

Analysing mediation effectiveness in election-related violence prevention

Session leads:

Fabio Bargiacchi, Executive Director, ECES, fabio.bargiacchi@eces.eu

Victoria Florinder, Election Conflict Management Advisor, ECES, victoria.florinder@eces.eu

Elections are often perceived as being synonymous with democracy and legitimate political institutions. However, recent electoral processes around the globe, in diverse countries such as the US, Tanzania, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo have been marred by fraud or accusations of irregularities. Many countries still conduct elections with partisan electoral administrators, or electoral systems that are designed to consolidate historical election outcomes and conserve the political status quo, and others employ the electoral platform of referendums to legitimise the political views of a marginal majority of the electorate, as exemplified by the Brexit referendum. It is because elections and the myriad of political sub-processes that comprise them are so complex that they often become the battlegrounds for ideological, social and economic clashes, both endogenous and exogenous to the electoral process itself.

Once an electoral process has generated results, there is a specific temporal window for complaints to be registered and corrective actions to be implemented. However, it is uncommon for electoral bodies to be able to address all of the grievances registered and their drivers. Unresolved political grievances manifest themselves in other ways over time and often contribute to conflict in fragile environments. In some cases, mediation can be an effective tool in the prevention or escalation of electoral conflicts.

From a political economy perspective, elections serve two essential functions: regulating political competition in a peaceful manner and legitimizing the executive and legislative powers. Accordingly an electoral process can be considered successful when both of these outcomes are delivered. Applying a political economy analysis to electoral processes can help to assess whether or not the above criteria will be delivered in a certain context and to understand why or why not. This session aims to better understand the conditions that dictate the potential opportunities and pitfalls of election-related conflict prevention mechanisms. Discussants will shed light on real case studies of electoral conflicts, their root causes and how electoral political economy analysis has helped to assess why and how mediation could be implemented to resolve electoral-political impasses.

Primary discussion question:

In countries with a history of electoral conflict and violence, how and under what circumstances can mediation prevent or manage future conflicts to emerge during the electoral cycle?

Secondary discussion questions

1. Is the efficacy of mediation for resolving electoral conflicts and violence over-estimated?
2. Can empowering the weaker party in elections (in the case of an imbalance of political power) be an effective mediation strategy?
3. Why are elections in some countries a cause of political conflict and social tension?
 - (a) For example, the concept of plebiscite has re-emerged as a distinctive feature in European politics as a way to justify or legitimize the implementation of policies in the absence of a larger public debate, sometimes leading to situations which recall Mill's 'tyranny of the majority'. □
4. Employing ECES' methodology, what criteria can be used to assess the effectiveness of a potential mediation in preventing electoral conflict?

Session objective:

To illustrate the utility of using electoral political economy analysis as a tool to understand whether or not mediation can be effective in preventing conflict in a given electoral context

Desired outputs:

1. A policy-prescriptive paper that also explores a new tool or methodology that can be adapted and applied to different contexts.
2. A in-depth analysis of the current mediation methodologies and the different outcomes for each case studies.