

Electoral Violence Prevention:

The Role of Brokers in Kenya's 2013 General Elections

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Abstract

This research explores initiatives believed to have played a role in the prevention of electoral violence in Kenya's 2013 general elections. Intending to contribute to ongoing debates on electoral violence prevention, the study focuses on brokerage dynamics of violence prevention at the community level, as a way of understanding the significance such a topic can have if placed in peace research. It is inspired by studies that have shown the significant role of informal actors – such as brokers, also called gate-keepers, middlemen, go-betweens, or intermediaries in other contexts – in areas of governance and peacebuilding in countries characterized by weak institutions and distrust in the state. In these settings, governing elites and populations rely on services of brokers, the former in order to regain lost loyalty, the latter for accessing patronage that they would not otherwise. Hence, the main research question this study tries to respond to is formulated as: How can we understand the role of brokers in electoral violence prevention in Kenya?

Findings underlying this exploration consists of semi-structured interviews conducted with residents and actors whose actions are believed to have contributed to the prevention of electoral violence in 2013 in areas with a history of violence in Kenya. The interview data are complemented by other primary and secondary sources such as reports from special commissions of inquiry on electoral violence in Kenya, and scholarly articles on the 2013 peaceful elections.

Studying practices of electoral violence prevention at the community level, through the lenses of the brokerage literature, has helped to add to discussions on 'the local turn in peacebuilding' by destabilizing the tendency to search for distinct or unique categories of peacebuilders. It has allowed for underscoring the messiness of violence-affected arena, where each and every actor is able to find a room for maneuvering in entangled social relations. On the basis of this, findings of this study suggest focusing on practices and mechanisms that help actors manage to play their role of connectors, rather than seeking to identify the permanent 'good' or 'bad' that is hardly ever accessible in the real world.

Key words: Electoral violence prevention; peacebuilding; brokers; brokerage practices; Kenya's 2013 elections