

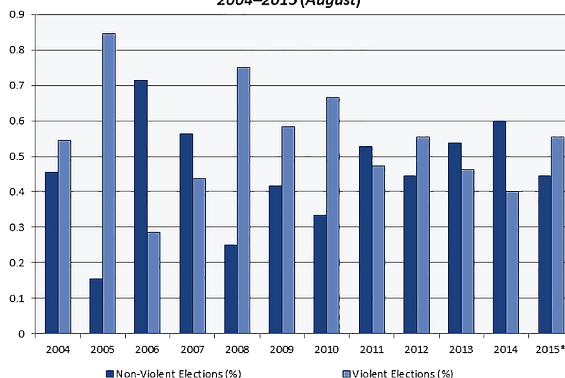
WHY ELECTION VIOLENCE IN AFRICA MATTERS

By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

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Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard is a Research Staff Member in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses. Her new [book](#), *Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: Causes and Consequences* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2015), is out now.

Elections in Africa
2004–2015 (August)



*Through August 25, 2015. (Source: Data compiled by Stephanie Burchard.)

TANZANIA: TENSIONS HIGH IN ZANZIBAR AHEAD OF OCTOBER VOTE

By Alexander Noyes

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Ali Mohammed Shein, President of Zanzibar, taking the oath of office administered by the Chief Justice of Zanzibar, at the Amaan Stadium, Zanzibar, Tanzania, November 3, 2010. (Source: AP Photo/Ali Sultan.)

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Electoral Violence Patterns and Trends in Africa

In a [book](#) released this month, I systematically examine the nature of electoral violence and its causes and consequences in sub-Saharan Africa. Based on an analysis of the more than 300 elections held in 47 African countries from 1990 through August 2015, 56 percent (171) can be characterized as “violent,” with reports of harassment by security forces, intimidation by political operatives, and more extreme forms of violence taking place either before or after the election.

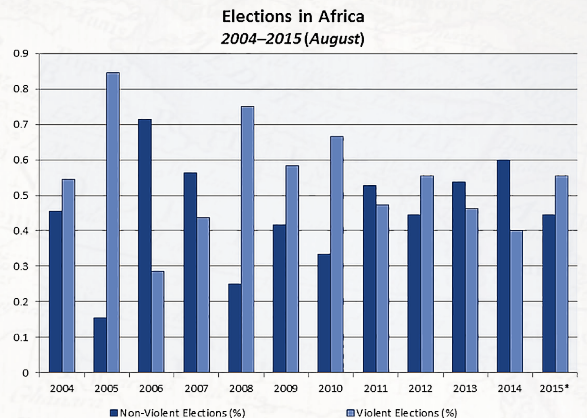
While most electoral violence does not escalate beyond harassment and intimidation, in a subset of these violent elections, roughly 40 percent of elections (or 20 percent of all elections held in Africa) experienced serious incidents such as politically motivated assassinations, widespread violence, or both. In a few cases (Angola 1992, Burundi 2015, Congo-Brazzaville 1993, Cote d’Ivoire 2010, Nigeria 2011, Zimbabwe 2008), prolonged civil conflict broke out. For reference, it is estimated that [globally](#), approximately 20 percent of elections experience some form of violence, with violence occurring most frequently in South Asia and Africa.

Some violence is strategic, or planned, while some is incidental, or spontaneous. I estimate the breakdown of violence by type to be about 40 percent strategic and 60 percent incidental. These numbers are imprecise—the planners and perpetrators of violence often attempt to make planned violence appear spontaneous to evade detection by law enforcement officials, media outlets, and international election observers and monitors.

Pre-election violence is generally less intense but occurs more frequently. More than 95 percent of electoral violence occurs either before or on Election Day. Post-election violence has only taken place in a handful of cases and almost never without pre-election violence preceding it. Unfortunately, outbreaks of post-election violence tend to be extreme, such as the [2007–2008 Kenyan post-election violence](#), where nearly 1,500 died over the course of two months, and the [2011 Nigerian case](#), where at least 800 died in the days following the general election.

As Scott Straus and Charlie Taylor [argue](#), ruling parties are often the primary agents of violence. The party in power is often not the only actor responsible for electoral violence, however. Opposition parties and civil protesters have also been known to engage in violent tactics. Specifically, politicians of all partisan persuasions have engaged in violence in countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, and [Zimbabwe](#).

In the 1990s, the first decade of the continent’s large-scale return to multiparty elections after decades of dictatorship and autocracy, 60 percent of elections were violent. From 2000 to 2009, 57 percent of elections were violent. From 2010 through the present, 50 percent of elections have been violent. Thus, there appears to have been a modest decrease in electoral violence since the 1990s, but it is worrisome that roughly 50 percent of elections still involve violence. Furthermore, in 2015 alone, five of the nine (56 percent) elections conducted in sub-Saharan Africa to date have been violent. Elections



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are scheduled in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Tanzania, South Sudan, and Sao Tome and Principe for the latter half of 2015. The patterns of the past 25 years of elections held in Africa suggest that at least half of these upcoming elections will experience some form of violence.

Why Does Electoral Violence Occur and Why Does It Matter?

Research has identified several political factors correlated with electoral violence: certain [electoral systems](#) associated with a winner-take-all mentality; [co-opted electoral management bodies](#); [electoral fraud](#); and weak adherence to the [rule of law](#). Many of these factors are found in newly democratizing countries, and many newly democratizing countries are found on the African continent.

So why does electoral violence matter? What does it affect? First, there is the normative argument that violence of any type is counterproductive and should be acted against when possible. Related to this argument is the idea that although electoral violence may happen, in many cases it does not have to. Much electoral violence could be prevented either through improved electoral management or enhanced trust in political institutions.

Finally, and most instrumentally, electoral violence is [inimical to democratic consolidation](#). Individual voters, the building blocks of democracy, are adversely affected by electoral violence. Electoral violence results in lower levels of democratic satisfaction at the individual level, and those who fear electoral violence exhibit lower levels of trust in relevant political actors and electoral institutions. These attitudinal effects can translate into regime vulnerability as violence undermines a government's legitimacy. Electoral violence may result in short-term victories for some, but in the long term, democracy is the loser.

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History of Electoral Conflict Leads to Government of National Unity

Zanzibar, made up primarily of the islands of Unguja and Pemba, has a long history of election-related violence and political polarization between the ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), and the Civic United Front (CUF), the main opposition party on the islands. Since the move to multiparty democracy, the 1995, 2000, and 2005 elections all suffered from violence and allegations of fraud by the opposition. After a number of failed [attempts](#) at power-sharing, the leaders of CCM and CUF in the lead-up to the 2010 elections agreed to form a government of national unity (GNU). The idea was put to a referendum, in which the GNU gained the support of 66 percent of voters. A very close but peaceful vote in the 2010 elections resulted in CCM's Ali Mohamed Shein winning the presidency and CUF's Seif Shariff Hamad, the second-place finisher, taking the position of first vice president. The 19-member cabinet was allocated on a proportional basis, with [nine](#) members from CUF.

Despite several high-level rifts, lingering resentment from hardliners in both parties, and a number of incidents of political violence at the hands of the Islamist group [UAMSHO](#), the early years of the GNU were viewed as a [success](#). The GNU was hailed for bringing about Zanzibar's first peaceful multiparty election and for significantly lessening the long-running political tensions in Zanzibar. Both CCM and CUF praised progress made under the deal. President Shein [attributed](#) newfound unity and stability on the islands to the GNU. Second Vice President Seif Ali Iddi, also of CCM, echoed these sentiments, [asserting](#), "We worked collectively in the government regardless of our political differences. We enjoyed peace and stability in the islands. . . ." First vice president Hamad also [maintained](#), "the top leadership is working very, very closely together. The President, myself, the Second Vice President, we always consult."

Renewed Tensions Ahead of Vote

Such consensus has been steadily eroding of late, however, with recent disagreements escalating tensions before the October election. As outlined in the October 30, 2014, edition of *Africa Watch*, Tanzania's contentious [constitutional review](#) process threatened the GNU in May 2014, as CUF favored increased autonomy for Zanzibar while CCM was adamant about retaining the status quo. The rift between the two parties reached a head when some senior CCM members [called](#) for a new referendum on the GNU to see if people were still in favor of the arrangement. Although a constitutional referendum was eventually [postponed](#), debates over the future of the constitution have remained politically salient as acrimony continues between CCM and CUF over preparations for the October elections.

In May 2015, Hamad held a press conference [alleging](#) that CCM was planning to rig the elections. In June, CUF staged a [walkout](#) from Zanzibar's House of Representatives over alleged flaws in the voter registration process, including intimidation by security forces. Hamad was subsequently [barred](#) from attending a session in the House. In July, amid rising incidents of political violence at the hands of security forces and party-affiliated militias, opposition parties [refused](#) to sign an election code of

ethics drawn up by the Zanzibar electoral commission. In a letter to the police chief and the head of the electoral commission, CUF [cited](#) seven incidents of intimidation and violence aimed at opposition supporters in the run-up to the vote. During a campaign event for his reelection, Shein rejected allegations of plans to rig the election, [asserting](#), "It is very sad that already some candidates are saying that the elections will be manipulated, how? Elections are always transparent, with both party agents and police present. Why do you start complaining of rigging elections now? This is political immaturity."

Conclusion

Despite a peaceful election in 2010 and initial progress on political reconciliation under the GNU, political tensions have returned to Zanzibar, a development that bodes ill for prospects of a peaceful election period. The October elections will present the GNU framework with its toughest test yet. Unlike the unity governments formed in Kenya and Zimbabwe in 2008, which were transitional in nature, Zanzibar's form of power-sharing is more permanent and difficult to alter, as the GNU mechanism is enshrined in the constitution and was popularly legitimized by the 2010 referendum. That said, while officials from both [CCM](#) and [CUF](#) have expressed their wishes to remain in the GNU framework moving forward, it remains to be seen whether the mechanism will be able to survive a hotly contested election, particularly if there is significant violence.

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