institutions in Kosovo during the March 2004 violence is beyond dispute. What is more difficult to analyze is *why* the security institutions in Kosovo failed so miserably during the March violence. It is crucial that such an analysis takes place, in order to reform the institutional set-up of the security institutions in Kosovo and to prevent a similar collapse in the future” (Human Right Watch).

For this study, we will have an in-depth look at the performance of the institutions concerned with the prevention of election-related violence. These include government agencies such as the COMELEC, the security institutions, namely: the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the local courts, the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the Department of Education (DepEd); as well as civil society including the Church, academe, non-government organizations and media.

The main question that this part of the analysis will ask is: *Does the failure of election institutions instigate election-related violence in Abra?* Using this particular lens, the following questions are raised:

- What are the institutions that directly affect the practice of and pave the way for fair and peaceful elections in Abra?
- What are their particular functions and goals? Do the institutions, in the first place, have clear identities and functions which would allow them to effectively ensure peaceful and democratic elections?
- Are the institutions able to perform their functions as measured by the accomplishments of performance targets and standards?
- What are the implications of the level of their institutional performance on the persistence of election violence in Abra?
- How can their weaknesses/strengths as institutions be explained? Are the institutional performance connected to the political dynamics of the area and the cultural characteristics of the people in Abra?
- What are key areas that need to be addressed to strengthen the identified institutions?

2. Power Analysis

Power is a form of influence; it is influence where compliance is attained by creating the prospect of severe sanctions for non-compliance. Influence means relation among actors such that the wants, desires, preferences or intentions of one or more actors affect the actions or predispositions to act of one or more other actors (Dahl, 1991).

This analytical lens looks at power. It presents the hypothesis that the relationship among power players becomes violent when competition for resources is involved, and when there is a struggle for

the further expansion of resource base using means such as guns, goons and gold. Power analysis, therefore, looks at the players or the actors; their motivation, their goals; the means they use to achieve their ends; and the costs and returns of these means. It also maps the relationship and interconnections among actors and how this web of power relationship over time further perpetuates the condition of violent elections.

Power analysis provides a picture of the existing political-economic situation and how condition perpetuates election-related violence. In a sense, power analysis is based on elite theory, which argues that there are very few individuals and groups (a small minority) that hold power in society (given certain attributes and control over resource base of power) that enable them to be independent from the state, or which enables them to capture and use state instrumentalities for their ends.

It must be kept in mind, however, that the elite democracy and patron-client frameworks used in interpreting Philippine politics also inform power analysis. Elite democracy, for instance, stipulates that there is formalistic democracy in the Philippines, but this is enjoyed only by the elites who control power through guns, goons and gold and through graft and corrupt practices. The patron-client framework, on the other hand, sees power relations in the Philippines as between a patron who provides his client employment and protection who, in return, pays back the patron through his political support.

The following are the questions raised using this analytical lens:

- Who holds power in Abra?
- How is power exercised in Abra?
- What is the relationship among the power-holders? How do they relate with the government?
- What is their motivation in staying in power?
- What interests do they protect?
- How do the power-holders obtain, maintain and expand their power?
- What are the outcomes/ results of their exercise of power?
- What are the current and emerging threats to the power-holders?
- How do power-holders confront/ face criticisms, opposition and threats?
- How are they made accountable for their exercise of power?

Culture, as defined by Sir Edward B. Tylor (1871), is that “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”¹. Individuals who grow up and/or living in a particular society internalize a belief system that is dominantly shared by its members (Fry, 2006). The shared beliefs of the culture guides the overall way of life that is expressed in terms of behavior, actions, feelings as well as value judgments towards certain social phenomena.

1 Quoted from an internet material (<http://www2.truman.edu/~rgraber/cultev/tylor.html>, accessed 24 January 2010) quoting from Tylor, Edward B. (1924 [orig 1871]). *Primitive Culture*. 2 vols. 7th ed. New York: Brentano's.

The occurrence of violence is treated as one of the social phenomena that can occur in a given society (Vicente, 2009, internet material). Its occurrence, being a social phenomenon, elicits sentiments from those who experience it. The kind of sentiments that is accorded is an expression of what characterizes a belief system that operates within a particular culture. Cultural beliefs, in other words, can favor the responses towards any type of social phenomena that may occur such as, but are not limited to, violence, hostilities and conflict (Fry, 2006).

With this framework, the occurrence of violence in general and election violence in particular can be elucidated by looking at the causes which are attributable to the dominant belief system in a particular society. Violent attitudes and behaviors as well as feelings of being violent and tendency to becoming violent can be a result of complex cultural configurations that permit such kinds of orientations and make them rather socially acceptable.

By taking into account cultural factors, one is able to understand why a phenomenon like violence is prevalent in a particular society. Understanding the cultural make-up of the people can provide a cultural explanation of why such a culture is conducive for the occurrence of violence.

This analytical lens investigates the interplay of several cultural factors to explain the preponderance to election violence. Specifically, it raises the following questions:

- 1) What characterizes a culture that breeds election violence? What is it in that culture that perpetuates violence in general and election violence in particular?
- 2) What is the cultural make-up of actors? What are the people's practices, beliefs, behaviors, attitudes and local constructs (concepts, understanding, perception) relevant in explaining the occurrence of election violence?

Answering the questions entails looking at the outlook towards violence that is inherent to a culture and also the cultural reaction towards the expression of violence. Moreover, it allows an understanding of the cultural base of election violence by looking not only on the overt (practices, and behaviors) but also on the covert (attitudes and local constructs) expression of cultural codes and how they interrelate, complement and reinforce each other. It surfaces the socio-anthropological aspects in expounding the cultural dynamics that encourages violence.

At least for the study, elaborating on the role of cultural dynamics in the prevalence of violence entail looking at the following:

1. the cultural composition of a given population, which refers to how violence figures out in the culture in terms of the people's notion, perception, attitude and practices;
2. avoidance and toleration as among the possible cultural responses or reactions towards violence (Fry, 2006);
3. the context where response to violence may be deemed desirable, necessary and appropriate; and
4. the people's day-to-day interaction and activities that brings into surface some notable cultural features.

C. Methodology

For each of the three analytical lenses, a particular research approach or strategy has been employed. For institutional analysis, a rapid organizational performance assessment on the institutions responsible for the prevention of election-related violence was used. For socio-cultural analysis, a conceptual model was developed to make sense of the survey data and to provide an organizing framework that can adequately demonstrate how the concepts under study are weaved and understood in relation to election-related violence. And for power analysis, historical analysis, as well as case studies on high profile election-related violence cases were done.

1. Rapid Organizational Performance Assessment

To establish whether there is a failure of institutions, the research team first established an institutional framework for the prevention of election-related violence where the institutions responsible for election-related violence prevention and established the nature of their institutional mandate were identified. Then, levels of accountability were determined categorizing the institutions into those that are immediately accountable (basic institutions), those who have accountability to the ERV situation given their mandate but are only indirectly accountable (secondary institutions) and the civil society organizations whose accountability is more socially-imposed than legally-binding.

Figure 2 shows this institutional framework.

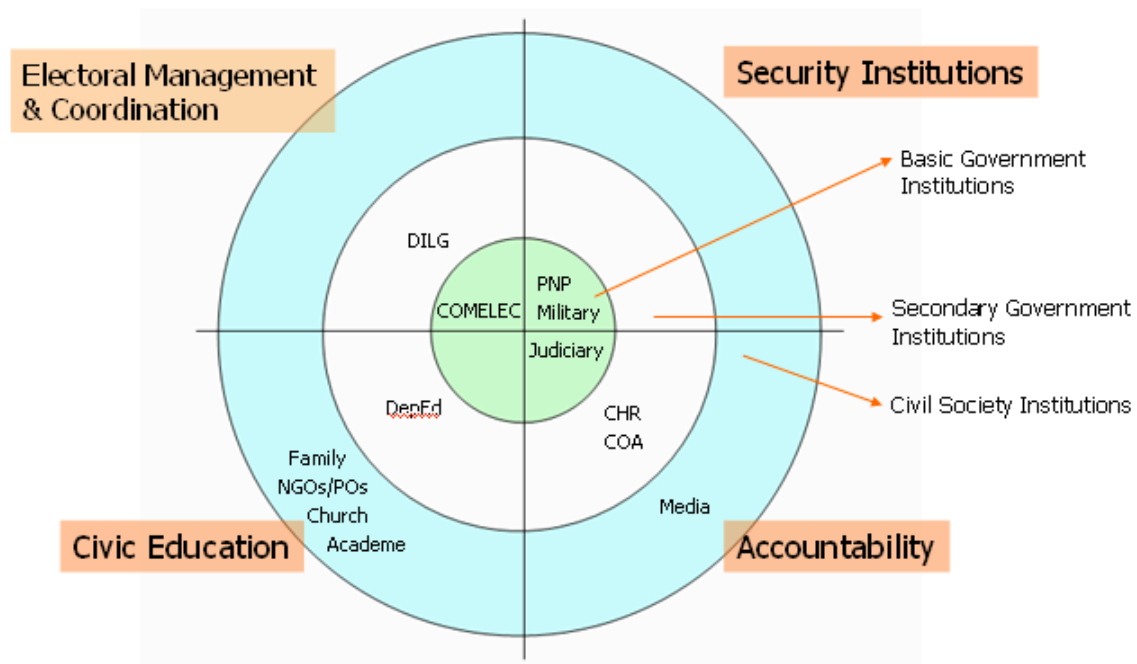


Figure 2: Institutional Framework

The next step was to look at the performance of each institution according to their mandate in preventing election-related violence. The data-processing table below shows the data that were generated and how were they processed to answer the institutional analysis questions raised.

Table 2: Data Processing Table

FUNCTIONS	ACCOMPLISHMENTS <i>(TO BE SUPPORTED BY THE REPORTS AND OTHER NECESSARY DOCUMENTS)</i> (In 2004, In 2007 and planning in preparation for 2010)	ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE
Function 1	1. 2004 2. 2007 3. 2010	
Function 2		
Function 3		

To complete the information, Key Informant Interviews were conducted and Review of Official Reports and Documents were also undertaken.

2. Conceptual Diagram

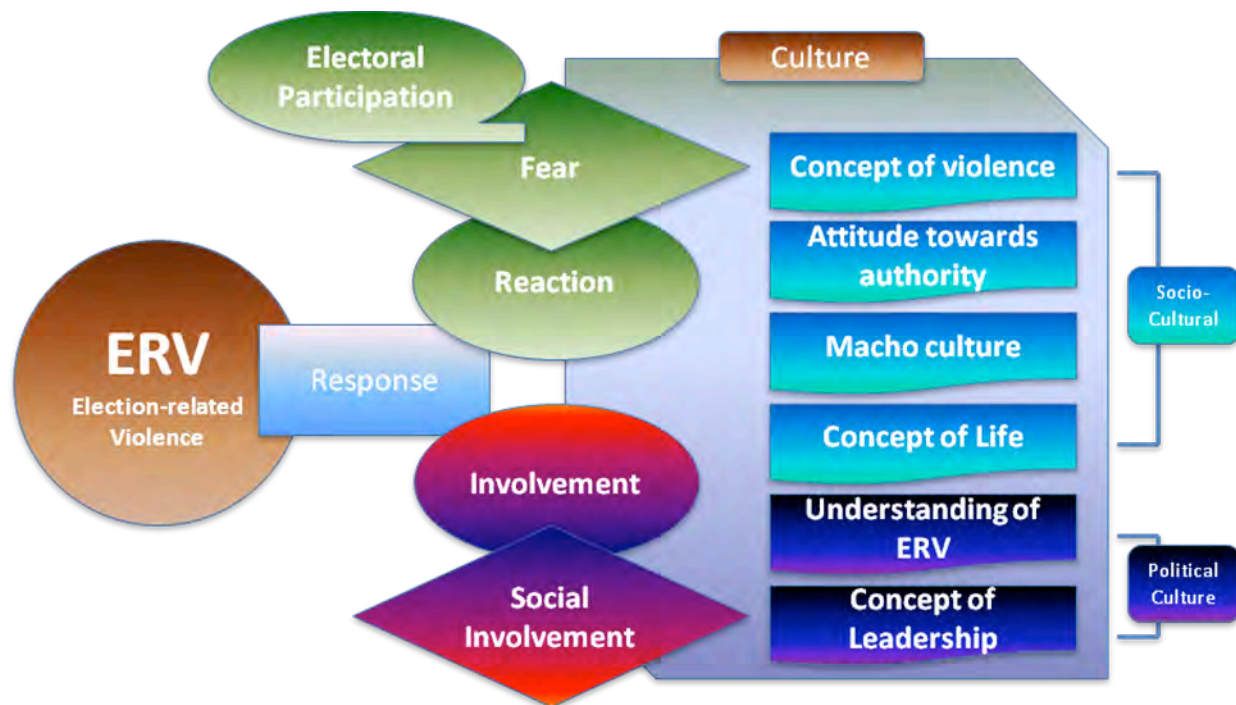
To understand the culture of Abra and its possible relationship to violence in general and election-related violence in particular, a conceptual model was created to demonstrate how certain perceptions, attitudes and beliefs shape people's response towards election-related violence. Following earlier discussions, these perceptions, attitudes and beliefs are assumed to be situated and shared under a larger context, which we refer to as culture (Fry, 2006). Figure 3 presents the conceptual model:

The conceptual model basically presents the concepts being looked at to illustrate a possible configuration on how culture can shape people's reaction and levels of involvement that is indicative of people's response towards election-related violence. Studies linking culture and response to violence have shown that certain cultural characteristics (i.e. shared beliefs, values) contribute to the emergence of several approaches on how people deal with violence. Cross-cultural studies, for instance, have demonstrated avoidance and tolerance as the most common responses towards violence (Fry, 2006). These assumptions are what the cultural analysis of this study aims to validate. The conceptual model therefore, serves as a handle to map-out the concepts under study in accordance with those assumptions.

To find out the characteristics of a culture that breeds election-related violence and to answer the question of what it is in that culture that perpetuates violence, the conceptual model tells that the response that is generally accorded by the people to election-related violence is primarily described and assessed in terms of several indicators, namely reactions and levels of involvement. Following the definition of culture that is earlier laid out, some cultural features that manifest in people's reactions and levels of involvement in relation to election-related violence may be shaped by

people's shared beliefs and values (described here as socio-cultural) and shared attitudes and behaviors such as attitudes and behaviors towards politics (described here as political culture). The conceptual model lays down several variables of the socio-cultural and political culture dimensions that are looked at as far as trying to give a picture of the cultural make-up of Abra that encourage violence is concerned. Focusing on those variables² would eventually help in probing whether such cultural elements are relevant in explaining the occurrence of election-related violence in Abra³. Each of them will be further discussed in the cultural analysis section of this paper.

Figure 3: Conceptual Model



As far as data processing is concerned, the conceptual model was used in clustering and organizing the data gathered from the attitude survey and ethnography. It also guided the development of the items included in the survey questionnaire, in terms of ascertaining if each of the concepts under study are have already covered and appropriate measures have been created to quantify them.

² The following variables were looked at for the socio-cultural dimension: concept of violence, attitude towards authority, macho culture and concept of life. Meanwhile, understanding of election-related violence and concept of leadership/attitude towards authority were looked at for the political culture dimension.

³ Note however that the conceptual model does not exhaust all elements of a culture that can possibly explain the prevalence of election-related violence. The concepts that were used to elaborate the socio-cultural and political culture dimensions are based on the concepts that figured out in the participant observation and initial interviews that were conducted.

3. Historical Analysis and Case Studies

To come up with the political map for the study that will map power relations in Abra, the political history of the province, including three (3) case studies of election-related violence, was reviewed. By chronicling these events, the following were hopefully answered: What were the major developments in politics and government of Abra in the past? Who were the actors? Who were holding key seats of power? How have they been relating with other actors outside Abra, eg., actors at the central level? What is their relationship with the instrumentalities of the government?

The cases studied were selected based on the following criteria: (1) that they happened recently, six months before and after the 2007 elections; (2) that they are high profile cases involving key political actors; (3) that they have elements of cases that will show the real power dynamics that happens on the ground.

Case 1: Assassination of Former Abra Rep. Luis “Chito” P. Bersamin, Jr.

Before nightfall of 16 December 2006, then-Abra Rep. Luis P. Bersamin, Jr. was assassinated after attending the wedding of his niece at Mt. Carmel Church in Quezon City. He and his police bodyguard were shot by two gunmen while walking to their car. Prior to his assassination, it was reported that he was planning to run for Abra governor. With his man-for-the-masses appeal, he became an instant threat to other rival political families. After almost three years, alleged mastermind former Abra Gov. Vicente Ysidro Valera was formally charged, arrested, and incarcerated at the Quezon City Jail.

Case 2: The Holy Spirit Incident

On the afternoon of 16 May 2007, Mrs. Brenda Crisologo, wife of Tingeng mayoralty candidate Edwin Crisologo was shot by a certain Totoy Buyao, watcher of rival mayoralty candidate Lenin Benwaren while the counting of votes was being held at the Holy Spirit Academy of Bangued. The gunman himself died after he was shot by responding Army Rangers. It is interesting to note that the gunman was a former houseboy of the Crisologos who was incarcerated at a very young age for alleged drug pushing. After being rehabilitated with the aid of the Luna family who was allied with the Benwarens, he was released, worked as a parabagkat (market porter) and eventually became a poll watcher of Lenin Benwaren during the May 2007 elections.

Case 3: The Boliney Incident

Seven personnel were killed and two were wounded from a nine-man team of the Army’s 41st Infantry Battalion when alleged rebels attacked them on 16 May 2007 in Barangay Baoayan, Boliney. The said Army team was deployed in the area as route security as the election results paraphernalia were being transferred from polling areas to the town center. According to Boliney residents, the insurgents, camped near the community, were demanding possession of the ballot boxes for some unknown reasons. In response to the demand, a plan was made to deliver the ballots

to the NPA elements using the women in the community and Rev. Fr. Aure Tagura as courier. Included in the plan was the people's resolve—through their handguns—to engage the NPA personnel violently. However, the plan leaked out through NPA infiltrators. The NPA, allegedly out of fear of the people's willingness to engage them violently, did not continue their harassment of the transfer of the ballots to the provincial capital of Bangued. The ballots in question, hidden in between clothes, were transported the next day and reached the town center on 18 May 2007. On the way to Bangued, there was reportedly another attempt to snatch the ballots coming from operatives of the CIDG who were allegedly men of then Gov. Vicente Ysidro P. Valera.

The following were the data-gathering methods employed in the study: literature review, review of official reports and documents, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, attitude survey and participant observation.

1. Review of Related Literature and other Secondary Materials

In tackling the main research query of the study, which looks for the causes of election-related violence in Abra and their relationships, the first step that was undertaken was a thorough review of related literature, reports and other secondary materials. This allowed the formulation of the conceptual framework and framework of analysis for the research. It also allowed the research to build on a working definition of election-related violence, which by itself was a challenging task because of: (1) the broad definition and the lack of exact definition of violence; and (2) the difficulty of establishing the real motive of violence, thus the difficulty of determining which is election-related or not among cases of violence.

Based on the review of related literature conducted for the study, there is a dearth of literature on election-related violence in the Philippines, especially literature on election-related violence in Abra. In fact, aside from reports from non-government organizations and journal articles, there are no other material that extensively and academically looks into the cases of election-related violence in Abra.

On the other hand, election-related violence in the Philippines is tackled in several literature on Philippine politics, particularly elections. However, there is no particular book that tackles election-related violence alone. The literature on election-related violence in other countries, however, are more numerous—ranging from materials that delve on how election-related violence should be studied and how it can be prevented (IFES, 2002; Odhikar & IFES, 2009) to specific country case studies on election-related violence (Vicente, 2009).

Most of the data on election-related violence can be found in news articles and reports from non-government organizations. These data, however, are not yet consolidated. Journal articles also serve as good sources for analyses on election-related violence. Even reports and journal articles, however, remain minimal compared to other political issues such as, say, terrorism or insurgency.

The following are the major literature/ secondary materials that were reviewed:

1. *ACE case study on Philippine 2007 Election Violence*. This material, written by the Institute for Political and Electoral Reforms (IPER), is a trend analysis on the prevalence of election-related violence in the Philippines. Providing and comparing data from the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Bantay Eleksyon 2007, this case study provides an account of the overall state of election-related violence in the Philippines. Using the aforementioned data, this material also discussed extensively the gaps in the definition of election-related violence resulting from the arbitration of what is called as “election period.”
2. *Election Violence in the Philippines*. This paper was written by Patrick Patiño and Djorina Velasco in 2004. It looks at the root causes of violence and the practice and prevalence of election-related violence in the Philippines. The paper provides an overview of the electoral system and the conduct of elections, as well as data on election-related violence, including data on how such acts are committed. Moreover, the paper also identified the different actors that are significant in the perpetuation of election-related violence, their motivations, interest, resources and benefits (i.e. cost and returns).
3. *Making Democracy Safe: How Institutions and Democratization Influence the Use of Violence as an Electoral Strategy*. This 2009 unpublished paper of Megan Reif focuses on the rather broad definition of election-related violence. Reif posits the difficulty in treating the definition of violence in the aggregate. Election violence, according to Reif, should be defined by using typologies to surface its unique dimensions. An example of these typological definitions include 1) actor specificity, 2) tactic specificity, 3) time specificity, 4) motive specificity, 5) situation specificity and 6) outcome specificity.
4. *Electoral Conflict and Violence: A Strategy for Study and Prevention*. This study done by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in 2002 profiled the patterns of conflict and violence. Having identified the range of motives, victims and perpetrators, the study suggested several program responses that can be developed to reduce, prevent or resolve conflicts during elections.
5. *The Human Potential for Peace: An Anthropological Challenge to Assumptions about War and Peace*. This book by Douglas Fry published in 2006 provides an accurate account on the importance of looking at culture in understanding violence in general. Fry also pointed out several reactions to violence that are common in most of the culture he studied through ethnography. Tolerance and avoidance were among the cultural reactions that Fry identified.
6. *The Blood Politics of Abra*. This article of Ma. Ayn Ballesta that came out in the website of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism in 2007 provides a comprehensive background on Abra politics. It delves on the long entrenched political clans and a detailed account of the history of Abra politics and electoral violence in the province. The author of the article belongs to one of the province’s political clans.
7. *Task Force HOPE Report on Election Hotspots in the Philippines*. The report consolidates the list of election hotspots all throughout the Philippines for the past three elections (2001, 2004 and 2007).

2. Review of Official Reports and Documents

A review of official reports and documents was also undertaken in order to build the three case studies, where official police reports were used. The assessment/ accomplishment reports from various government agencies also proved useful in carrying out a rapid organizational assessment

Official reports were both verbally requested and formally requested through a letter from the authorities.

3. Key Informant Interviews

Key informants from relevant government agencies and non-government/civil society organizations were interviewed. List of key informants were prepared based on their institutions and on referrals by key contacts. Letters were sent to them and the requested appointment was verbally followed-up. The target informants were those who perform functions or play roles that were related to the subject of the study. Interview protocols were developed for the conduct of the interviews in collaboration with the stakeholders of the study.

Four (4) interview protocols were used in conducting the interview, namely:

- (a) General Guide Questions, which tackled the informants' understanding of and analysis on the causes of ERV. This was used in interviewing all key informants.
- (b) Institutional Analysis Guide Questions, which delved on institutional performance. This was used in interviewing representatives from institutions.
- (c) Case Study Guide Questions, which documented and investigated the cases being studied. Guide questions were designed according to the case being investigated. Most of the respondents were asked about the cases, but not general guide questions (the victims' or suspect's relatives who were not involved in politics).
- (d) Power Analysis Guide Questions. Though the aim of the case studies was to uncover the different relationship and interplay of different actors, another set of guide questions was developed to explicitly ask the respondents about how power is exercised by some of the actors. Questions on power analysis were presented to all key informants.

4. Focus Group Discussions

For the purpose of generating data and cross-validating the data that have been gathered, two FGDs were conducted. The first FGD⁴ included members of the research and education committees of the

4 Participants: (from the research committee) Dr. Elizabeth Valera of Divine World College, Ms. Pura Sumangil of Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG), Ms. Cely Asedillo of Abra State Institute of Science and Technology (ASIST); (from the education committee): Ms. Merla Ruiz of DZPA Radio Station, Fr. Carmelo Gonzalez of Abra Today, SPO1 Gary Gattud of Philippine National Police (PNP), Mr. Crescencio Calina of Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Ms. Paz Bumogas of CCAGG, Lt. Col. Ignacio Madiaga of the Philippine Army (PA)

Abra Multi-sectoral Group where the general ERV situation of Abra was discussed, as well as the research framework. The second FGD⁵, on the other hand, focused on the organizational performance assessment of institutions concerned.

- First, the institutions were asked to identify their mandate and functions.
- Second, they were asked to write their success indicators or performance targets for each function for 2007.
- Third, they were asked to assess how far were they able to accomplish their performance target and perform their functions and mandate.
- And lastly, the other institutions were asked to give their respective assessment on the other institutions.

5. Attitude Survey

To have a scientific basis in understanding the attitude of the people of Abra on election violence and the appropriate response to it, an attitude survey was conducted. An attitude survey is a type of research that is carried out to assess the feelings of a target audience toward an object of study.

The survey instrument was divided into the following parts:

1. profiling of respondents which entailed asking basic information about the respondents such as name (optional), age, sex, civil status, religion, ethnicity, educational attainment, source of income, etc;
2. a section devoted to asking voting information to gather data on the voting history of the respondent;
3. a series of open-ended, single and multiple response type of questions aimed at capturing the understanding, awareness and experience of the respondents on election-related violence;
4. a series of institutional assessment questions that asked about the respondents' satisfaction on different government agencies and/or institutions having vital roles particularly in addressing the problem of election-related violence;
5. a series of open-ended, single and multiple response type of questions that asked about the respondents' perceived solutions to the problem of election-related violence; and
6. a series of scales that were designed to quantify the majority of items significant in carrying out the cultural analysis, namely: concept of violence, attitude towards authority, macho culture, concept of life, concept of leadership and social involvement.

Data from the attitude survey was used all throughout the study (i.e. Abra situationer, institutional analysis and power analysis), but it was mainly used in the cultural analysis, where the attitude survey

5 Participants: Lt. Col. Ignacio B. Madriaga, Commanding Officer of 41st Infantry Battalion, representing the Philippine Army, Atty. Harold Kub-aron, Regional Human Rights Officer of CHR-Baguio, representing the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), Mr. Eugene Ramos, Election Officer of Bucay Town, representing the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), Mr. Eric Basa, Election Officer of La Paz Town, representing the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), Mr. Crescencio Calina, DILG Provincial Director, representing the DILG, P/Supt. Dexter B. Ollaging, representing the PNP, Dr. Hedwig Belmes, Education Supervisor, representing the Department of Education (DepEd), Ms. Paz Bumogas of Concerned CCAGG from the NGO sector, Ms. Merla Ruiz, Station Manager of DZPA from the local media; and Dr. Elsa Bagioan of ASIST from the academe.

was the primary instrument that was employed to study the concepts that are being explored in relation to election-related violence. The survey was administered to 150 respondents.

Cluster sampling was employed in the selection of respondents. It is a two-stage sampling where a sample of areas is chosen in the first stage, and then thereafter, a sample of respondents within those areas is selected in the second stage. In essence, cluster sampling involves the process of taking random samples from preceding random samples. This feature of cluster sampling makes it an effective strategy as it banks on multiple randomizations.

In determining the respondents, the researchers first randomly identified five towns in Abra where the respondents are to be drawn. Among the towns that were randomly chosen for the study include the towns of Bangued, La Paz, Dolores, Bucay and Lagangilang. Among the towns that were selected, Dolores and Bangued were declared hotspots in the 2007 elections.

To further ensure a fair process in respondent selection, five barangays were again randomly selected from each of the towns, targeting six respondents from each of the selected barangays. In total, there were 30 respondents in each of the selected towns. (See Annex 1 for the complete list of barangays.)

To facilitate the respondent selection in each of the barangays that were identified, the latest voters' list of Abra, as of September 8, 2009, was obtained from the COMELEC. The voters' list contained precinct-level voter listings, thus the need to aggregate the list of voters per barangay so as to equalize the chances of being selected. Each person in the aggregated voters' list per barangay was assigned a unique number, and using a random formula in Microsoft Excel, six respondents in each of the barangays were chosen.

Also, the sampling selection was clustered per town (5 towns with 30 respondents each) in order to set the analysis to town-level. This way, the researchers were able to compare the dynamics within each town/municipality.

The ethnography (using participant observation), along with the initial interviews that were conducted, became the basis in the formulation of scale items used to measure or translate into quantifiable terms the concepts that this cultural analysis aims to investigate. The socio-cultural and political culture dimensions were primarily articulated using scales. The scales are composed of scale items derived from what was actually observed in the culture of Abra and what was actually noted in informal interviews with the Abrenians about their way of life. Observations and stories from the ethnography and interviews were carefully translated and re-phrased into scale items, which were eventually presented to the respondents when the survey was administered.

For the socio-cultural and political culture dimensions, the respondents were presented with several statements and were asked to express their thoughts and feelings by agreeing (strongly agree, agree) or disagreeing (strongly disagree, disagree) with the statements. The respondents were also given the option to remain neutral just in case they were undecided with their answers. Multiple-response type questions were also used to measure the other dimensions of political culture. Scale responses were cross-tabulated with area (town), age and gender to determine variation in the respondents.

Note however that the scales were only aimed at describing the culture, i.e. that a certain attitude, thinking or perception exists, rather than providing an accurate measure to determine or accurately predict, for instance, the levels of involvement, the gravity of fear and degree of being macho of the respondents. At the same time, the scales were not intended to score the respondents in terms of their conception of violence, life, leadership and authority. It is on this ground that the scales were not subjected into factor analysis (i.e. a test to determine whether a scale accurately measures the concept it is trying to measure).

Furthermore, it is outside the scope of this study to establish or at least test causality (or direct correlations) between the occurrence of election-related violence and the dimensions of the cultural elements earlier identified, namely socio cultural and political culture. For instance, to test the correlation of the high incidence of election-related violence and the levels by which people regard life can be a subject of further investigation.

It should also be noted that the scales do not exhaust all the facets of the concepts being studied. Such concepts may be multi-faceted, and it is not within the scope of this study to explore on their complexity.

6. Participant Observation

Ethnography using participant observation as a method was also employed in the cultural analysis. It aided in further understanding the cultural make-up of the Abrenians and how it shapes their perception on ERV. In a span of two to three months, the researchers participated in various community affairs in Abra.

Often employed in the social sciences, ethnography is a scientific and qualitative research method used for gathering empirical data on human societies and cultures, through field work. It aims to give a thorough and holistic description of the nature of the culture and people being studied through written notes. It is usually founded on the idea that humans are understood better in the fullest possible context including the environment in which they are situated, the improvements they made to this environment, livelihood, food habits, housing, customs, beliefs, languages, and so on⁶.

Aside from daily observation of the Abrenian way of life, the following are the activities undertaken to better understand the cultural make-up of the Abrenians:

1. *"Panagtitiipon Dagiti Umili"* (General Assembly of the People of Upper Sallapadan, Abra). This activity was a vital observation on how Abrenians view authority and government in general and the value they give on peace and improvement. The activity centered on the turn-over of the Kalayaan Barangay Projects from the AFP to the local government units.
2. Sunday livestock market in Zone 6, Bangued, Abra.
3. State of the Province Address of Gov. Eustaquio Bersamin.

⁶ <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-ethnography.htm>

4. SVD Centennial Celebration in Penarrubia and Bangued, Abra.
5. First Abra Leadership Summit. This activity illustrated the dynamics among politicians and how they interact with their constituents.
6. Philippine Charity Sweepstakes' Nationwide Simultaneous Medical-Dental Mission.
7. Sangguniang Panlalawigan Members Session.
8. CHR investigation on alleged PAGs in Brgy. Alaoa, Tineg, Abra.

7. Validation Workshop

Before finalizing the conclusions and recommendations, a validation workshop with key stakeholders of the study was also conducted where the initial study result was presented for validation. Some key informants were also asked to act as reviewers of the first draft manuscript who reviewed primarily the content, but also gave their comments on the style and structure of the report.

D. Scope and Limitation

Given that the study had to be completed in time for the 2010 elections, the timeframe of the study only allowed for a rapid research on the ERV situation in Abra and spanned for only half a year from July to December. This limited the research team's options, which had gather data and information that were readily accessible given the timeframe.

The study covers historical data on election related violence in Abra since the 1900s but has only covered in detail the situation of the province covering the 2004 and 2007 elections in order to provide relevant data needed for policy recommendations for the upcoming elections.

Furthermore, the study substantially relies on government data-banking such as police reports, COMELEC data, etc. as they are at present the only agencies who have the capacity to gather such information.

The police reports, particularly reports on election-related violence and statistics of reported cases of violence in Abra in the 2001, 2004 and 2007 elections became difficult to access. The local police would always say they do not have the data or that they do not have the records. When a letter by the Research Team was forwarded to the police asking them to officially declare in writing that they cannot produce the reports and statistics, P/Supt. Charlo Collado ordered his men to produce the needed documents. Noticeably, it was only then that the police tried to organize their records.

The study however recognizes the limitations with the documents reviewed. On the one hand, there is a lack of documents due to the government's inefficient and/or insufficient data-banking, as well as red tapes imposed on public access to documents and reports of some agencies. On the other hand, some data and statistics gathered were not consistent with each other and were contested by some of the stakeholders. These limit the findings of the study and leaves gray areas that need to be explored by future studies.

The definition of election-related violence also posed a major challenge on the study. Election-related violence (ERV) is multi-faceted; it has a broad, all encompassing definition. This nature of election-related violence makes it difficult to coin a single, exact or an aggregated definition that would capture the concept in its entirety. Based on the materials that were reviewed, the problem comes from the difficulty of establishing the real motive of violence, thus making the determination of which is election-related or not among the cases of violence particularly tricky. Defining election-related violence alone entails considering several dimensions to understand its peculiarities (Reif, 2009). The problems and complications in defining election-related violence will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Defining and Understanding the Situation of Election-Related Violence

Election-related violence is generally defined as all acts or incidence that affect directly or indirectly the normal conduct of elections (Bantay Eleksyon 2007 as cited in IPER; 2007, p. 2). Balogun, on the other hand, describes it as an act that impedes the whole process of elections and it becomes a threat to the democratic process (2003; internet material) since it infringes on liberties and the freedom to choose. It also creates fear, affecting voters' participation in the elections (IPER; 2007; p. 1). Violence, therefore, victimizes an electoral process that is supposed to be fair, responsive and honest (IFES; 2002; p. 2).

All these definitions provide us with a lens by which election-related violence can be understood. However, while they characterize the rather broad and convoluted definition of the concept, they still fail to divulge its other facets and dimensions.

One way to better understand ERV can be found in IFES' 2002 paper (p. 3) on the prevention of election conflict or violence, which sees it as a result of different types of conflicts that follow the chronology of elections, occurring at certain intervals following the election period. The scanning of the situation of election-related violence in different countries surfaces the different types of conflict that can occur during the phases of elections and spur violence. These include:

1. Campaign conflict that can occur as rivals seek to disrupt the opponents' campaigns, intimidate voters and candidates, and use threats and violence to influence participation in the voting.
2. Balloting conflict that can occur on Election Day when rivalries are played out at the polling station.
3. Results conflict that can occur because of disputes over election results, and the inability of judicial mechanisms to resolve disputes in a fair, timely, and transparent manner.
4. Representation conflict that can occur when elections are organized as "zero sum" events and "losers" are left out of participation in governance.

The chronology of elections and the kind of conflict and violence that comes within it, as presented above, put forward a variety of motives, victims and perpetrators that explains why violence occurs during elections. To assess the levels of election conflict, IFES (2002) conducted a survey of 57 electoral events in 2001. Four descriptive categories of conflict and violence emerged, suggesting a variety of motives, victims and perpetrators that characterize electoral violence (p. 4):

1. Voters in conflict with the State and claiming unfairness in the election process (Thailand, Zambia). Because voters perceive the conduct of elections as biased and unfair, they resort to violent protests, which in turn disrupt the electoral process that is supposed to be held peacefully and orderly. In Thailand, for example, violent protests erupted because the voters

believed that local election officials were rigging the election procedures. This was also observed in Zambia where the perceived unfairness in the conduct of the election led to an unacceptable outcome among the voters, thereby igniting violent street protests.

2. The State in conflict with voters who challenge the election results or the electoral hegemony of the State (e.g., Chad and Belarus). This category is related to the first. However, it should be noted that in the first category, the electoral process is disrupted by voters spurring violence, reacting violently to the perceived anomaly in the conduct of elections. In this category, it is the State that is causing a disruption to the electoral process by reacting violently to non-violent/peaceful expressions of disagreements or protests to the conduct and outcome of the elections. In Chad for instance, government security forces violently dispersed a peaceful demonstration of 100 women and injured some of them by firing tear gas. It was reported that Chadian security forces made excessive use of force against non-violent protesters. Hence, it is the State that spurs violence, not the voters.
3. Political rivals in conflict with each other for political gain (e.g., Yemen, Benin, Philippines, Uganda, Fiji, Seychelles, Pakistan, The Gambia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka). According to the survey of electoral events, conflict among political rivals seems to have been the most common form of campaign conflict.
4. A blending of these three categories.

Another way of understanding election-related violence is by categorizing it into different typologies to take into account its multi-faceted nature. Understanding election-related violence using typologies organizes how it is defined and brings into surface its salient dimensions. According to Reif (2009; internet material), typologies form the foundation for explaining the variation in the dimensions of a violent incident—WHO commit WHICH acts of violence against WHAT targets, WHEN and WHERE. Election-related violence can therefore be understood in terms of the following typologies: actor specific, tactic specific, time specific, motive specific, situation specific and outcome specific.

1. **Actor specific.** An actor specific definition of election-related violence refers to actors who commit acts of violence and direct those acts to other actors to achieve certain outcomes. This typology answers the question of who is involved in a certain violent incident—who is the suspect/perpetrator and who is the victim? Normally, an actor specific definition describes election-related violence as an employment of force by candidates, political parties or their supporters to intimidate opponents in order to achieve electoral victories (Balogun; 2003).
2. **Tactic Specific.** Tactic specific definition of election-related violence points to the ways, means and strategies by which actors carry out acts of violence to achieve certain goals. Election-related violence, when viewed from this typology, can refer to the monopolizing electoral victories through premeditated acts that are *systematically* carried out using coercive means such as, but are not limited to, inflicting threat and fear (IPER; 2007, p. 1).
3. **Motive Specific.** The motive specific typology looks at the reasons behind violent acts committed in relation to elections. It tries to explain what drives the actors from committing

violent acts. It explores the costs and benefits of perpetuating election-related violence. Definitions that point out to motivations, goals and end results of actors in doing violence during elections, like seizure and monopoly of political power and electoral victories (Balogun; 2003; and IPER; 2007), can be considered motive specific.

4. *Situation Specific.* Situation specific typology can refer to the overall scenario, atmosphere or a context where election-related violence can happen. This typology can also cut across the actor, motivation and time specific typologies in the sense that they can also provide the context by which election-related violence can happen. The intense political rivalries of actors, the high stakes of holding on to power and the peculiarities brought about by a certain time period can all be construed as contexts or atmosphere that makes it conducive for election-related violence to happen.
5. *Outcome Specific.* Outcome specific typology refers to the general outcome of election-related violence, factoring in all the typologies. It refers to the end-result, given that all the typologies interplay and at work. Crudely, it answers what happens if election-related violence exists. Definitions which describe election-related violence as a situation that creates dissent among the stakeholders and poses threat to any democratic regime (Balogun; 2003) actually describes its consequence—hence, they are outcome specific. It can be a situation where the normal exercise of electoral processes is directly or indirectly affected, wherein the electoral process is disrupted, the political environment disturbed and the exercise of democracy damaged (Bantay Eleksyon; 2007 as cited in IPER; 2007; p. 2).
6. *Time Specific.* Time specific typology gives primacy to time or period as a qualifier in defining an incident as election-related. With this typology, violent incidents are classified as election-related depending on the period of their occurrence, when they fall into the specified election period, or when they happen within the phases of the election process.

Election-Related Violence as Officially Defined in the Philippines

According to the Philippine National Police (PNP) election-related violence covers certain acts that affect the environment, behavior and conduct of any electoral process, such as abductions, killings, physical attacks, intimidation, and other acts resulting in death, injuries and damage to property. Incidents of election-related violence can be classified according to the phases of elections, which are as follows: (1) pre-election or registration, (2) campaign, (3) Election Day, (4) counting and canvassing, and (5) proclamation (IPER; 2007; pp. 1-2).

According to Section 3 of the Omnibus Election Code, the election period shall commence 90 days before the scheduled Election Day and 30 days thereafter, unless otherwise fixed in special cases by the COMELEC⁷. For the 2010 elections, the COMELEC stated in Resolution No. 8646, which was promulgated on 14 July 2009, that the official election period shall commence on 10 January 2010 and end on 9 June 2010. In other words, the official election period is from 120 days before the day

7 Copy of the Omnibus Election Code available at <http://www.chanrobles.com/electioncodeofthephilippines.htm>

of the election and 30 days thereafter. The Philippine National Police, for its part, follows the election period prescribed by the COMELEC, since the above-mentioned resolution issued involves the prohibition on the bearing, carrying or transporting of firearms and other deadly weapons in public places⁸.

The PNP also records the cases of election-related violence in consonance with the official election period set out by the COMELEC. In 2007, for instance, the PNP recorded the incidents of election-related violence during the official election period from 14 January 2007 to 12 June of the same year (IPER; 2007; p. 2). This means that, aside from defining election-related violence using the forms earlier laid out, the PNP utilizes a time-bound definition of election-related violence, as it works on a specific time-frame in its recording of ERV cases.

Closer study reveals that the Omnibus Election Code determines and lists “violent” acts in relation to intimidation, coercion and harassment. While the PNP, on the other hand, classifies election-related violence differently and only enumerates the following categories of incidents: shooting, explosion, ambush, harassment, burning/arson, ballot snatching and gun ban violation. In addition, the PNP considers only those cases wherein the political motivation has been confirmed (IPER; 2007; p. 2).

By adopting a time-specific definition, the Philippine National Police has thereby limited ERV cases to politically motivated acts that have occurred within a particular timeframe. This, however, is quite problematic. For one, it could prompt investigators to categorize all acts of violence that have been perpetrated during the election period as election-related. Second, establishing the “political motive” for any violent act is often difficult, and sometimes unclear. In addition, it also remains uncertain whether the PNP actually categorizes incidents of election-related violence, not only based on the election timeframe, but also by looking into other typologies (such as the type of actors involved).

The issue on the limitation of the PNP definition and the definition of election-related violence in general will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections of this chapter, as we try to: (1) propose how election-related violence can be defined using the categories and typologies of election-related violence as conceptual guides; and (2) propose how election-related violence can be defined based on the observed gap between the official PNP definition and what was observed on the ground, using the case of Abra.

In the meantime, for purposes of presenting the data on the situation of election-related violence in the Philippines and in Abra, the PNP definition will hold constant, as the data that will be presented to describe the situation of election-related violence came from the reports of the PNP.

Election-Related Violence in the Philippines in General

In order to describe the situation of election-related violence in the country, official figures from the PNP (combined with the data from the Department of Interior and Local Government or DILG) is compared and contrasted with the data from Bantay Eleksyon 2007 and COMPACT’s study. The

⁸ See PNP Memorandum Re: Information Operations Plan on the Nationwide Firearms Ban Effective 20 January 2010, and Provision of Security Detail. See also AFP-PNP Joint Operational Guidelines for 2010 National and Local Elections Joint Directive 01-2010

statistics in these reports paint the overall picture of election-related violence in the Philippines, albeit there are differences in the figures due the PNP's stricter and more limited definition of election-related violence.

As an independent monitoring coalition of electoral reform advocates, Bantay Eleksyon defines election-related violence "...as any or all acts or incidence that directly or indirectly affects the normal exercise of electoral processes" (IPER; 2007; p. 2). For its monitoring and recording of ERVs in 2007, it used parameters that indirectly or directly have affected the normal processes of the election, without prejudice as to whether the incidence are politically motivated or not (IPER; 2007; p. 4). It also has detailed accounts of ERV cases that are unrelated or non-politically motivated in the point of view of the PNP. This is because the PNP emphasizes on the more manifest acts of violence and relegated acts of coercion, intimidation and harassment to a separate category termed as "Prohibited Acts" (IPER; 2007; p. 7).

The monitoring coalition asserts that the PNP's time-bound definition of election-related violence (i.e. monitoring takes place in the designated election period) fails to take into account the reality of Philippine elections, wherein violence commences as early as a year before the election day. Bantay Eleksyon's treatment of election-related violence cases differs from the PNP since the latter focuses mainly on the "election-period," while the former recognizes the historical practice on the ground (IPER; 2007; p. 7).

Considering the concerns over the limitation of the PNP's definition and its treatment of election-related violence, Bantay Eleksyon used additional parameters in determining election-related violence incidents as follows (IPER; 2007; p. 2):

1. The election period (and hence the monitoring period) starts with preparations one year before Election Day and ends on June 30 when new terms start.
2. Electoral violence includes acts listed in the Omnibus Election Code, which are violent acts in more subdued forms, categorized in relation to intimidation, coercion and harassment.

The Compact for Peaceful Elections (COMPACT) is another violence documentation initiative that started in 2004. It is a nationwide campaign against electoral violence that seeks to bring together civil society organizations and other institutions in the country to address the spiraling incidences of political violence, particularly during the election season (IPD Website⁹). In its 2007 report¹⁰, COMPACT described electoral violence as the use of violence to achieve electoral victory. It also considered the following forms of election-related violence: (1) permit to campaign (PTC) and permit to win (PTW) issued by the NPA; (2) shooting incidents; (3) threats; (4) intimidation of voters and monitors; (5) partisanship of men-in-uniform; and (6) presence of non-state armed groups.

⁹ http://ipd.org.ph/main/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=74&Itemid=61 accessed 4 April 2010.

¹⁰ Accessed 4 April 2010 through the website of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), http://www.pcij.org/blog/wp-docs/Compact_for_Peaceful_Elections.pdf

Election-related violence in the past elections

Table 3 presents a comparison of data from the BE Report of 2007, COMPACT study on ERVs (figures by IPD dated 1995, 1998, 2001 and 2004) and of the PNP and/or DILG for the years 1995-1994 and 2007. The figures show an increasing number of persons killed/dead vis-à-vis other incidents of ERV.

Table 3: Comparative Data on Election-Related Violence Incidents (deaths, injury, wounded, other incidents)				
	IPD/COMPACT/BE		PNP/DILG	
Year	Killed/Death	Other Incidents*	Killed/Death	Other Incidents*
1995	108	244	83	No data
1998	77	322	98	295
2001	111	562	111	562
2004	182	No data	117	332
<i>2007</i>	<i>158</i>	<i>224</i>	<i>121**</i>	<i>176**</i>

Source: IPER, 2007. Note that (*) may include other forms of ERVIs. Italicized figures are based on BE's 2007 report with category of killed and wounded. Also (**) includes data from PNP's 2007 report with same category, IPD monitoring (2004), BE Final Report (2007) and PNP 2007 Final Report.

The IPD/COMPACT/BE report demonstrates that the number of killings went down in 1998 but increased in the next two elections. It again went down in 2007 elections. An increase in the 1998 and 2001 elections had been observed for other election-related violence incidents. Similarly, there is a decrease in the 2007 elections.

The PNP/DILG report on the other hand, shows an increasing trend of killings from 1998 to 2007. An increase had also observed in other election-related violence incidents, though the figures dropped down in the 2004 and 2007 elections.

Comparing the two results, election-related violence incidents (ERVs) generally went down in the 2007 elections. Moreover, Table 4, based on the PNP data, shows that although there is a continuing high trend of ERVs in the 2004 and 2001 elections, there is a slight lowering in 2007.

Among the ERVs that were recorded by the PNP in 2007, shooting incidents were the highest, and then followed by harassment/intimidation, as shown in the disaggregated data by nature of ERV in Table 5.

**Table 4: Comparative Election-Related Violence Data
(Year 2001, 2004 and 2007)**

	2007 Elections	2004 Elections	2001 Elections
NR of incidents	229	249	269
- Shooting	105	111	70
- Explosion	16	28	30
- Rebel Atrocity	12	22	34
- Others	96	88	135
Casualties			
- Killed	121	148	111
- Wounded	176	261	293
Candidates/Politicians			
- Killed	37	40	21
- Wounded	24	18	9

Source: PNP (as cited in IPER, 2007)

Table 5: Disaggregated Data of ERVI cases of 2007 (PNP)

Form of ERVI	Number of Politically-Motivated Cases
Shooting	105
Explosion	16
Murder/Ambush	11
Frustrated Homicide/Murder	0
Harassment/Intimidation	50
Burning/Arson	5
Abduction	0
Ballot Snatching	7
Encroachment	1
Rebel Atrocities	12
Others	22
TOTALS	229

Source: PNP (as cited in IPER, 2007)

Following Bantay Eleksyon's definition of ERV, a much higher incidence had been recorded because as evident in Table 6, it also reported other forms of ERV deemed to have affected the normal exercise of election in 2007 such as gun ban violation, encounter/police raids, injury, riot, assault and damage to property (IPER, 2007, p. 4).

Table 6: Disaggregated Data of ERVI cases of 2007 (BE)	
Form of ERVI	Number of Politically-Motivated Cases
Shooting	71
Explosion	16
Murder/Ambush	85
Frustrated Homicide/Murder	15
Harassment/Intimidation	53
Burning/Arson	4
Abduction	8
Ballot Snatching	7
Encroachment	1
Rebel Atrocities	3
Others-gunban violation	21
Encounter/Police raid	3
Injury	6
Riot	5
Assault	1
Damage to Property	1
Others	300
TOTALS	

Source: Bantay Eleksyon 2007 (as cited in IPER, 2007)

The ERV trend is actually shifting to “higher-value targets” (IPER, 2007, p. 8). In 2007, PNP recorded very high casualties of incumbent/politicians/candidates being victimized. The same trend was also observed in the Bantay Eleksyon report. Table 7 and Table 8 present said reports respectively, indicating casualties per type of victims.

Table 7: Election-Related Violence (by Types of Victims, 2007, PNP)			
Type of Victim	Killed	Wounded	Subjected to Violent Incident
Incumbent/Politician/Candidate	37	24	2
Supporter	49	62	
Other Government Official	0	0	
Uniformed Personnel	21	36	
Civilian	14	54	
TOTALS	121	176	2

Source: PNP (as cited in IPER, 2007)

Table 8: Election-Related Violence (by Types of Victims, 2007, Bantay Eleksyon)			
Type of Victim	Killed	Wounded	Subjected to Violent Incident
Incumbent/Politician/Candidate	34	14	16
Supporter	62	28	43
COMELEC Personnel/Deputy	5	4	1
Uniformed Personnel	14	45	5
Civilian	14	73	12
Property/Groups	-	-	3
Other	-	13	-
TOTALS	129	177	80

Source: Bantay Eleksyon 2007 (as cited in IPER, 2007)

The PNP data in Table 4 shows that incumbents/politicians/candidates including their supporters were assailed by the perpetrators. 121 persons were killed, 176 were wounded and 2 persons were subjected to violence. Though displaying the same trend, a much higher incidence was reported by Bantay Eleksyon, with 129 persons killed, 177 wounded and another 80 individuals who were subjected to violence.

The tables show variations in the figures that were reported by the Philippine National Police and Bantay Eleksyon in 2007. These statistical variations were attributed to the dissimilarity in the operationalization of violence, the difference in the classification of ERV cases, the parameters utilized in the determination of ERVs, as well as the determination of “election period”. With this, IPER argues that the PNP data does not represent the actual number of occurrences (IPER; 2007; p. 7).

Because of the PNP’s time specific definition of election-related violence, they can only monitor EVR cases during the declared election period. IPER however contends (2007; pp. 7-8) that by limiting the monitoring period to the election period, the PNP has failed to take into account the fact in the Philippines, the election campaign (as well as the concomitant electoral violence) begins as early as a year before the election day. In effect, the PNP is only able to cover the formal campaign period and inevitably denies the existence, significance and magnitude of ERV incidents during the pre-election campaign period.

For its part, IPER (2007, p. 7-8) asserts that all stakeholders should have a clear and common definition and classification of election violence. Doing so will prevent the PNP from arbitrarily categorizing violent acts as “election-related” which not only render official statistics unreliable, but can even underplay the reality of election violence. In effect, IPER subscribes to the definition of Bantay Eleksyon laid out in the earlier section.

Despite these issues, both reports highlight an alarming level of election-related violence, most especially, the significant increase in the number of persons killed during the synchronized election of 2007. There is “increasing and intensifying” acts of election violence in the Philippines; and as

according to the recent observations, violence has been directed against election personalities, whether candidates, government officials, election officers, or mere supporters (IPER; 2007; p. 4).

Election hotspots

To address the prevalence of election-related violence, the Commission on Elections may declare select areas across the country as “election hotspots.” Figure 4 presents the process by which election hotspots are declared.

Hotspots are considered (a) election areas of concern or EAC; and (b) election areas of immediate concern (EAIC).

EAC are cities, municipalities or towns where election-related violence is likely to occur or where election-related offenses were committed during the previous elections. On the other hand, EAIC are cities, municipalities or towns where election-related violence are highly expected to occur (Velasco interview; 2009).

An area is declared “area of immediate concern” based on the series of killings that happened in its territory during the preceding elections, violations of election laws, as well as trends in the series of killings. However, the COMELEC admits that there are no definite benchmarks or determinants for declaring an area under immediate concern (Velasco interview; 2009).

In hotspot areas such as Abra, additional resources coming from the COMELEC central office are provided to the police and military during the election period, as part of the budget allotted for local election administration. Both the military and the police receive subsistence allowance; but these are insufficient. Taskforces are instead created to have a coherent program on ERV prevention which is allotted its own budget. The security institutions, nonetheless, would still have to use their normal operating resources and compensate for the lack of funds. Other institutions such as the COMELEC, the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) do not get additional budget, because their work in election hotspots are considered part and parcel of the job that is covered by their daily operational expenses, which remain dismal even for their usual operation. The COMELEC and the CHR also have their respective centralized financial management systems, which means that the local COMELEC and CHR offices can only disburse funds coming from the central office, which provides them with very little autonomy in the allocation of their resources.

In practice, EAC and EAIC are often used interchangeably. We should note however, that when an area, political division, subdivision or unit is declared EAIC, it is not necessarily under COMELEC control. It is placed under COMELEC control only if “violence intensifies” (Velasco interview; 2009).

Areas under COMELEC control

As per resolution number 7773 and 8734, the COMELEC, upon recommendation from the PNP (e.g. AFP-PNP Joint Letter Directive 01-2010) can declare “any political division, subdivision, unit or area” under “under immediate and direct control” most especially when it is affected by “serious armed threats.” By serious armed threats, the COMELEC refers to “the presence of paramilitary

forces, private armies or identifiable armed bands widely perceived to have committed terrorism, fraud or other election irregularities and threaten or tend to disrupt the holding of free, peaceful, honest, orderly and credible elections in any political division, subdivision, unit or area.” The declaration is made based on COMELEC’s approval of a request coming from the PNP through an en-banc decision. Series of killing, violations of election laws and non-implementation of election bans are sufficient grounds in placing an area under COMELEC control. When declared as such, the COMELEC can impose an “iron hand” in the area, establish checkpoints and proclaim a total gun ban (Velasco interview, 2009). It shall continue to be “in full force and in effect until the end of the election period, unless sooner lifted by the Commission” (COMELEC Resolution No. 7773 and 8734).

To ensure the conduct of free, peaceful, orderly, honest and credible elections in each political division, subdivision, unit or area placed under COMELEC control, a Special Task Force may be created by the Commission, which shall be headed by the Commissioner-in-charge of the region. Task force members shall also include the Regional Election Director and the highest-ranking official of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) assigned in the aforesaid area. The AFP and PNP are directed to immediately provide personnel, equipment, vehicles and other transportation facilities as the Special Task Force may require.

Deputization

To maintain peace and order in polling places, the COMELEC deputizes the PNP and the AFP to assist them in their work. In areas, for example, which have a history of election violence or voter harassment, the AFP is deputized to protect the Board of Election Inspectors (BEI), the polling precincts, the voters, ballot boxes, and secure the normal conduct of voting during Election Day.

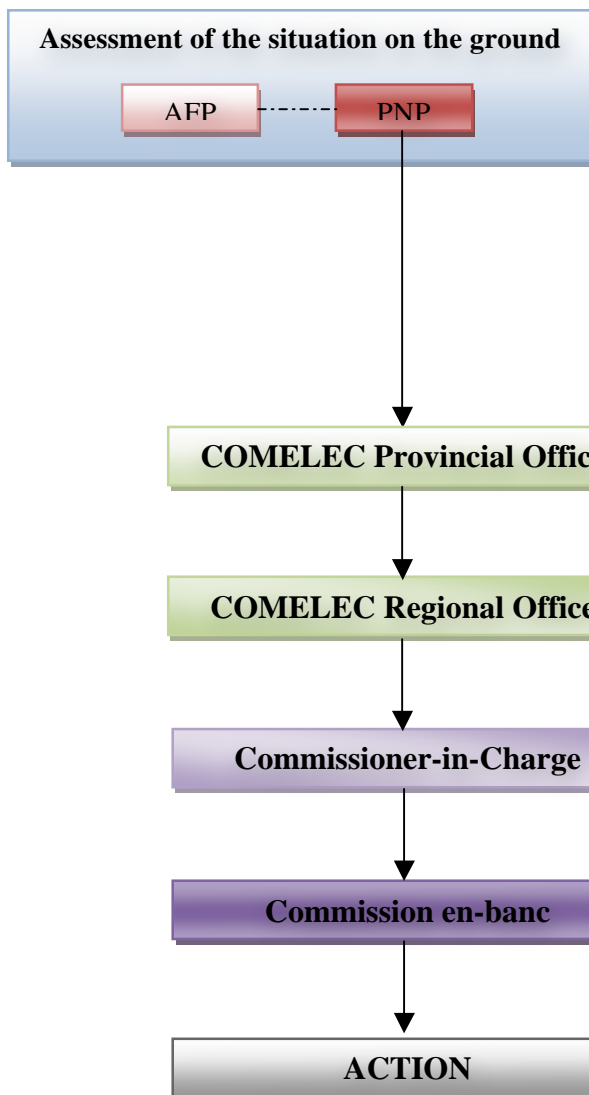
The process by which the PNP and AFP is deputized is through a resolution issued by the COMELEC requesting “the concurrence of the President of the Philippines in the deputization of law enforcement agencies and instrumentalities of the government ... to ensure free, orderly, honest, peaceful and credible elections.” After the President’s concurrence, the Commission then issues a resolution effecting the deputization, invoking “the power vested in it by the Constitution, Omnibus Election Code and other election laws.” Upon deputization, the COMELEC would then lay down the duties and responsibilities of the deputized agencies (e.g. COMELEC Resolution Nos. 3308 and 3309, accessed 12/10/09 from www.chanrobles.com).

Where are the election hotspots?

Figure 5 plots the consistent election hotspots all over the country for the past three elections.

As of 2007, there are 181 towns in the country declared as election hotspots (see Annex 1). One of worst cases is the province of Masbate, wherein all, except three, of its towns are consistent hotspots in the last three elections. In Nueva Ecija, on the other hand, 17 out of its 32 towns are also considered election hotspots¹¹.

¹¹ PNP Task Force HOPE, accessed 3 March 2010. URL: http://www.pnp.gov.ph/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=177&Itemid=78



The Philippine National Police (PNP) is directly involved in the identification of “hotspots” or areas to be placed under “areas of concern” and “areas of immediate concern.”

Based on its assessment, the Philippine Army of the AFP may also identify hotspots. However, it is subject to validation by the PNP.

Upon identification of the areas, the PNP writes a letter of request to the Comelec requesting the areas to be declared hotspots.

The request is submitted to the Comelec Provincial Office thru the Provincial Election Officer.

The request is then forwarded to the Comelec Regional Office.

The Regional Office submits the request to the Commissioner-in-Charge (CIC)

The Commissioner-in-Charge submits the request to the Commission en banc for consideration.

Upon review and deliberation by the en banc, the request is approved.

The flowchart is based on the interview with Commissioner Armando Velasco (September 2009), 1st Lt. Carlito Nisnisan of the 41st IB Philippine Army (February 2010), a news item about the declaration of “hotspots” found at <http://www.pia.gov.ph/?m=12&sec=reader&rp=1&fi=p070426.htm&no=8&date=04/26/2007> accessed 10 February 2010 and AFP-PNP joint letter directive 01-2010.

Figure 4: Process by which areas are declared “election hotspots”

Meanwhile, in Abra, 10 out of the 27 towns are regular hotspots and were declared under COMELEC control in 2007. And during the 2004 elections, four towns were also placed under COMELEC control, namely: Bangued, Danglas, La Paz and Tineg.

**Figure 5: Consistent Election Hotspots
(2001, 2004 & 2007)**



Election-related Violence in Abra

Abra is a landlocked province on the northwestern side of the Cordilleras in Northern Luzon, bounded on the north by Ilocos Norte and Apayao, on the east by the province of Kalinga, on the west by Ilocos Sur and on the south by Mountain Province. It is the largest in the Cordilleras with a total land area of 397,555 hectares, divided into east and northwestern portions comprised of rolling hills and rugged mountains; and south and western portions comprised of plains and valleys. It is politically divided into 27 municipalities and 303 barangays with Bangued as the official capital¹².

As of August 1, 2007, Abra has a total population of 230,953 with an annual growth rate of 1.35 % for the period 2000 to 2007. Bangued is the most populous with a total population of 46,179 comprising 20 % of the total provincial population.¹³

¹² Provincial Development Plan & Investment Program CY 2004-2010

¹³ POPCEN 2007 (accessed 4 January 2010 at <http://www.census.gov.ph/data/pressrelease/2009/pr0977tx.html>, press release # 2009-77 released August 24, 2009).

Majority of the people who inhabit the plains of Abra are Christianized Ilocanos and Tingguians. Ilocanos, who are the more dominant of the two groups, are concentrated near the mouths of the Laoag and Abra Rivers. Meanwhile, the Tingguians or Itnegs (which means people living near the Tineg River) are concentrated in the towns of Tubo, Manabo, Sallapadan, San Quintin, Luba, and Boliney. They are classified into two: the valley Tingguians, or those living in the village communities with the Ilocano settlers; and the mountain Tingguians who are distributed in sparsely populated areas in the highland regions of northern and eastern Abra (Peralta, 2000).

During the 1980's, Abra became a hotbed of communist rebels. The insurgency had its peak in 1985, feeding on the discontent over the loss of ancestral lands due to the establishment of large logging concessions. It eventually dissipated when the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA) broke away from the communist movement with the hopes of championing the efforts towards an autonomous Cordilleran government. Rev. Fr. Conrado Balweg, a former SVD priest turned revolutionary leader started his crusade in Abra and fought for the rights of the Cordillera tribes. In 1987, after successfully negotiating a peace accord with Balweg's group, the Philippine government created the Cordillera Administrative Region. In 1990, Abra became a part of CAR despite the disapproval of some Abrenians. (See Annex 2 for a more extensive discussion on the Abra profile and history.)

Violence in Abra

In 2006, PNP Cordillera recorded 47 murders, 28 frustrated murders, six (2) attempted murders, 22 frustrated homicides, six (6) attempted homicides, and 11 homicide cases. These numbers signified a considerable increase from the previous figures. However, most of the killings lack witnesses, for fear that their lives will be threatened once they get involved (Ballesta; 2007; internet material).

Another report of the Police Regional Office of Cordillera (PRO-COR) in 2007 indicated that of the 116 cases of violence recorded in the previous year, only about 70 cases are under follow-up investigation, and 45 of which have "slim chances" of being resolved because the perpetrators "cannot be identified." Additionally, witnesses are afraid to come out, fearing that their lives will be in jeopardy once they come out. This led the PRO-COR to conclude that violence is part of the everyday life of the Abrenians (Ballesta; 2007).

From Oct 7-13, 2007, eight (8) incidents of killings were already recorded in just five (5) days (Alegre; 2007; internet material). The said occurrence alarmed the majority of Abrenians for fear that the culture of violence and impunity is already in the verge of becoming pervasive.

Another incident occurred on the early morning of May 14, 2009, when unidentified armed men fired at the house of a local journalist. This was apparently done in retaliation for an editorial article written regarding the Abra Electric Cooperative (ABRECO) (GMANews.TV Report)¹⁴. The said article discussed the alleged inconsistencies and red tape in the said office. After the shooting, there were reports that the mother of the ABRECO General Manager offered the journalist a job in the said public office in exchange for her silence (Bulatlat.Com Report)¹⁵.

14 <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/161414/Armed-men-attack-journalists-house-in-Abra-province>

15 <http://www.bulatlat.com/main/2009/06/06/attack-on-abra-journalist-remains-unsolved/>

Two weeks after the incident, unidentified armed men fired at the house of a barangay councilman in Caganayan, Tineg.

A month after that, in June of 2009, unidentified armed men fired at the St. Arnold Janssen Communications Center which houses the local radio stations and newspaper (GMANews.TV Report)¹⁶. Upon investigation, the police found no clear indication of any real motive behind the incident.

In its analysis of the situation of violence in the province, Abra's local police declared that one of the factors causing violence is the cultural trait of the Abrenians, which tries to settle their differences in a violent manner. The police further claim that the sensational political killings have placed Abra into the limelight (Abra PPO Annual Report, 2007).

Abra as an area of immediate concern

During the last three elections, Abra consistently figured in the list of COMELEC's areas of immediate concern, with almost half of the towns considered as hotspots. In the GMANews.TV report presented earlier, Abra accounts for ten towns that are regular hotspots, namely: Lagayan, Danglas, Dolores, Bangued, Langiden, Tayum, Lacub, Malibcong, Boliney and Tubo¹⁷.

Abra was automatically included in the list of areas of immediate concern for the 2007 local elections following the murder of Rep. Luis P. Bersamin, Jr (Panares; 2007; internet material). Bersamin Jr., was murdered with his bodyguard while attending a wedding in Quezon City. His death proved to be the last straw. Much attention was given to his death, which made the whole nation realize that the killings in this small province will not stop if nothing is done about it.

For the 2010 elections, it is still considered an area of immediate concern due to the brewing rivalries between allied political families in 2007 holding key government positions, which for the 2010 elections has decided to run against each other.

Cases of election-related violence in Abra

Based on statistics from the two previous elections, the total number of ERV killings in Abra constitutes almost 16% of the total ERV killings in the country—a clear indication of the prevalence of election-related violence in the province.

The Abra Provincial Police Office (Abra PPO) reported 31 ERV incidents from January 1 to May 27, 2004, and 13 other incidents that occurred from January 14 to May 14, 2007. Table 9 presents the number of reported ERV cases vis-à-vis the types of election-related violence incidents. Of these

16 <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/165278/Armed-men-attack-radio-station-in-Abra>

17 PNP Task Force HOPE (http://www.pnp.gov.ph/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=177&Itemid=78). Said data also appeared in a GMANews.TV report by Ederic Eder & Brenda Barrientos entitled, "**181 RP Towns consistent election hotspots**" accessed at http://www.gmanews.tv/story/43437/181-RP-towns-consistent-poll-hotspots/_/2/

numbers, 16 were killed, 9 were injured and 14 cases were filed in court in 2004. In 2007, 12 were killed, 9 were wounded and all cases are still under investigation¹⁸.

Table 9: Election-Related Violence in Abra (2004, 2007)		
Election-Related Violence	14 Jan-14 May 2007	01 Jan- 15 May 2004
Number of Incidents	13	31
-Murder	5	13
-Frustrated Murder	3	7
-Attempted Murder	3	1
-Homicide	1	1
-Frustrated Homicide		1
-Attempted Homicide	1	1
-Indiscriminate Firing		1
-Grave Threat/Arbitrary Detention/Gun Ban		4
-Grenade Throwing/ Explosion		2
Source: Abra PPO		

Comparing the results of the two previous elections, there was a sudden decrease in the incidence of election-related violence in Abra during the 2007 elections as compared to the 2004 elections. Likewise, general criminality in Abra during the same period also saw a sudden decrease. As indicated in Table 6, murder registered the highest frequency among incidents of election-related violence (ERV) recorded by the Abra PPO, This comprised almost half of the total number of incidents.

Comparing the number of ERV cases in 2004 and 2007 with the crime volume reported by the Abra PPO from 01 January to 06 May 2007 and 01 January to 31 May 2004 respectively, the reported cases of ERV incidents comprise approximately one-fourths of the total crime volume in the province. This, however, does not discount the possibility that incidents of election-related crimes for the two election years might have been underreported.

In addition, the data from Abra PPO, as presented in Tables 10 and 11, reveal that majority of the victims of election-related crimes are campaign supporters, which comprise almost 80% of the total election-related violence cases. Similarly, majority of the suspects for reported election-related crimes are unidentified and/or civilians.

18 Data provided by Abra PPO on 9 October 2009.

Table 10: Victims of Election-Related Violence		
Type of Victim	01 Jan to 06 May 2007	01 Jan to 31 May 2004
Campaign Manager	1	0
Campaign Supporter	23	29
Public Official	4	7
Police Officer	4	1
BEI	2	0
NAMFREL Volunteer	1	0
Source: Abra PPO		

Table 11: Suspects of Election-Related Violence		
Type of Suspect	01 Jan to 06 May 2007	01 Jan to 31 May 2004
Unidentified	8	19
Civilians	10	20
Public Official	2	1
Police Officer	0	1
Source: Abra PPO		

Presence of political dynasties

The literature on Abra's political history (e.g., Ballesta; 2007) reveal the intense competition for power among deeply-entrenched families or clan-based political elites which, for long time, were able to establish their dominance and influence over the province. The volatile and antagonistic relationships of these families have become the source and perpetuation of election-related violence. The chapter on power analysis will discuss this point in greater detail.

Intensity of political killings

Four decades ago, only the politicians' minions and followers died because of politics—all of them as mere sacrificial lambs. Killing was not yet institutionalized; and it was only in 1965 that the presence of goons was first documented. This was in relation to the killing of then Bucay Vice-Mayor Silvestre Perlas. And since then, major and minor political figures have been regularly killed (Ballesta, 2007).

From 2001 to 2007, for example, a total of 31 politicians who were killed. Up until now, almost all the cases remain under investigation. These cases are indeed indicative of the prevalent situation of election-related violence in Abra, which has gone from bad to worse (Ballesta, 2007).

Presence of private armed groups (PAGs)

As of 2007, government authorities have confirmed the existence of private/partisan armed groups (PAGs) in the province. According to the investigation conducted by Task Force Abra and CIDG in 2006, there were 10 private armed groups on Abra with 117 members, and a total of 3,000 firearms in the whole province. Based on this classified report, it was estimated that from the said groups, two-thirds are followers of former Governor Vicente Valera and his ally, Tineg Mayor Edwin Crisolago; while Abra Representative Cecilia Seares- Luna reportedly had seven members in her own armed group, headed by her son Lagayan Mayor Jendricks Luna. Mailed Molina, who heads a faction of the Cordillera People's Liberation Army was reported to have an "undetermined" number of private armed groups.¹⁹

The 2007 Annual Report of the Abra PPO also points to the same politicians controlling these PAGs. However, compared to the Task Force Abra report, the Abra PPO annual report counts only up to 8 groups reportedly maintained by certain politicians in the province. The three largest groups are allegedly controlled by Tineg Mayor Edwin Crisolago, Ex-Governor Vicente Valera and his wife Ma. Cita Valera, and Congresswoman Cecilia Seares-Luna. The Abra PPO has also recorded suspected PAG activities in other municipalities.

According to accounts, the emergence of private armed groups arose from the need of the people and the politicians to protect themselves from intense rivalries that have characterized Abra politics. It was also because of the distrust that the general populace has over the capacity of local courts to resolve conflicts. Members of PAGs, for their part, have resorted to violence either for survival or to satisfy their thirst for vengeance (Paredes, 2004).

Moreover, the police contend that the intense political rivalries undermine the possibility of undertaking peaceful elections in the province. These rivalries have spawned the PAGs of Abra, and so-called "payback time" has been the usual reason for committing electoral violence. Those responsible, according to the police, more often than not, either belong to political families or are career politicians who desire to preserve their stay in power (Abra PPO Annual Report; 2007).

Insurgency as a factor in election-related violence

The police has identified the problem of insurgency as one of the security issues/concerns of Abra. The 2007 Annual Report of the Abra PPO, for instance, has stated that the province is under threat by five (5) CPP-NPA guerilla fronts. However, some representatives from the PNP as well as from the military believe that the insurgency is not a major factor in the prevalence of election-related violence in the province. This is due to the fact that, based on confirmed their confirmed reports, there are only very insurgents who serve as goons for politicians.

¹⁹ Frank Cimatu, Private armies threaten Abra polls. http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/regions/view/20070507-4614/Private_armies_threaten_Abra_polls_-_police_report

Proliferation of illegal firearms

The PNP has released a report which states that of the over one million illegal firearms in the country, Cordillera accounts for at least 6,000 loose firearms—50 % of which are in Abra.

Moreover, the data provided by the Abra Police Provincial Office presented in Table 12 shows that for the first quarter of 2007, there were 69 cases involving the violation of COMELEC Resolution No. 7764-A (gun ban). Majority of the cases were immediately resolved with approximately 20% under follow-up investigation. However, there is lack of data available on the number of surrendered firearms for the last three elections. The only data available was for the month of October 2004, which stated that 89 firearms were surrendered by 47 politicians.

The “mass surrender” of firearms was a product of a dialogue between the police and the politicians in order to promote “peace and tranquility” in the province. Along with the mass surrender of firearms, the dialogue also discussed the possibility of dismantling the PAGs in the province. The notable politicians who participated in the dialogue and surrendered their firearms were: then Governor Vicente Valera who surrendered the most number of firearms (eight firearms); then Mayor Cecilia Ceares-Luna who surrendered three; and then Mayor Ysrael Bernos who surrendered the same number of firearms as Luna (Task Force Abra Accomplishment Report; 2005).

Table 12: Violation of Gun Ban			
First Quarter of 2007	Solved Cases	Follow-up Investigation	Total
January	12	1	13
February	12	6	18
March	7	1	8
April	11	2	13
GRAND TOTAL	55	14	69

Probing on the Definition of Election-Related Violence

As earlier stated, the PNP categorizes a violent incident as election-related when it occurred during the official election period set by the COMELEC. This, according to Bantay Eleksyon, renders the PNP statistics inaccurate. As an alternative, Bantay Eleksyon suggests that ERV monitoring should start one year before THE Election Day and end on June 30 when the winning candidates formally assume office (IPER; 2007; p. 2).

The difficulty of defining election-related violence arises from how it should be properly understood conceptually. First, election-related violence, if defined in the broadest sense, becomes applicable only on a case-to-case basis. For example, if election violence is defined as an act that inflicts fear and disrupts the electoral process, it may not be applicable to Abra at all. This is because while the survey results show that the people generally recognize the presence of election-related violence, their continued participation in the elections indicate that they are not largely affected by this situation.

Second, it is difficult to establish the motive for an act of violence. This difficulty makes it hard to differentiate an incident of election-related violence from one that is not. A situation like this also leads one to ask: How does the PNP ensure that all the incidents that have occurred during the election period are in fact election-related? Likewise, how will election-related incidents happening outside the election period be treated? In such gray areas, requisites in the classification of incidents must be maintained. What criteria should be adopted in order to differentiate which of the incidents are election-related or not?

Answering these questions is extremely important especially if the numbers of incidents are used as basis in identifying areas of concern.

The difficulty, moreover, in establishing the motive of a violent incident brings confusion to the people that are directly affected. This can be seen in the results of the 150-respondent survey conducted in Abra wherein 63.3% believe that election-related violence is happening in the province, while 36% believe otherwise. 44% of those who do not believe that election-related violence is happening said that they are not sure which of the reported violent cases fall under the category of election-related violence; while another 44.4% said that they do not know of any proof that would determine that the incidents of violence are indeed election-related.

Implications of an Unclear Definition

What criteria does the COMELEC use in determining whether a particular area is an election hotspot?

According to one COMELEC official, the Commission would declare an area under its control “if violence intensifies” (Velasco interview; 2009). The COMELEC can also declare an election hotspot based on the number of killings that have occurred in a particular area during the preceding elections.

However, in reality, the Commission has no definite benchmark for categorizing election hotspots. They also have no quantifiable references that they can use as a basis for placing an area under COMELEC control. Even the PNP has fared no better, since the process by which it evaluates and identifies elections hotspots remains understudied.

The difficulty in declaring an election hotspot is partly due to the unclear definition of election-related violence. As earlier stated, the identification of hotspots is based on the series of killings that have occurred during the election period. However, the uncertainty whether the actual killings are election-related or not will definitely cast doubts on the criteria, which then makes the entire identification process unreliable.

Another reason for this difficulty is the lack of adequate framework for the identification and classification of election hotspots. If an area is to be declared an election hotspot based on its history of violence, then indicators should be in-place that would determine that the said incidents were indeed election-related. If this is not done, then a situation may arise wherein areas which are supposed to be declared as hotspots may not be given such a status.

There are also instances wherein hotspots are declared, not because there have been incidents of election-related violence, but strategically in order to prevent the escalation of electoral violence. The declaration is strategic because when an area becomes a hotspot, the police force is augmented and additional resources, however minimal, are allocated. However, if hotspots are declared only for the purpose of preventing election-related violence, then all areas in the country should be categorized as hotspots.

This lack of criteria makes it imperative to address the following issues: (1) Are there incidents of violence in non-hotspot areas? Or (2) is election-related violence also prevalent in areas that are not declared as hotspots?

Furthermore, there seems to be no differentiation among hotspot areas. COMELEC uses “areas of concern” and “areas of immediate concern” to provide some distinctions, but these two terminologies are often used interchangeably.

This treatment has implications as far as prioritization among hotspot areas is concerned, in terms of what areas need more and special attention relative to the state of election-related violence. If additional resources are to be allocated in hotspot areas, then priority areas should be set and defined given the limited resources. It will be of no use declaring hotspots if all areas are prioritized.

Defining Election-Related Violence

The key to understanding election-related violence is by scanning how it is defined or understood as a concept. For this study, it is imperative to get hold of the situation on the ground, particularly on how the stakeholders understand the phenomenon of election-related violence. By aggregating the responses from key informant interviews with representatives from several key institutions, stakeholder analysis will be able to demonstrate the following common notions about election-related violence in Abra:

1. *There is a trend in the occurrence of election-related violence in Abra, in which most cases remain unresolved.* Most often, except during the 2007 elections, incidents of election-related violence occur six months before and six months after the elections. In fact, the pattern of violence I already quite discernible. First, a politician will try to terrorize his opponents and their supporters before the actual elections; the latter would then retaliate; and once the elections are over, the losing politician will initiate acts of violence as a way of exacting vengeance. The local courts, however, are unable to act on these cases because of lack of cooperation, not only from the witnesses, but from the victims themselves. These incidents of violence occur because of the intense struggle for key positions in the government; while the long-standing rivalry among political clans aggravate the situation. Politics is seen by these families a business enterprise from where they derive their livelihood (DILG, Army, Civil Society, Church, Media, Police²⁰ and Judiciary).

²⁰ The provincial police believe that there is a prevalence of election-related violence in Abra and that the situation is getting worse. As a result, in the past three elections, there has been three PNP task forces formed to mitigate election-related violence. Task Force Lagayan was created in 2001 to respond to the threats of election-related violence in the mayoralty race. Task Force Bangued Shield was created in 2004 to mitigate election-violence in the capital town. It was indicated that Bangued, being a melting pot of all cultures becomes the center of all activities

2. *The prevalence of election-related violence is largely determined by the existing power configuration.* The occurrence of election-related violence is also a function of the existing power configuration. Hence, changes in power configuration affect the pattern of election-related violence. The past elections, particularly in 2007, indicate that election-related violence worsens when there is a growing opposition, and “hard core” political opponents face each other during elections. On the other hand, election-related violence ceases to persist when new alliances among politicians are formed, and the opposition is not yet that strong (Academe, Business Sector).
3. *The occurrence of election-related violence is seasonal and isolated.* Some stakeholders claim that in the last three elections, election-related violence did not have the same level of gravity, and that high incidences of election-related violence does not happen all the time. Moreover, ERV cases only occur in some places, and not in the entire province. According to these stakeholders, such places include the municipalities of Tineg, Bangued, Dolores, La Paz, Lagayan and Danglas. On the other hand, most areas in the province are generally peaceful during election time (DepEd, PIA, COMELEC).

This study defines election-related violence with reference to the definitions, categories and typologies as presented in the preliminary parts of this chapter. This study presents a definition that tries to cover the gaps in the definition of election-related violence—being broad, unclear and limited. The definition of election-related violence in this study takes into consideration the following:

1. The difficulty of establishing the motive of a violent incident, which complicates the process of identifying election-related cases;
2. The limited time-frame perspective as indicated in the PNP’s classification of ERV incidents;
3. The typological definition of election-related violence, as advanced by some researchers (e.g., Reif; 2009);
4. The categories of election conflict and violence (IFES; 2002); and
5. The common understanding and kind of election-related violence as observed on the ground, in Abra.

For the purposes of this study, the typologies of election-related violence are used to organize a rather convoluted concept and to come-up with a more coherent definition. It is imperative that the definition which will be developed later on must be in consonance with how the people on the ground understand the phenomenon of ERV. The key informant interviews that were conducted validated the veracity of some aspects of the typological definitions of election-related violence as earlier discussed, particularly the actor specific, time specific and motive specific typologies.

The stakeholders in Abra recognize that election-related violence is characterized by a situation where in political actors try to terrorize their political rivals or opponents through violent means. These intense political rivalries result to killings, either to eliminate opponents or avenge one’s defeat in the electoral contest. The masterminds of these violent incidents are usually politicians who use other actors (i.e., hired killers) to do their bidding. Victims, on the other hand, usually come from the other camp.

including election-related violence. Task Force Abra, on the other hand, evolved from the earlier task force to further respond to the problem of election-related violence within the provincial level.

The stakeholders generally subscribe to the time-specific typology in terms of their understanding of election-related violence—there is a trend in the occurrence of election-related violence in Abra, such that it happens six months before and six months after the Election Day. This trend is recognized by the local police. High incidents of election-related violence six months before and six months after the elections have been consistently reported over the years. The local PNP, however, claims that ERV incidents have decreased and had become negligible in the 2007 polls because of the change in leadership.

They also point to competition over power and resources as the reason why politicians resort to electoral violence. They believe that the desire to gain or to maintain control over certain government positions is the main motivation for continuing to get hold on to power, at all costs.

Though not explicitly validated by the key informant interviews, tactic specific typology is also a given when election-related violence is discussed because, it can be assumed that actors employ tactics in order to carry out acts of violence. A situation specific typology is also a given because ERV occur under a certain context. An Outcome specific typology, on the other hand, describes election-related violence in the broadest sense, specifying its impact to the electoral process and democratic exercise in general.

The definition of election-related violence that is proposed for the purposes of this study elaborates on the actor specific, time-specific and situation specific typologies. It tries to quantify and specify the definition of election-related violence, as indicated in these typologies:

1. *Actor specific.* Election-related violence involves politicians and their supporters as the main actors, with desired end-results and available means to achieve them. It involves conflict between and among political rivals for political gain (IFES; 2002). This type of election-related violence is widely observed in Abra. Violence is perpetrated by politicians and/or their supporters to ensure electoral victory, by disrupting (in any manner) the opponent's campaign, and by using threats and other violent means to influence the results of the elections. An act of violence is considered election-related when the perpetrators or suspects come from rival political families and/or their respective supporters. By supporters, this study refers to persons who are directly involved in the campaigns. It does not include ordinary individuals who are simply expressing their preference for a particular candidate. This actor specific definition of election-related violence also includes other actors (i.e., hired killers, private armies, etc.) that are utilized by certain politicians and/or their supporters to carry out violent acts.
2. *Time specific.* Election-related violence happens during a specified time-frame. For this study, the official PNP definition (which states that incidents that occur 90 days before the Election Day and 30 days thereafter are considered election-related) is taken into account, primarily because the study relied heavily on police data in presenting the situation of election related violence in the national level and in Abra. Recognizing the limitation of the PNP definition and considering the peculiarities of Abra, the common understanding of election-related violence, as recognized by the local police, is factored in – election election-related violence happens in the province six months before and six months after the elections.

In relation to the actor-specific definition, this study further qualifies the time-specificity of election-related violence through the following levels: there is election-related violence (1) when there is a series of violent incidents (i.e. killings) involving politicians happening in a particular period; and (2) if there is a series of attack directed to the campaign team members.

3. *Situation specific.* Situation specific typology describes the context where election-related violence is likely to occur. Such context presupposes the existence of conflict that fuels violence. Following the IFES' (2002) category, election violence and conflict can occur in a setting where the fairness of the election process is put into question and the electoral hegemony of the state is challenged. The “zero-sum” feature of elections also ignites violence as losers are excluded by the winning candidates in the exercise power. This is particularly true for Abra.

Election-related violence is likely to happen in a context where there is a proliferation of illegal firearms and in some cases, where insurgency exists. It also occurs in a context where perks of government offices are so attractive that politicians would vie for these posts at all costs. Election-related violence also occur in certain periods where it is most conducive, i.e. when there is a growing alliance in the opposition whose aim is to overthrow the ones who are dominant.

Patiño and Velasco (2004) also enumerated the following forms and types of election-related violence namely killings, abductions, terrorisms, physical attacks on rallies, homes, offices of candidates and supporters, and any other acts that result in death, physical injuries, and/or damage to private properties. Non-physical or “preliminary forms” of election-related violence such as intimidation, coercion and harassment were also included. These types of election-related violence are utilized in this study.

It must be noted that the Omnibus Election Code, notwithstanding the fact that it is the authority in all election matters, does not comprehensively enumerate acts of electoral violence. It only determines violent acts in relation to intimidation, coercion and harassments (IPER; 2007; p. 1).

Power Analysis

A review of Abra's political situation reveals the rather intense existence and preponderance of election-related violence in the province, which explains why it has consistently figured in the COMELEC's list of election hot spots since 2001. This chapter will attempt to analyze the predominance of election related violence in Abra by looking into the relationship of political actors as power holders. It will also look into the role of interests, motivations and means of the political actors in gaining and maintaining political power in Abra. As such, the more pressing question is: With the presence of various political actors, why is Abra's elections violent?

This part provides rather provisional and tentative answers to the question, primarily through a review and mapping of the political history of Abra and data gathered through key informant interviews. By looking at three contemporary cases of ERV such as the Boliney and Holy Spirit Academy incidents and the assassination of former Abra Representative Luis "Chito" Bersamin, Jr., this chapter will highlight the role of political actors in shaping the outcome of elections in the province.

Abra's recent elections are violent because political power is deeply contested by a few political families whose relationships with each other are quite volatile and antagonistic. In other words, power is distributed to a few political actors who are directed by their interests, goals, resources, and means to achieve their goals. And these power-holders include political elites, goons, private armies, security institutions, and flailing communist insurgents.

Competition among the same political elites is intense because it is encouraged by the practice of using coercion to achieve both their political and economic ends. However, the systemic and structural configurations of the Philippine electoral system also cultivate adversarial relationships among competing political families. The stakes of winning elections pits each candidate to slug it out through and through the electoral trail. This forces political actors to claw at each other for the ultimate prize of occupying an electoral position—a stake that increases every election period as public fund allocation increases.

What these actors primarily compete for is the ultimate prize of vested authority or power over the use and allocation of public resources, which are then utilized by winning candidates for their own advantage. The 1987 Constitution and the Local Government Code of 1991 provides elected local officials with the power and mandate to oversee infrastructure work, allocate resources and to generate funds for the government's service delivery programs, among many others. In turn, this has become a major source of economic gain, motivating Abra politicians to do whatever it takes to win and maintain their positions of power—by eliminating opponents, harassing rivals and non-supporters, compromising and penetrating security institutions, building and using private armies, goons, local community leaders and even go as far as contracting the services of insurgents (Patiño & Velasco; 2004).

The perpetuation of violence is aggravated by the presence of weak accountability and transparency institutions in the province. These mechanisms, which are supposed to hold public officials accountable, are underperforming. Security institutions are compromised and erring officials are not held responsible to answer for their lack of performance and corrupt activities. Local officials

understand the degree and danger of politics in Abra, such that most town mayors hold office in the provincial capital of Bangued rather than in their respective municipalities. Their relocation also weakens the peace and order situation because their absence means lack of proper supervision of their municipalities.

The cases to be discussed in the later portions of this chapter will show how political power is contested using violence, compromising and thus undermining security institutions, and exploiting people's poverty to further enrich these power-holders. The occurrence of ERV during the election period indicates that the provincial elites, who allegedly used these extra-legal means to win positions, are at their most heightened alert and paranoia at this time. Elections pose a threat to incumbent officials, for it allows their rivals to take bold steps in changing the distribution of power. As such, the means to eliminate these threats occur by using violence means to achieve political ends; killing, harassment, and intimidation of opponents. Another threat to the elites are the dissension of their political allies who, like the power-holders, are motivated by the same set of interests and goals, and in some cases, personal vendetta. It happens as these political elites are mostly connected through familial ties rather than political ones.

A failing communist insurgency also exacerbates the situation not only by contributing to the disruption of the electoral exercise, but also through the insurgents becoming a source of the arms and goons politicians use to ensure their hold on power. At present, there have been 10 reported partisan armed groups in possession of firearms and under the orders of local politicians. The condition of violence is further worsened by the general underdevelopment of the province, making Abra's ordinary inhabitants dependent on politicians to provide for their livelihood and protection. The condition of violence and its perpetuation contributes to the predominance of loose/illegal firearms, since politicians and the Abra public in general see the possession of guns as a means of protecting themselves.

The assassination of Congressman Bersamin Jr. brings to the fore the reality of intense inter-elite competition which has defined Abra politics for the longest time. Characterizing such inter-elite competition for political power in Abra are the patterns of continuity among political elites throughout Abra's political history, as well as the rather volatile alliances that exist between them. The volatility of relations among political elites, seen in the rather sudden breakdown of partnerships in some and in the rise of opposition forces in others, contributes to the political violence Abra continually experiences.

Three years after Congressman Bersamin Jr. and his police bodyguard were killed in Mt. Carmel Church in Quezon City, suspects in the murder were identified and eventually captured. Included in the list of suspects arrested by the police is former La Paz, Abra Vice-Mayor Freddie Dupo. The biggest name connected to the crime, however, is that of alleged mastermind former Abra Governor Vicente Ysidro P. Valera, who was arrested in Makati and later incarcerated in Quezon City Jail in September 2009²¹.

21 Gathered from various reports from the following links, all last accessed 7 December 2009
<http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=22686&publicationSubCategoryId=63>,
<http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=23105&publicationSubCategoryId=63>,
<http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=502326&publicationSubCategoryId=93>.

Tracing Roots: A Historical-Politico familial Background

The political history of Abra is rife with the predominance of a few entrenched political families. For the past five decades, it has been the same names that come out as winners in every electoral contest. By looking at the people who have occupied the major elective posts in Abra, particularly the position of mayor, governor and district representative, one can deduce where and to whom power has been distributed. There are three major periods to consider, that is: from the 1920s all the way to the 1960s, which was dominated by the Villamors and Paredeses; then from 1963 to 1986, which saw the dominance of the Barbero, Seares and Bernos clans with Villamors' overarching influence. And the period from 1986 to 2007, which saw the return of the Paredes. This family's prominent political figure then at that time was Vicsyd Valera who held positions for almost 21 years. It was also during this period that the politics of Abra saw fluid alliances—a method or strategy to which these families were able to consolidate a political base that allowed them to effectively dominate the political landscape of Abra. For more than five decades already, these political families have lorded and competed over who sits at the pinnacle of political power in the province.

The assassination of Chito Bersamin Jr. allegedly ordered by then Governor Vicsyd Valera brings to light a case of politics that is thicker than blood. Through kinship, both Bersamin Jr. and Valera are directly related to the most prominent political clans in Abra. Chito Bersamin Jr. is related to the Villamors in his maternal side, and to the Paredeses in his paternal side. Valera, on the other hand, is related to the Paredeses through his maternal side. According to the accounts and records the Villamors and the Paredeses have been political rivals since the 1950's until one of the Villamors was married to a Paredes. This relationship later on became a major factor in one of Abra's most prominent ERV cases.

Throughout the years, the relationships of these families and their political allies have been established through bonds of kinship, ritual, and political alliances, and with very few exceptions²², these two clans, the Villamors and Paredeses, have dominated and influenced Abra politics, specifically in the congressional and governorship positions (See Table 13). In fact, some evidence point to the fact that Luis Bersamin Jr. and Vicente Valera both share the same ancestry, that of Don Juan Felix Paredes, and as such, they really belong to only one family²³.

The alliance between Vicente Ysidro Valera and Luis Bersamin Jr. dates back to 1987, when Bersamin ran for mayor in Bangued (Abra's capital city) under the ticket of Valera, and since then became political allies up until 2001, when the first signs of disagreement between the parties arose. Such tensions however were successfully eased out through the mediation of their families and political allies. The alliance again was threatened in 2004, yet, as was in the first case, the Valera-Bersamin partnership was successfully restored. By the run-up to the 2007 elections, however, the

22 The best example of such is the loss of Jose Valera to Carmelo Barbero in 1963. The comeback was completed in 1986, with the appointment of Jose Valera's son, Vicente Ysidro Varela, as officer-in-charge governor of the province, in Ballesta, Ma. Ayn (pseud.), "The blood politics of Abra," in <http://pcij.org/stories/the-blood-politics-of-abra/> last accessed 07 December 2009.

23 See Ballesta, Ma. Ayn (pseud.), "The blood politics of Abra," in <http://pcij.org/stories/the-blood-politics-of-abra/> last accessed 07 December 2009.

Valera-Bersamin alliance soured²⁴, allegedly because Valera was threatened by the possibility of Bersamin Jr.'s running for governor of Abra²⁵ (in which case they will be rivals for power) and who also had a popular following amongst the populace of Abra. That political motivation of one actor to maintain power might just have paved the way for Bersamin's death.

Table 13: Congressional and Governorship Positions in Abra		
PERIOD	REPRESENTATIVE	GOVERNOR
5 th Legislature (1919-1922)	Eustaquio Purugganan ²⁶	Atty. Julio V. Borbon ²⁷
6 th Legislature (1922-1925)	Adolfo Brillantes ²⁸	Atty. Virgilio V. Valera ²⁹
7 th Legislature (1925-1928)	Quintin Paredes	Eustaquio P. Purugganan
8 th Legislature (1928-1931)	Quintin Paredes	Atty. Virgilio V. Valera
9 th Legislature (1931-1934)	Quintin Paredes	Atty. Virgilio V. Valera
10 th Legislature (1934-1935)	Quintin Paredes	Atty. Virgilio V. Valera
1 st National Assembly (Commonwealth, 1935-1938)	Agapito Garduque	Bienvenido N. Valera
2 nd National Assembly (1938-1941)	Quintin Paredes	Eustaquio P. Purugganan
3 rd National Assembly (1941-1946) ³⁰	Jesus Paredes	Bernardo V. Bayuden/ Atty. Zacarias A. Crispin
1 st Congress (After independence, 1946-1949)	Quintin Paredes	Atty. Juan C. Brillantes/Luis F. Bersamin Sr., MD ³¹
2 nd Congress (1949-1953)	Virgilio Valera	Luis F. Bersamin Sr., MD/Engr. Lucas P. Paredes ³²
3 rd Congress (1953-1957)	Lucas P. Paredes	Vene B. Pe Benito, DVM/Atty. Ernesto P. Parel/Atty. Jose L. Valera ³³
4 th Congress (1957-1961)	Lucas P. Paredes	Atty. Jose L. Valera
5 th Congress (1961-1965)	Lucas P. Paredes	Atty. Jose L. Valera/Col. Carmelo Z. Barbero ³⁴

24 Key informant interview, 14 September 2009. The key informant, as reflected in the transcripts, points to another political family in Abra as the one responsible for the eventual breakdown of relations between Vicente Ysidro Valera and Luis Bersamin Jr.

25 Key informant interview, 8 September 2009.

26 Member of the Paredes clan; son of Nicolasa Paredes (daughter of Don Juan Felix Paredes) and Severino Purugganan.

27 Member of the Villamor clan, mentor of Quintin Paredes.

28 Ally of the Villamor clan.

29 Member of the Villamor clan.

30 From 1943-1944, however, the congressional position was transferred to Juan Brillantes and then to Quintin Paredes, while Bernardo V. Bayuden became governor of the province.

31 Luis Bersamin Sr., MD, belongs to both the Villamor and Paredes clans; his mother is a Villamor while his wife, Rosario Purugganan, is a Paredes. He ran for governor in 1947 supported by the Paredes clan.

32 The Paredes clan withdrew their support from Bersamin Sr., MD in favor of Engr. Lucas Paredes.

33 Father of Vicente Ysidro P. Valera and husband of Violeta Paredes (belonging to the Paredes clan).

6 th Congress (1965-1969)	Carmelo Z. Barbero	Petronilo V. Seares
7 th Congress (1969-1972) ³⁵	Carmelo Z. Barbero ³⁶	Petronilo V. Seares/Gabino Balbin ³⁷
Interim Batasang Pambansa (1984-1986)	Arturo V. Barbero	Andres B. Bernos
8 th Congress (1987-1992)	Rudolfo A. Bernardez	Atty. Vicente Ysidro P. Valera ³⁸
9 th Congress (1992-1995)	Jeremias Z. Zapata	Atty. Vicente Ysidro P. Valera
10 th Congress (1995-1998)	Jeremias Z. Zapata	Constante B. Culangen MD
11 th Congress (1998-2001)	Vicente Ysidro P. Valera	Atty Ma. Zita Claustro-Valera
12 th Congress (2001-2004)	Luis P. Bersamin Jr	Atty. Vicente Ysidro P. Valera
13 th Congress (2004-2007)	Luis P. Bersamin Jr.	Atty. Vicente Ysidro P. Valera
14 th Congress (2007-2010)	Cecilia S. Seares-Luna	Eustaquio P. Bersamin

Extending Power through Private Armies, Goons, and Ward Leaders

Political violence, especially during the election season, is largely instigated by intense intra-elite competition for power. This, however, is not new to Abra. In fact, it has been that way since the early 1900s.

The first signs of violence marred with political motives came in 1963, when both Carmelo Barbero and Jose Valera were suspected of having private armies. These armed groups under orders from their respective politicians were allegedly composed of former military or police personnel involved in crimes and syndicates who ally themselves with politicians to escape prosecution and seek protection. They could also be civilians and local community leaders armed and trained by local politicians to consolidate a candidate's electoral base by harassing supporters of rival candidates.

The lure of better economic opportunities attracts individuals to join a private army. As reported by NSCB³⁹, Abra is economically destitute in terms of available and decent job or income opportunities. This will be discussed in greater detail in the succeeding sections of this chapter.

Having these armed groups is a way of showing force and security. But for the ordinary individual, joining a private army is largely a matter of economic survival. Anecdotal accounts tell the story of how being “gardener” for a local politician could lead to being a “full-rank “goon. Being a hired gun is far better, in terms of income or compensation, from being a mere security guard of a politician. Loyalty is peddled by serving the politician who pays well.

34 Former vice-governor of Abra with Jose Valera as governor; allied with Valera (Paredes) in the late 1950s, only to break it in 1963 in favor of the Villamors, thus forming the Carmelo Barbero-Petronilo V. Seares (of Villamor clan) tandem for the gubernatorial race.

35 Congress was suspended with the declaration of Martial Law on 21 September 1972.

36 Barbero was appointed as Deputy Defense Minister in 1976 by Ferdinand Marcos, his son Arturo assumed office as governor of Abra.

37 Barbero separated from Petronilo Seares in 1971, and ran for governor with Gabino Balbin as running-mate; Balbin became the governor because Barbero opted to keep his position as Abra representative.

38 Appointed by the Aquino government, with the endorsement of then Bishop of Abra, Most Rev. Cesar Raval, SVD.

39 NSCB 2006 Poverty Incidence and Rank of Ten Poorest Provinces in the Philippines

The functions of these private armies or hired goons range from a variety of electoral errands to illegally ensure the victory of their political employers. The services reportedly rendered vary from stealing blank forms to procuring excess ballots for use in the manufacture of votes, to destroying the list of voters or other elections materials, and disrupting the transportation of votes for the purpose of disenfranchising non-supporters. These activities are funded largely through the incumbent officials' access to public resources (this will also be discussed in the latter portion of this chapter, in connection to the motivations of political actors to engage in competitive behavior).

The hiring and employing private armies and goons is a display of political muscle. Politicians rationalize this with the “protection logic.” At the same time, they can also use their private armies to intimidate their opponents. For an area like Abra, which is reported to have several private armies, one cannot be a politician if one has no goons. In fact, in Abra, guns and private armies are already considered as part of the politicians' political machinery.

It must be pointed out, however, that a politician can only control these armed elements so long as he has the ability to sustain their regular. Politicians are also on the leash of some of these groups since once a transaction is made, it becomes mutual dependency relationship where one actor is expected to do something in favor to the other and vice versa. This is the case if the hired goon also has political interests, for example in bids for public infrastructure.

The first reported case of election related violence involving partisan armed groups (PAGs) was in 1965 with the assassination of the vice mayor of Bucay, which was allegedly ordered by then Nacionalista Party congressional candidate Antonio Paredes. The order given to these men (who came from different parts of Luzon), purportedly, was to kill every opponent of Paredes including Carmelo Barbero and then governor Petronilo Seares—notwithstanding the fact that Barbero himself reportedly had his own men from Ilocos Sur who were supposedly trained by his allies in the military (Ballesta; 2007). It is believed that the Paredes and Barbero rivalry gave birth to Abra's private armies which, in recent counts have numbered to 10 heavily armed groups.

At present the major political families in Abra—the Lunas and the Valeras—are reported to have their own private armies whose members count from anywhere from 100 to 400 individuals. Both families have denied the accusation. However, the PNP includes in its watch-list the same family names as cuddling private armies. Both the Lunas and the Valeras justify their possession of firearms as a matter of personal protection⁴⁰. They also dismiss the accusation of cuddling private armies by claiming that these armed men are actually their close relatives.

Security is so fragile in the province that then Lagayan mayor Cecil Luna recounts how a botched assassination attempt against her and her family prompted her to gather firearms for personal protection. Luna quickly accused then Abra Governor Vicsyd Valera for ordering the hit, using military personnel⁴¹. In one sweeping move, the then DILG Secretary sacked the entire Abra police force—all 529 strong—for its failure to suppress violence in the province, especially in relation to the failed assassination attempt against the Luna family. A similar fate faced the Army force stationed in Abra after it was found out that Lt. Col Noel Misleng, under the order of Governor Vicsyd Valera, masterminded the act.

40 <http://www.pcij.org/i-report/2007/abra-politics3.html>

41 <http://www.pcij.org/i-report/2007/abra-politics3.html>

Volatile Political Alliances

By looking back at history, we can see that Abra's political actors have successfully entrenched themselves in the province by forming and reforming alliances. However, the break-up of these political alliances and the re-establishments of new ones in Abra are often accompanied by reports and occurrences of election-related violence. In other words, the occurrence of ERV and the seeming increase and decrease coincide with the breaking and forming of alliances.

Notable accounts of alliances can be traced back to the 1920s when the rivalry between the Villamors and Paredeses was ended when these two prominent families became united in matrimony. In the years of their alliance, one popular story that circulated was about how Atty. Julio Borbon of the Villamor clan mentored Quintin Paredes who, at that time, was a promising staff of the former. Their alliance remained stable when Dr. Luis Bersamin Sr. from the Villamor clan ran for governor and was supported by his wife's family—the Paredeses—from 1946 to 1953.

However, stability began to erode later on when the Paredes clan withdrew its support from Dr. Bersamin Sr. in favor of Engr. Lucas Paredes who ran for Congress in 1953. This move practically weakened the Villamors' political base since their main support came from the Paredes family. It also enabled Lucas Paredes, who was Abra governor from 1949-1953, to become district representative from 1953-1965⁴².

It was during that period when Col. Carmelo Barbero began to enter the scene. In the late 1950s, Quintin Paredes supported Col. Carmelo Barbero who, after being assisted by the latter and as a sign of gratitude, severed ties with the Villamor clan and joined the Paredeses to run as Jose Valera's vice governor. The Valera-Barbero ticket won the gubernatorial and vice gubernatorial posts. Their victory, however, was accompanied by reported cases of violence. The provincial capitol was burned and shooting incidents were also reported for the first time in Abra's electoral history,

In 1963, Abra's political landscape was ripe such that Barbero severed ties with Jose Valera and renewed his alliance with the Villamors, which made up the Carmelo Barbero and Petronilo Seares ticket for the local elections. Though the Barbero-Seares team won the elections, more killings were reported at this time and in addition, both parties were also accused of cuddling PAGs.

Then in 1984, Arturo Barbero—son of Carmelo Barbero—ran with Andres Bernos and won. By the following year however, Andres Bernos and his family was ambushed—leaving his youngest child dead. After the People Power Revolution of 1986, Abra saw the reemergence of the Paredes clan, with the appointment of Vicente “Vicsyd” Valera as OIC governor of Abra. It was during this time when the first reports of communist insurgents supplying both guns and goons began to circulate.

Another notable alliance was that of Chito Bersamin and Vicsyd Valera. Based on information that were culled during several key informant interviews, it was during the elections that followed EDSA 1 that Chito Bersamin Jr. (who was then a manager of Allied Bank) approached Paking Guzman, who was a close political ally of Governor Vicsyd Valera. Guzman then introduced Bersamin to the Governor and was told of Bersamin's intention of running as Bangued mayor. With Governor

42 Informant interview, Gov. Eustaquit “Takit” P. Bersamin.

Valera's support and political machinery, Chito Bersamin was elected mayor of Bangued for three terms (9 years) and their relationship as political allies was, in many ways, healthy.

Anecdotal accounts narrate how in 2001, 2004, and 2007, this political alliance went sour twice. The first and second row was remedied through the mediation of Regional Trial Court (RTC) Judge Lucas Bersamin and Paking Guzman, who was mayor of the town of Dolores. By 2007, the alliance was already at its worst state. Rumors also began to circulate that one of the emerging political clans—the Lunas—wanted to exploit the situation to further weaken the Bersamin-Valera alliance⁴³.

It was an alliance that lasted for almost 20 years; but also saw the highest rates of ERV incidences, particularly in 2001 and 2006. Those killed included members of known political families—the most high profile of which was the murder of Chito Bersamin himself. The murder of opponents to eliminate them from competition is one of the most glaring displays of election-related violence in any given area. It usually a recourse sought by competing political groups in order to ensure that power is either maintained or drastically transferred to another political actor.

The breakdown of major political alliances (like in the case of Bersamin and Valera) affects the entire political situation, that violence is distributed down to the local areas.

The case, for example, of La Paz Mayor Joseph Santo Niño Bernos and the murder of his family members, highlight what happens when major political alliances at the provincial level are stirred. In La Paz, Marc Ysrael Bernos was murdered in the town plaza despite having ample security. He was on his third term as mayor, with his brother Joseph Santo Nino Bernos vice mayor. Marc Ysrael was allied with Chito Bersamin, Jr. and was a staunch opposition leader against incumbent governor Vicsyd Valera. Tensions began to brew in La Paz when the wife of Vicsyd Valera entered the political scene. Incidentally both the Bernos brothers were survivors of a past attempt to assassinate their family, which left their youngest sibling dead. The main target of that assassination was Andres Bernos, their father, who won with Arturo Barbero in the 1984 gubernatorial race.

Even before Marc Ysrael Bernos, was killed two other killings had already occurred with strong political motivations. These incidents involved the murder of Jose Segundo, who was the mayor of the town of Tubo, and Clarence Benwaren of Tineg⁴⁴. Benwaren, for his part, had a long-standing political rivalry with another political clan in Tineg—the Crisologos. The murder of Marc Bernos was followed by the assassination of Abra Board Member James Bersamin.

A trend emerges from all these killings. All of them were in opposition to the incumbent governor, or were in the way of his allies who were competing in the next elections⁴⁵. The victim's family all point to political motives, and that it was under Gov. Vicsyd Valera's order. However, up until now, none of the cases filed have been resolved.

One feature of this inter-elite competition for political power in Abra are the patterns of relational continuity among political elites, as well as the rather volatile alliances that exist between them. The volatility of these relations among political elites, as seen in the rather sudden breakdown of

43 Interview with Mayor Albert Paking Guzman. 14 September, 2009, 11:00 am, Dolores Abra.

44 Interview with Mayor Joseph Sto. Nino Bernos. 22 September 2009. 2:00 pm, La Paz Abra.

45 Interview notes Mayor Joseph Sto Nino Bernos, 22 September, 2009 2pm.

partnerships in some and in the rise of opposition forces in others, contributes to the political violence that Abra experiences.

Patron-Client: National-Local Symbiotic Relationship

By observing how these political families were able to gain power, it can be deduced that particular local elites were able to dominate local politics because of their connection to the national administration. Patron-client relationships, which exist on the basis of favors and obligations, had prevailed during the long reign of these local politicians.

In fact, it can be argued that the extensiveness of each family's political connection is key to understanding the power and influence that they possess. In a political system where one way of sustaining power is by forming and strengthening relationships through various means such as providing income, political support, allegiance and votes, linkages to the national government have great impact on the stability of a particular politician.

One clear example is that of the Barbero clan. In 1976, Carmelo Barbero was appointed by then President Marcos as Deputy Defense Minister. Following that year Arturo Barbero, Carmelo Barbero's son, assumed office as governor of Abra. Barberos were dominant from the Martial Law period, from the time of Barbero's appointment in 1976, all the way to the pre-EDSA People Power Revolution.

Another case is that of the Paredeses. In 1986, after the EDSA Revolution, Vicsyd Valera was appointed by the Aquino Administration as OIC governor of Abra. A selection process brought about his appointment, with support and recommendations from the Church. According to reports and interviews, it was his religious connections, prominent political background and being a descendant of the Paredeses which got him the nomination and appointment.

His assumption into office saw the reemergence of the Paredes clan. He became Abra's elected governor after he won the election that followed the EDSA Revolution. It was also during this time that he allied himself with Chito Bersamin, Jr. since both of them were then with Cory Aquino and Doy Laurel's United Nationalist Democratic Opposition (UNIDO). UNIDO was the dominant opposition party to the Marcos regime during the snap elections of 1986. In 1992, both Bersamin and Valera switched party loyalty and joined the ruling Lakas-NUCD, which was founded by Fidel V. Ramos. In 1998, they both allied with the Puwersa ng Masang ng Pilipino (PMP) which was President Estrada's political party when he was elected president in 1998⁴⁶.

Vicsyd Valera held office for almost 21 years, which ended in 2007. According to key informants, Valera lost favor from the administration during the 2004 presidential elections, after he failed to deliver votes for President Arroyo in Northern Luzon, particularly in the CAR provinces. It was only in Ilocos Sur that Arroyo was able to win votes, allegedly through the patronage of then Ilocos Sur Governor Chavit Singson⁴⁷.

46 Interview with Mayor Albert Paking Guzman, 14 September, 2009, 11:00am, Dolores Abra

47 Interview with Mayor Albert Paking Guzman, 14 September, 2009, 11:00am, Dolores Abra

System-Induced Violence: The Institutional-Legal Context of the Electoral System

The level of competition can also be determined by the context in which it is framed. The Philippine electoral system inherently encourages intense competition among candidates. Under Article 5 of the 1987 Constitution (as well as under the Omnibus Election Code), the Philippines adopts the first-pass-the-post or winner-takes-all system. In this system, a single candidate with the most votes wins. It is the same for executive and legislative positions.

The winner of this kind of system is vested with significant power and authority to utilize, distribute and account for resources. Losing in an election not only means political defeat but can also mean economic losses for the candidate. In the case of Abra, the political elites have no other option but to compete to ensure both their political and economic gain.

Thus, one of the immediate answers to the question as to why Abra elections are so violent is this: Politicians simply have a high stake in elections, that they will do almost everything in order to get political power, since political power can easily be translated into economic power, especially at the in the local level. As Rocamora points out:

...under the Local Government Code [of 1991], local government units, or LGUs, are to receive 40 percent of [national tax] collections, and this is supposed to be automatically released. LGUs also have much broader power to tax their areas and to raise revenues by other means, including loans and development assistance (Rocamora; 1995).

Thus, more than just simply preserving their family's hold on political power, politicians are bent on maintaining their respective positions because of the economic benefits that it gives them.

Table 14 shows the annual IRA share of Abra from 2002 to 2009. It is important to note that notwithstanding its increasing shares in the IRA, Abra has been classified as 9th of the 10 most impoverished or poor provinces in the Philippines in 2006, with the poverty threshold pegged at 17,900 with 50.1% poverty incidence. This means that 50 out of 100 families in Abra can be classified as poor.

**Table 14: Annual IRA share of Abra
(2002-2009)**

Fiscal Year	Allocation from National Tax Collection (IRA) in millions
2002	259.00
2003	271.16
2004	271.20
2005	291.34
2006	318.83
2007	348.09
2008	396.28
2009	469.22
2010	499.19

As a writer on Abra politics puts it:

But in reality there is no puzzle, there is no sphinx, the answers to the whys are not intricate webs of conspiracies. The simple fact is that every cent of the provincial and municipal internal revenue allotment (IRA) is equivalent to a drop of blood. Most of those in the position to receive IRA fought their way there with the help of their private armies that shed sweat, tears, and a lot of blood before, during, and after elections⁴⁸.

Key Findings from Cases

Poverty Exploited: Abra and its Economic Situation

Land-locked by Ilocos Norte to the north, Ilocos Sur and the Mountain Province down south and Kalingay and Apayao to the east, Abra has no adequate water resources, and its rugged and tough countryside damaged by years of intensive logging makes it difficult for agriculture to flourish. This leaves the province with limited economic opportunities and, forcing some of its inhabitants to get employment from local politicians.

The political engagement of Abra's citizens is hindered by its dismal poverty situation. According to the National Statistics Coordinating Board (NSCB) for example, Abra is one of the poorest provinces in the country, which shares a poverty threshold of roughly Php 16,810.00 with other Cordillera provinces. Data from NSCB further indicate that poverty in the CAR region (to which Abra is included) rose from 25.8% in 2003 to 28.8% in 2008. The poverty rating of Abra is at 50.1%. This means that out of every 100 families, 50 families are considered poor because they earn below the poverty threshold. The daily income of a single earning Abrenian falls in between P50-P250 and 80 -100% of that is allocated for food. That situation even reaches the point where the earned income is not enough to buy food.

48 See Ballesta, Ma. Ayn (pseud.), "The blood politics of Abra," in <http://pcij.org/stories/the-blood-politics-of-abra/> last accessed 07 December 2009; Also from a key informant interview, 05 November 2009.

Further data from the National Economic Research Business Assistance Center of the Cordillera Administrative Region indicate that in 2008, the unemployment rate in the province was 8.2%, out of a total labor force of 142,000. This however does not indicate that those employed receive enough compensation for their daily living expenses.

This is in sharp contrast to the economic resources that province's political families possess. Based on the documents that were gathered from the Municipality of Bangued (such as business permits, real property registration and tax declaration), Abra's prominent political clans own several businesses and properties.

In order to better understand the intense competition among Abra's political elites, we shall be looking into several cases studies—the first of which is the Holy Spirit incident. This was chosen because it was able to point out that positions of power in the province have become sources of economic mobility, stability, and largesse. Politics as a profitable enterprise has, by now, become a common and accepted notion in Abra.

This thinking is so widespread that Abrenians would actually work for local politicians in the hope of earning enough income to sustain their daily living. Others would even do the politicians' bidding for free to gain their benevolence. Such was the case in 2007 when Brenda Crisologo—wife of Tineg mayoralty candidate Edwin Crisologo—was shot dead by a certain Totoy Buyao during the counting of votes at the Holy Spirit Academy. The 18-year old assailant was a poll watcher for the rival camp of the Benwarens. Buyao himself was shot dead by an Army Ranger who immediately responded to the situation. The underlying circumstances were rather apparent: the shooting occurred in the midst of the intense political rivalry between the Crisologos (who are allied with Valeras) and the Benwarens (who are allied with Luna family).

In addition, the rivalry between the Crisologos and Benwarens has already been ongoing as early as 2002, when Tineg Mayor Clarence Benwaren was shot dead in Calauan, Laguna after attending a wedding on October 29 of the same year⁴⁹. The Benwaren family laid the blame on Edwin, while the police (while not dismissing the Crisologo angle) pointed to the New People's Army as primary suspects, especially since Clarence Benwaren was allegedly included in the NPA's hit list⁵⁰. Other groups, on the other hand, suspected Governor Vicente Ysidro Valera as the real mastermind behind the killing⁵¹.

The story of Totoy Buyao highlights various vantage points to explain why ERV is happening in Abra. The first one is that poverty is exploited by the local officials in order to cheat elections. Totoy Buyao was allegedly a drug addict and a former inmate before he was taken in by the Benwarens whose relationship with the Crisologos was far from cordial. Upon his release, he was either ordered to kill a member of the rival family who was running against his patron or was influenced to do so. Some reports alleged that Totoy Buyao was forced to do the deed because of *utang na loob* (debt of

49 <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=181908&publicationSubCategoryId=63> last accessed 07 December 2009.

50 <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=182058&publicationSubCategoryId=63> last accessed 07 December 2009; also, key informant interview, 05 November 2009.

51 <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=182572&publicationSubCategoryId=67> last accessed 07 December 2009.

gratitude), or that he was convinced to exact his revenge on the Crisologos who had him imprisoned for being an alleged drug dealer⁵².

Hence, this murder can simultaneously be seen as both personally and politically motivated. It must be pointed out that the assassination happened during the elections and that the act was already suicidal since marine troops were stationed around the vicinity. As expected, Totoy Buyao was killed by responding military personnel. And because of his death, the suspect's motivation was never established; but circumstantial evidence hints at a possible political motive, primarily because Totoy Buyao was a poll watcher for the Benwarens at that time.

Sources also add that Buyao was a former houseboy of the Crisologo family. At a very young age, he became a drug pusher and was eventually imprisoned for peddling illegal drugs. The Luna family, who were known allies of the Benwarens, assisted in Buyao's rehabilitation while he was still in prison. After his release, he was employed as a *parabagkat* (roughly a marketplace porter). Then, in 2007, he became a poll watcher of Lenin Benwarens (brother of the late Clarence Benwarens) who was running for mayor. It must be pointed out, however, that Buyao was wearing a Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) identification card when he was killed, even though he was an acknowledged supporter of Lenin Benwarens⁵³.

Another angle that the police looked into was personal vendetta. However the dominant conjecture circulating is that someone commanded Buyao to do the killing—which he did at the expense of his own life. Such conjecture underscores the point that the lack of economic opportunities compels some of Abra's townsfolk to serve their political bosses (even if their bosses order them to kill other persons) just to survive. Ballesta (2007) puts it more succinctly:

For lack of economic opportunities, ordinary folk are forced to lick the boots of politicians and resign themselves to being the politician's house help, babysitters, paid admirers, and hired guns. Some [townsfolk] are so gripped by poverty that food, shelter, clothing, plus an “allowance” of at least P500 a month are enough remuneration for jobs that range from fetching food and drink to being ready to kill and be killed for their bosses (Ballesta; 2007).

The Holy Spirit incident is set against a backdrop wherein Tineg (which is one of the poorest and most neglected towns in Abra) receives the highest IRA amounting to approximately four million pesos a month, or more than Php 40 million a year (Ballesta; 2007). Tineg's mayor, reportedly, is also an absentee mayor, with only his wife (who acts as administrator) and the municipal treasurer as the palpable signs of governance. Most of the town's public offices are in the provincial capital, thus depriving Tineg of basic government services⁵⁴.

The insurgency problem further complicates the problem of election-related violence in Abra, not only because they disrupt democratic processes, but also—and perhaps more dangerously—they create conditions that allow the development of private armies by politicians with both arms and men.

52 Interview notes with P/Dir Eugene Gabriel Martin, Directorate for Intelligence, 05, November, 2009

53 Key informant interview, 21 August 2009.

54 Key informant interview, 05 November 2009.

Adding Insult to Injury: Flailing Communist Insurgents, the Involvement of Security Institutions and the Proliferation of Loose Firearms

According to some accounts, the communist insurgency first began in Abra in 1976, at the height of the controversy regarding Cellophil Resources Corporation’s “exclusive timber concession on the ancestral lands of the Tingguians” (Youngblood; 1990; p. 32) Cellophil is a company controlled Herminio Disini—a crony of President Marcos. Given the expected dire consequences of the company’s presence to the lives of the Tingguians, the NPA—which is the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)—increased its presence in Abra (among other provinces) to purportedly support the growing opposition against the dictatorship’s (economic) policies (Youngblood; 1990; p. 106).

Accounts show that by the latter years of the Marcos regime, the insurgency in Abra in particular, and in the Cordillera region in general, had already escalated. The province became a hotbed of communist movement, which fed on the discontent that the Tingguians felt over the loss of ancestral lands because of Cellophil’s logging concession. In fact, the insurgents were so strong that they were able to form two battalions in the Cordilleras.

But in 1984, the Cordillera People’s Liberation Army (CPLA) broke away from the communist movement and championed the effort to establish an autonomous Cordilleran government. The main icon of this movement was a former Society of the Divine Word (SVD) priest-turned rebel Conrado Balweg.

By 1989, with the fall of the Marcos authoritarian regime, and the CPP’s organizational integrity greatly diminished as a consequence of the first EDSA People Power Revolution, insurgent activity in Abra began to mellow down. This did not, however, mean the cessation of all NPA activity in the province⁵⁵. Armed encounters are still happening in the remotes areas, indicating that the NPA is still a force to be reckoned with.

This is attested by the Boliney incident, which occurred during the elections in 2007. The incident started after a seven-man team from the Army’s 41st Infantry Battalion was killed when alleged rebels attacked them on 16 May 2007 in Barangay Amtuagan in the town of Boliney. The said Army personnel served as security escorts as the ballot boxes were being transferred from the polling areas to the town center. The insurgents, for reasons unknown, then demanded that the ballot boxes be handed to them.

In an effort to safeguard the ballots, a plan was prepared involving the women of Boliney and a local priest: they were to hand the ballots to the NPA, and then after the ringing of the church bells (which would signal the turnover of the ballots), the people will engage the NPA. As part of their preparations, the people began arming themselves with handguns.

55 Particular incidences of violence, in fact, are still attributed to the activities of the rebels, and there are still reports of clashes between elements of the NPA and the army. See for example reports from <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=66704&publicationSubCategoryId=67>, <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=54985&publicationSubCategoryId=67>, and <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=52181&publicationSubCategoryId=67>, all last accessed 08 December 2009.

The plan, however, leaked out and the NPA (allegedly out of fear) did not continue with their harassment and allowed the transfer of the ballots to the provincial capital. The ballots reached Bangued on May 18, 2007 hidden in-between clothes. This, however, was not done without any more harassment, because on the way to Bangued, there was reportedly another attempt to snatch the ballots—this time involving police officers from the Crime Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG), who were allegedly loyal to then-Governor Vicente Ysidro Valera⁵⁶.

The significance of the Boliney incident is seen, not in terms of its effect on the elections in general (since according to sources, the votes from were rather small to affect the overall outcome of the elections), but because it reveals how a flailing insurgency contributes to the perpetuation of election-related violence in the province.

There is also another way by which the communist movement aggravates Abra's ERV situation contributes to the perpetuation and exacerbation of election-related violence in Abra: by providing politicians with arms and goons. The suspicion that the NPA also acted as armed goons of certain politicians became so widespread, especially after the Boliney incident. All point to Governor Vicente Ysidro Valera as one of those who had linkages with the communist insurgents. There seems to be good reason for the suspicion as Ballesta notes in her article for the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) which appeared IN February 2009: "two former NPA members, Lacub Mayor Cesar Baroña and Malibcong Mayor Mario Baawa are allied with the [him]" (Ballesta; 2007). Persons who also had knowledge about the incident also suspected the Governor⁵⁷.

Adding weight to the problem of this flailing insurgency is the alleged involvement of security institutions, namely the military and the national police. According to investigation reports on the Boliney incident as well as the testimony of informants, certain military personnel leaked the information about the military convoy assigned to safeguard the ballots from Boliney. This eventually led to the death of seven Army officers, while wounding two others⁵⁸.

In the same incident, it was alleged that elements from the CIDG intercepted and attempted to confiscate the ballot boxes while en route to the provincial capital. Luckily, the attempt t failed due to the prudent actions by the very individuals who were ordered to handover the election materials⁵⁹.

The prospect of economic gain is one probable reason why security personnel from the police and the military work for certain politicians. According to key informants, the collusion between politicians on one hand, and police and military officers on the other happen even at the highest levels⁶⁰.

Abra's long history of political violence greatly has contributed to the current proliferation of loose and/or illegal firearms⁶¹,—this, by creating a mindset (shared by both politicians and ordinary citizens) that it is only by owning a gun can one protect one's self and his family. The Boliney

56 Key informant interview, 24 August 2009.

57 Key informant interviews dated 08 September and 19 September, 2009.

58 Key informant interviews about the Boliney incident.

59 Interview notes with Ms Ma Teresa Benas, Head of Philippine Information Agency, Abra, 24, August 2009, 2:00pm.

60 Interview notes with Mr Carlito Turqueza Jr. ABC President, Dolores, Abra, 14 September 2009.

61 An insight also pointed out by a key informant interviewed 05 November 2009.

incident, for instance, indicated that the people were willing to engage the NPA in an armed confrontation so as to ensure the integrity of the vote. What was left unsaid is that guns were readily available for the public.

The flailing communist insurgency also contributes to the perpetuation of political violence, especially during elections, by providing arms and men for the politicians' private militias.

The general underdevelopment of Abra is another contributing factor, by producing individuals who are ultimately beholden to the political elites for their protection and livelihood. These individuals are then used to prolong the elites' hold on power through intimidation and violence.

The prevalence of violence then fuels the intense rivalry among the elites. Competition for political power becomes intense because such power can easily be translated into economic advantages, further enriching these politicians.

Another motivation that would prompt candidates to run, aside from political and economic advantages, is the thirst for personal revenge. This can occur when the political families are themselves victimized by election related violence. In an interview with Governor Takit Bersamin, he said that ran for governor in 2007 Presidential Elections because no one from their family wanted to run for public office, even though he wanted to continue what his brother has started. Admittedly he ran motivated by revenge and bent on pursuing the suspects of his brother's murder⁶².

What all these indicate is that elections in Abra are violent not because political families are by nature violent, but because of the conflation of these factors.

According to the latest PNP report, there were a total of 79 confiscated firearms during the strict implementation of Task Force Kontra Boga in the Abra⁶³. However, many are still unaccounted for, because loose firearms are not only in the hands of politicians; even ordinary citizens have them.

The occurrences of ERV cases in Abra highlight the fact that the actions of political actors are guided their own interests. Politician will use any means to achieve the objective of winning electoral posts. The strategy of hiring goons to harass, threaten, and ultimately eliminate opponents, is seen as a necessary course of action.

The entrenchment of political elites, it must be said, does not rely solely on the politicians' resources. The very entrenchment results in political elites' creation of networks in key government institutions, which contributes to their further hold on political power. Indeed, many allegations have come up claiming the capture and co-optation of certain government institutions by politicians, making these institutions weak. This, then, has affected the capacity of these institutions to lessen if not totally eradicate election-related violence in the province. The institutional assessment will tackle this matter.

62 Interview with Gov Takit Bersamin, Sept 8, 2009, Province of Abra.

63 Data was culled from PNP Firearms and Explosives Division documents.

Institutional Analysis

Understanding Institutions

As a benchmark of democracy, elections are meant to ensure the peaceful contestation for power by establishing a set of norms that structure how one is put into positions of leadership. Thus, democratic elections require institutions that provide fair and predictable rules of the game. In this study, institutions do not only refer to organizations, but are understood as rules, norms and shared strategies “that influence mutually understood actor preferences and lead to “observed regularities in the patterns of human behavior” (Crawford and Ostrom; 199; p. 582). These serve as mechanisms that lay down the framework for certain societal practices and provide structures for social order. Electoral institutions, in other words, put in place norms that allow peaceful and fair elections.

On the other hand, weak electoral institutions may lead to civil unrest and public distrust of election process, ultimately resulting in a weak democracy.

The question we ask now is: *Does the failure of election institutions cause election violence in Abra?*

To answer this query, we must first identify the institutions involved in elections, as well as the specific functions that we want to evaluate. In understanding how institutions prevent election-related violence (or fail to do so), we must first identify specific and relevant institutions which play a vital role in ERV prevention—herein defined as organizations—and understand the specific roles these institutions play, how their functions are interconnected and what particular aspect of ERV-prevention they address.

In further mapping each institution and the particular functions they are mandated to perform, it is useful to classify them using two categories that will allow us to see a more holistic picture of an institutional ERV-prevention approach: institutions as classified using their level of responsibility and the kind of function they perform.

Level of Responsibility

The functions vested in an institution goes hand in hand with the level of accountability that is required of them. Specialized agencies are created specifically to champion certain programs and issue areas, albeit performed in coordination with other, ‘less’ responsible institutions. Such is the complexity of a bureaucracy which assigns certain roles to particular agencies, creating a network of government organizations, each fashioned specifically to deliver specific services and perform certain tasks, at varying levels of accountability.

Zooming in on election-related violence, we ask: Who is directly responsible for preventing election related violence? And which institutions, on the other hand, provide supporting albeit critical roles?

We will look at three levels of accountability: (1) Basic Institutions, (2) Secondary Institutions, and (3) civil society institutions. Basic Institutions are government institutions which play a direct role in ensuring peaceful elections and preventing ERV. These are at the forefront in administering the

elections, preventing conflict, ensuring election laws are followed and giving sanctions to offenders and ERV perpetrators. These institutions include the COMELEC, AFP, PNP, and the Judiciary.

Secondary Institutions are also government institutions which provide support mechanisms to the basic institutions in addressing ERV. They do not necessarily prevent election related violence but oversee the performance of basic institutions or provide services that allow them to function more effectively. Thus, these institutions are less accountable and serve secondary roles in ERV prevention. Secondary institutions include the DILG, DepEd, CHR, COA.

Lastly, civil society institutions are actors outside the government which help directly or indirectly in preventing ERV. These institutions mimic government functions which the government fails to deliver, filling in the gaps left by underperforming agencies. These include the media, the Church, the academe and other NGOs/POs active in advocating peaceful elections.

Functions of Institutions

While the level of responsibility may differ, the functions of these institutions also vary and cut across these levels of accountability. Electoral institutions specifically play particular roles that contribute to ERV prevention. Under this typology, we identify the functions of institutions by looking at the approaches that they utilize in ensuring peaceful elections.

As illustrated in Figure 2, institutional actions used to prevent ERV include the following:

- 1.) Coordination/Management. Certain institutions manage and supervise the whole or a portion of the election process and coordinates among different responsible agencies to facilitate the implementation of election laws and rules (e.g., COMELEC, DILG).
- 2.) Use of Force. Security institutions serve to deter and/or defend against election related violence with the threat of force (e.g., PNP, AFP).
- 3.) Civic Education. Through education and socialization, institutions instill important democratic values and respect for human rights among the citizenry, thus promoting peaceful elections (e.g., DepED, the Church, academe, family, NGOs).
- 4.) Accountability. Other institutions are mandated to hold accountable the different institutions responsible for ensuring peaceful and orderly elections and sanction agents who commit election-related violence (e.g., Judiciary, CHR, COA, media).

What we find are institutions with varying levels of responsibility performing different functions. Those who are at the core largely determine the level of election related violence in an area, as their performance directly affects the practice of elections in a certain locality. The different functions, on the other hand, form a holistic approach that covers different areas of intervention to effectively deter ERV. It should be noted however that each institution may actually be performing more than one function. This map, as illustrated in the diagram above, serves as a tool that allows one to look at the critical areas where intervention is needed—which institutions are most pivotal, which functions are not performed well and how these institutions are interconnected.

A Closer Look: Assessing Institutions in Preventing and Resolving ERV Cases

Assessing institutional performance in Abra serve as a challenge as many institutions are still unable to evaluate their own systems and identify whether they are performing their set institutional targets in terms of preventing electoral violence.

Nonetheless, the research team from hereon has identified the specific functions that each institution was mandated to perform under the four major functions necessary in preventing election-related violence, and established whether they are effectively performing and achieving their desired outcomes, based on reports and the interviews that were conducted with different stakeholders in the course of the research.

A. *Coordination/Management*

Coordinative institutions are tasked mainly to facilitate the process of election administration. In ERV prevention particularly, they must be able to deputize important functions to the different institutions involved and supervise their performance of duties. Below are two coordinative bodies identified as critical in ensuring peaceful elections in the province of Abra.

Commission on Elections

The Commission on Elections is mandated to ensure free, clean and orderly elections and administer and enforce effectively all laws relative to the conduct of elections. They should be able to promote integrity of election process vis-à-vis the predictability of the processes and the proper implementation of policies. They are thus responsible for the presence and/or absence of conflict-ridden elections by deputizing and supervising other offices which perform duties during the election period (Omnibus Election Code).

The ABRA case is characterized by a local COMELEC that is doing its functions but is unable to produce results that can effectively ascertain the credibility of the elections. According to many stakeholders, the COMELEC is able to perform its ministerial function during elections. Besides conducting basic voters' education in-between elections, the COMELEC coordinates with the local courts and other relevant agencies in dealing with election-related cases. They have also done several efforts to protect the elections against fraud, i.e. efforts at modernization at the national level. COMELEC also tries to professionalize its workforce through seminars and trainings. There have also been endeavors to cleanse the list of voters with the help of the local civil registrars. In recent years, COMELEC election officers were even reshuffled in CARAGA to ensure objectivity of the election officers (EOs).

Despite these measures and programs, the COMELEC still remain vulnerable to fraud and has even been called *kumolek* by some Abrenians. COMELEC officials are even allegedly paid by some politicians to bend the poll results to their advantage. In the latest 2007 elections, some stakeholders said that there were so many irregularities which could have been prevented. Electoral fraud also remains prevalent even at the municipal level where some COMELEC personnel were implicated. Moreover, that Abra has been an ERV hotspot for the last three elections reflect COMELEC's inability to handle election-related crimes in ABRA.

What was finally established was that COMELEC remains unable to function effectively due to under-the-table transactions. Linkages, as facilitated and managed by COMELEC, consequently remain weak and compromised.

Department of Internal and Local Government (DILG)

The Department of Internal and Local Government is tasked to orient the Philippine National Police on election activities and their role in enforcing election rules and regulations. They should supervise the PNP in their execution of their duties as deputized by the COMELEC. They are also mandated to manage inter-agency activities and strengthen local special bodies (Department of Interior and Local Government Powers and Functions and COMELEC Resolution 7788).

The Department of Interior and Local Government helps in the administration of voters' registration and voter education, especially on the qualifications of candidates in Abra. The Department also assists the COMELEC in circulating issuances. It further monitors candidates who filed for candidacy including their parties and orient politicians about their roles as public officials.

The DILG also investigates untoward incidents during elections. It checks the number of voters who were not able to vote, the places where elections were disrupted, and investigates on the reasons for the disruption of elections. The DILG have also investigated election-related violence and fraud in Abra and have sent fact-finding teams to investigate ERV cases.

In terms of managing and supervising local governance, however, the DILG proved to be powerless against politicians as DILG officials find it hard to impose their power on local officials and are in reality subordinated under the politician's rule as exemplified by the presence of absentee mayors in Abra (mayors who reside outside their area of jurisdiction and live instead in Bangued, the provincial center). The Department is, moreover, underperforming in its responsibilities to the municipalities and is unable to provide ample support to local agencies in the province.

Specifically in preventing ERV, the Department's participation remains limited as it has no implementing arm and only serves a ministerial function. Some stakeholders from the police and army also report that the agency is not effectively performing in supervising the Philippine National Police and the local government units.

B. Use of Force

The use of force provides a deterrent to possible law offenders during election time. The institutions thus tasked to perform this function must be well-equipped in ensuring security during election time to prevent private armies and other political forces from performing violent acts. Two agencies operating in Abra naturally fall in this category: the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Philippine National Police

The Philippine National Police should provide security to polling places, the members of the boards of election inspectors and the voters whenever the need therefore arises, or whenever the Commission through its election officers or Election Law Enforcement Teams so requires. They should also be able to secure COMELEC personnel and

representatives performing their duties and functions in connection with the elections whenever a request to this effect is made or when required by the Commission. Furthermore, they should take steps to protect voters from threats, intimidation, coercion or harassment.

They are also tasked to enforce prohibited acts under Section 261 of the Omnibus Election Code which bans the following during the election period:

- *appointment or use of special policemen, special agents, confidential agents or the like,*
- *the possession of deadly weapons*
- *the carrying of firearms outside residence or place of business*
- *the use of armored land vehicles, water or air-craft*
- *the use of policemen and provincial guards as bodyguards or security guards.*

The Philippine National Police should further take effective measures to prevent members of civilian vigilante units and barangay tanods from engaging in partisan political activities or any act of terrorism, intimidation, coercion, harassment, or reprisal. They are expected to take steps to prevent private securities agencies from acting as private armies of any candidate, political party, organization or coalition, campaigners for terroristic or violent acts against persons in connection with the national and local elections reprisal (COMELEC Resolution 7788).

Abra's police force is able to perform its functions, according to the stakeholders. In addition to giving support to the Army, they are able to regulate gun ownership in Abra, albeit not completely. They have implemented *Oplan Kontra Buga* which led to the confiscation of at least 30% of loose firearms in the province, and the arrest of firearms holders without gun ban exemption. The police have also implemented amnesties and renewal program of firearms with easier payment schemes for renewal of permit to strengthen their monitoring of firearms holder in the province.

During the 2007 elections, the PNP was able to mobilize all their police officers in the province to assist in the conduct of elections and have even implemented non-security functions such as voters' education. They also helped initiate the First Abra Leaders Summit held on the 26th August of last year.

The PNP in Abra however is alleged to be highly politicized and still lacks credibility among the Abrenian people. With police power placed under the DILG, the vulnerability of the PNP from being accessed as private armies were indeed lessened, although some personnel are still said to be beholden to certain politicians and continue to perpetuate illegal activities. They were also alleged by some key informants as capable of staging a scenario in order to make a particular town of Abra, and even the entire province itself, an election hotspot to favor a particular interest group.

Moreover, the police, even though they were able to perform their mandate, were not able to prevent ERV in the province. They still lack the capacity in providing security during elections with their lack of manpower, resources and specialized skills. As of January 2010, the police still lacks around 156 police officers to be distributed to the different Municipal Police Stations to comply with the directive of the higher headquarters which is 20 Police Non-Commissioned Officers and 1 Police Commissioned Officer ratio that must be assigned in each police station.

Armed Forces of the Philippines

The Armed Forces of the Philippines, similar to the PNP should be able to provide security to polling places, to members of the boards of election inspectors, to the personnel of the Commission and other employees of the government performing election duties. They should make available certain facilities, such as land, air, and water-craft; communication systems and other equipment, in connection with the delivery and retrieval of election documents, supplies, forms, paraphernalia and equipment, and look into the existence of any armed group organized to commit, or which is committing or about to commit, acts of terrorism or threats to intimidate or coerce any person to vote for or against a candidate and to suppress or prevent said acts of terrorism or threats. The AFP should also assist the Commission in implementing more effectively election laws and/or rules and regulations, particularly the laws governing prohibition against policemen and provincial guards acting as bodyguards or security guards, the use of armored vehicles and air or water-craft and the prohibition on bearing, carrying or transporting firearms and other deadly weapons in public places. Furthermore, they should conduct a periodic assessment of the peace and order conditions in critical areas and recommend measures which may be adopted by the Commission in the interest of free, orderly, honest, peaceful and credible elections. They should also be ready to comply with and/or implement directives or resolutions which the Commission may issue or promulgate from time to time (COMELEC Resolution No. 8741 and 8716).

The AFP, specifically the 41st Infantry Battalion which is stationed in Abra, is currently perceived by many Abrenians as performing better than they have been in the past. They have higher visibility in Abra, even in remote areas, and has helped significantly in diminishing insurgency and in reducing firearms. The number of rebel returnees has also increased: almost 30 former rebels have entered their Social Integration Program. More than their security functions, they have also initiated programs beyond their mandate: they have conducted peace advocacies and even medical missions in different municipalities in Abra.

Nonetheless, they have yet to completely eradicate insurgency in the province which also has implications in the persistence of election-related violence in Abra. AFP personnel, for instance, was ambushed by insurgents in Boliney as they were guarding and delivering ballots in the past election. Lt. Col. Ignacio Madriaga, commanding officer of the 41st Infantry Battalion, admitted that they could only consider their mission successful when there is already little or no election-related violence in Abra.

The Army was also implicated in the attempted assassination of Congressman Cecy Luna and other election-related violence. Some Army personnel were allegedly involved in electoral cheating and are allegedly biased for certain politicians. The Army, similar to the PNP also remains organizationally weak as they lack manpower and resources.

Similar to the police, the manpower of the Army also remains limited. At present, the Battalion has yet to achieve the ideal 500 soldiers per battalion ratio, having only around 400 soldiers in their group.

C. Accountability

Accountability mechanisms such as the local judicial system mainly serve to give sanction and thus hold public officials and other players accountable who may disrupt the peaceful exercise of elections in the province. Apart from the local courts, the other accountability mechanisms in Abra

which should prevent election violence include the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the Commission on Audit (COA) and the media.

Justice System

The local courts serve to ensure the resolution of election-related violence and crimes at the local level. They have prosecutory powers which allow them to give due sanctions to violations of election rules and laws and other election-related crimes and persecute convicted violators (Interview with Fiscal Nestor Tolentino, Chief Provincial Prosecutor, Regional Trial Court, Bangued, Abra. 25 August 2009).

Called by some as the “Mall of Justice”, the local courts in Abra proved dismal in terms of performance and case adjudication. Informants from the COMELEC, DILG, PNP and the academe said that the local courts are able to perform their function and are able to provide legal advice in the cases they handle. However, these same informants, along with other stakeholders from the Army, the Church and the media still report allegations that the local courts have a price and that justice can be bought.

The local justice system, besides being vulnerable to political pressure, also finds itself legally bound by its reactive legal framework. Local courts, for example, can only act based on the kind of evidence presented. Local judges have their hands tied when there are no witnesses stepping forward or when no proof is presented, which is usually the case in Abra where problems are resolved outside the courts. Local courts are thus forced to dismiss the case when there is insufficient evidence, leading to a majority of unresolved and/or dismissed cases. In fact by 2004, 17 out of 32 incidents of election related violence had no witnesses, thus no cases could be filed in the local courts; and 16 of the said cases had unidentified suspects. Of the 15 cases filed in the judicial courts, 9 were dismissed prematurely while the rest are still unresolved. By 2007, of the 13 cases recorded by PNP, eight (8) cases had unidentified suspects. All are still under investigation and are currently unresolved.

The lack of efficient systems and unreliable data-banking of cases also prevent the local courts to ensure the speedy and credible prosecution of election-related cases. Furthermore, there are no mechanisms that sanction local courts and pressure them to act on pending cases.

It is also worth noting that the local justice system received the lowest performance rating from the public perception survey conducted by the research team, garnering only a 3.04/5 rating among the survey respondents. This validates the underperformance of the local courts as reported by the key informants of this research.

Commission on Human Rights

The Commission on Human Rights is mandated to promote the prevention of human rights violation and abuses through advocacy, partnership, monitoring, information, education, research, and training. They should champion the investigation, reporting, and monitoring of human rights violations and abuses which include election related violence. They should also empower victims of human rights violations and their families, other vulnerable sectors, and all stakeholders to fight for their human rights and recommend and advocate for appropriate rights-based legislative, administrative and judicial policies, programs and measures.

In monitoring human rights compliance of the different agencies, they must also be able to investigate if the PNP, AFP, LGUs, and other agencies are complying with human rights standards or whether they are becoming agents of political violence especially during elections, and most critically in election hotspots (Commission on Human Rights Vision and Mission).

The CHR in Abra is unable to execute their mandate, specifically in preventing and monitoring ERV cases. They have been able to send investigation teams when complaints are raised in their CHR regional office, but rarely on election-related instances. In fact it has been established that they have no database on ERV in their regional office. A few human rights cases in Abra were investigated but there have been few if no resolutions achieved, and those which were investigated focus mainly on domestic violence and human rights violations against vulnerable sectors.

This is largely because there is no CHR office in Abra. The regional office of CHR under which the Abra province falls under is located in Baguio, which is around five hours away from Abra by land. Moreover, their system remains underdeveloped and their regional office is undermanned, which consists of around nine CHR personnel (excluding the administrative personnel) for the whole Cordillera region. Similar to the situation of local courts, their processes are also mostly reactive. They can perform investigations *moto proprio* but only with regards to controversial cases.

Commission on Audit

The Commission on Audit should examine, audit and settle all accounts pertaining to the revenue and receipts of, and expenditures or uses of funds and property owned or held in trust by, or pertaining to, the government. They serve as the overseer of the IRA ensuring that they are not used unlawfully and in connection to partisan political campaigning. During elections the Commission on Audit, its Chairman and officials are designated as deputies and as such, they shall enforce the prohibition of certain infrastructure programs 10 days prior to election day. COA thus serves to account the government expenses, ensuring they are not used for elections illegally including the perpetration of ERV, and to hold accountable incumbents who are abusing the financial resources of the government ((Article IX-D of the 1987 Philippine Constitution and COMELEC Resolution No. 8716).

COA however has been dubbed as *KUHLA*, pertaining to their reputation as being corrupt. Records show that they were able to function according to their mandate. They are able to audit local provincial expenses and give recommendations to the local government on their financial management. Nonetheless many stakeholders report that they are not performing well and are instead allied with politicians in graft and corruption.

COA for instance is unable to audit some municipalities such as Tineg and Dolores. The office reported ghost projects and discrepancies in financial records in the past, although it was not able to file complaints against any public official. Their lack of prosecution power also keeps COA officers from exercising authority over politicians who abuse their office and use the IRA for personalistic purposes, as COA remains merely a recommendatory body which lacks clear mechanisms for ensuring that the local governments follow their recommendations and set sanctions

Media

The media is tasked to ensure public awareness on important issues and serve as a medium for information dissemination. They should practice professional journalism and uphold credible news reporting, thus providing neutral

and comprehensive reports on the important events surrounding elections and report anomalies as well as good practices during the election period. This, subsequently, includes public awareness on the occurrence of election related violence in a certain area. (Interview with Ms. Merla Ruiz, Station Manager, CMN-DZPA, Abra. 15 August 2009 and Ms. Rose Marie Collo, Correspondent, CMN-DZPA & Abra Today, Abra. 17 August 2009).

Known as the *takbuhan ng tao*, the local media is one of the highest rated institution of Abrenians, garnering a 4.27/5 performance rating from the survey respondents conducted by the research team. Through the media, the citizens are also able to participate in the electoral process via interactive technologies, i.e., text messaging. The media was also instrumental in inviting volunteers to join the NAMFREL and the PPCRV in poll watching. The media was also able to promote peace advocacies and help intensify voters' education. Since 2009 for instance, voters' education is conducted through *Turay ni Botanteng Abrenyo* or *the Power of the Abrenian Voter*—a 30-minute radio program aired on DZPA every Friday at 12:30-1:00pm. This serves as a forum where the AFP, PNP, COMELEC and other agencies are given time to explain their roles for the coming elections. They also conduct candidates' forums every campaign period.

Specifically on accountability, the media was initially perceived as non-aggressive in addressing and reporting election-related violence. Nonetheless, the media has been more active in advocating peace during elections and has been more critical with politicians who have been alleged to perpetuate corruption and violence in Abra.

However, there are only a few independent media in Abra. DZPA remains the only local radio station, and there are still no local TV channels in the province. Most Abra households have cable TV networks, as local networks have poor signal in the area. Two of the three cable providers are also allegedly owned by incumbent mayors in the province. Those few journalists and media outfits who are critical of the government and the traditional politicians are outnumbered and even lack manpower.

D. Civic Education

Specific institutions should also provide education to Abrenians on democratic and humanitarian values to promote peaceful elections in Abra and ensure that normative principles are inculcated in the community. This can be achieved through the socialization efforts of the Department of Education (DepED), the academe, the Church and the different non-government organizations (NGOs).

Department of Education

Their primary mission of the Department of Education is to provide quality basic education that is equitably accessible to all and lay the foundation for life-long learning and service for the common good, thus preparing a responsible citizenry of enlightened leaders who love and serve the country. As such, the department should inculcate values in students which include but are not limited to honesty, civic duties, service and nationalism. They should thus be able to integrate election-related concepts in the curriculum such as honest conduct of election, voter's education, voter's registration and human right to suffrage (Department of Education Vision and Mission and Interview with Dr. Hedwig Belmes, Education Supervisor for Social Studies, Department of Education, Abra. 19 August 2009).

Administratively, the DepEd should also oversee the composition of the Board of Election Inspectors (BEIs) during election time (COMELEC Resolution No. 3310 and No. 8716).

In the previous elections, public teachers under the supervision of the Department of Education were able to serve as BEIs, even if some of them were ambushed and wounded. In fact, they are one of those at the forefront when it comes to election-related violence as they are mandated to perform duties during elections. Thus, the prevalence of fear thus among teachers allow them to be easily pressured, while other female teachers, in order to ensure their security, encourage their husbands to run in the elections instead. Other teachers are also perceived to be partial to certain candidates.

On conducting civic education, they are able to involve their students in peace advocacies and rallies in coordination with the AFP and the local government. The DepEd however still lack in value formation among the students specifically in inculcating nationalism, appreciation of life etc. in their students as many Abreños, as illustrated by the survey conducted by the research team, see life as dispensable and choose not to be socially and politically involved in terms of ERV prevention.

Church

As the major religious block present in many localities and significantly possessing political power (despite secularized governance in the Philippines), the Church is considered as a major political force in the country. They are expected to inculcate justice, peace, and unity and other values of the Gospel among its community members and promote a society that “grow(s) together in devotion to God, respect for men and love of country.” Inherent thus in its mandate is the promotion of a peaceful, non-violent and orderly elections. The Church should also empower the people to be more involved in good governance, project a non-partisan stand and serve as buffer between and among political forces (Vision and Mission, Diocese of Bangued, 1994).

Some priests in Abra are seen as guardians of the ballots during elections. A case in point is Fr. Aure Tagura who volunteered to deliver the ballots from Boliney to Bangued to ensure that the ballots would not be ambushed, believing that his religious affiliation will protect him from election violence. The Church was also one of those who initiated the formation of the Abra Multi-sectoral Group, composed of stakeholders from government and non-government agencies and organizations which has been organized specifically for ERV resolution. They have also conducted Operation Quick Count and implemented several voters’ education. They are also well-known to be active in the fight against election violence. Some stakeholders, however, still believe that the Church fails to instill values specially the value of life in the people given that even with a hundred years of Christian dominance, Abra society still remains violent.

NGOs/POs

Non-government institutions and people’s organizations are civil society actors who fill in the gaps the government fails to deliver. They serve as the conscience of the people and should be able to ensure value formation and public awareness of important issues, empower citizen participation in ensuring clean, fair and peaceful elections and provide a venue where citizens can exercise their civic duties and engage the government. They are also expected to monitor election processes and conduct public reporting of their organizations’ monitoring results (Interview with SPO1 Garry Gattud, Task Force Abra, Abra Provincial Police Office. 20 August 2009, Dr. Elsa Bagioan, Office of Student Affairs, Abra State Institute of Science and Technology, Abra. 25 August 2009, Fiscal Nestor Tolentino, Chief Provincial Prosecutor, Regional Trial Court, Bangued, Abra. 25 August 2009, Dr. Hedwig Belmes, Education Supervisor for

Social Studies, Department of Education, Abra. 19 August 2009, Most Rev. Leopoldo Jaucian, Bishop, Diocese of Abra, Abra. 25 August 2009, and Hon. Florentino M. Brillantes, Jr., Barangay Captain, Zone 6 (Sinapangan), Bangued, Abra. 17 August 2009).

Abra has a vibrant civil society which has been renowned nationally and even abroad. They have the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG) and the Abra Civil Society Network, among others. These NGOs however focus mostly on rural development and government infrastructure projects monitoring and rarely deals with ERV-prevention. Only a few are helping in elections such as CCAGG, PPCRV and NAMFREL, but these engagements only deal with ensuring honest elections and stop short of addressing election violence directly. NGOs still have yet to substantially coordinate with uniformed men and the government for better collaboration as trust-building is still deficient according to some informants.

Academe

Academic institutions are expected to give academic perspectives and promote critical debates on the issues surrounding elections; in this case, election related violence. They should furthermore offer a tempered assessment of politician's platforms and policy agenda and promote issue-based elections. Moreover the academe should disseminate information on elections and the electorate's rights, provide voters education and peace advocacies, as well as neutral venues for candidates' forums (Interview with Dr. Elsa Bagioan, Office of Student Affairs, Abra State Institute of Science and Technology, Abra. 25 August 2009).

The main academic institution in Abra is the Holy Spirit College which is considered the most prominent college in the province. This institution has been increasingly engaging elections in the recent past. Students are also more active during peace rallies and seminars. The school has also conducted voters' education to supplement government initiatives. However, their engagement with peace initiatives and ERV prevention programs still remains limited. Nonetheless, they have been active in the multi-sectoral group, which signals a more active role of the academic institution in the advocacy against electoral violence.

Performance vs. Targets

Looking at specific institutions responsible for ensuring peaceful and credible elections, we see that there have been numerous activities and initiatives from 2004 to the present in order to prevent election-related violence. The data gathered point to the procedural functioning of institutions in ERV prevention, with no substantive impact in terms of results and outcomes—that is, they are process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented. Thus, they are technically able to manage and supervise the elections, implement security measures against ERV, conduct civic education and handle election related cases. However, these functions do not necessarily produce the desired outcome, thus the persistence of election related violence.

Table 15 juxtaposes the expected outcomes following from the objectives and respective mandate of each institution with the actual outcome produced given the various efforts of each institution:

Table 15: Expected Outcomes and Actual Outcomes of Institutions in Addressing ERV.

Expected Outcome	Efforts at Achieving Expected Outcome	Actual Outcome
<i>Coordination and Management Institutions</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elections laws are followed. • Predictable processes during election. • Effective deputization, coordination and facilitation of institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernization of elections. • Coordination among institutions in dealing with ERV. • Circulated issuance and policies in elections and candidate education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some elections policies especially those pertaining to the use of armed groups and guns during elections were violated. • Unpredictable and unstable conduct of elections. • Persisting problems with coordination of actions among institutions.
<i>Security Institutions</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polling places are safe and all concerned are secured • Exercise of the right to vote free from intimidation or violence • No illegal armed groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilized resources for election security • Conducted gun ban and amnesty program and insurgency reintegration programs • Installed checkpoints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of polling places became sites of electoral violence and ballots were not secured • Intimidation and violence were used against persons and candidates during elections. • Private armies, goons and insurgents persisted
<i>Accountability Institutions</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speedy resolution of election related violence cases. • Violation of election rules are prosecuted and punished. • Operations of the government free from irregularities and corruption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filed and process cases on ERV. • Sent investigative missions to probe into violent incidents. • Audited provincial expenses and transactions. • Implemented election civil society monitoring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigations were conducted but few cases were filed and are still pending. • No resolutions have been arrived at and none have been prosecuted • Official reports showed discrepancies and irregularities in assets and operations
<i>Civic Education Institutions</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of Nationalism and citizenship inculcated among citizens. • Active and concerned citizenry demanding accountability from the government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted Peace advocacies. • Voter's Education • Promoted citizen engagement in governance through civil society projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instrumentalist view of elections among citizens persist. • Low participation in addressing public issues affecting them.

In running down the four functions and the specific targets that each institution should perform, we discover a significant gap between performance targets and the actual impact of these institutions. There are indeed programs and efforts to curb election-related violence, but they remain unable to do so.

Preventing election-related violence requires, as the table shows, a culmination of key outcomes which include both orderly and trustworthy systems of elections to a citizenry that treats their votes as sacred and integral to their human right to suffrage. This takes into great consideration the level of responsibility of the institution. What should be emphasized is that the failure of one institution to perform its function impinges on the performance of other functions. The inability, for instance, of the COMELEC as the institution at the core of ensuring credible elections provide a constraining backdrop to the performance of security functions which subsequently disallow a holistic approach to ERV mitigation.

The police also find their efforts wasted given that even though they are able to pin down suspects and file ERV cases in court, the local courts which are supposed to ensure accountability are largely unable to provide resolution to the filed cases. Secondary and civil society institutions also have direct implications on other functions. The failure of academic institutions, for example, to engage and properly inform the public of institutional obligations due them, effectively disable the citizenry from demanding these institutions to perform and reform.

The identified set of expected outcomes are further diluted by the lack of a national agenda in addressing election related violence as well as insufficient or lacking operational performance targets by the different local institutions. The institutions know their functions in term of preventing violence during elections, but they do not have set goals. The CHR and DILG for instance have yet to come up with a set program on electoral violence.

The Abra police do not have a specific target on the confiscation of loose firearms thus accomplishment level remains hard to assess: in 2007, the police was able to confiscate 76 loose firearms, while this year, they have already arrested 13 persons who have violated the gun ban. This however proves dismal when compared the estimated number of loose firearms in the province amounting to around 3,000—that is half of loose firearms in the Cordillera Region.

The Army does not have specific targets on ERV cases apart from zero-violence. While the COMELEC-Bangued reports 100% accomplishment in peace and order situation with the general objective of “help(ing) in the maintenance of peace and order in the municipality”, which could be further operationalized into set goals and targets.

At present, there are still no specific goals set on dissolving partisan armed groups, no targets on the resolution of ERV cases filed in court, no set number of loose firearms that should be confiscated given a set timeline, no level of public information and dissemination that serves as benchmarks for ensuring a participative citizenry and no standard government spending for political and electoral reform, among others, which leads to reactive institutions that remain passive in dealing with ERV. This lack of benchmarks and baseline data significantly contributes to the institutions’ lackluster performance. Having no set score that needs to be achieved, these institutions have non-aggressive programs and project implementation as well as dismal measures for mitigating election violence.

Institutions also either have weak or inadequate performance assessment systems: they either have (1) unclear performance standards, (2) a weak information management and data-banking system, and/or (3) unclear processes and procedures to assess institutional performance. This situation leads to a defective evaluation system, consequently disallowing the institutions to improve their organizational set-up and. For instance, the different institutions report activities and programs they have implemented, but they fail to identify clear accomplishments through clear, pre-identified and verifiable success indicators.

Pertinent Findings

After looking closely at each institution, several key points can be established with regards to the performance of the relevant institutions.

A salient finding of the study shows that most institutions were able to perform their functions procedurally but not substantively. The expected outcomes were not achieved, with actual outcomes falling significantly short and wanting. The institutions further failed to carry out a holistic approach that would ensure peaceful and credible elections given, the lack of national agenda and specific targets in addressing ERV.

The COMELEC still has weak systems in coordinating the efforts against election-related violence. Given that COMELEC bears the highest level of responsibility as the overseer of the whole electoral process, their local offices still do not have the capacity to effectively perform their functions on the ground with highly centralized systems and lacking comprehensive program on ERV prevention.

Accountability mechanisms are underperforming, which undermine the developments undergone by security and coordinating institutions. Offenders remain scot-free given the inability of local accountability mechanisms to hold them responsible. These accountability institutions also remain vulnerable and reactive, and are thus easily compromised.

Security institutions sometimes become instruments of violence. Both the PNP and AFP, despite initiatives at professionalization, have yet to achieve fully functioning and objective systems which are able to provide fair treatment to political players and ensure the security of the people of Abra.

Lastly, the reach of civic education also remains limited. Specific programs for peace that engage citizens' participation and promote the value of elections are still lacking and do not translate into citizen action against election-related violence.

Factors Affecting Institutional Performance

To understand the condition of Abra's institutions, what is perhaps most important is to determine why these institutions are performing so poorly in terms of ERV prevention and resolution, and enumerate the factors that hinder them from functioning, as well as the areas that need to be reformed.

Institutional Context

Abra politics is predominantly feudal in character. Thus, we find are informal institutions which promote norms that run counter those promoted by the more formal and democratic ones. These informal institutions of patronage-based politics serve as a non-conducive backdrop for democratic institutions. The prevalence of a spoils system for instance, and the persistence of political dynasties both at the provincial and the municipal level disallow equity and fairness in governance. The continuing reliance on guns, goons and gold serve as the norm also prevents the practice of peaceful elections through institutional means. And lastly, the overwhelming framework that looks at the political system as a business enterprise distorts the performance of democratic institutions which are turned instead into private channels for personal profits.

Organizational Deficiencies

Performance is also affected by the discrepancy between organizational capacity and the function that these organizations are tasked to perform. The critical duty of ensuring peaceful and credible elections, for instance, is daunting for many local offices which do not receive ample support from the national government and are not equipped with the necessary preliminaries which include:

Low Resources. Many local offices in Abra remain undermanned. The police/military to population ratio remain below the benchmarks indicated. Even the CHR regional office is spread too thinly over their area of jurisdiction. These offices also lack funds for their daily operational expenses and receive little to no additional resources for ERV prevention as compared to non-hotspot areas (no hazard pays, no additional budget and equipment, etc.). In addition, the local COMELEC lacks financial independence, making it indebted to the local government. The lack of necessary technology and equipment also prevents them to efficiently perform their duties. This includes the lack of modernized data-banking and computerized systems.

Low Competencies. Many institutions are also unable to professionalize their workforce, making them more vulnerable to political intervention. There is also a need for more intensive and targeted capacity-building, as well values-formation initiatives to upgrade the quality and performance of the personnel in these institutions.

Poor Leadership. There is also poor leadership among Abra's institutions. There are a number of corrupt and abusive officials in the different agencies who become allies of incumbent local officials. Others do not have the political will to properly implement their programs, given the atmosphere of lawlessness and feudalism.

Weak Structure. The undeveloped system and structure of these organizations also keep them from performing efficiently. Legal frameworks prove unable and unresponsive to the real situation in Abra. The COMELEC's financial system, for example, is very centralized that local offices are constrained in allocating their budget on priority programs and thus only serve disbursing functions. The lack of prosecution powers and the reactive nature of accountability mechanisms provide a major hindrance to ERV resolution. The presence of red tape in the decision-making of the Army also prevents them from taking immediate action when necessary. There is also the national-to-local coordination among the major agencies such as the COA, CHR, DILG, COMELEC, etc. Given the

underperformance of their local offices, these institutions fail to support and provide the assistance that these offices need. This lack of support and attention from the national government on the situation of Abra could be explained by Abra's geographical characteristics and its relative insignificance when it comes to vote-base given its low population. The province only has a total of 147,615 registered voters (NSCB 2009), ranking it 66th among the 80 provinces in terms of voter registration size.

Minimal Support from Citizens. The disengagement of citizens in democratic electoral politics and in the institutional processes give these institutions little impetus to develop their systems. As a consequence, the people's needs to be translated into policies or inputs for institutional processes.

Discrepancy Between Institutional Values and Societal Values

Institutions also fail to perform effectively because the democratic values that guide these institutions are not compatible with the values that are to be found in Abra society. This incompatibility results not in differences in values per se, but with the conflicting hierarchies of values which prioritizes different, albeit not necessarily opposing values.

One example involves the need to choose between surviving and practicing democracy. When faced between choosing between their lives or their votes, the people will naturally tend to go with the former, especially when their families are endangered. Some Abrenians also value economic stability over the value of another's life, thus allowing them to offer their services to eliminate certain political opponents. Communitarian values also inherent in democratic institutions are superseded by familial values dominant in the province.

There are also cases wherein institutions are not able to embody the values they are supposed to enforce but are instead subjected to politicization. COA for instance, which should enforce and instill accountability is itself shrouded in doubt. The persistence of corruption and moral bankruptcy also remains a dilemma in terms of reconciling democratic values and institutional leadership and practices.

Public Assessment of Institutions

To further evaluate the performance of institutions, it is necessary to understand how Abrenians perceive their institutions. Do the constituents see their institutions as performing and delivering services due them? Do they see these institutions translating their rights into basic programs?

Based on a survey conducted by the research team on the public perception on institutional performance it was observed that the survey respondents gave the institutions high performance ratings as seen Table 16.

The results indicate that the ratings the institutions received did not go below 3/5, 3 still pertaining to a satisfactory level of performance. There is thus a certain dissonance between public opinion and the stakeholders' assessment that were discussed previously—there is an emerging general “satisfaction” of the public on the institutional performance of the different institutions which are evidently unable to effectively prevent election-related violence. This, in part, can be explained by that the limited expectations that the public has on procedural performance of functions.

Table 16: Public Assessment of Institutions	
Institutions	Mean Rating
MEDIA	4.27
CHURCH	4.25
ACADEME	4.18
DEPED	4.07
NGO	3.84
COMELEC	3.83
ARMY	3.69
DILG	3.69
POLICE:	3.63
CHR	3.44
COA	3.32
JUSTICE SYSTEM	3.04

This situation provides a dilemma for Abra politics: *a disengaged society is not a healthy ground for change*. Indeed, when people are satisfied with their election institutions, these institutions would not feel the need to professionalize.

As an addendum, three explanatory theses, which will be explained in detail in the next chapter, are hereby presented to explain the disengagement of Abrenians in electoral political development: Firstly, Abrenians have a low sense of citizenship and claim-making. With low citizenship values, they fail to recognize the roles the institutions should be performing and the services they should be delivering.

Secondly, Abrenians, like most Filipinos remain uncritical about their government. They fail to speak out and openly criticize the government and prefer to be in the background, quietly disengaging from the messy electoral politics prevalent in the province. This uncritical Filipino culture therefore also hinders the citizen from claiming the services that they are entitled to.

Lastly, the government remains literally and performatively distant from the Abrenians, especially those who are in the mountainous areas where government services are either lacking or unavailable. Geographic distance and the relative underperformance of institutions in large parts of Abra alienate the people from participating in electoral development.

Closing Points: Implications

Organizational development is a basic requirement in strengthening institutional performance. If organizational deficiencies are not addressed, basic services including violence prevention would not

be delivered effectively. This, in turn, will allow politicians to become violent, undemocratic and authoritarian.

A major dilemma that has to be addressed is the fact that institutions seem to be performing procedurally but are underperforming substantively due: (1) to their unclear goals and standards, (2) the institutional context of Abra, (3) the organizational deficiencies of these institutions and (4) the discrepancy between institutional and societal values.

These constraints challenge the different institutions to develop systems and processes that are effective in delivering services to all areas of Abra. What is needed is a more strategic approach in addressing the identified gaps. With limited resources, specific priorities should be set and multi-sectoral agreement on key programs should be agreed upon. Basic institutions such as the COMELEC and the local courts need to be reformed; if not, secondary and civil society functions will continue to be compromised and will have little impact on ERV prevention. Moreover, since the use of force is unable to deter election-related violence, non-violent means to become even more essential. Given the demoralized bureaucracy, institutional leadership should also be strengthened and existing legal frameworks should be reviewed and reformed to address current realities.

If local initiatives still fail to address election-related violence, national institutions, which serve as the counterparts of these local institutions, should have a greater role in service delivery at the local level. The degree of national support should be able to propel local initiatives to create greater impact on the ground.

The lack of civic values also perpetuates underperformance of institutions. If there is continued lack of awareness on the part of the Abrenians on the respective roles and functions of these institutions, the citizens' claim-making effort will remain marginal and the pressure for the institutions to professionalize will remain wanting. Thus, the main challenge in developing Abra's electoral institutions involve, not only professionalizing the institutions, but educating ordinary citizens as well.

Cultural Analysis

Theoretically, culture is regarded as a context of violence, where violence is attributed to certain cultural characteristics that propagate and sustain it (Spiereburg, 2005; Bond, 2007). Several studies on the relationship of culture and violence have looked at various cultural factors as explanatory variables in elucidating why violence become a phenomenon in a particular society. Rupesinghe and Rubio (1994) for instance, have raised the possible link of culture to violence.

Berger and Luckman (1967, as cited in Bond, 2007) also refers to culture as a provider of “plausibility structures” which create conditions that enables cultural actors to orchestrate certain kind of activities that may be favored or disapproved accordingly. An example of which is violence. Cultural reaction to violence depends upon how it is internalized in a particular culture, specifically on how cultural actors view and develop feelings regarding violence—in which case, violence becomes a social phenomenon.

Referring to these “plausibility structures”, Bond (2007, internet material) argues that a “socialized logic of the cultural system” shape any kind of circumstance that predispose towards violence. Hence, culture may be responsible for legitimizing the violence that is perpetuated.

The relationship of violence to culture stems from the theoretical assumption that the shared system of beliefs (what is true), values (what is important), expectations and behavior of actors living together in a particular society form a complex whole. This complex whole determines whether a certain culture can be conducive or non-conducive for violence (Bond, 2004 as cited in Bond, 2007). In effect, an explanation of violence through cultural lens focuses on the complex configuration of beliefs, values expectations and behavior shared within a particular culture, in order to provide an adequate account of why violence occurs in that culture.

Reaction to violence therefore is a function of how cultural actors are socialized to violence. Their values, attitudes, belief and behavior can be a reflection of how they are taught, in a given cultural system, to respond and deal with violence (Bond, 2007).

Possible Cultural Explanations to Violence

Taking off from the configuration of shared values, attitudes beliefs and behaviors that may be accorded to particular social phenomenon like violence, this cultural analysis is particularly interested in how violence is conceived in a particular culture. It is important to look at how cultural actors define and understand violence, and if violence entails killings, it is also important to examine how cultural actors regard life. Also, it is important to explore the social relationships of cultural actors to determine which cultural traits fuel violence. If violence exists and it not being prevented, it is crucial to examine how authorities and leaders are regarded, and how cultural actors relate to the situation. In these terms, this study elaborates on the following cultural elements:

Concept of Violence

In trying to explain violence, it is important to look at how it is conceived by the actors who experience it, what it means to them and how it is regarded in their common discourse (Pontara, 1978). With this approach, the reasons why actors resort to violence may be ascertained. In some societies, actors resort to violence to attain something—i.e., reward, revenge, etc. (Spierenburg, 2005). Acts of violence are commonly instrumental, and this instrumentalist conception of violence enables actors to make violence become both justified and justifiable (Bond, 2007). In which case, if actors agreed that violence can be orchestrated to achieve certain ends, violence becomes normal and legitimate (Jarrett, 2009).

Concept of Life

The orchestration of violence as instrumental operates in certain cultural contexts. If violence reaches the point where life is involved, acts of violence become a function of how life is valued and what life means to the cultural actors. Actors' presupposition and regard to human life plays a role in influencing how they think about doing violent acts (Batsanov, 2006).

Macho Culture

Most literature on culture and violence looks at the role of the male character in the perpetuation of violence, on the assumption that there are gender differences in human behavior. There is a “macho personality constellation” that considers violence as manly (Mosher and Tomkins, 1988). This gender difference differentiates the male sex from the female, stating that males are stronger and more vigorous which makes their character favorable to violence. There is also a claim that males dominate in destructive activities and they are found cross-culturally to show greater levels of externalizing disorder (Bond, 2007). In fact, there is a theory which states that males monopolize violence (Goudsblom, 1998 as cited in Spierenburg, 2005).

Most researches expound on the traditional, macho-type of male honor in explaining the association of males to a more encompassing characterization of violent behaviors. By honor, it means the value towards self worth and merits, stressing male bravery and toughness (Spierenburg, 2005). It is also regarded as an expression of the “might is right” complex (Batsanov, 2006).

In the Philippine context, a certain regard of male character exists, which is termed as “macho culture.” Macho culture is common knowledge and Filipino culture is regarded as extremely macho (Engelbrecht, et. al., 2000). There is a surreptitious system of male supremacy, and males are associated with violence, particularly in cases of domestic violence (Mederos, 2007).

Gun violence in the Philippines also points to macho culture as one of the factors that cause violence. Guns are regarded as status symbols because of the kind of power that comes with it. There is a “macho” feeling that comes from the barrel of gun. In addition, guns proliferate because men regard them as the most convenient tool that will protect anyone from violent entities and lawless elements (Sunstar.Com⁶⁴).

64 Sunstar.Com posted January 17, 2010 at <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/network/culture-gun-violence-evident-clan-members>, accessed February 10, 2010.

Regard for Authority

In a given setting where there is violence, the existence of authority presupposes deterrence in committing acts of violence. The actors' view of authority influence their attitudes and behavior towards violence and may lessen their tendency to commit, if not deter them from committing, violent acts (Ray and Lovejoy, 1990). The authority being described here are the “institutional authorities” such as the Army, police and government leaders (Ray and Lovejoy, 1990; Rigby and Rump, 1979). Moreover, it is interesting to discover how actors view authority, and how that view of authority influences their engagement in violent activities and involvement in dealing with the issue of violence. This will give rise to the discussion of the cultural actors' concept of leadership and social involvement.

Concept of Leadership and Social Involvement

Batsonov (2008) posits that a “culture of violence” is influenced by the system of government that is put in place, most especially when the said government is based on violence or instituted through violence and fraud. Consequently, the manner by which government is perceived by cultural actors has an implication to the persistence of violence. Given this proposition, their particular view of leadership and their perception of government leaders should be investigated in order to see how such kinds of views and perceptions figure in approaching and explaining violence.

Another cultural feature that is observed to have an implication in explaining violence is the existence of a climate of social apathy and indifference to injustice. A cultural context can pre-occupy actors to attend to their most immediate needs and pleasures and dissociate them from engaging in social issues such as violence. Such pre-occupations create a psychological context for violence, and translate to insensitivity to wider social and political problems. Such insensitivity can lead to the complete refusal to act, which will eventually result to dependency on somebody else to address these problems (Batsanov, 2006).

Variables to be Investigated

The manner by which violence can be viewed and explained in this study using a cultural lens is presented. This cultural analysis draws its premises from the theoretical assumptions on culture and violence laid out previously. Thus, the cultural analysis starts from the following assumptions:

1. the understanding, attitudes and behaviors towards violence stems from the belief and value systems that is shared within a given culture;
2. violence, being a social phenomena, can be attributed to the shared belief and value systems in a particular society;
3. culture plays a role in people's sentiments and outlook in life, particularly in approaching or dealing with situations or social phenomena such as the occurrence of violence;
4. the occurrence of violence elicits a certain kind of reaction from cultural actors, and that reaction can be regarded as an expression of their belief system; and
5. the configuration of cultural factors, including the shared understanding, behaviors and attitudes towards violence (in general) can explain why election-related violence (in particular) is conducive in a given society.

With these assumptions, this cultural analysis looks at the outlook towards violence that is inherent in the culture of Abra. It also seeks to understand the cultural base of election-related violence by looking at both the overt and covert expressions of cultural codes. Overt expression refers to the observable practices and behaviors, while covert expression refers to attitudes and local constructs about violence in general and election-related violence in particular.

Furthermore, it will try to elaborate on the role of culture in the prevalence of election-related violence in terms of cultural composition or make-up (i.e. how violence figures out in people's notion, perception, attitudes and practices), cultural reaction (i.e. possible avoidance and toleration), cultural conductivity (i.e. a context where certain response towards violence is deemed desirable, necessary and appropriate) and taken-for-granted realities (i.e. people's day-to-day interaction and activities).

Moreover, cultural analysis is particularly interested in examining a certain cultural reaction towards violence and the factors that contribute to the formation of such a reaction. These factors are a set of concepts that are indicative of shared understanding, behavior and attitudes within a given society. For the purposes of grouping the concepts together, they are organized using two constructs, namely socio-cultural and political culture. Socio-cultural refers to general societal beliefs and values, while political culture refers to attitude and behavior towards politics.

Referring to the discussions above, this cultural analysis tries to look at the *response* of the Abrenians towards election-related violence (ERV). Their *response* is inferred by looking at their *reaction* towards the situation and *how they get themselves involved*.

Reaction is assessed by looking at *fear*, which is operationalized in terms of *electoral participation*; while involvement is measured using a *social involvement scale*. Reactions and the levels of involvement that people accord to the situation are situated under the context of a larger *culture*. It is regarded that reaction and involvement are most likely shaped by the people's way of life.

The socio-cultural aspect is explored in terms of the following dimensions: concept of violence, attitude towards authority, *macho* culture and concept of life. Political culture on the other hand is conceived in terms of the people's understanding of election-related violence and their concept of leadership or attitude towards politics.

The conceptual framework of the cultural analysis is presented in a conceptual model in Figure 3.

To make sense of the concepts that were laid out, the cultural analysis made use of participant observation and attitude survey as primary data gathering tools. Respondents in the attitude survey were randomly selected from five towns in Abra. The selection of the towns included as sampling clusters was also in random from the total 27 towns. The sample population is n=150 relative to the adult population of Abra (18 years old and above). With the sample size, the sampling procedure rendered a plus-minus 7% margin of error, with 90% level of confidence and 50% anticipated response distribution. Most of the responses that were gathered are homogenous, thus making the majority of the results statistically significant.

Profile of Survey Respondents

Females (51%) comprise the majority of the respondents as opposed to males (49%). The mean age is 40.93 (SD = 14.3), indicating that the sample population is relatively old. An overwhelming majority of the respondents are Catholic (88%) and Ilokano (95.3%). Majority of the respondents registered themselves as Ilokano, however, the field enumerators, who happened to be natives of Abra, were surprised that people from known Tinggian-populated areas reported Ilokano as their ethnicity. The enumerators attribute this observation to the sentiments of Tinggians that they are a cultural minority, and to avoid being discriminated, they do not declare their ethnicity whenever someone asks them about it.

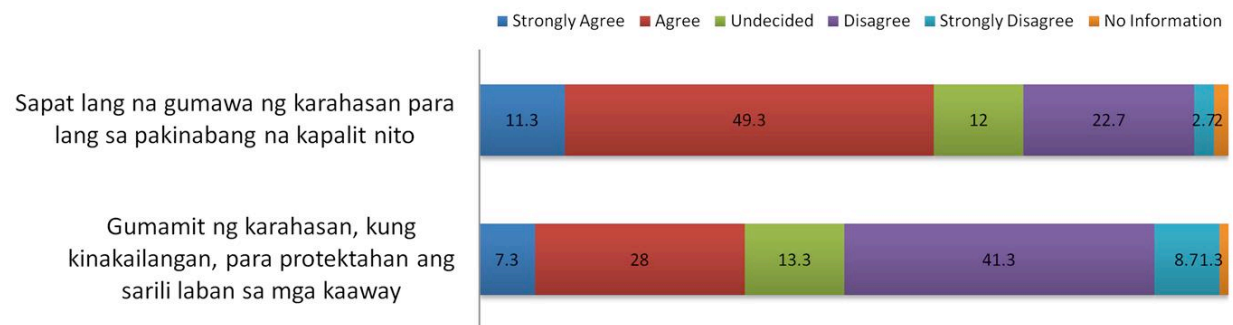
The sample population is relatively educated, where majority of them (51%) were able to go and/or finish college (Annex 2). Majority of them are employed (77%) with *pagsasaka* (44%) and *may sariling pinagkakakitaan* (24.7%) as their source of income (Annex 3). The latter refers to small income generating activities that they perform, for instance, owning a sari-sari store, a small piggery, driving tricycle, being a house helper and the like.

Socio-cultural Results

Concept of Violence

To get a picture on the concept of violence, statements reflecting some observed reasoning for using violence were presented to the respondents. Figure 6 presents the results.

Figure 6: Pagtingin sa Karahasan



The results show that the respondents have the tendency to use violence if they have to. This observation is more evident and significant in the first item where majority of the respondents (11.3% strongly agree, 49.3% agree) agreed that violence could be done (or is worth doing) as long as there is a reward or benefit at stake⁶⁵. In this context, there is an attitude towards performing violence when there is a compelling need to do so.

⁶⁵ Note however that what is meant by ‘reward’ is not clearly defined. The respondents were not asked to elaborate on the rewards (or pakinabang) they are expecting to achieve in resorting to violence.

The responses in the second statement (7.3% strongly agree, 28% agree) indicate the possibility that violence can also be used for a more compelling reason, like using it to defend oneself from other violent entities. In the Bolney incident for instance, the people already armed themselves with handguns and were determined to engage the NPAs violently in order to deal with them. The rebels have camped near their community and were demanding the possession of ballot boxes for reportedly unknown reasons.

Examining the results, a kind of thinking is therefore observed that violence is regarded as purposive and a necessary resort. Acts of violence can never be personal, as doing it is viewed as a means to achieve an end. This view of violence is even more expounded in the participant observation. People regard the use of violence as instrumental—there is a tendency to rationalize violence and some people believe that they can use violence if necessary.

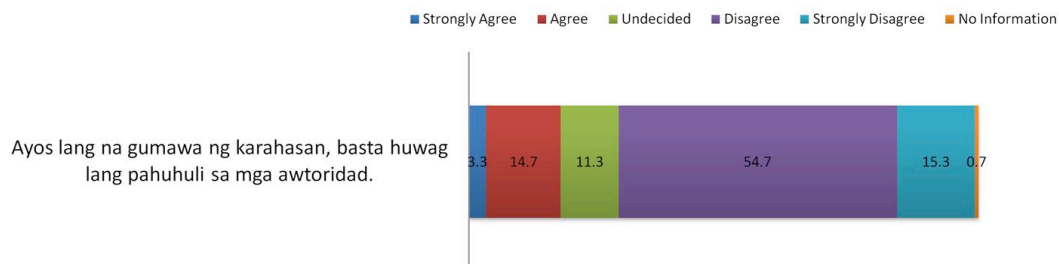
In a barangay in Bucay, Abra, people believe in their capacity to deal with life-threatening situations. If they do not get any help from the police or *barangay tanods* just in case their life is in danger, they are ready to take everything in their own hands and fight for their lives.

The cross tabulation of results with respondents’ sex reveals that among the sexes, males are more likely to adhere to this conception of violence than females. Also, those belonging to the older age groups subscribe to violence as being instrumental (See Annex 3A for the distribution of responses).

Attitude Towards Authority

Attitude towards authority was assessed by presenting the respondents with a statement that manifest a disregard for authority. Figure 7 presents the results.

Figure 7: Pagtingin sa Autoridad



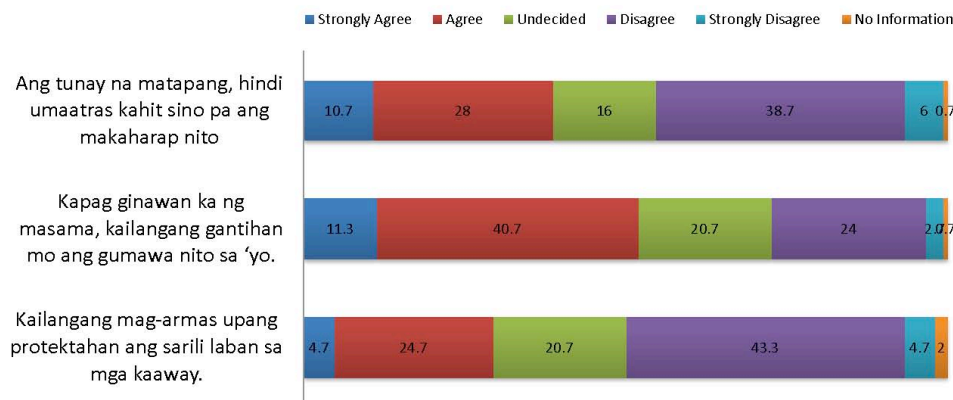
The responses across the continuum show that majority of the respondents disagree (54.7% disagree, 15.3% strongly disagree) with the idea that they may perform violent acts as long as they are not caught by the authorities. Reading the results on the inverse, it is not ‘okay’ or acceptable for the respondents to commit violent acts because authorities are there. Hence, the result tells that the respondents exhibit high regard towards authority and they do not subscribe to the idea of undermining it.

Putting it simply, the recognition of the mere presence of authority or security institutions (defined as the PNP and AFP) would let the respondents think twice before committing violent acts. Remarkably, males and females tend to share the same view towards authority (see Annex 4 for the distribution of responses across sexes).

Macho Culture

To examine and further illustrate this so-called ‘macho’ culture in Abra, a three-item scale indicative of common ‘macho’ values, as observed, was presented to the respondents. Figure 8 presents the results.

Figure 8: Macho Culture



The results obtained from the responses show that a ‘macho’ culture is evident in Abra. There are significant agreements on the scale items that are reflective of ‘macho’ traits most especially on the second statement, which indicates the tendency of the respondents to act, in the event that anything bad (not necessarily violent) is inflicted on them (11.3% strongly agree, 40.7% agree). Whenever it is necessary, they are likely to seek vengeance towards other persons who have caused any harm. They will not take things sitting down—an attitude which can mean disapproval of being weak. Also, a considerable number of respondents agreed (4.7% strongly agree, 24.7% agree) that they need to take up arms in order to protect themselves. 20.7% remain undecided.

Though not statistically significant, results in the first item of the scale imply that a kind of thinking exists wherein it is regarded that the measure of one’s courage relies on one’s refusal to retreat in the face of enemies.

Results of the ethnography point to the same thing. Guns are everywhere and guns are displayed like the usual things that you see inside a person’s residence. For instance, inside the house of a certain barangay captain, a firearm is un mindfully placed on top of a dining table along with kitchen utensils, the same time as the barangay captain eats his breakfast. When asked about it, the barangay captain explains that events are uncertain, so he needs to keep himself prepared at all times. Moreover, because of the proliferation of firearms, there are cases wherein guns are fired on the streets; and because brave men always strike back when they are provoked, it is not hard to witness petty fights on select corners of Abra.

As earlier stated, attitudes espousing ‘macho’ traits is prevalent in a setting where males are regarded as brave, powerful, mighty and strong. Using the sex of the respondents to further dissect the distribution of responses, the culture of Abra shows a traditional set-up wherein females perceive, treat and expect males as ‘macho’. Accordingly, males live up to the label bestowed unto them. Annex 5 shows the results, where there is a considerable variation in responses among the two sexes—females believe that males should never retreat from enemies, and that males should arm themselves for their protection.

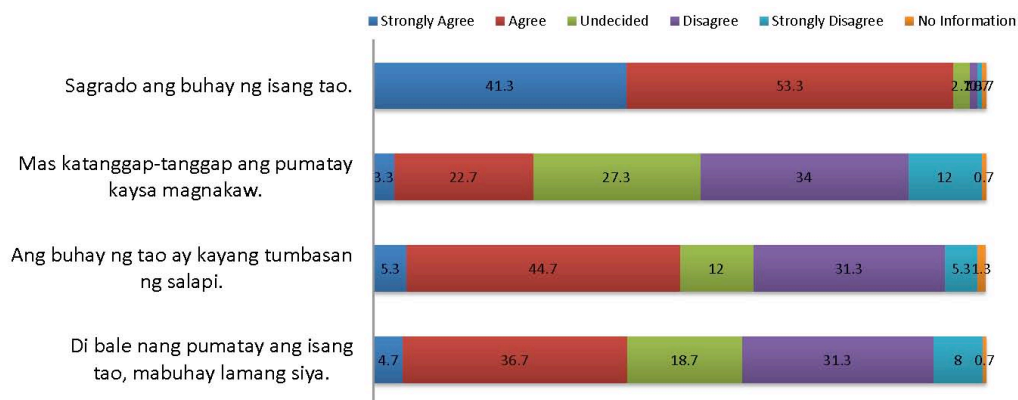
The observations from the ethnography also tells that Abra society, in terms of gender relations, is structured traditionally such that females regard males as the stronger character, and males live by it. Males, who are always assertive of their existence, have this domineering attitude in all life situations—not anyone is bolder than them, no one can intimidate them, and most of them retaliate to win back a defeat. These ‘macho’ traits figure in the day-to-day affairs in Abra. A plain glance that is interpreted maliciously, for instance, can wreck chaos, to the point of ‘macho’ males wrestling or even stabbing each other on the streets.

Summing up the results, it can be inferred that the ‘macho’ values that were validated by the responses have the potential of creating a cultural context conducive to violence. The reactive tendencies of the people, as demonstrated in their likelihood to take revenge and take up arms to defend themselves can possibly turn into a continuous show of force.

Concept of Life

The concept of life was assessed using a four-point scale containing different notions about the importance of life. Four statements were presented to the respondents and they were asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree with those statements. Figure 9 presents the results.

Figure 9: Pagtingin sa Buhay ng Isang Tao



An overwhelming majority of respondents (41.3% strongly agree, 53.3% agree) consider life as sacred, but that view or conception of life is not consistent with the results of other items in the scale. It should be noted that the last three statements were phrased negatively in order to determine

if the responses will vary from the first statement, and as far as the results are concerned, a significant variation is observed.

Life is regarded as sacred but there exists a kind of thinking that life is something that can be bought (5.3% strongly agreed, 44.7% agreed). Although the results do not figure strongly in terms of statistical significance, responses in other scale items indicate that there is a view about killing, being a job, as more acceptable than stealing (3.3% strongly agree, 22.7% agree). Survival at the expense of others can also be considered acceptable (4.7% strongly agree, 36.7% agree). Cross tabulation results also show that male respondents belonging to the older age groups are likely to accept these notions about life (see Annex 6).

The tendency to sacrifice values for the sake of survival also surfaced in the ethnography. It is also worth noting that in a community that was observed, some community members confessed that cases of killings are often resolved by simply paying damages to the families of the victims.

The results show the tendency of the respondents to dissipate from their values, most especially when external motivators enter into the picture. They view life as sacred, which is something that is socially desirable; but there is a possibility that such value will be disregarded when rewards (material or otherwise) are at stake. The prevailing view of life therefore is something that is impersonal. The results imply that if some people get anything (e.g., rewards) from taking a life, they are likely to grab the opportunity and do so.

Together with people's concept of violence, the likelihood of violence is even more fuelled by the people's low regard to life. This view, coupled with a worsening socio-economic status, makes it possible for some people to easily kill in exchange for rewards and favors.

Political Culture Results

Given the above-mentioned socio-cultural orientation, this section tries to examine the people's political culture—their understanding of election-related violence, most especially their outlook towards their leaders. It should be noted however, that the effects of socio-cultural factors, being an independent variable to political culture, was not tested.

Understanding of Election-Related Violence

Majority of the respondents (52.7%) refuse to believe that election-related violence is rooted and endemic to their history (see Annex 7), which means that they do not consider violence in elections as intrinsic to their culture. On a different note, they view the existence of election-related violence as a product of certain circumstances. In other words, it is something that is created by political actors that try to wield and control power. In fact, eighty percent (80%) of the respondents believe that the condition of election-related violence is aggravated by competing political families (see Annex 8). Table 17 substantiates this finding.

Table 17 reveals that competition over power and influence is viewed by the respondents as the primary cause of election-related violence. Cheating during election is also perceived as one of the factors that fuel violence.

Table 17: Perceived Causes of Election-Related Violence in Abra

1	Maraming nag-aagawan sa impluwensiya at kapangyarihan	66.7%
2	Pandaraya tuwing eleksiyon	56.9%
3	Walang ibang mapagkakitaan ang mga tao kundi maging patron at manilbihan sa mga pulitiko	26.4%
4	Hindi ginagawa ng mga institusyon at ahensiya ng pamahalaan ang kanilang tungkulin	21.5%
5	Sadyang mahilig sa gulo ang mga tao	7.6%
6	Iba pa	4.9%

The prevalence of election-related violence is also linked to economic reasons, wherein the province's limited sources of livelihood compel people to become dependent to those who are in power. Table 18 presents a related result by which respondents identify hired men and others providing 'services' to politicians as perpetrators of election-related violence. The results show the association of election-related violence with poverty (i.e., politicians as source of livelihood).

Abra is the ninth poorest province in the Philippines. The participant observation that was conducted in some Abra communities tells a lot about this condition. A large number of people say they are suffering from extreme poverty because even the "simplest" kind of basic services, like health, are not being provided to them. There is not enough source of livelihood, and all they can do is to hope that someday, their government will provide them jobs and alleviate their condition. For now, they have to find ways to survive. They said that any job that can save them from hunger will do.

As a result of poverty, people see elections as an opportunity to extract money from the politicians. They see elections as a money-making venture, rather than a democratic exercise. This socially acceptable behavior conditions the vicious cycle of patronage and impacts political participation.

Table 18: Perceived Perpetrators of Election-Related Violence in Abra

1	Mga goons, hired killers at iba pang naninilbihan sa mga pulitiko	68.7%
2	Mga pamilyang magkakaaway sa pulitika	25.3%
3	Wala	6%
4	Mga rebelde	2%
5	Militar	0.7%

Results of the ethnography show that election-related violence is not something that will scare people off or will prevent them from performing their daily routines. These observations point to the impression that the people have developed a certain degree of tolerance over the existence of election-related violence.

Summing up the results, election-related violence in Abra is attributed to certain individuals who use violence to wield power and influence. The survey data show the perception that election violence is not something that is created by the people but is rather created by those who hold power and influence, given the resources at their disposal. The people seem to understand that the perpetuation of election-related violence is beyond their control; hence the problem must be solved by the people who created it in the first place. They have other concerns, like their daily survival, which make them apolitical.

Concept of Leadership

Interestingly, the respondents recognize that the solution to electoral violence lie in the hands of their leaders. This is consistent with the observation that people retreat as agents that can solve the problem of ERV. They still aspire for a “good leader” to come along and would then solve the problem of violence in general. Table 19 presents the responses of the respondents when asked about their preferred qualities of a person who they think would help in stopping violence.

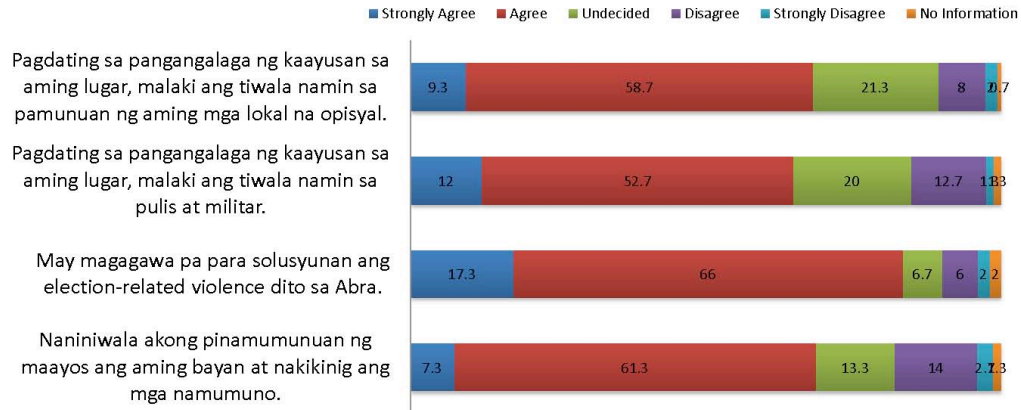
Rank	Quality	Percentage
1	Mabuting pinuno	67.4%
2	May malinis na track record	51.4%
3	Walang kinikilingan/pinapanigan/kinakampihan	41.7%
4	Magaling makipag-ugnayan	29.9%
5	Iba pa	3.5%

The yearning for a good leader is even more exemplified in Table 20, where the respondents said they expect their candidates to be good leaders once elected.

Rank	Reason	Percentage
1	Inaasahan ang mabuting pamumuno	89.2%
2	Pakikisama	38.2%
3	Gusto ko siya bilang tao	15.7%
4	May inaasahan akong suporta	5.9%
5	Inutusan ako para suportahan siya	2.9%
6	Iba pa	1.0%

Figure 10 shows a more elaborate observation with regards to the concept of leadership. It shows responses to the scale items, which illustrate the concept of leadership and attitude towards politics.

Figure 10: Concept of Leadership and Attitude towards Politics



The results indicate high optimism towards leaders and authorities. 68% of the respondents (9.3% strongly agree, 58.7% agree) trust the local government when it comes to maintaining peace and order (as opposed to 10% who think otherwise). 64.7% (12% strongly agree, 52.7% agree) also said they trust the police and the military with the same function of ensuring peace and order (as opposed to 14% who think otherwise). Accordingly, 68.6% (7.3% strongly agree, 61.3% agree) believe that they are well-governed (as opposed to 16.7% who think otherwise). The results give an impression that the people rely too much on the entities that they think can solve the problem. They exhibit high regard for leadership. They believe that something can be done to solve the problem of election-related violence. It is remarkable that they also accord a considerable level of trust to the PNP and AFP in maintaining peace and order.

This high optimism towards leaders and authorities gives the impression that the people are highly dependent on the government as far as solving the problem of election-related violence is concerned. The high optimism could lead people to think that they have responsibility whatsoever, and would instead make them reliant on entities who they think can solve the problem. The belief could also create a mindset wherein not doing anything about the situation is the appropriate thing to do.

It is evident from the results that there is a culture of dependency among the people. They are dependent, simply because they think that their leaders can govern them well. However, the concept of leadership seems to be one-way and passive, wherein the people do not feel the need to collaborate with their leaders in achieving an end-goal.

The results further demonstrate that the people are left with no choice but to entrust the solution of the problem to those in government. This optimism reinforces the thinking that the perpetrators of election-related violence (who usually hold positions of leadership, power and influence) must be the ones to solve it. This seems apparent because people recognize that most of those who hold

positions in government somehow competed for power and influence, and it is that very competition that breeds election-related violence.

Culture of Fear and Electoral Participation

To assess the existence of fear towards election-related violence, the respondents were asked to report about their experience in the past, if any, where they decided not to go out and vote because of threats of violence. An overwhelming majority (92.67%) said they have never had such an experience. They said they always go out and participate in the elections regardless of the existence of election-related violence (see Annex 10).

This result complements the earlier observation that election-related violence is not something that would scare off people. Fear towards the situation could not be established because elections are highly regarded and people still go out and vote.

Moreover, fear is not so significant, as people are likely to think that the occurrence of violence is normal. The results of the participant observation reveal that people have accepted that violence can occur at anytime. During elections, they always expect the eruption of violence among competing politicians as they try to eliminate each other. They said that if violence does not happen, then there must be a “miracle.”

Figure 11: Culture of Fear

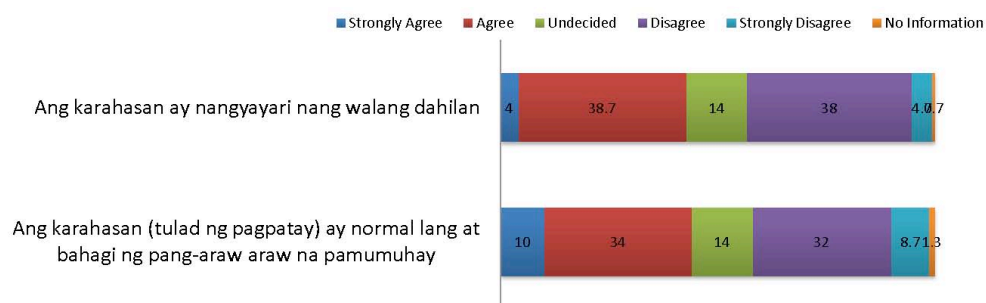


Figure 11 shows a scale that was developed to assess the culture of fear, with focus on the regard that violence is normal. Though statistical significance was not observed in the results, there is a considerable number of respondents who said that violence can happen out of nowhere (4% strongly agree, 38.7% agree) and that violence is part of their daily lives (10% strongly agree, 34% agree).

The inexistence of a culture of fear is supported by the fact that electoral participation is relatively high, notwithstanding the threats that come along with the prevalence of election-related violence. In fact, Table 21 further articulates the high level of electoral participation, because the respondents see voting as a means of supporting their candidates. The respondents perceive that they are enjoying their right of suffrage, since they even check on and scrutinize their candidates before voting for them, as shown in Table 22.

Uri ng Suporta	Prosentado
Ibinoboto ko ang kandidato ko	96.90%
Sumasama ako sa kanyang kampanya	6.20%
Nagkukusa akong maging poll-watcher	9.20%
Sumasali bilang miyembro ng kanyang campaign team	1.50%

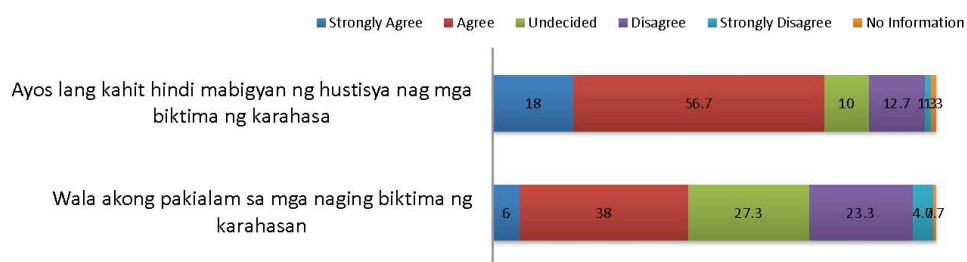
Dahilan	Prosentado
Hindi nararapat na iisang pamilya lamang ang nasa poder	21.10%
Pinag-aaralan muna ang bawat kandidato bago iboto	76.10%
Iba pa	7.30%

The absence of fear however, should not be taken positively as it translates to people’s inaction—they have no fear because they are not doing anything. Moreover, the absence of fear has seemingly developed into complete complacency.

Social Involvement

The levels of social involvement as shown in the results in Figure 12 further indicate people’s inaction towards the situation of ERV. In devising a scale to measure social involvement, altruistic statements were reversely worded and were presented to the respondents.

Figure 12: Social Involvement



The responses to the two scale items suggest that people do not care—i.e., that people would rather avoid playing an active role in addressing election-related violence. As much as they could, they would try to dissociate themselves from the situation and would distance themselves to act merely as passive observers. Their expression of unconcern towards victims indicates that people are (in general) not worried about violence, probably because there is something else that is worth caring for (i.e. daily survival).

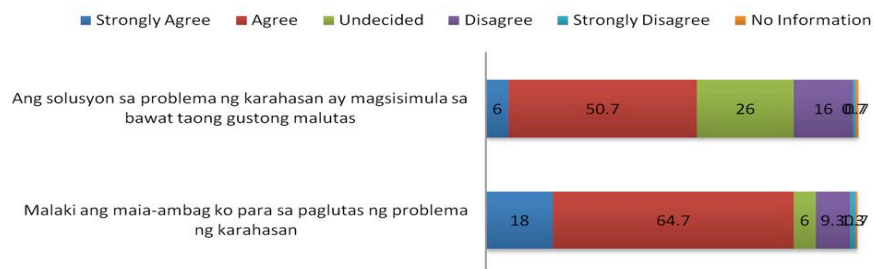
Looking closely at the results, an attitude of detachment is evident. In fact, an overwhelming 74.7% approve an attitude of indifference (18% strongly agree, 56.7% agree), saying that it is “okay” or acceptable for them if justice is not served to the victims of violence. Furthermore, 44% (6% strongly agree, 38% agree) declared that they will not even bother to care about those who became victims of violence.

Consequently, people are inclined to let the situation as it is, believing that election-related violence would still be prevalent, since there are no other means of livelihood in the province. In fact, 73.67% of those who accept that people are inherently dependent on politicians express attitudes of indifference on people who became victims of violence⁶⁶.

From these results, it can be inferred that the people’s state of dependency lead to inaction since they are fully reliant on the government, including the police and the military. This is quite apparent since majority of respondents (44%) who reported that they trust their local government officials also expressed unconcern towards the victims of ERV⁶⁷.

Interestingly enough, though a considerable low level of involvement is observed, people still believe that they can actually initiate change (18% strongly agree, 64.7% agree). The respondents also agree that the solution to the problem of election-related violence must come from those who really want to do something about the situation (6% strongly agree, 50.7% agree). Figure 13 confirms this observation.

Figure 13: Agency



Summary and Discussion

This study has looked into the cultural dimension in order to determine some of the factors that allow the perpetuation of election-related violence in the province of Abra.

Using this type of analysis, the following questions were initially asked:

⁶⁶ Based on cross-tabulating responses of those who ticked “Walang ibang mapagkakakitaan ang mga tao kundi maging patron at manilbihan sa mga pulitiko” as one of the reasons for the occurrence of election-related violence against the statement “Ayos lang kahit hindi mabigyan ng hustisya ang mga biktima ng karahasan”.

⁶⁷ Based on cross-tabulating responses obtained from the statement “Ayos lang kahit hindi mabigyan ng hustisya ang mga biktima ng karahasan” against the statement “Pagdating sa pangangalaga ng kaayusan sa aming lugar, malaki ang tiwala naming sa pamunuan ng aming mga lokal na opisyal”.

1. How do people in Abra conceive election-related violence?
2. Given such a phenomenon, how do people feel about the situation? How do they approach it? How do they act accordingly?

These questions seek to describe the mix of shared understanding, behavior and attitudes in the face of a social phenomenon called election-related violence.

ERV is not an unknown concept for the people of Abra. When asked about election-related violence, they know about the actors and their relationships, they are aware of its causes, and they know that other people become victims of ERV. However, it is striking that the results of the survey indicate low levels of involvement among the people—there is an attitude of indifference, and people detach themselves from the situation.

The further data suggests that generally, ERV does not elicit fear from the people because they always go out and participate in the elections. However, the absence of fear leads to inaction, because people feel that they are safe and secure as long as they do not challenge the status quo.

They also believe that they have the power to make a difference. In fact, 83.3% of the survey respondents believe that something can still be done to solve the problem of election-related violence⁶⁸. Likewise, 82.7% generally agree that they can significantly contribute in addressing violence in general⁶⁹. However, they seem to have resigned already from the fact that they cannot be involved since they need to attend to their survival needs.

The data on the ethnography, moreover, reveal that people's participation is hampered by their poor economic condition. As a result, people tend to become opportunistic during elections, and they allow themselves to become clients of politicians.

With such findings, we are able to show how election-related violence permeates in the culture, and the role that it plays in the lives of the people. In other words, the people's responses and reaction to ERV manifest their understanding, behavior and attitudes.

What characterize Abra's culture? What is it in Abra's culture that breeds and perpetuates violence in general and election-related violence in particular? These questions can be answered in three ways:

1. there is a culture of dependency on the government that renders people passive;
2. there is a belief system that makes Abra's culture more conducive to violence; and
3. there is a tendency for cultural values to clash under certain circumstances.

First, the absence of fear as stated earlier has seemingly developed into complacency. It brings forth the people's refusal to act on the problem, leading to their full reliance on the government, which they think possesses all the needed capacity and resources to address the situation. As a result, the dependency and optimism towards government institutions and leaders are relatively high. The

⁶⁸ 17.3% strongly agree and 66% agree. This is derived from the scale item in Figure 6, "may magagawa pa para solusyonan ang election-related violence dito sa Abra."

⁶⁹ Based on the combined score of a scale item in Figure 9, 18% strongly agree and 64.7% agree on "malaki ang mai-a-ambag ko para sa paglutas ng problema ng karahasan."

people have become seemingly powerless and are now completely reliant on the government, particularly the military and the police, to do all the work.

Likewise, there is a tendency for the people to regard election violence as none of their business, since they often attribute this to the elites who compete for power, influence and resources. As such, most Abrenians think that those who created the problem must also be the ones to solve it.

For the second point, electoral violence in Abra can be attributed to some cultural features that tolerate violence, which can be collectively referred to as ‘macho’ culture. The preponderance of the ‘macho trait’ has implications on the use of arms, because those who strongly think they are ‘macho’ are likely to take-up arms to protect themselves. Others demonstrate macho traits when their strength is undermined or when revenge is necessary.

Furthermore, the macho culture, along with the seemingly low regard for life, has implications on how violence is regarded—it is treated as normal and justifiable. Its use is instrumental, i.e., there is a tendency to rationalize violence and some people believe that they can use violence if necessary. As earlier discussed, males tend to subscribe to an instrumentalist view of violence and exhibit low regard for life.

The use of violence as instrumental is also noted in the participant observation conducted in several communities in Abra. People tend to use violence to protect themselves whenever they become helpless from the authorities like the police and *barangay tanods*.

Lastly, there is a dissonance between values and action towards life. People believe that life is sacred but under certain circumstances, they tend to retreat from that belief. People see life as precious, but when material rewards are involved, some of them would give the latter more regard. This may explain the reason why hired men kill because of rewards and why some people think that it is better to kill (being a job) than to steal.

The observed divergence between the people’s view of life and their actions and behavior indicates weak value foundations. Values are still vulnerable, and the way how they are internalized remains inadequate for guiding people.

The findings in the cultural analysis highlight the basic reaction towards violence as observed in most cross-cultural studies. According to Fry (2006), people who are affected by violence tolerate the situation and develop coping mechanisms by which they try to avoid it. Based on the findings, the people of Abra have tolerated the situation by viewing themselves as passive actors and regarding violence as normal. They have found an avenue to avoid the issue by making themselves less involved and becoming indifferent. These reactions, being referred to as tolerance and avoidance, must be noted in addressing how people approach violence.

It is also observed that across the age groups, the view of violence being instrumental, the low regard for life and the propagation of macho traits are persistent among the older segments of the population. With this, there is a high chance of inculcating a new set of values to the younger generation.

Synthesis and Conclusions

With 30 politicians dying in a span of eight (8) years, there can be little doubt that election-related violence occurs in the province of Abra. But how is this prevalent?

If taken as a percentage of the total ERV incidents in the Philippines in the past three elections, ERV incidents in Abra constitute about 16% of the total national ERV killings in the country.

How long has this been happening in the province?

The first reported incident of ERV was in 1963, (wherein the elections were hotly contested by Col. Carmelo Barbero and his rival Jose Valera) and has persisted until now.

ERV incidents in Abra seem to follow a trend over time. Incidents of killings and harassments would usually peak six (6) months before and after elections. ERV incidents would be low in two to three election years preceding the change in leadership (politician/ political family) and would go up in the succeeding elections until there is a change in leadership. The occurrence of election-related violence and its seeming increase and decrease coincide with the breaking/forming of alliances which either entrenches a political clan or dislodges the current dominant power, which then ushers the entry or dominance of an emerging or re-emerging clan.

The alliance of Chito Bersamin and Vicsyd Valera was an alliance that lasted almost 20 years but also saw the highest rates of ERV incidences particularly in the year 2001 and 2006 involving the deaths of members from known political families the most high profile of which was the murder of Chito Bersamin himself.

But this still begs the question: Why is there election-related violence in Abra?

The prevalence of ERV in the province is largely due to a confluence of inter-related factors; and this can be better explained by first reviewing Abra's violent political history.

According to most accounts, it was in 1963 when ERV became a regular occurrence in Abra. It was due to the strong competition among political families or alliance of political families. This competition was, in turn, brought about by the growing benefits and perks of holding public office. Aside from the allotment provided to local governments, the perks of being in public office include access to the central government, which was becoming more and more powerful, and more and more corrupt.

It is also probable that there was a personal element to the earliest cases of ERV in the province since almost all those who were involved were coming from the same clan or long time alliances that split up—a situation that is usually marked by betrayal and ill-gotten feelings.

In addition, the Philippine electoral system is itself a factor that contributes to the violence. The system of plurality elections is a winner-take-all system, which is more prone to eliciting violent reaction from actors, than proportional representation, which encourages power-sharing. In such a

situation, the role of government agents responsible in ensuring peace and order becomes even more critical.

It must be pointed, however, that any contest (including elections) could spark violence, especially if the stakes are already high, strong emotions are involved, and the institutional-legal context elicits negative behavioral reaction from actors. And this is precisely the reason why there is a need for the government to regulate and manage elections. The confluence of factors that results in ERV starts with this point.

Election-related violence happens in Abra because institutions of government are not able to prevent it.

The most minimal purpose of government is to ensure peace and order; for without it, public affairs become almost impossible and development grounds to a halt.

The police and the military exist for this very purpose and they are supposed to enjoy the monopoly of legitimate coercion to ensure no individual, group or conglomeration of forces can use violence that will threaten the life, liberty and property of citizens.

The COMELEC, for its part, is there to manage the elections, and ensure that all possible threats to the conduct of peaceful and credible elections will be handled swiftly and appropriately. The judiciary, on the other hand, is there to ensure that whoever violates the law will be given proper sanctions.

Based on the research, these “basic” institutions go through the motion of performing their mandate, but their performance does not yield its expected outcome. They are still unable to prevent violence.

The Judiciary, for instance, has a dismal record in resolving ERV cases due mainly to lack of witnesses. This signals the collapse of the justice system, since the community no longer cooperates in the administration of justice. This point will be tackled extensively in the succeeding pages.

By 2004, 17 out of 32 ERV cases had no witnesses thus no cases could be filed in the local courts. Moreover, 16 of the said cases had unidentified suspects. Of the 15 cases filed in the judicial courts, 9 were dismissed prematurely while the rest are still unresolved. By 2007, of the 13 cases recorded by PNP, only 2 cases were filed in court, 8 cases had unidentified suspects. All are still under investigation and are currently unresolved.

This brings us to the second factor explaining election-related violence in Abra.

Institutions of government are not able to prevent violence because they are weak.

Alfred McCoy, in the book *An Anarchy of Families*, described the Philippines as a weak state with strong society. Government instrumentalities are weak because they are largely “captured” by political families, which are then used to extract “rent”.

In several ERV incidents in Abra, there were alleged involvement of some elements of the police and the military. There are anecdotal accounts of this as well. One example is the alleged involvement of elements of the CIDG in the Boliney incident. While transporting the ballots to Bangued, it was reported that elements of the CIDG (allegedly men of former Gov. Vicente Ysidro Valera), tried to get hold of the ballots.

In the case of the PNP, it started when the authority over the police force was transferred from the national to the local government. Based on our interviews, police personnel are placed in a Catch 22 situation if in case their local chief executive (LCE) issues an order which is against their call of duty.

The military, on the other hand, has to work closely with local politicians when they are deployed in a particular area to address the problem of insurgency. Generally, commanding officers and officers are deployed based on their performance and on the discretion of higher officials of the AFP. On the average, commanding officers spend two years in a battalion or brigade unless sooner deployed to other areas. Officers, on the other hand, spend approximately five years in one assignment before moving on to another. Enlisted personnel are usually deployed with consideration of their area of locality. There are some instances however, when an enlisted personnel gets deployed in one area only for the rest of his service. And given the long years of stay in the area, with little pay, some military men got recruited to serve the vested political ends of some politicians.

A good example would be the testimony of Corporal Eduardo Barcelona, who testified that they were ordered by their Battalion Commander Col. Noel Mislang, allegedly upon orders of former Gov. Vicente Ysidro Valera, to assassinate the family of former Lagayan Mayor Cecilia Seares-Luna in 2005. The Boliney incident that killed seven personnel and wounding two others from a nine-man Army team in Brgy. Baoayan, Boliney allegedly happened because military men were tipped-off by their fellow military men who serve as “rats” to the then incumbent Governor. There are also anecdotal evidence pointing to the tendency of some judges to “disappear” when suspects brought to them by the police are connected to a politician.

The institutions, or a part of them, are captured because of the same politicians’/ political families’ long hold to power.

Since the early 1920s, the same political families have held key positions in Abra: the Villamors, the Paredeses, the Valeras from the Paredes clan, the Barberos, the Bersamins (from the Villamor and Paredes clans), the Bernoses and the Seareses. The Valeras and the Bersamins trace their origins from the Paredes clan which was the first dynasty to dominate Abra politics. Even the sitting congresswoman came from a political family that dates back to 1960s—the Seareses.

For 23 years (from 1963 to 1986), the Barberos practically ruled over the province. And after Martial Law until 2007 (that is, for the next 22 years of Abra’s history), it was the Valeras which was the dominant family. Both were alleged to have maintained their own private armed groups; and during both terms incidents of election-related violence have been reported.

Their years in office by the same politicians or political family would have enabled them to establish networks in key institutions. And their working relationship with these institutions would have acquainted them with government officials—an acquaintance which could have evolved to a variety of relationships that could serve variety of purposes.

Governors and mayors for instance are automatically deputized as representatives of the National Police Commission in their respective jurisdiction which means they can inspect police forces and units, conduct audit, and exercise other functions as may be duly authorized by the Commission. They have the power to direct, supervise, and oversee the day-to-day functions of police. They also have the authority to choose the chief of police from a list of those recommended by the provincial police director and to recommend to the provincial director the transfer, reassignment or detail of PNP members outside of their respective city or town residences.

The Army, albeit having more autonomy than the police, still has to coordinate with the local government units in conducting their operations in the area.

The LGU is also mandated through the Omnibus Election Code to provide office space for the local COMELEC office. The DILG as the natural overseers of LGUs also coordinate closely, supervise, capacitate and sanction LCEs. The CHR is also allowed under the Constitution to ask the aid of the local government unit as it sees it to conduct its functions at the local level.

Other than the “capture” of basic institutions, there are also other reasons why they are weak.

Some government institutions face constraints in resources and support that affect their capability organizationally.

Government institutions responsible for the prevention of ERV have been performing procedurally, but not substantively. This means that no significant results are being delivered.

Almost all the institutions pointed out the constraints in their resources that negatively affect their performance, given the tall order of preventing election-related violence.

Security institutions in Abra also do not receive sufficient support from the central government. In the AFP for instance, all battalions usually get the same budget regardless of the state of election violence in the area. Additional budget will only be allotted if the area is considered priority areas in terms of their Internal Security Operations. Abra is not considered as priority area in this respect. Security personnel also remain lacking. As of January 2010, there is still a shortage of 156 policemen in the province, while the military only has an estimate of 400 soldiers instead of the ideal 500.

Additional resources are provided to the police and military during election period, and hotspots are placed under COMELEC control. Hence resources from the central Comelec are used for both national and local electoral administration. However these additional resources are not sufficient. Both the police and the military personnel only receive subsistence allowance from the COMELEC and according to stakeholders, receipt of this allowance is even unreliable and unpredictable. Taskforces are indeed created to have a coherent program on ERV prevention which is allotted its own budget. These security institutions, nonetheless, still have to use their normal operating resources and compensate for the lack of funds.

Furthermore, other institutions such as the COMELEC, CHR and DILG do not get additional budget for ERV prevention. Their work in election hotspots are considered as part and parcel of the job that is covered by their daily operational expenses which remain dismal even for their usual

operation. The COMELEC and the CHR also have their respective centralized financial management systems, which mean that the local COMELEC and CHR office only disburses funds coming from the central office, giving them very little autonomy in allocating their resources.

More importantly, there is a need to check on the capability-building measures for the institutions responsible for preventing ERV, particularly the COMELEC, and the secondary and accountability institutions. It is apparent that there is no capability-building measure that particularly targets performance of institutions in preventing institutions.

The lack of readily-accessible and systematic database on their performance points clearly to the problem on institutional development. Performance cannot be improved if there is no benchmark to start with and the monitoring of progress is unclear. The targets on prevention of ERV are also vague and unverifiable. Though this is understandable given the difficult nature of monitoring ERV, our impression was that no sustained effort has been done for this purpose.

Civil society organizations, on the hand, have started coordinating with government institutions for ERV prevention, but a programmatic intervention has yet to be introduced which involves performance targets, a well-laid out plan to achieve the performance targets and a longer timeframe.

Though there is now growing support from key civil society actors such as the church, the non-government organizations and media for the work of preventing ERV, some pointed out that this has only recently started and has yet to bear fruit. In addition, the support is still minimal given the seeming lack of support from the national institutions and the public at large.

The relevant national institutions such as the COMELEC, CHR, PNP and AFP, for instance, have unclear targets on election-related violence in Abra. The support provided has been in the form of the formation of a Taskforce in identified areas of immediate concern to oversee efforts on ERV prevention. But there have been no additional support given to institutions which may be in the form of hazard pays, additional resources, manpower, transportation and communication equipment, security escorts, personnel morale upliftment, etc.

The public, on the other hand, is largely uninvolved in the issue. In the survey conducted (from 10 to 25 September 2009), the respondents exhibit low levels of involvement towards the issue. An overwhelming 75% approves an attitude of indifference (as opposed to 14% who think otherwise), saying that it is “okay” or acceptable for them if justice is not served to the victims of violence. Furthermore, 44% declared they won’t even bother to care about those who became victims of violence (as opposed to 28% who think otherwise).

The Multi-Stakeholder Group also acknowledges the need to create awareness in the public to strengthen support for the campaign against ERV.

There are also restraints in the legal framework that limit what security institutions can do to prevent ERV.

Military forces and police are prohibited 50 meters away from the voting place, unless COMELEC requests for it, which can only be asked for if there is an imminent danger. The principle behind this prohibition is to prevent arms or any instrument of violence to affect the decision of voters.

This, however, significantly weakens the preventive capacity of the security forces. The violence would have already broken out or a killing or any use of force would have already been committed before the police and the military gets to the scene.

The security institutions, such as the police and the military, work within the legal framework of civilian rule. Their actions and decisions are constraint by civilian authority.

There is a dilemma when the situation is such that local civilian authorities are the ones allegedly involved in the violence that must be prevented and are therefore the ones who must be neutralized. It is a dilemma when institutions of government are no longer able to control and prevent the acquisition and use of guns and armed men. The dilemma is whether constraints in the use of military power should be relaxed, suspended or minimized so that the situation of violence is contained. Due to the country's experience under Martial Law where there were numerous military abuses, this is a big dilemma.

The ERV situation in Abra persists because of direct or indirect national consents.

The lack of clear agenda and targets of national government institutions to end ERV in Abra is an indirect consent to the persistence of violence in the province. The lack of programmatic and systematic capability-building intervention for some institutions responsible for ERV prevention puts to question any real effort by the national government to end election-related violence in Abra.

The political history of Abra points to the persistent relationship of local power-holders and the national leadership. Legally, the relationship of national and local exists in Philippine politics for despite of decentralization, the President still decides on the release of the budget of LGUs. The President also exercises general supervision over all local government units and may direct appropriate national agencies to provide financial, technical or other forms of assistance to local government units upon the request of the LGU concerned. Apart from serving as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the President can also suspend or restore the power of local chief executives on the police. Complaints on erring official could also be filed, decided upon and appealed to the Office of the President under the LGC. Resignation and suspensions of high ranking officials can only be executed upon the approval of the President.

Key to understanding the longevity of periods to which the political clans have dominated Abra politics is their relationship with the national government. In 1976 Carmelo Barbero was appointed during the Marcos administration as Deputy Defense Minister. Following that year, Arturo Barbero assumed office as Governor of Abra. Barberos were dominant from the Martial Law period, from the time of Barbero's appointment in 1976, all the way to pre-EDSA People Power Revolution.

In 1986, Vicsyd Valera was appointed by the Aquino Administration as OIC governor of Abra. His appointment was brought about by a selection process during the 1986 Cory Administration with support and recommendations from the Church. His religious connections and prominent political background (being a descendant of the Paredeses) got him the nomination and appointment. His assumption into office saw the reemergence of the Paredes clan in Abra politics. Vicsyd Valera held office for almost 21 years which ended in 2006 after his arrest as the alleged mastermind in the

assassination of Chito Bersamin who reportedly allied himself with the Arroyo administration and had plans to run for governor the following election.

In other words, there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between the local power-holders of Abra and the powers-that-be at the national level. Following the hold to power of a few political families and the period to which it lasted, it can be observed that particular local elites were able to dominate local politics because of their connection to Malacañang. This usually is a strong indication of a patron-based politics which is not only particular in Abra but prevalent throughout the country.

There are indications that the long hold to power of some politicians and political families involve the use of guns and goons.

There are no hard facts because no case has been resolved, but consequential evidence exists. For one, violence, particularly killings, happened while the politicians involved were in power. Whether they were involved or not, the fact that it was never prevented and resolved during their more than twenty years in power put some level of accountability on them.

Secondly, the police has verified the existence of 100 private armed groups and the proliferation of 3,000 illegal firearms, which if they did not belong to the sitting politicians, would have been used against them. The fact that they have stayed in power for more than two decades indicates the ability to survive politically in an environment where illegal guns and goons proliferate.

Based on an investigation made by Task Force Abra and the CIDG in 2006, Abra has 10 “partisan armed groups” (PAGs) with 117 members. From the said groups, it was estimated, based on a classified report, that two-thirds are followers of former Governor Vicente Valera and his ally, Ting Mayor Edwin Crisolago. Abra Representative Cecilia Seares-Luna reportedly had seven members in her own armed group, headed by her son Lagayan Mayor Jendricks Luna. Mailed Molina, who heads a faction of the Cordillera People’s Liberation Army was reported to have an “undetermined” number of private armed groups.

Based on interviews conducted and the survey administered, the use of guns to protect oneself or achieve a purpose is easily justifiable. Some of the respondents (30%) see the need to use arms for protection from present and potential enemies. Also, the use of violence to deter violence is viewed as “normal” by some politicians.

Thirdly, based on the interviews and participant observation conducted, this seemed to be common knowledge. This is perhaps unreliable in scientific terms, but using an anthropological perspective, this is an indication or a red flag that requires close attention.

The biggest question is where were the guns and goons coming from? Interviews with officials point to the long history of political killings and violence in the province as the culprit. Since there are no gun manufacturers and distributors in Abra, it was believed that Abrenios would purchase firearms outside of the province for personal protection. It tells a lot from an anthropological perspective when even the police and the military cannot give a definite explanation despite the fact that Abra has been an election hotspot for more half a decade now.

The persistence of ERV can be attributed to a culture that is seemingly conducive to violence.

It is a culture that permits violence. It is a culture where people do not disagree on attitudes that espouse and favor violence. It is a culture that is predisposed to violence because people see violence as instrumental and justifiable. These views are brought about by the seemingly weak value foundations that are unable to guide the people's behaviors and tendencies towards violence. These values are compromised by certain social constraints such as poverty. This is exemplified by the dissonance between people's notion of life and the way how killing is rationalized – people regard life as sacred but when faced with material rewards, they tend to dwindle from that belief. In effect, because values appear to be vulnerable, people's attitude tend to favor and accept violence.

The traditional set-up of Abra society further characterizes its tendency to become violent. The existence of a “macho culture” exacerbates the contextual acquiescence that propagates violence. Males are predisposed to violence. Men are considered great, dominant and brave; and these expectations manifest in their day-to-day affairs. They also use cultural symbols, such as the possession of a gun to demonstrate the labels bestowed on them.

Moreover, it is a culture where dependency seems to be the norm. The people bestow high regard towards their government and they see their government powerful enough to solve their problems, including the problem of election-related violence. They have accepted that violence is bred by the competition over power among politicians sitting in the government, and since they see themselves uninvolved with the power game, they think addressing violence is not their concern. Such optimism towards the government and the general attitude of inaction invigorate the culture of dependency. As the responses obtained in the attitude survey would show, majority of the people believe that they are well governed (68.6%) and accord high level of trust to their leaders (68%) and authorities (64.7%).

With the general public predisposed to do nothing to address ERV or to improve their general political situation and given the weakness of government institutions, election-related violence persists in the province. The efforts of some civil society groups, on the other hand, have just started and cannot account to the prevention of ERV.

The dependency on the government or disempowerment of the people, which contributed to the persistence of violence, is linked to poverty.

Abra is one of the poorest provinces in the country. The survey conducted proved that political participation is hampered by the need of the people to attend to survival needs. While they believe in their powers to make a difference (83.3% of the respondents believe that something can still be done to solve the problem of election-related violence), they seem to have resigned already from the fact that they cannot be involved because they first need to attend to survival needs. The respondents are inclined to let the situation as it is because in the first place, they believe that election-related violence would still be prevalent, as there is no other means of livelihood for most people, except by becoming the clients and servants of politicians. For lack of opportunities, people do not only depend on the government to address public issues and concerns, some also depend on politicians, “their bosses” or “patron” for their survival needs.

This leads to the breakdown of accountability that result to corruption in institutions. With people disempowered and dependent on the government, elections failed to be an accountability measure that accounts for abuse of power. With lack of people’s participation in institutions captured by vested interests, governance has become prone to abuse of discretion.

The long-hold to power, the captured institutions, and the dependent culture allow violence and corruption to exist and persist. Corruption, in turn, reinforces the concentration of political power that easily translates to economic power, completing the vicious cycle of violence, disempowerment and abuse of authority.

Recommendations

Election-related violence is a serious challenge, and can in fact be considered as one of the most fundamental problems of Philippine society. Addressing this phenomenon therefore is not an easy task, since it would also require addressing perhaps half of the problems of Philippine politics.

Though challenging, we take a bold attempt to outline possible ways forward. The study also tried to address the particular cluster of factors that have been ascertained as the leading causes and effects of ERV.

The following are the summary points of our recommendations:

- Institutional development involving the key agencies responsible for ERV prevention is critical.
- Violence is instigated using a weapon. Gradual disarmament towards total disarmament paralleled with advocacy promoting a gun-less Abra society will significantly reduce violence.
- A network of champions at the national level in key institutions supporting local action is pivotal in “guarding” the exercise of power by national leaders as they relate with the local, preventing any form of padrino system.
- Filling up the gaps in accountability can ensure that public resources are spent for public good and not for private gain, which increases the stakes in the elections.
- Civic and values education can make a difference in mobilizing public support for ERV prevention.
- Elections fail to hold officials who are perceived to be corrupt accountable because of the use of violence. This, then, perpetuates the cycle of corruption that leads to further underdevelopment. And because of this lack of economic opportunities, the poor get attracted being instruments of violence. It is therefore critical in any ERV prevention effort to address underdevelopment by prioritizing job creation.

These recommendations fall into a systematic and integrated approach to preventing ERV in Abra. Given the interdependence of factors and the deeply-rooted problem of ERV in the said province, the recommended intervention must be systematic—i.e., it should have clear targets and program of action. It has to be integrated; the efforts are supposed to be inter-connected and are able to address all the critical causes and effects of ERV. The efforts are mainly preventive, i.e., preventing the worsening of the ERV situation and consequently improving the electoral condition in Abra.

Institutional Development

In addressing critical political issues such as election-related violence, a bureaucracy at the local level that is strong, effective and professional is needed; and institutional development is a needed process in achieving this.

There is a need to strengthen and develop the capacity of the institutions immediately responsible for ERV prevention, namely: the COMELEC, the police, the military, the judiciary. To do so, we have to assess their organizational capacity needs and establish clear performance targets on ERV prevention. In particular, human resource gaps should be addressed through capability-building measures. Resources required to get the job done in preventing ERV must be benchmarked and the needed resources should also be mobilized. Part of capacity-building is the development of data-base or info management, which is key to ERV prevention efforts. This should be a priority.

In addition, institutional development involves identifying the weaknesses in the policy environment that affect the institutions' performance. Perhaps we need to explore how to enable a more proactive response from the military and police without compromising safeguards against abuses in the legitimate use of force. Conducting elections in hotspots earlier could also be explored so that the resource of the government can be focused on the hotspots, as well as the attention of all other stakeholders.

Finally, the general institutional-legal context is critical in structuring the overall conduct of elections. At the national policy level, there is a need to reflect back on the winner-take-all system of plurality elections and consider a proportional representation system that encourages power-sharing. Another element of that larger structural reform is the development of political parties into vehicles for programmatic politics in order to encourage more inter-party dialogues.

Gradual Disarmament

It is most critical that there is gradual disarmament towards a gun-free Abra society. Without guns, goons will not be a major problem. Guns primarily instigate violence and turn elections deadly.

There is a need to check the policies on arms regulation to make it stricter, more accountable and transparent.

It also is critical to engage the public in pushing for gun-free society by advocating for a violence-intolerant society by highlighting the dangers of guns and the responsible use of it, if it is really necessary.

Finally, there should be a sustained pressure at the national level should be exerted for the central government to attend to arms trading and arms proliferation.

Network of National Champions

Local efforts, if remained confined with only local clout, is weak to check and balance the symbiotic relationship of national and local leaders that are vulnerable to abuse of discretion, and are therefore exploited to serve vested interests.

There is a need to promote the advocacy of ERV as a national issue in order to clarify the agenda of national agencies in addressing election-related violence. We should therefore tap electoral reform advocates, peace advocates and champions in related NGAs.

This network of champions from the national level which shall come from the different sectors shall provide support to local responses to ERV by: (1) reporting on the ERV situation; (2) monitoring developments on ERV that hopefully will (3) heighten awareness; (4) broaden support; and (5) deter further violence.

Resources should also be allocated for ERV response. Without resources provided to end ERV, support will not go far. Before even knowing how much is needed, we need to baseline how much is being spent.

International efforts against conflicted politics are vibrant, and local action must be linked up with these international initiatives as well.

Strengthening Accountability

Public office is often used for private gain because power can be abused. Power is abused because it is not checked and there is too much discretion. Strengthening accountability reduces, if not eliminates, discretion that could be abused.

We should also intensify social accountability—i.e., the participation of people in governance, particularly in exacting accountability from the allocation, utilization and accounting of public resources. This can be done by building on the gains of the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG) on promoting transparency and accountability in programs and services of the government. We should promote the application of social accountability in all aspects of governance from planning, allocation of resources to evaluation. Examples would be joint audit report preparations and monitoring of audit report response.

Efforts should also be made to systematically improve the systems of state accountability, which include systems of the Commission on Audit, Judiciary, and LGU performance monitoring; as well as mandated mechanisms for citizen participation, such as local sectoral bodies, local development councils, Sangguniang Kabataan, etc.

Accountability of local government can also be enhanced through performance-based budgeting for LGUs, to ensure that the budget is responsive to accountability reports from the government and the civil society.

Civic and Values Education

People must learn to demand so that public office becomes a public trust. And they will only demand if they know what to expect from their government and what they are entitled to. People will be more confident to engage in public affairs if they know how, and once they start believing that their claim-making actually pays off.

And since this targets values, civic and values education has to be sustained and programmatic:

- Baseline! What are the citizenship education programs provided to the people of Abra. Know the providers, content and resources.

- Benchmark! Develop a strategy for citizenship education that will promote active citizenship that is intolerant to corruption and violence. Again, set benchmarks in terms of providers, content and resources.
- Integrate! Integrate citizenship education content into the existing mechanisms in government (DepEd) and civil society; and create alternative and youth-oriented citizenship education.

Finally, it is critical to find support for such initiatives so more groups will engage in citizenship education and it becomes a movement by itself.

Address poverty through job creation

The public can never be a concern for an individual if she/he has to attend to survival needs such as food, shelter, health. Human rights will be a luxury and an unnecessary trouble if they have no means to support themselves.

Given Abra's geographical isolation, investments are difficult to come by. Hence, alternative means of livelihood is one of the most effective ways of generating jobs, aside from the government's infrastructure projects that have long-term effects.

Tap Department of Trade and Industry's program on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and explore available funding for SMEs. Also introduce a program on social entrepreneurship, which involve income-generating activities that have social impact.

Sustaining the Efforts

Most critical to ensure success is to keep going. The Multi-Sectoral Group is a milestone that must be sustained. It serves as a link to national-based networks/ organizations/ champions and coordinates their efforts. While it has to be sustained, bureaucratizing it must be avoided. Instead clarify and level-off on roles among members and stakeholders.

In doing so, there is a need for each member to understand the limits of what the network can do and what can be done sector-based and organization-based. The Multi-Sectoral Group is not the end all and be all of ERV prevention.

There is a need to build their capability, particularly in monitoring through information management. There is also a need to continuously engage in trust- and confidence-building efforts that nurture their collective spirit.

But efforts of the Multi-Sectoral Group cannot be confined to existing members. They need to reach out to the rest of the population by broadening a constituency that does not tolerate violence.

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