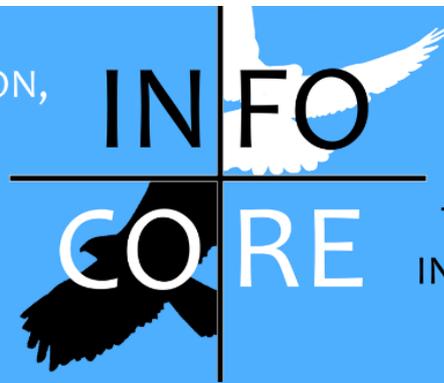


(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION,
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:



THE ROLE OF MEDIA
IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

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METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: POLITICAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

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IDC, Herzliya

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POLITICAL MEDIA STRATEGY: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK
(EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

The goal of Work Package 2 is to better understand the ongoing interactions and influences between political leaders involved in a conflict and various types of media. The research will examine this topic from three perspectives: (1) the influence of leaders on the media, (2) the influence of the media on leaders, and (3) the “two-way” flow of influence between leaders and the media. There are fifteen core research questions (five from each perspective) that are designed serve as the conceptual map for the project. Semi-structured interviews will be used to provide the researcher with both a basic structure and the flexibility to go in new directions where warranted. In keeping with the INFOCORE research proposal, leaders from Europe and three regions will be interviewed: the Middle East, the Western Balkans, and the Great Lakes of Africa. The Middle East interviews will focus on both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the conflict in Syria. The Western Balkans interviews will look at both the Kosovo conflict and the Inter-ethnic conflict in Macedonia. The African Great Lakes interviews will look at the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the conflict in Burundi. The strategy includes conducting at least 135 interviews, providing one of the largest and most varied sets of interviews carried out on this topic to date.

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POLITICAL MEDIA STRATEGY: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Political leaders involved in conflicts continuously attempt to exploit the domestic and international news media as a tool to promote their arguments to a variety of audiences (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert 2005; Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007, 2006; Entman, 2004; Hallin, 1989; Knightly, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 1997). They also react to media coverage of the conflict, and while many such responses tend to be primarily rhetorical and symbolic in nature, some can amount to significant changes in tactics, strategy, and/or policy (Gilboa, 2005; Kepplinger, 2007; Robinson, 2011). Consistent with the original INFOCORE proposal, “WP2 focuses on political actors in their double roles as sources/advocates and audience/users.”

This document is designed to outline the methodological framework that will be employed in the research. We begin with the conceptual framework which provides the theoretical anchor for the research. It is divided into three sections. The first will deal with the influence of political leaders on the media during conflict, the second will briefly discuss what we know about the attempts of leaders to engage in conflict resolution, and the third will look at the “other side of the coin: the influence the media have on political leaders.

Conceptual Framework

For researchers who study media and violent conflict, one of the most important questions concerns the ability of the media to achieve independence from the authorities.¹ A recurring theme in this area of study is that the domestic news media has both ideological and commercial reasons for promoting the government agenda, especially in the early stages of conflicts (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007, 2006; Hallin, 1989; Knightly, 2004, Wolfsfeld, 1997). This effect is often referred to in the literature as the “rally round the flag” phenomenon (Baker & Oneal 2001; Groeling & Baum, 2008). From a commercial standpoint, journalists who oppose war efforts are likely to be seen as disloyal or even traitors. Journalists also heavily depend on the authorities as critical and indispensable sources for understanding conflict events. Finally, journalists are just as likely as other citizens to be swept up in the war fever that becomes so prevalent during such crises. An important dissenter to this general line of thought is Althaus (2003), whose study found much more critical coverage by American journalists during the 1990-91 Gulf War than other scholars. In general, though it would seem that political elites can generally rely on most media to cooperate, especially in the early stages of violent conflicts.

The more interesting question concerns those situations where political leaders begin to *lose* control over how the news media frames the conflict. As suggested earlier, one of the factors contributing to this loss of control is a decline in the level of elite consensus in support of leaders’ policies as well as a loss of public trust (Bennett, 1990; Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2006; Hallin, 1989; Wolfsfeld, 1997). Hallin (1989) was among the first scholars to describe this phenomenon in reference to the role of the media in the Vietnam War. While many attributed growing dissatisfaction with that war to the fact that it was the first televised conflict, Hallin

¹ This brief scientific review is taken from a more extensive review that appears as an INFOCORE working paper (Conceptual Paper for WP2).

provided substantial evidence that the early coverage of that war was extremely supportive of the U.S. policy. Only after a *political change* occurred among the elites did media coverage shift from what Hallin referred to as the “sphere of consensus” to the “sphere of legitimate controversy.” Political change refers here to a growing number of people in both the political sphere and the military who were raising doubts about whether continuing the Vietnam War effort made sense. What we learn from this is that when political elites disagree they provide the news media with competing conflict frames. Such internal conflicts are always newsworthy and thus the media are always anxious to exploit such disagreements to serve their own professional interests.

Another way that governments can lose control over the news media is by losing control over the “flow of information” (Wolfsfeld, 1997, 2012). The authorities involved in a conflict often strive to remain the mainstream media’s major sources of information and images; they are often in a good position to enforce a monopoly on information, specifically on matters of intelligence, diplomacy and the military. As the authorities lose control over information, journalists gain greater access to events and images that contradict the narrative being promoted by political and military leaders. It is important to emphasize that this problem did not begin with the emergence of the Internet. Thus, in 1971 Daniel Ellsberg publicized the “Pentagon Papers” showing that the Johnson administration had been lying to both the public and to Congress (Sheehan & Greenfield, 1971). This clearly had an effect on public trust. A very different situation characterized the control over information during the 1991 Gulf War. Studies of the role of the news media in that conflict (Bennett & Paletz, 1994; Entman & Page, 1994; Wolfsfeld, 1997) tell us that this was a rather exceptional case in which the allies had a virtual monopoly over the flow of information. When combined with the unusual level of international consensus surrounding the military effort against Iraq, this monopoly enabled U.S. allies to exercise an enormous amount of control over the news stories about that conflict (Wolfsfeld, 1997).

This level of informational control has become almost impossible in the digital age. Two of the best known examples of these phenomena are the “Wikileaks” incident (Benkler, 2011; Leigh & Harding, 2011; Sifry, 2011) and the “Snowden Affair” (Shafer, 2014). In each of these cases, dissidents were able to publicize massive amounts of top-secret documents that the United States and other governments desperately wanted to protect. The technological changes that have taken place in recent decades allow people from some of the most remote areas on the planet to send messages and images around the world. Lawrence (2000) suggested that in many places we are moving away from “institutionally driven news” toward “event driven” news. As every citizen becomes a potential news producer, “bottom-up” flow of information is replacing the normal “top-down” flow. On the other hand, an important article by Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston (2006) suggests that even when news stories begin in the field, the authorities still play a major role in framing the events in ways that help promote official positions.

Political Leaders, Media, and Peace

At first glance, it may seem surprising that such a vast literature exists on the media and conflict, but very little exists about the role of the media in conflict resolution. However, a close look at the issue reveals that one of the major reasons for this lack of scholarly attention tells us something important about the phenomenon itself: peace is boring.

Political leaders who decide to actively engage in a peace process may be surprised to learn that it is far more difficult to mobilize the news media for peace than it is to mobilize for war. Generally speaking, there is an inherent contradiction between the needs of a peace process and the needs of news (Gavilán & Teresa, 2011; Hackett, 2006; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; 2006; Saleem & Hanan, 2014; Sheafer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010; Wolfsfeld, Alimi, & Kailani, 2008; Wolfsfeld, 2004). A successful peace process requires patience, and the news media demands immediacy. Peace is most likely to develop within a calm environment, and the media has an obsessive interest in threats and violence. Peace building is a complex process, and the news media deals with simple events. Progress towards peace requires at least a minimum understanding of the needs of the other side, but the news media reinforces ethnocentrism and hatred for the other side (Wolfsfeld, 2004).

One fascinating research question that has been mostly ignored how things have changed in the digital age. Has the emergence of the new media in any way altered the mostly negative influence of the media on attempts to bring about peace? Theoretically, one could envision some potential for peace makers in this area, but more pessimistic directions seem just as likely. On the more optimistic side, for example, is the argument that perhaps leaders could bypass the cynical and violent nature of the mainstream media and send more reconciliatory messages to the public. One might also hope that pro-peace movements would have new ways to mobilize the public to move towards peace. Nevertheless, in order for such messages and images to go “viral,” they need to resonate with significant elements in the public. Given that peace is boring, and that most citizens have developed a strong hatred for enemies, leaders may face obstacles similar to those they experienced with the traditional media. As for enabling pro-peace movements to more effectively send their messages, it is likely that hate groups will find it even easier to quickly and massively circulate their venom to the public. The social media is clearly a more emotional form of media and messages that stoke the fires are likely to be popular.

In sum, the relations between political leaders and all forms of media are clearly undergoing some significant changes in recent years. Nevertheless, the nature, extent, and ramifications of these changes are far from uniform. If one trend has become clear, it is that leaders everywhere have increasingly lost their ability to take control over the flow of information to their own publics and the world. How this will affect the ultimate role of the news media in various types of conflicts remains an open question. The same can be said about questions related to the role of the new media in attempts at conflict resolution. Perhaps the ambitious research agenda of the INFOCORE project will successfully shed some light on these issues.

Media Influences on Political Leaders

The discussion now turns to the “other side of the coin” – the ways in which the various types of media impact political leaders. Despite its obvious importance, this topic is far more theoretically and methodologically challenging than the impact of political leaders on the media, and as such, it has received far less theoretical and empirical attention.

One theory that received a good deal of attention in the past was the so-called “CNN” effect (Gilboa, 2005; Livingston, 1997; Robinson, 2011; Seib, 2002). The central underlying idea, which remains popular in some circles, was that when the international news media focuses a tremendous amount of attention on a particular conflict, it

“forces” political leaders in more powerful countries to intervene. The implicit criticism is that these leaders are making critical decisions about military intervention based on headlines. As Seib (2002) argues, the CNN effect is “presumed to illustrate the dynamic tension that exists between real-time television news and policymaking with the news having the upper hand in terms of influence” (p. 27).

Researchers who have studied the phenomenon in depth have come to the conclusion that while such a dynamic does take place in some cases, it is rare. The decision to intervene militarily into a conflict is far more conditional and complex than proponents of this theory suggest. Consider again the example of Syria, which is part of the INFOCORE research plan. While estimates vary, it is assumed that at least 100,000 people have died in that conflict.² There was certainly a massive amount of media coverage in the early stages of that conflict, and people around the world were shocked by some of the images being widely distributed on the Internet. While the major powers have given some military support to oppositional forces, they were understandably reluctant to provide either air or ground support. This was a very different outcome from what took place in Libya in 2011, when a decision by the U.N. Security council to intervene in the conflict certainly contributed to the downfall of Muammar Gadhafi. Once again, the best explanations for decisions about intervening are rooted in the surrounding political environment rather than the nature of media coverage.

This argument is not meant to suggest that the international news media coverage does not have some effect on policy makers involved in conflicts. It would appear that here, too, the amount of elite consensus has an impact. Fitzsimmons (2006) examined the extent to which the news media reporting on U.S. military operations in Somalia and the Iraq War influenced the course of American military strategy during these conflicts. Fitzsimmons concluded that, given a general consensus about such conflicts, strategic realities were more important than media coverage. As consensus dropped, the impact of the media rose. Bloch-Elkon (2007) came to a similar conclusion about the conflict in Bosnia, arguing that the impact of the media is greatest when the overall policy is unclear and there is no government consensus. Examining the surrounding political environment is also critical in these instances.

The conceptual question presented can be stated in fairly simple terms: “Should the news media be seen as a tool for leaders to exert their influence, or as an active, independent, and influential actor with a major impact on the course of conflicts?” While the question may be fairly straightforward, the answer is far more complicated. As always, the best approach is to think about the relative influence of the media in terms of a continuum. Thus, a better research question would be, “Under what circumstances is the media more or less likely to play an active, independent, and influential role in conflicts?” At one end of this continuum are cases in which the authorities are able to dominate most media outlets, and at the other end are those cases in which political leaders appear to spend a great deal of time and effort adapting to media demands. The goal of research in this area is to better understand those factors that move the marker in either of these two directions.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_Syrian_Civil_War

Major Research Questions

It is helpful to present some initial research questions that will help guide the empirical research. Three preliminary clarifications are in order. First, in the interest of succinctness, the questions will not include any direct references to cross-conflict comparisons. Nevertheless, given the conceptual assumptions outlined earlier, such differences will certainly be an important aspect of the research strategy. Secondly, given the obvious connection between this topic and the other INFOCORE work packages, these research questions will need to be theoretically and methodologically integrated with those being developed by the other researchers in the group. Finally, this list of research questions is far from exhaustive. It was decided to only list a total of five research questions with regard to three topic areas, in order to serve as an initial springboard for developing further directions.

Research Questions about Political Leaders Influencing the Media

- What strategies do political leaders use in their attempts to influence domestic and international news coverage of a conflict?
- How much of their time and resources do political leaders devote to devising media strategies and/or taking media factors into consideration when dealing with the conflict?
- Which types of political leaders, and which types of circumstances, appear to increase the amount of success leaders have in promoting their frames to different news media?
- How much do political leaders in various conflict areas adjust their communication strategies in response to the changes brought about by the advent of the new media?
- How do political leaders develop and implement different media strategies when dealing with the domestic, international, and new media?

Research Questions about the Influence of the Media on Political Leaders

- Under what circumstances are political leaders most likely to react (either symbolically or substantively) to news stories that appear in the domestic, international, and new media?
- Under what circumstances do political leaders exploit negative international publicity as a springboard for achieving domestic legitimacy (“chest-banging”)?
- Under what circumstances are political leaders most likely to consider media reaction when planning and executing policies related to the conflict (anticipatory effects)?
- To what extent do political leaders carry out systematic attempts to monitor and analyze domestic and international media coverage of the conflict? Does such monitoring have any effects on their policies or actions?

Research Questions about the Two-Way Flow of Influence between Political Leaders and the Media

- How do variations in the political and media environment impact the two-way flow of influence between political leaders and the media with regard to a conflict?

- How much and in what ways has the advent of the new media impacted the two-way flow of influence between political leaders and the various media outlets with regard to a conflict?
- Under what circumstances do political leaders or the media appear to have the “upper hand” in terms of “who influences whom?”
- Under what circumstances do changes occur among the “routine” interactions between journalists and political leaders concerning a conflict, and what are the reasons and consequences of such changes?
- In what ways, if any, does the two-way flow of influence between political leaders and the media impact the ultimate role of the media in a conflict?

The Interviews, Interviewees, and Data Analysis

The major methodology to be employed in WP2 is the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews begin with a core set of questions but allow the interviewer to follow new directions in the course of the session. The goal of this type interview is to listen and learn rather than to test hypotheses. The semi-structured format provides the optimal method for developing new insights about the topic in question. Given the complexity of the issues being studied this is the optimal method for finding answers to the research questions. The interviews should normally take between an hour and an hour and a half. Whenever possible, they will be conducted in private rather than in public places. The sessions will be recorded and transcribed in the original language.

Extensive summaries of the transcripts will be created in English to facilitate subsequent analysis. The summaries will be constructed by the research team in each conflict area. These are the individuals who are in the best position to make the difficult decision of which parts of the interview are sufficiently marginal to the study to be left out of the summaries.

The core questions used in the interviews will be rooted in the 15 research questions listed above, but for each interview they will be adapted to the specific conflict and especially to recent events in the region. As an example, the Palestinian and Israeli political leaders will be asked to relate to the role of the media in the latest round of violence between Israel and Hamas. Many of the most important insights for this study are likely to emerge when expert informants talk about their own interactions with various media during such conflicts. The more recent the events, the more likely the leaders will be in a position to provide accurate details.

The Interviewees

In keeping with the goals of WP2, the interviewees will all be political leaders who represent the antagonists in the various conflicts being studied. While the major focus will be on political leaders (elected and unelected), the goal is to also include military leaders and leaders of major political movements. Table 1 (see below) shows a list of the minimum number of interviews planned for each conflict zone; we say “minimum” because if resources allow, additional interviews will be added. As can be seen, the total number of political leader interviews is 135, so this is probably one of the largest data sets ever collected on this topic. It is important to point out that within each category (e.g. Palestine), there will be many different groups represented, and thus the table provides only a

general overview of the types of individuals who will be interviewed in each conflict area. The European leaders to be interviewed will be actors (as mediators or negotiators) with a direct connection to the conflicts under study.

The interviewees in each conflict area will be selected based on two major criteria. First, they will be chosen on the basis of their position in the overall hierarchy of power. Those who are significant actors representing significant institutions/groups will be given preference. It is important to interview individuals in a position to impact events. Nevertheless, due to access problems, it may sometimes be necessary to interview individuals who work with these leaders. The upside of this problem is that sometimes, members of the leaders' staff are more willing to "open up" than the leaders. The second criterion will be the extent to which the individual in question has ongoing contact with the media. These individuals are the expert informants who have the most knowledge, experience, and insights about the two-way flow of influence between the media and the political leaders.

Table 1: Minimum Planned Number of Interviews in Each Conflict Area

| Conflict Area | Antagonist | Number of Interviews |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Middle East | Israel | 15 |
| Middle East | Palestine | 15 |
| Middle East | Syrian Government | 10 |
| Middle East | Syrian Opposition | 10 |
| Western Balkans | Macedonia | 15 |
| Western Balkans | Kosovo | 15 |
| Great Lakes of Africa | DRC | 20 |
| Great Lakes of Africa | Burundi | 20 |
| General | European Leaders | 15 |
| Total Number of Interviews | | 135 |

Sample Questions for the Qualitative Interviews (Israel/Hamas version)

Below are some examples of core questions that Israeli political leaders will be asked about the role of the media in the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas.³

1. How concerned would you say you and other leaders were regarding how the international media covered the recent war between Israel and Hamas?
2. Did you or any members of your staff make any attempt to monitor or influence what was being said about the conflict in the social media? Can you provide any examples of this?
3. Can you think of any examples in which the decisions that were made by either the government or the military were influenced by news coverage of the Gaza conflict?

³ In Israel, the 2014 round of violence between Israel and Hamas is not usually referred to as a "war." It is referred to as "Operation Protective Edge" (Tzuk Eitan). In each conflict area, the question terminology will be adapted to what is considered appropriate in the particular cultural context.

4. On which types of issues do the domestic and international news media appear to have the greatest influence on either the government or the military?
5. Can you give any examples of decisions that were made during the conflict that were at least partially based on how the local or international media were likely to react to such decisions?
6. Do you ever get the sense that your interactions with the international community were being influenced by international media coverage? Can you give any examples?
7. How would you compare the role of the various types of media in this confrontation to the role they played in the past?
8. If you had to list three lessons you learned about how to deal with the local and international media during wars, what would they be?
9. Do you believe that the international coverage of civilian casualties among the Palestinians had an effect on the course of the conflict? In what ways?
10. Do you think that media coverage (domestic and international) either helped or hindered attempts to reach a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas?

At the end of the interview, study participants will be asked to also fill out a short questionnaire, which will include a number of “closed” questions. This will allow at least some quantitative analysis of the responses that should prove especially useful for comparing among different types of interviewees and conflicts. Here are five examples of questions that would be especially helpful in that regard:

1. On a scale of one to ten, how much influence would you say the international news media have on the course of the conflict?
2. On a scale of one to ten, how much do you believe the social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) have changed the nature of modern warfare?
3. On a scale of one to ten, how successful would you say you are in conveying your messages about the conflict to the domestic media?
4. On a scale of one to ten, how successful would you say you are in conveying your messages about the conflict to the international media?
5. On a scale of one to ten, to what extent would you say the international news media provides the world with an accurate picture of the conflict?

Data Analysis

The data from all interviews will be stored and organized using the qualitative analysis software Narralizer.⁴ Narralizer provides an effective tool for creating a database that allows the researcher to easily search and cross-reference the original interview transcripts, the original interview summaries, and the translated summaries. The researcher can then construct an index of various themes that emerge from the interviews, which facilitates a systematic method for integrating the various data for the various types of interviewees and conflict areas. In

⁴ For details of the Narralizer software see: <http://www.narralizer.com/>

order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, no data will be stored in the program that will allow users to identify the subjects. No names will be used and all interviewees will be assigned codes.

These themes will be dedicated to answering the major research questions as well as developing new directions for the study. One of the important principles for this type of qualitative analysis is to avoid limiting the search to findings that are consistent with the researcher's initial assumptions and expectations. In order to avoid falling into this trap, a conscious effort will be made to look for interview data that contradicts these expectations. This strategy is important because the overall logic of this type of research is *inductive*, and the major approach is to listen and learn.

Contingency Plans

As with any research plan, events can make it more difficult to carry out the planned interviews. This is especially true when studying violent conflicts. The interviews in Syria will be especially difficult to carry out and it is fair to assume that many, if not all of them will be carried out using a secure videoconferencing software. The same problems may also take place with regard to the other conflicts.

Another possible risk is that some of the interviewees will refuse to be interviewed by Israeli researchers. Our hope is that we will find a Palestinian interviewer that will be acceptable to most Palestinian interviewees.

Ethical Guidelines

All interviewees will be asked to sign an "informed consent" form (see Appendix A). In order to maintain anonymity, all interviewees will be assigned a code and only the principle researchers will maintain the list of names that correspond to those codes. No names will be used in any reports, articles, or books that are written concerning the results of the study. The original data will be stored on the LMU server, which meets all of the EU standards for data protection. There will be two additional security procedures carried out to ensure that no one outside of INFOCORE gains access to the list that links the names of the interviewees to the codes that are used in the data set. First, when the initial lists are being created all files that list the names will be encrypted in order to prevent any unauthorized access. Second, after all the materials have been collected these files will be destroyed and only two hard copies of the list (one for backup purposes) will be kept by the principle researcher. He will be responsible for issuing the codes and maintaining their secrecy.

Time Schedule

Preparation of the final list of interview questions and participants will be conducted between October 1, 2014 and November 30, 2014.⁵ The interviews in all conflict areas will be conducted, transcribed, summarized in English, and entered into the Narralizer software program between December 1, 2014 and October 31, 2015. While some initial data analysis will also begin at this time, the major analysis will take place between November 1, 2015 and February 29, 2016.

⁵ Some of the interviews in Europe will start later than in the other locations due to the fact that there is a new Parliament and Commission taking office.

Concluding Comments

There is every reason to believe that the methodology detailed above should provide a large set of rich data for better understanding the ongoing interactions and influences between political leaders and the various forms of media. While a significant amount of research on this topic has already been conducted, the INFOCORE project is probably one of the most ambitious. There are three aspects of this research that are especially noteworthy. The first is the potential for providing an in-depth comparison between several very different types of conflicts. Second is the convening of a multitude of researchers and research methods that should provide a much more comprehensive set of results. Third and finally, the study will be among the first to examine how the role of the media in conflicts has changed in the digital age.

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Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: INFOCORE: INFORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION, RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION: THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organizing the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part.

If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to participate. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

The information you have submitted will be published as a report and you will be sent a copy. Please note that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify you from any publications.

Participant’s Statement:

I, _____
(Name of interviewee)

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

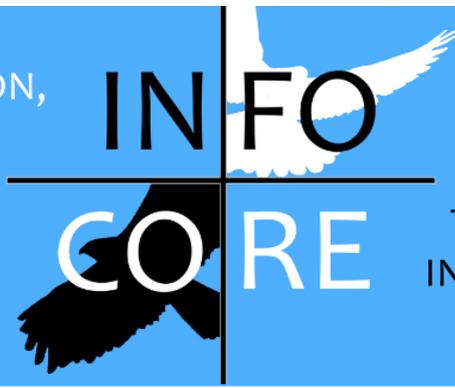
I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the point of publication.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me.

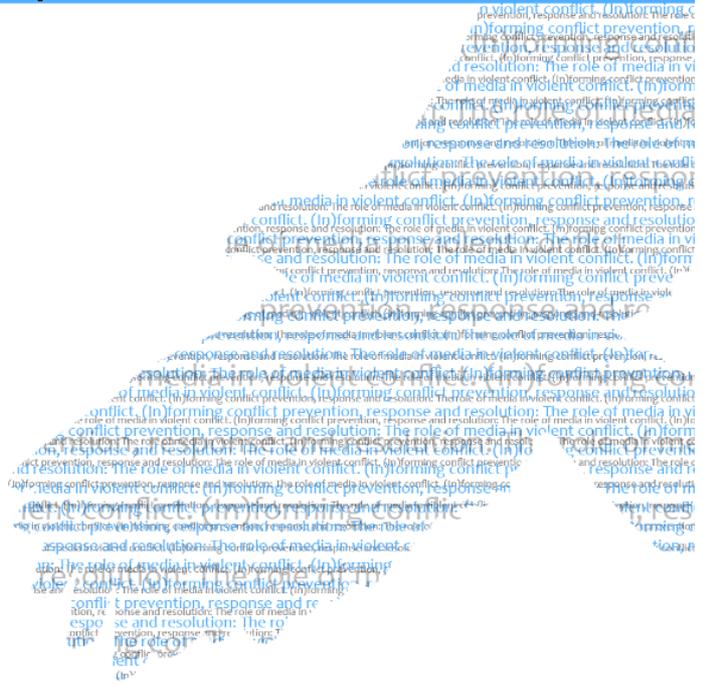
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Date, Place

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Signature

(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION,
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:



THE ROLE OF MEDIA
IN VIOLENT CONFLICT



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