

Elections and Violent Conflict in Kenya: Making Prevention Stick

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To prevent a recurrence of the widespread violence that left 1,100 dead and 650,000 displaced in the aftermath of the December 2007 Kenyan elections, Kenya and the broader international community initiated a multifaceted peacebuilding effort in the lead-up to the country's March 2013 elections.

When election day passed without widespread violence, international and regional actors lauded the electoral process as “peaceful” and “successful.” But the Kenyan population express a more qualified view about the elections and point to palpable tension, fear, and anxiety felt throughout the country to explain the perceived stability at the surface. To test the international success narrative, this report draws on a series of dialogues conducted across ten counties in Kenya. The dialogues were designed to understand how ordinary Kenyans experienced the elections, identify the factors that constrained behavior and prevented mass violence, and determine whether relevant lessons can be drawn not just for Kenya's 2017 elections but also for upcoming elections around the world.

About the Report

This report aims to complement existing postelection analysis by examining local experiences of Kenya's 2013 general elections, evaluating the various factors that worked to prevent widespread violent conflict and assessing the sustainability of the “relative calm” achieved during the electoral period. The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and its partners, the Constitutional Reform and Education Consortium (CRECO) and the Interparty Youth Forum (IPYF), convened citizen dialogues and conducted key informant interviews to evaluate preventive efforts around the March 2013 general elections in Kenya. Through qualitative research, USIP and its partners collected original data from November to mid-December 2013 in ten carefully selected counties across Kenya—Marsabit, Embu, Nyeri, Nakuru, Uasin Gishu, Bungoma, Kisumu, Nyamira, Mombasa, and Nairobi. The citizen views collected offer valuable insights into popular attitudes and the factors that influenced behavior during the electoral process. This report is part of USIP's broader commitment to peace in the Horn of Africa and thematic focus on preventing electoral violence.

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