Elections have become the foundation of every representative democracy; allowing the masses to participate in decision making and the selection of duty bearers to superintend over the administration of the state. This therefore makes elections an important component of democracy; largely hailed as the system of government that is able to protect the citizens and result in peace. In largely Africa and elsewhere, elections have become the major fault line in conflicts. The three major phases of the electoral calendar are often characterized by low scale violence or a great conflict as has happened in Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe, Kenya and several other African countries.

Violence is mostly resorted to in elections when parties contestants realize that the climate of opinion in not in their favour. The uses of party vigilante groups, heavily-built men and other technological machinations to subvert the will of the people have become a repetitive phenomenon worthy of investigation. This session therefore explores election as the double-edge sword of modern democracy and its role as a conflict resolution tool and a cause of conflict as well.
The key topics to be covered in this session are:

- **Topic 1:** DEFINITIONS AND CONTESTATIONS
- **Topic 2:** ELECTION AS A CONFLICT RESOLUTION TOOL
- **Topic 3:** ELECTION AS A TRIGGER OF CONFLICT
- **Topic 4:** THE ELECTORAL CYCLE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS
Reading materials


Learning objectives

At the end of the session, students should be able to:

• Understand what election is and the reasons why people vote
• Understand the broader role of elections in democratic peace
• Appreciate how elections could be a cause and solution to conflicts
• Become familiar with the electoral cycle and the potential conflict fault line associated with them
• Appreciate the need for a policy response to electoral violence
DEFINITION AND CONTESTATIONS
Acts or threats of coercion, intimidation or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arises in the context of electoral competition” (UNDP, 2009:4)

“Electoral conflict and violence can be defined as any random or organised act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence an electoral process” (Fischer, 2002:8).
• The struggle for power increases the stakes in elections and can potentially make it violent.

• How the election process and administration is designed, managed and implemented has a strong bearing on electoral violence (Fischer, 2002:2).
Topic Two

ELECTION AS CONFLICT MGT TOOL
ELECTION AS A CONFLICT MGT TOOL

• Elections are not necessarily conflictual. Democracy is equated with majority rule and majority rule is assumed to be best effected by a majority vote (Emerson, 2011: xi)

• Elections therefore provide the means by which competition in society are best channelled into constructive process, via:
  – Giving citizens voice
  – Setting policy agenda
  – Demonstrating the peoples’ will
  – Generating legitimacy

• Elections therefore serve as conflict prevention, management and resolution tool
• Deep-rooted fault lines, rather than elections cause conflict
• Electoral violence is a sub-type of political violence distinguished by:
  - Its timing (close to elections)
  - Its goals (to impact elections, either by changing outcomes or to disrupt the elections themselves)
THE ELECTORAL CYCLE
The Pre-election Phase

This period is usually between 18 to 3 months before the election. Likely triggers of violence may include:

- Skewing the electoral playing field
- Contesting election rules and regulations
- Party primaries and intra-party competition
- Voter registration
Nature of violence

- Harassment of opposition
- Intimidation during EMB appointments
- Intimidation of lawmakers during reform
- Attacking independent judges
- Closing down and bullying free media outlets
- Hostage taking, kidnapping and extortions
- Attack on voters to prevent registration
- Displacement of voters
- Breaching information security
Likely triggers of violence may include:

- Contextual issues
- The candidates seeking power
- The nature of competition
- Regulators of the election process
- The nature of the campaign
Nature of violence

- Attacks on electoral officials
- Attacks on observers
- Intimidation of voters
- Theft or physical attacks on election materials
- Disruptions or fights during the counting of ballot
- Clashes between rival supporters
Post-election phase

This period is between the E-day and the communication of results and in the aftermath.

Likely triggers of violence may include:

- Structural issues/enabling conditions
- Political stakes
- Suppliers of violence
- Triggers
Violence in this phase may come in various forms:

- Results vs. Representation conflicts (Fischer, 2002)

- Between voting and proclamation vs. Post-election outcomes and their aftermath (UNDP, 2009)
A framework aimed at preventing and resolving election conflicts have three components:

- stakeholder analysis;
- electoral threat assessment;
- legal frameworks evaluation.
References

