

Abstract

The history of electoral conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has illustrated several of the distinctive challenges related to the conduct of elections in post-conflict contexts. The research in the context of the PEV-SADC project has shown how the conflict dynamics of first-generation elections differ from those of second-generation elections. The DRC's first-generation elections in 2006 faced enormous security challenges, which are characteristic of immediate post-conflict contexts where transforming armed factions into civilian political actors is a daunting task. The research has also shown that unresolved conflict dynamics in first-generation elections tend to be exported into the next electoral cycle, which makes the arena for contestations for political extremely volatile.

This volatility was compounded by the issue-based nature of electoral politics characteristic of second-generation elections, where a high premium is placed on the quest for peace dividends that include social and economic returns for the new political order. In contrast, while greater emphasis was –understandably– placed on the first-generation elections in 2006, in order to prevent the disintegration of the delicate peace process; the second-generation elections in 2011 reversed these gains in a context of limited international support. The logic of ballots as a substitute for bullets has been deconstructed by the logic of ballots and bullets as strategic complements in instances of electoral violence both in 2006 and in 2011. Future research should attempt to focus on increasing understanding on how political actors such as political parties in post-conflict electoral processes mutate to become guerrilla actors and how this process can be mitigated sustainably through institutional development. Attempts should also be made to generate new knowledge on the use of in violence elections as a strategic complement in post-conflict contexts, in order to develop appropriate mitigation and transformational mechanisms. Second-generation elections remain as critical as first-generation elections in post-conflict contexts and therefore require a similar level of attention from the international community. Lastly, long term institutional capacity building of EMBs and other actors in the electoral process is crucial for peaceful and sustainable electoral processes.