# AN ASSESSMENT OF ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN PROMOTING PEACEFUL ELECTIONS IN KENYA

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## Abstract

At present, almost all the political parties are losing their legitimacy because of their lack of internal democracy, bad governance, and corruption, the game of power sharing and not committing to the national interest. Dispute in elections provide fertile ground for polarization, inter-party conflict, widespread violence, mistrust, and intolerance. The study aim was to assess the role of political parties in promoting peaceful elections in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey. The study targeted the secretary general of the political parties. The study population was 65 respondents. The census method was used to select the study respondents. The study sample size was 65 respondents. The study used questionnaires to collect data. Descriptive statistics data analysis method was applied to analyze numerical data gathered using closed ended questions. Pearson R correlation was used to measure strength and the direction of linear relationship between variables. Multiple regression models were fitted to the data in order to test the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Data was presented in form of tables. The study found that the political parties raise awareness of social cohesion and maintaining peace during elections, the actors desist from making wild and unsubstantiated allegations against political opponents and other election stakeholder, actors refrain from using indecent or abusive language on air, supporters are urged to be tolerant, participating in election management and followers are urged to maintain peace during and after elections. The study concludes that political parties play a significant role promoting peaceful elections in Kenya. The study recommends that there is need for the political parties to publicly indicate their desire for peaceful elections by signing and enforcing a code of appropriate conduct and by including the democratic values of respect for dignity and human rights in their public speeches and their actions. Internal censure of their members (even prominent ones) for any language or action that threatens social cohesion would be a good approach for political parties to provide credible evidence of their desire for peaceful elections.

**Key Words:** political parties, peaceful elections

**Background of the Study**

Elections are an important mechanism in democratic and peace processes. Their purpose is to provide citizens with an opportunity to choose freely their political leaders and allocate power peacefully. However, underlying tensions in a society and high-stake competition can also result in violent and fraudulent elections (Lynch, 2018). Less visible and more complex than armed conflicts, political and electoral violence remain an important threat to human security and regional stability (Riedl, 2016). In Asia, numerous examples from the last ten years reflect the frequency of political and electoral violence (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and East Timor (Morse, 2015). In Africa, 20 percent of elections over the last two decades were marred by violence (Lynch, 2018). Such episodes of violence do not result directly from elections, but reflect instead the breakdown of political processes. Electoral violence sees different manifestations, spanning from regime-perpetrated coercion at the hands of the security forces or armed thugs operating at the hands of politicians to threaten voters or intimidating electoral observers, to local turf wars between party youth-wings (Staniland, 2014). Much electoral violence involves political grassroots, is spurred by individual parochial goals, and displays escalatory dynamics that are beyond the control of the individual politician. However, if elections are legitimate and inclusive, they can pave the way for freedom of expression and promote peaceful transitions (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2014).

A political party can be described as any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office (Burchard, 2015). Political parties are thus key actors in the electoral arena, serving both as agents of representation and stepping stones to political power (Fjelde & Höglund, 2016). At a minimum, political parties are stable organizations through which politicians coordinate their political activity, engage in electoral processes, and manage political power (Hicken, 2015). Yet, beyond some minimalist set of characteristics, political parties vary substantially in their organizational features. The role parties play in societies is crucial, especially in fledgling democracies and post-conflict states that are in the process of democratization and democratic development. Political parties serve as platforms through which citizens can express grievances which otherwise might escalate to violence, as well as their interests and views on which direction state building should take (Tavits, 2013).

Political parties perform an important task in government. They bring people together to achieve control of the government, develop policies favorable to their interests or the groups that support them, and organize and persuade voters to elect their candidates to office (Burchard, 2015). The basic purpose of political parties is to nominate candidates for public office and to get as many of them elected as possible. Once elected, these officials try to achieve the goals of their party through legislation and program initiatives. Although many people do not think of it this way, registering in a party makes them members of a political party. Political parties want as many people involved as possible. Most members take a fairly passive role, simply voting for their party's candidates at election time. Some become more active and work as officials in the party or volunteer to persuade people to vote. The most ambitious members may decide to run for office themselves (Staniland, 2014).

According to International Republican Institute (2020), political parties are critical to democratic governance, linking citizens and government and acting as a platform for citizens to influence government. Important functions of political parties in democracy include promoting the

interests of their members, gaining and maintaining power within the government and proposing policy options. Political parties are most effective when they bring together like-minded citizens with common political preferences and goals.

Political parties can also play an important role in brokering an end to conflict, mediating bargaining over the nature of the political settlement and shaping the post-conflict state. Indeed, parties are unique among political institutions in their potential to give political expression to grievances that may otherwise be expressed through violence and to aggregate and articulate the interests of citizens during both peace negotiations and transition processes, as well as more broadly in post-conflict political governance and state building. However, in practice political parties frequently do not play such a positive role and in some contexts actively undermine peace. Such failure is due both to constraints imposed by the broader political and institutional context and to the internal weaknesses of parties themselves (Morse, 2019).

Political parties have difficulties fulfilling the obligations of their roles. They are frequently poorly institutionalized, with limited membership, weak policy capacity and shifting bases of support; they often rely on narrow personal, regional or ethnic ties, rather than reflecting society as a whole; they are typically organizationally thin and insufficiently funded, coming to life only at election time; they seldom have coherent ideologies or policy agendas; and they are frequently unable to ensure disciplined collective action in parliament (Kant, 2016). Kumar and De Zeeuw (2018) adds that political parties have limited organizational or political capacity, little presence beyond the capital, and limited membership; and are only active at election time. They often do not have coherent ideologies or policy agendas to which citizens can hold them to account, lack internal democracy, and are highly personalized around charismatic leaders who monopolize power and do not tolerate dissent. Moreover, the precarious financing of many parties in conflict-affected contexts limits their ability to reach out to citizens and makes them more likely to seek illicit funding sources. This institutional, policy and financial weakness limits parties' ability to deliver effectively on any of their functions. Pouligny (2015) indicates that, political parties do not emerge as mass-based movements with strong aggregation and articulation functions. Instead, they are often the result of elite initiatives with a focus not on aggregation and articulation but on the representative functions of parties, providing candidates for elected and government positions.

As multiparty elections have spread to become the global norm over the past two decades, violence during electoral periods has become a significant concern for domestic and international observers alike. Electoral violence accompanies about a quarter of all national elections worldwide (Hafner-Burton, Hyde & Jablonski, 2014). The ramification of electoral violence on affected societies goes beyond its significant human and economic toll. It holds the potential not only to shape immediate electoral outcomes, but also to influence the overall prospects for democratic transition and consolidation (Fjelde & Höglund, 2016).

Kenya has it has been a multi-party system since 1992 and one of the ruling coalition's consists of several parties. Kenya had over 200 registered political parties as of November 2017. Following the implementation of several Political Parties Acts starting with the 31 December 2008 act, the number of political parties has been coming down considerably since. Article 1A of the Constitution affirms that: "The Republic of Kenya shall be a multiparty democratic state". The Constitution, tautologically and unhelpfully, defines a political party as "a political party which is duly registered under any law which requires political parties to be registered, and

which has complied with the requirements of any law as to the constitution or rules of political parties nominating candidates for the National Assembly" (Constitution, Article 123). The definitions supplied by the Political Parties Act 2007, 2, highlight the associative character of parties, their function within the electoral system and the complexity of relationships between them: "corporate member" means a registered political party which is a member of another registered political party... "political party" means any association or organization of persons which has for its objects or purposes or one or more of its objects or purposes the proposing or supporting of candidates for national or local authority elections, with a view to forming or influencing the formation of the Government of Kenya or any local authority within Kenya: Provided that in the case of a political party whose membership includes corporate members, each such member shall, unless the context otherwise requires, be deemed to be a political party within the meaning of this Act (Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

In Kenya, the formation and existence of political parties is mainly based on ethnicity remain strong; and hence political coalitions are formed based on ethnic backgrounds of the respective party leadership. Since 1963, Kenya has experienced various forms of political and social unrest. The post-election turmoil of late 2007 and early 2008 was not an anomaly. Similar election-related violence in Kenya occurred in 1992 and 1997. In the intertribal clashes that erupted in 2007 during the standoff between the incumbent, Moi Kibaki, and the challenger, Raila Odinga, approximately 1,300 people lost their lives and hundreds of thousands were displaced. Widespread sexual violence against women also marred the post-election landscape.

Kenya has made efforts to avoid a repeat of this violence. Legislation has been introduced that heavily penalizes incumbents who use public resources to support their election campaigns. The proposed legislation also delineates the grounds and process by which parliamentarians can be removed from office in order to check abuses of power and other inappropriate behavior. Under the bill, the winner of the presidency would be required to win more than 50 percent of votes cast, as well as more than 25 percent of the vote in twenty-four counties, thus seeking to militate against the tribal or ethnic chauvinism of any one candidate.  Kenya has also integrated peacebuilding and conflict prevention elements in its development programs in order to identify vulnerable communities and promote tolerance of diversity.  Other than the government, it is important to understand the role of political parties in promoting peaceful elections in Kenya.

**Statement of Problem**

Kenya has experienced recurrent election-related violence since the mid-1990s. A key driver of conflict and violence has been a deep-rooted fear among Kenya's largest ethnic groups of exclusion from influence and power, and thus from access to resources. Exclusion is exacerbated by politicized ethnicity, corruption and clienteles, which undermine issue-based politics and leave peace and reform processes open to elite capture (Bhatta, 2012). In the early 1990s, sustained pressure by an active civil society succeeded in replacing the one-party system with a multiparty system. Nevertheless, almost all the political parties are losing their legitimacy because of their lack of internal democracy, bad governance, and corruption, the game of power sharing and not committing to the national interest. Dispute in elections provide fertile ground for polarization, inter-party conflict, widespread violence, mistrust, and intolerance. These factors pose a threat to sustainable peace. Political parties are often instrumental in causing disturbance following controversial elections. They often engage in electoral violence to prevent an unfavorable outcome (Ogula, 2018).

The first multi-party national elections conducted after the repeal of Section 2A were accompanied by an upsurge in tribal animosities, especially in Rift Valley Province. The trend continued to varying degrees through subsequent elections. Multi-party elections in Kenya have therefore been associated with ethnic tensions, bloodshed, and carnage. The 2007–08 post-election violence, for example, led to over 1,300 people dying, many more being injured, and 650,000 being displaced, not to mention the significant loss of property and the disruption to economic activities in the neighboring countries with which Kenya conducts trade (Oyugi, 2015). Considering these circumstances, it was surprising to note how relatively peaceful the 2013 national elections were. The reasons for this turn of events have become a matter of interest to policymakers not only in Africa but all over the world, especially where early-stage democracies are emerging. The factors which led to the Kenyan elections being relatively peaceful have remained undocumented. Of these factors, the role of the political parties in ensuring peaceful elections in Kenya has also remained undocumented.

Fjelde (2020) researched on political party strength and electoral violence. Taylor (2018) researched on best practices for the prevention of electoral violence. Owusu (2017) did an assessment on the national peace council in Ghanaian elections.  The reviewed studies show that there has been little focus on the role of political parties in promoting peaceful elections. Hence this study seeks to assess the role of political parties in promoting peaceful elections in Kenya.

**Objective of the Study**

The study aim was to assess the role of political parties in promoting peaceful elections in Kenya.

**Theoretical Review**

This study will be anchored on the theory of conflict transformation. Some of the proponents of theory of conflict transformation are Lederach (1981), Galtung (1969) and Paffenholz (2009). Conflict transformation is a long-term process that requires changes in personal, structural and cultural aspects of conflict over long term. Conflict Transformation not only seeks to re-establish the status quo but it is a long-term outcome, process and structure-oriented effort with a strong emphasis on justices and social change. The theory stresses the necessity of transforming cultural and asymmetric power imbalances between the conflicting parties in order to move to sustainable peace. In order to be successful, conflict transformation therefore has to happen on all levels of the society simultaneously and independently (Zistel, 2009).

Zistel (2009) argues that conflict transformation builds on culturally appropriate models of conflict mediation aimed at empowerment of the people and recognition. Since many societies have their own mechanisms and techniques for preventing, managing and resolving conflicts, efforts for transforming conflicts need therefore to include, respect and promote resources from within the society and the peace building initiatives employed build on the society's existing cultural frameworks. This is because culture is a critical resource in the management of conflict. It provides the people with the means to own the process and solve their own problems, 'African renaissance.' Many religious institutions have promoted local and indigenous conflict mechanism projects.

Lederach (2001) provides a substantive and analytical framework that addresses need for comprehensive and strategic approach to transformation of deep-rooted conflicts, as well as,

integrated frameworks for building peace and sustained reconciliation. He visualizes Peace building as a structural process that allows conflict transformation to take place at three key levels of leadership; top, middle level, and grassroots level. This provides a contextual understanding of the activities and approaches which support the participation and involvement of the population in conflict from "top to bottom and from bottom to top" in building peace in post conflict societies.

The theory provides a practical method of underpinning peace building activities that are based on insight into and the resources available to the society at large. It proposes a set of peace building activities through which leadership at all levels-top, middle, and grassroots-would coordinate their various efforts towards a reconciliatory, common process that will enable the building of relationships and trust, cooperation and societal cohesion.

**Literature review**

A number of strategies are used to manage and prevent electoral violence. These strategies are to a varying degree applied by different actors. Apart from political parties there are other actors involved in managing and preventing electoral violence who include local and international monitoring and observer missions; and national, regional and local dispute resolution and mediation missions. The bodies involved in these activities range from public authorities, political parties, an electoral commission, religious organizations, civil society, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and traditional authorities such as chiefs or clan leaders. Five main types of strategies can be identified (Paris, 2014). First, the presence of monitors can be instrumental in preventing electoral violence through naming and shaming mechanisms and by creating awareness of tensions building up. Second, mediation can be carried out in high-tension situations to solve an ongoing election-related dispute. Third, the legal framework and institutional design provides the basis for combating impunity and for creating conditions discouraging violence. Fourth, law enforcement highlights the deterring function of security forces. Fifth, voter-focused strategies emphasize the importance of long-term prevention though the cultivation of democratic norms and tolerance in society at large (Höglund, 2016).

According to Lyons (2016), the multiplicity of actors involved in prevention and management of electoral violence requires great coordination and role division among local and international actors and among international actors. The prevalence of involving different actors in electoral security and conflict management means that there is a risk of overlap. It is unfortunately no guarantee against some areas being neglected. Such gaps are often due to a lack of coordination in the planning and division of tasks and areas of importance for violence management. There are several positive examples where electoral monitoring has been coordinated among international, domestic agencies and hundreds of civil society organizations to successfully monitor an election. If an independent electoral commission has capacity and legitimacy, such an agency is particularly suited for such coordinating activities. However, the lack of sufficient coordination remains a challenge in many situations of electoral violence (Lyons, 2015).

Fjelde (2020) researched on political party strength and electoral violence. The relationship between political party strength and electoral violence was studied by combining global data on the overall strength of political parties in the polity with data on violence across all national elections from 1946 to 2010. The statistical analysis accounts for a number of potentially confounding variables related to formal political institutions and election-specific characteristics.

The results point to a statistically significant and substantively important association between strong political parties and a reduced risk of violent electoral conflict.

Taylor (2018) researched on best practices for the prevention of electoral violence. Interviews showed that the inclusion of the politicians themselves was key in developing successful violence mitigation strategies. The research further showed that prevention efforts are more successful when practitioners are able to gain access to and adopt methods successfully used in other countries. This strongly suggests that successful investments in secure elections in one country can have positive spillover effects in other countries via transnational civil society networks.

Cottle and Thapa (2017) studied the role of political parties in Nepal's peace building process.  This study analyzed the political reality and the paralyzed peace process in Nepal. It also examined how the activities of political parties have deliberately failed to bring the process of peace building to Nepal. The country's political economy has been worsening in since the end of the insurgency. Except for the re-integration of the Maoists, the nation's political system has failed to build the peace. The numerous political parties urge a constant struggle for power to fulfil their own wishes and interests. The political parties are the driving force in Nepal so they could and should solve the economic and social problem and build the peace in Nepal. They should participate in the peace building process. The fate of the nation to make the political parties and its peace remain their responsibility positively and practically.

Owusu (2017) did an assessment on the national peace council in Ghanaian elections. This study focused on national infrastructure for peace and elections. The study assesses the role played by the National Peace Council (NPC) in promoting peace during elections in Ghana. To achieve its aims the study used the semi-structured interview methods to ascertain the perspectives of informants from three groups namely the NPC, the political parties in Ghana and public-students group. The concepts used in the study included peacebuilding, local or 'national' ownership and infrastructure for peace. The findings of the study indicated that the activities and mechanisms of the NPC promoted peace during the elections. Also, the study discovered from informant's perspective that, the violence that characterizes the elections in Ghana is attributed to factors related to the Ghanaian political culture and political policies that obstruct peace work during elections.

Makahamadze (2019) researched on the role of political parties in peacebuilding following disputed elections in Africa in Zimbabwe. Using Zimbabwe as a case study, the study discussed the challenges and opportunities that political parties experience in peacebuilding. Most of the elections in Zimbabwe have been characterized by fraud and violence, mainly perpetrated by the ruling party against the opposition. The study argues that durable peace in Zimbabwe might be achieved if the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), and the opposition parties work together to facilitate reconciliation, justice, forgiveness, and political reform. Without collaborative peacebuilding, Zimbabwe is unlikely to achieve sustainable peace.

Bennett (2015) researched on resilience in the face of post-election violence in Kenya. The analyses are based on conditional change logistic regression models using data from a unique longitudinal survey of the health and wellbeing of older people. The results show that maintaining or increasing formal local networks reduced the detrimental effects of the post-

election violence for older people's wellbeing, whilst household environment and informal local and non-local networks did not influence the relationship.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework is used to show the connection between the study variables. In this study it will be used to show the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This is as shown in Figure 1.
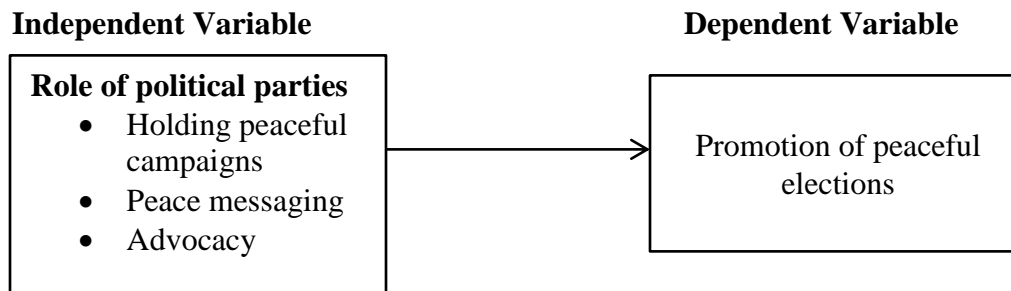
**Independent Variable**                                      **Dependent Variable**

**Role of political parties**
- Holding peaceful campaigns
- Peace messaging
- Advocacy

Promotion of peaceful elections

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

**Research methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey. Descriptive survey design enables the researcher to summarize and organize data in an effective way. It provides tools for describing collections of statistical observations and reducing information to an understandable form. This study adopted a descriptive research design since the design helps to understand the characteristics of a group in a given situation, offer ideas for further probe and research and help to make certain decisions. The study was conducted in political party's offices in Nairobi County. The study targeted the secretary general of the political parties. According to the registrar of political parties, there are 65 registered political parties in Kenya. The study population was 65 respondents. The census method was used to select the study respondents. The study sample size was 65 respondents. The study used questionnaires to collect data. It had open and close ended questions. The questionnaires were used since they allow collection of data from a large audience and they are cost effective. The researcher administered the questionnaires to the respondents. The emailing method was used in administration of questionnaires. All questionnaires received were referenced and items in the questionnaire coded to facilitate data entry. The study generated both quantitative and qualitative data. Descriptive statistics data analysis method was applied to analyze numerical data gathered using closed ended questions. Pearson R correlation was used to measure strength and the direction of linear relationship between variables. Multiple regression models were fitted to the data in order to test the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Data was presented in form of tables.

**Data Analysis and Presentation**

The study targeted 65 respondents from where 61 filled in and returned forming a response rate of 94%. This is excellent according to Mugenda (2009).

**Descriptive Statistics**

The respondents were required to indicate the level they agree with the following statements about the role of political parties in promoting peaceful elections in Kenya. Scale 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-moderate, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree. Results were as shown in Table 1.

The findings show that the political part participate in the reform of election laws as shown by a mean of 3.986 and standard deviation of 0.882, civic and voter education as shown by a mean of 3.962 and standard deviation of 0.972, observing elections and monitoring election violence as shown by a mean of 3.986 and standard deviation of 0.925, holding peaceful campaigns without unnecessary physical or verbal attacks on opponents as shown by a mean of 3.906 and standard deviation of 0.936, raising awareness of social cohesion and maintaining peace during elections as shown by a mean of 3.927 and standard deviation of 1.044, desisting from making wild and unsubstantiated allegations against political opponents and other election stakeholder as shown by a mean of 3.847 and standard deviation of 0.811, Refraining from using indecent or abusive language on air as shown by a mean of 3.840 and standard deviation of 0.829, urging supporters to be tolerant as shown by a mean of 3.837 and standard deviation of 0.923, participating in election management as shown by a mean of 3.899 and standard deviation of 0.889, advocacy as shown by a mean of 3.809 and standard deviation of 0.941 and encouraging followers to maintain peace during and after elections as shown by a mean of 3.792 and standard deviation of 0.866.

**Table 1: The Role of Political Parties**

| Statements | Mean | Std. Dev |
|---|---|---|
| Participating in the reform of election laws | 3.986 | 0.882 |
| Participating in election management | 3.899 | 0.889 |
| Raising awareness of social cohesion and maintaining peace during elections | 3.927 | 1.044 |
| Civic and voter education | 3.962 | 0.972 |
| Advocacy | 3.809 | 0.941 |
| Observing elections and monitoring election violence | 3.986 | 0.925 |
| Holding peaceful campaigns without unnecessary physical or verbal attacks on opponents | 3.906 | 0.936 |
| Encouraging followers to maintain peace during and after elections | 3.792 | 0.866 |
| Refraining from using indecent or abusive language on air | 3.840 | 0.829 |
| Urging supporters to be tolerant | 3.837 | 0.923 |
| Desisting from making wild and unsubstantiated allegations against political opponents and other election stakeholder | 3.847 | 0.811 |

The respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement on the following statements about promoting peaceful elections in Kenya. Using the scale 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-moderate, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree. The findings were as shown in Table 2.

The respondents agreed that promoting peaceful elections helps to promote well-being of communities as shown by a mean of 3.944 and standard deviation of 0.887, promoting peaceful elections helps the communities to progress as shown by a mean of 3.865 and standard deviation of 0.960 and promoting peaceful elections helps to solve problems more easily as shown by a mean of 3.830 and standard deviation of 0.892.

**Table 2: Promoting Peaceful Elections**

| Statements | Mean | Std. Dev |
|---|---|---|
| Promoting peaceful elections helps to promote well-being of communities | 3.944 | 0.887 |
| Promoting peaceful elections helps the communities to progress | 3.865 | 0.960 |
| Promoting peaceful elections helps to solve problems more easily | 3.830 | 0.892 |

## Conclusions

The study found that the political parties raise awareness of social cohesion and maintaining peace during elections, the actors desist from making wild and unsubstantiated allegations against political opponents and other election stakeholder, actors refrain from using indecent or abusive language on air, supporters are urged to be tolerant, participating in election management and followers are urged to maintain peace during and after elections. The study concludes that political parties play a significant role promoting peaceful elections in Kenya.

## Recommendations

The study found that political parties play a significant role promoting peaceful elections in Kenya. The study recommends that there is need for the political parties to publicly indicate their desire for peaceful elections by signing and enforcing a code of appropriate conduct and by including the democratic values of respect for dignity and human rights in their public speeches and their actions. Internal censure of their members (even prominent ones) for any language or action that threatens social cohesion would be a good approach for political parties to provide credible evidence of their desire for peaceful elections.

Electoral violence needs to be continuously addressed. Conventionally, there is a focus on national and general elections. For instance, electoral violence monitoring and citizen's and party education programmes are concentrated on the period ahead of such elections. However, by-elections are sometimes even more prone to violence than the general elections, and violence can also take place between elections. Therefore, to prevent and manage seriously the causes and consequences of violence, a policy for electoral violence management especially monitoring and voter-centred strategies needs to be carried out on a long-term basis and continue between general elections.

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