

The Effectiveness of Peace Building Strategies Used in the Management of Electoral Conflict in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya

Otte Zebedee Ekwenye¹
Prof. Crispinous Iteyo²

¹otte@kibu.ac.ke
²citeyo@mmust.ac.ke

¹Lecturer, ²Professor, ¹Department of Social Work and Criminology, Kibabii University, ²Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology

ABSTRACT

In recent times, Kenya has had a series of crises after elections, highlighting the imperative of ongoing endeavors to cultivate enduring peace. Understanding the factors that contribute to electoral conflicts is of utmost importance in formulating efficacious strategies for promoting peace. The primary objective of this study was to assess the efficacy of peace-building measures in the management of election tensions in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya. The study used an evaluation research methodology. After combining basic random and selective sampling methods, a total of 203 respondents and 36 key informants were selected for the study. The data was gathered by means of interview guides and questionnaires. Tables, charts, and figures were used to display the results of the descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative data collected from the questionnaires. Thematic analysis was used to arrange and analyze the results of the interviews. The findings highlight the efficacy of various peace-building strategies in lowering tensions and avoiding violence before, during, and after elections. These strategies include training, mediation, dialogue, grassroots advocacy, sensitization programs, and attitude-transformation initiatives. Furthermore, the study noted that targeting youth, developing confidence in the electoral management body, an early warning system, and collaboration between security forces and political parties is essential for a peaceful election. The study recommends that it would be beneficial for the Government of Kenya to develop a comprehensive framework that can effectively and methodically lead peace-building operations in the region.

Keywords: Causes, Consequences, Electoral Conflicts, Mitigation Strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Although conflicts arising from elections can have far-reaching consequences, research has shown that taking precautions can help mitigate these issues (Alihodžić, 2012). Prevention efforts and early warning systems are crucial components of peace-building programs that aim to avert electoral conflicts, violence, and property destruction. By promoting peace and strengthening the capacity of political organizations, ethnic groups, and individuals across racial lines, these tactics hope to create long-term solutions to disputes that arise during elections (Tschirgi, 2015). Managing conflicts, resolving them, transforming them, and then reuniting afterward are all part of peace-building initiatives.

In order to determine successful ways for establishing peace, it is important to identify triggering variables (Höglund, 2010). These factors include things like the competitive nature of elections, the character of politics, and incentives for political stances. Parties' political choices, strong national and local leadership, and the accessibility of resources like human capital all play a role in how well electoral conflict intervention works (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018).

Strengthening national institutions (election, legal, and political systems) and giving local leaders and civil society the tools they need to resolve conflicts peacefully, through initiatives like capacity building, is an important strategy for avoiding the escalation of electoral conflicts (Khadigala, 2010). According to Bado (2016), democratic civic education initiatives that are supported before, during, and after elections greatly decrease electoral conflict, which in turn promotes democracy. A culture of democratic ideals can be strengthened and an environment conducive to peaceful elections created through voter-focused initiatives, such as public debates and capacity building through voter education.

For honest and fair elections, it's crucial to fortify voting systems (Annan et al., 2012). In order to avoid violations of democratic norms and the use of unlawful or violent tactics to sway elections, it is crucial to enhance the capacity of all parties to cooperate amicably. It is crucial to promote democratic ideals and the rule of law, while also increasing institutional capacity, in order to build peace (Mross, 2019).

In order to reduce conflicts that arise from elections, Alihodžić (2012) argues that public discourses should focus on resolving complaints, particularly over contentious policies and subjects. Elections are a particularly volatile arena for unresolved complaints, especially in multiethnic communities where racial and tribal affiliations are powerful factors in voting behavior (Kelly, 2016). A more harmonious social and political order can be achieved by listening to community complaints throughout the voting process.

In order to create a durable peace associated to elections, the importance of comprehensive peace-building strategies that integrate conflict transformation, logistical support, technical assistance, and resources (Krause et al., 2018). According to Birch and Muchlinski (2018), these strategies entail the implementation of efforts to avert disputes that are associated to elections. These measures are implemented by a variety of actors, including religious leaders, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and peace advocacy groups.

To guarantee legitimate elections, USAID (2013) backs a mix of political and technical measures to lessen electoral conflict, including voter and political stakeholder capacity building and attitude reform programs. A credible and transparent election that everyone can recognize can be achieved through capacity building for voters, electoral actors, security, and electoral management institutions (Alihodžić & Asplund, 2018). Peace message, standards of behavior, and grassroots peace advocacy by civil society groups for stakeholders and voters are all interventions that contribute to creating capacity for peace (Opitz et al., 2013).

However, there is a lack of a comprehensive research agenda to evaluate the effectiveness of various peace-building initiatives, particularly in societies that are divided (Brankovic, 2018). This is despite the fact that there has been an increase in the number of efforts aimed at peacebuilding. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of various peace-building initiatives in Trans-Nzoia County in managing electoral conflict. These strategies include capacity building, grassroots peace advocacy, early warning early reaction, and the adoption of local dispute resolution and mediation processes.

1.1 Research Objective

To evaluate the effectiveness of various peace-building initiatives in managing electoral conflict in Trans-Nzoia County.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Conflict Transformation Theory, which was originally put forth by Lederach in 1997. The theory fundamentally argues that effectively addressing disputes, particularly those that emerge during electoral processes, necessitates the alteration of foundational structures, root causes, or systems that lead to conflict and bias. The crux of conflict transformation theory involves the examination and resolution of the fundamental structures, cultures, and components that contribute to political intolerance and societal conflicts (Montambeault et al., 2019).

Based on the theoretical framework, the process of managing conflicts pertaining to elections is characterized as a continuous endeavor aimed at shifting from unfavorable to favorable connections, mindsets, actions, and systems (Miall, 2004). The idea posits that peace should not be seen solely as the absence of conflict, but rather as a concept that is intricately tied to the nature of relationships. This includes the interactions that occur within society, as well as the manner in which society organizes its social, political, economic, and cultural connections (Marc, 2012). Conflict transformation theory emphasizes the necessity of ongoing endeavors to facilitate favorable alterations in the dynamics and structures that contribute to conflict, with the objective of cultivating a more harmonious and productive societal milieu.

2.2 Empirical Review

Lamidi (2019) posits that the overarching objective of peacebuilding is to turn society into a condition of stable peace by addressing the underlying causes of conflict and nurturing indigenous capacities to address social problems in a peaceful manner. Paffenholz et al. (2017) makes the observation that the original concept of peacebuilding was limited, with the primary emphasis being placed on post-conflict peacebuilding with the goal of preventing a resumption of physical violence. In order to achieve a lasting peace in societies that have been torn apart by conflict, Lederach presented a more comprehensive viewpoint on the process of peacebuilding. He placed an emphasis on social relations and reconciliation (Wright, 2004).

Peacebuilding, on the other hand, continues to be a contentious notion that is interpreted differently by many actors, such as intergovernmental groups and donor states (Barnett et al., 2007). Other actors include international organizations emphasizes on security and military operations, while others place more of an emphasis on socioeconomic development or the political aspect of democratization, institution building, and human rights. According to Autesserre (2017), the upshot of this difference in perception is that different peacebuilding actors employ a variety of techniques and approaches.

According to Akinmoladun and Ottuh (2015), peacebuilding is fundamentally distinct from traditional tactics for conflict resolution, such as peacemaking and peacekeeping. The goal of peacemaking is to bring an end to violent conflict by diplomatic efforts and conversation that does not involve violence, but the goal of peacebuilding is to address the fundamental issues or "root causes" that are at the basis of conflicts (Essien, 2020). It acknowledges that the cessation of hostilities may leave communities more divided than they were before (Bell & O'Rourke, 2010). These assumptions are based on the assumption that in order to transition from an unstable peace to a lasting peace, societal operations and interaction patterns need to alter.

There is a range of possibilities for conflict in civilizations that are comprised of people of different ethnicities. According to Kahl and Larrauri (2013), the process of peacebuilding necessitates the adoption of new mentalities and practices that are adaptable, consultative, collaborative, and founded on a contextual awareness of the underlying causes. In the context of split societies, Lijphart contends that majority rule is not only anti-democratic but also perilous since it might result in the persistent marginalization and discrimination of minority groups (Lijphart, 1981).

In the aftermath of the very contentious elections that took place in 2007 and 2008, religious organizations in Kenya played a crucial part in the process of rebuilding and reconciliation. Through their efforts, they were able to improve ties, raise awareness among the general public about voting procedures, and prevent electoral tension. Through the provision of psychosocial support, food and non-food items, and the facilitation of capacity-building conferences for religious leaders in the areas of mediation and peacebuilding skills, the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCKK) played a significant part in the humanitarian and peacebuilding activities that were undertaken (Welty, 2014).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used an evaluation research methodology to look at how effectively peace-building strategies worked in managing the election conflict in Kenya's Trans-Nzoia County. In Trans-Nzoia County, there were a total of 223,808 head of households. After combining basic random and selective sampling methods, a total of 203 respondents and 36 key informants were selected for the study. A total of 107 community leaders, including 100 heads of household, 70 village elders, 33 religious leaders, 11 chiefs, 5 deputy county commissioners, 1 county commissioner, 5 members of NGOs/CSOs, and 5 sub county commanders, were among the responses. The data was gathered by means of interview guides and questionnaires. Tables, charts, and figures were used to display the results of the descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative data collected from the questionnaires. Utilizing content analytic methodologies, qualitative data derived from interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were examined. Thematic analysis was used to arrange and analyze the results of the interviews and focus group discussions.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Perception about Types of Peace-building Strategies for Curbing Electoral Conflict

The study aimed to assess the respondent's perception about types of peace-building strategies for curbing electoral conflict. To achieve this aim, the respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement. The responses were as presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Perception about Types of Peace-building Strategies for Curbing Electoral Conflict*

Respondents Perception about peace building Strategies applied to curb electoral conflict	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Rank
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	SA+A
Use of grassroots peace advocacy / peace messaging	145 (62.3)	70 (30)	2 (0.9)	13 (5.6)	3 (1.3)	(92.3) 2
Training and institution-building activities	120 (51.5)	20 (8.6)	33 (14.2)	40 (17.2)	20 (8.6)	(60.1) 4
Adoption of early warning systems	46 (19.7)	56 (24)	43 (18.5)	40 (17.2)	48 (10.6)	(43.7) 5
Dialogue and mediation	164 (70.3)	43 (18.5)	6 (2.6)	12 (5.2)	8 (3.4)	(88.8) 3
Use of attitude-transformation programs	46 (19.7)	51 (21.9)	50 (21.5)	77 (33)	9 (3.9)	(41.6) 6
Sensitization programs	153 (65.7)	65 (27.9)	0	14 (6)	1 (0.4)	(93.6) 1

Table 1 shows findings from the respondent's perception about various peace building strategies that can assist to curb electoral conflict. On the use of grassroots peace advocacy and peace messaging methods as peace-building strategy to prevent electoral conflict, 145 (62.3%) strongly agreed that it leads to conflicts during elections followed by 70(30%) who agreed that it causes. In contrast 2(0.9%), 13(5.6%) and 3(1.3%) were not sure, disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. About 120(51.5%) participants strongly agreed that training and capacity building institutions involved in electoral process will assist in preventing electoral conflict. Another 20(8.6%) agreed that it do cause electoral conflict. In contrast, 33(14.2%), 40(17.2%), and 20(8.6%) were not sure, disagreed and strongly disagreed consecutively. Forty six (19.7%) strongly agreed that when employed it has capacity to prevent electoral conflict, 56(24%) agreed that it prevents, 43(18.5%) were not sure, 40(17.2%) disagreed while 48(10.6%) strongly disagreed. Respondents had the highest preference on the use of dialogue and mediation to among other peace-building strategies with 164(70.3%) of them strongly supporting, 43(18.5%) agreeing while 6(2.6%) were not sure. 12 (5.2 %) and 8(3.4%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. Most respondents had negative perceptions on the use of attitude transformation programs to prevent electoral conflict. Out of 203 sampled participants for the study, 77(33%) disagreed on the use of the programmes, 50(21.5%) were not use on how these programmes could impact on electoral conflict while 9(3.9%) strongly disagreed. On the other hand 46(19.7%) strongly agreed that it assists in preventing electoral conflict while 51(21.9%) agreed that it assists. Most respondents 153(65.7%) strongly agreed that these programmes have capacity to prevent electoral conflicts, 65(27.9%) agreed to the finding. However, 14(6%) and 1(0.4%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

The findings of the study highlight that dialogue, mediation, and the implementation of sensitization programs are the strategies most commonly favored for the prevention of electoral conflict. This observation is consistent with the research conducted by Magasu (2016) which underscores the significance of effective peace-building approaches that are based on discussion, mediation, and sensitization initiatives.

4.2 Early Warning System and Electoral Conflict Prevention

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the early warning system and electoral conflict prevention as an electoral strategy to prevent electoral conflict. The results are as shown below in Figure 1.

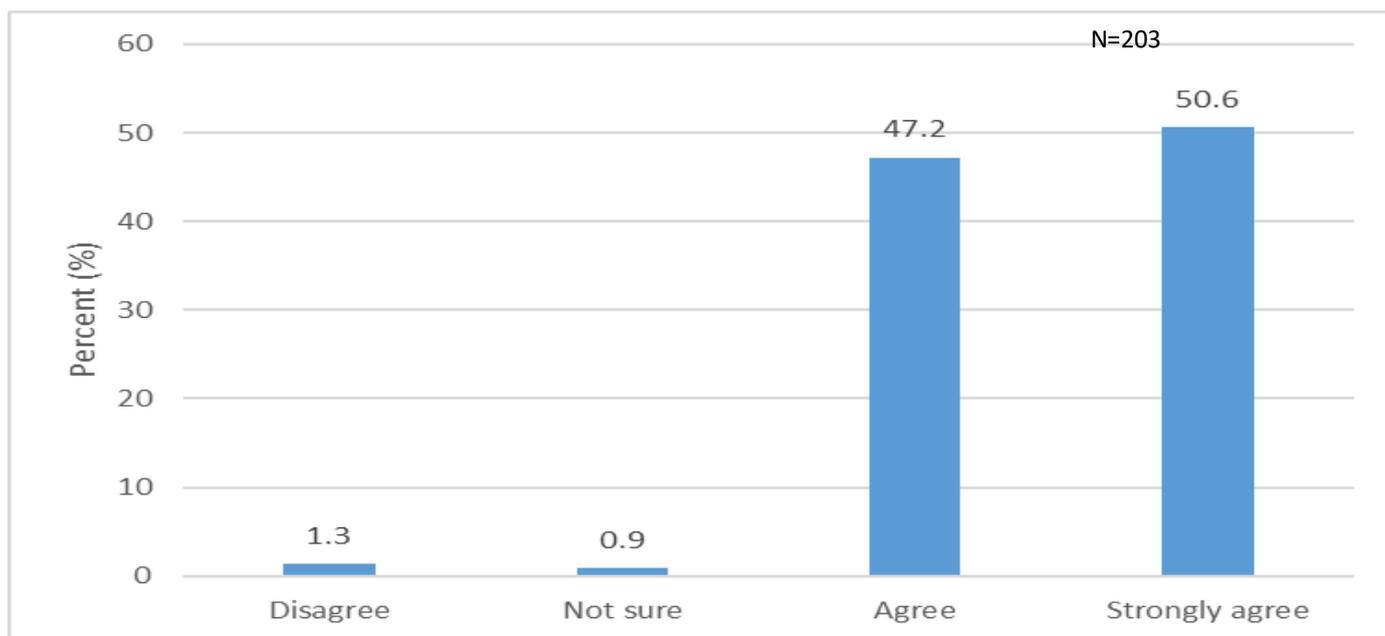


Figure 1
Early Warning System and Electoral Conflict Prevention

Figure 1 indicate that majority of respondents 118 (50.6%) strongly support adoption of early warning systems to assist in keeping track of conflicts before they occur through implementing of preventive measures. Further 110 (47.2%) of the respondents were in support of the strategy. This finding suggests that the adoption of such systems is perceived as a proactive measure to track conflicts before they escalate, aligning with preventive measures that reduce both property and human losses (Babaud & Ndung’u, 2012).

4.3 Targeted Peace Building Activities for the Youths

The respondents were asked to indicate the level of their agreement with targeted peace building activities for the youths as an electoral strategy to prevent electoral conflict. The results are as shown below in Figure 2.

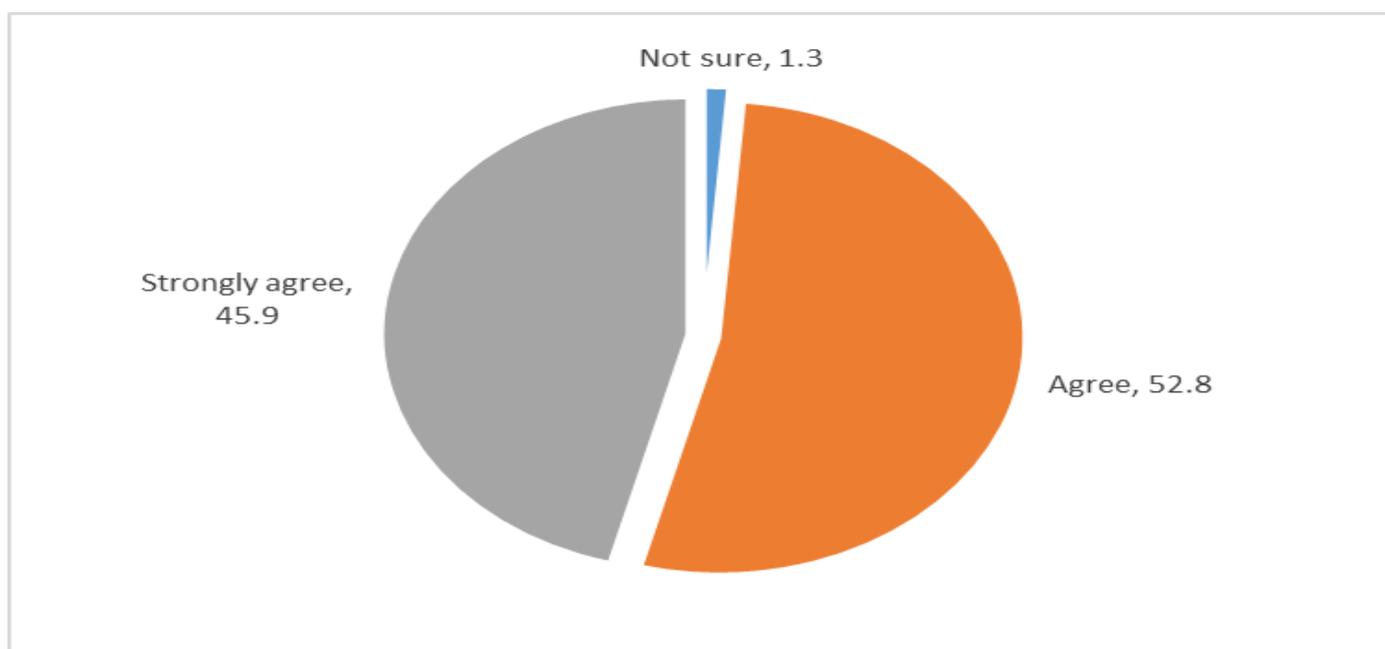


Figure 2
Targeted Peace Building Activities for the Youths

Figure 2 shows that the use of targeted peace building initiatives especially those aiming at the youths to reduce electoral conflict received overwhelming support from the respondents as 123 (52.8%) supported the strategy in addition to 107 (45.9%) who strongly agreed it. This finding can be interpreted that most respondents supported it because it aims at youths who are mostly used by the politicians to cause violence and destruction of property. Therefore, involving youth themselves in the conflict management and resolution activities is in itself a solution.

The results of this study are consistent with those of Akhaabi (2018), who found that young people play many roles in inter-communal violence. These roles include being perpetrators of violence, victims of violence, and peacemakers.

4.4 Training of Election Actors and Institutional Capacity Building

As a means of electoral conflict prevention, we asked respondents to rate how much they agreed that training election actors and increasing institutional capacity was a good idea. The results are as shown below in Figure 3.

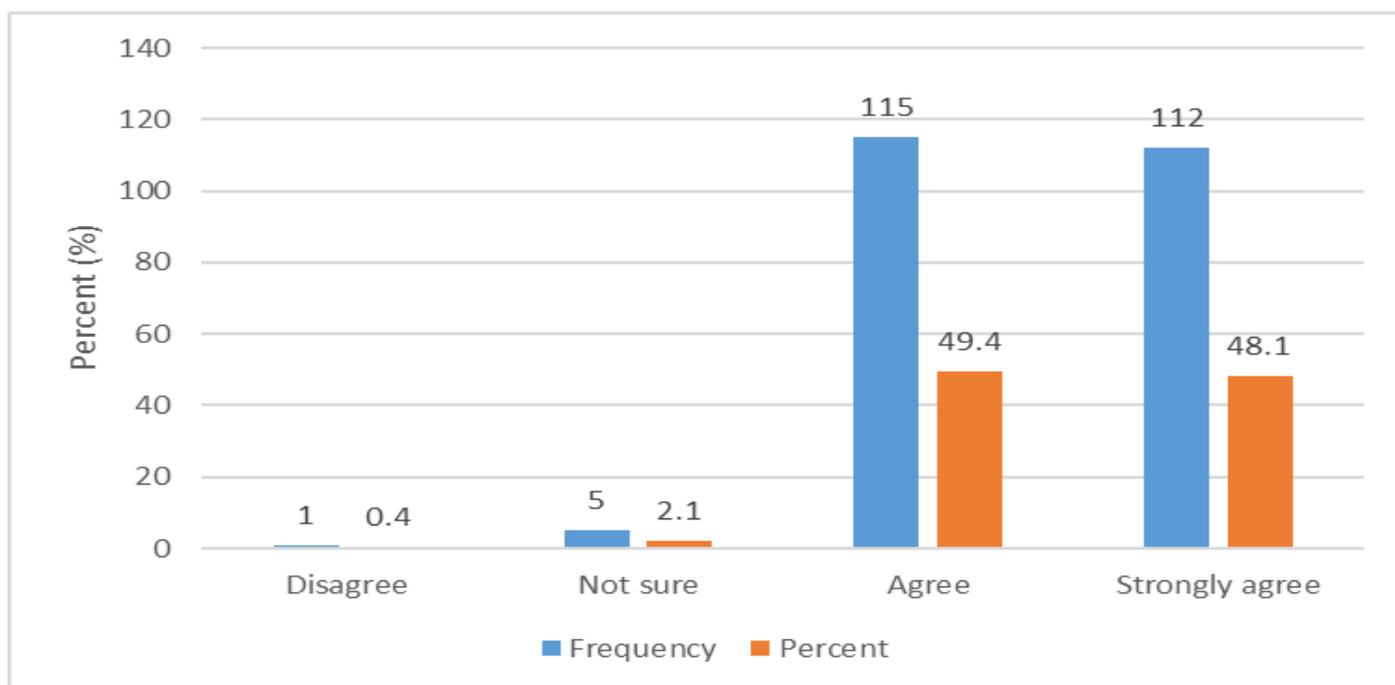


Figure 3
Training of Election Actors and Institutional Capacity Building

Figure 3 shows that majority 115 (49.4%) of the respondents agreed that institutional capacity building and training of election actors such as training EMB staff, sensitization of voters as well as political actors, and training of security actors can reduce incidences of electoral conflicts. In addition, the study shows that 48.1 (112) of the participants strongly agreed institutional capacity building and training of election actors have a positive impact on reducing electoral conflicts. Although training and institution building activities of voters, electoral actors, security and electoral management institutions was not widely used in Trans Nzoia County, most respondents indicated that when applied well it can assist in delivering credible and transparent elections.

This underscores the potential significance of allocating resources towards training initiatives for diverse stakeholders engaged in the electoral process, with the aim of augmenting conflict prevention measures and bolstering the overall integrity of elections within the region (Alihodžić, 2012).

4.5 Collaboration between Security Forces and Political Parties

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with collaboration between security forces and political parties as a strategy in relation to management of electoral conflict. The results are as shown below in Figure 4.

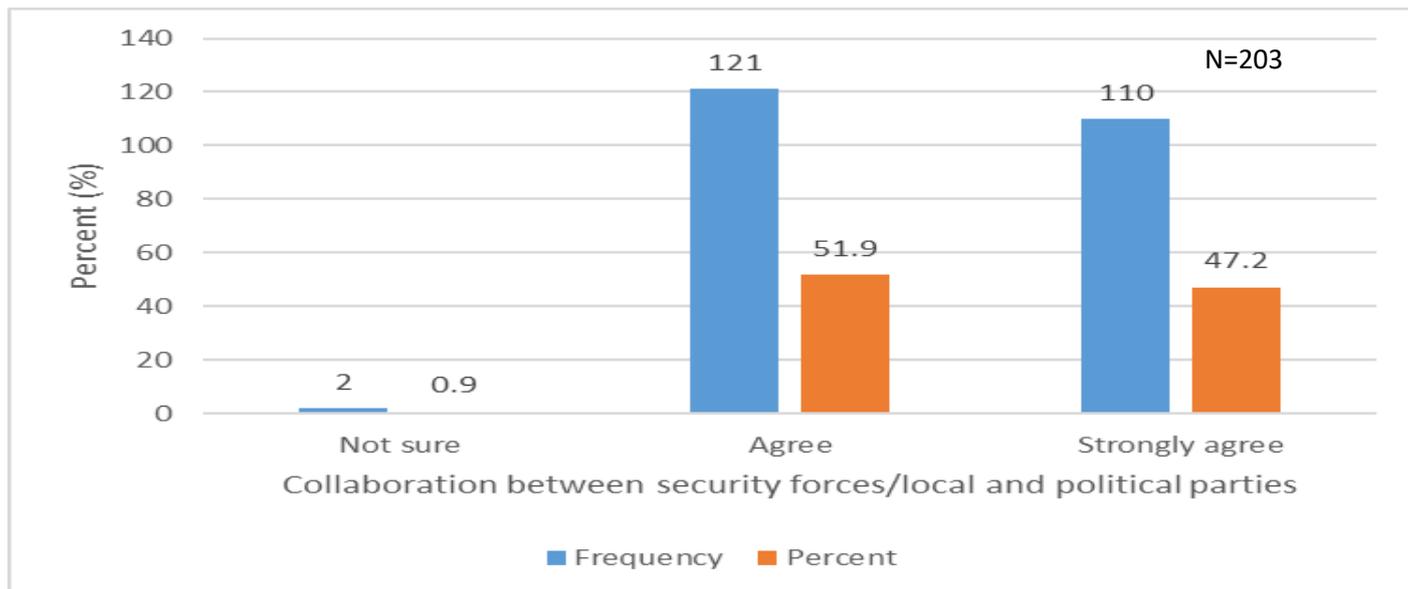


Figure 4
Collaboration between Security Forces and Political Parties

As indicated in Figure 4 majority of the respondents 121 (51.9%) agreed and 110 (47.2%) strongly agreed that collaborative activities between the security agencies and political parties can assist in building confidence in the agencies involved in election management during the electioneering period. This finding can be interpreted to mean that the existing animosity between these agencies affects planning and management of the elections, voting patterns and even outcome of the elections. Because the main purpose of electoral body is to deliver credible, verifiable and transparent election results, involvement of security agencies as partners/stakeholders will build confidence in the operations of the elections agency and therefore the elections outcome (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018).

4.6 Electoral Policy and Strategies for Security of Election Actors

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with various electoral policy and strategies for security of election actors in relation to management of electoral conflict. The results are as shown below in Figure 5.

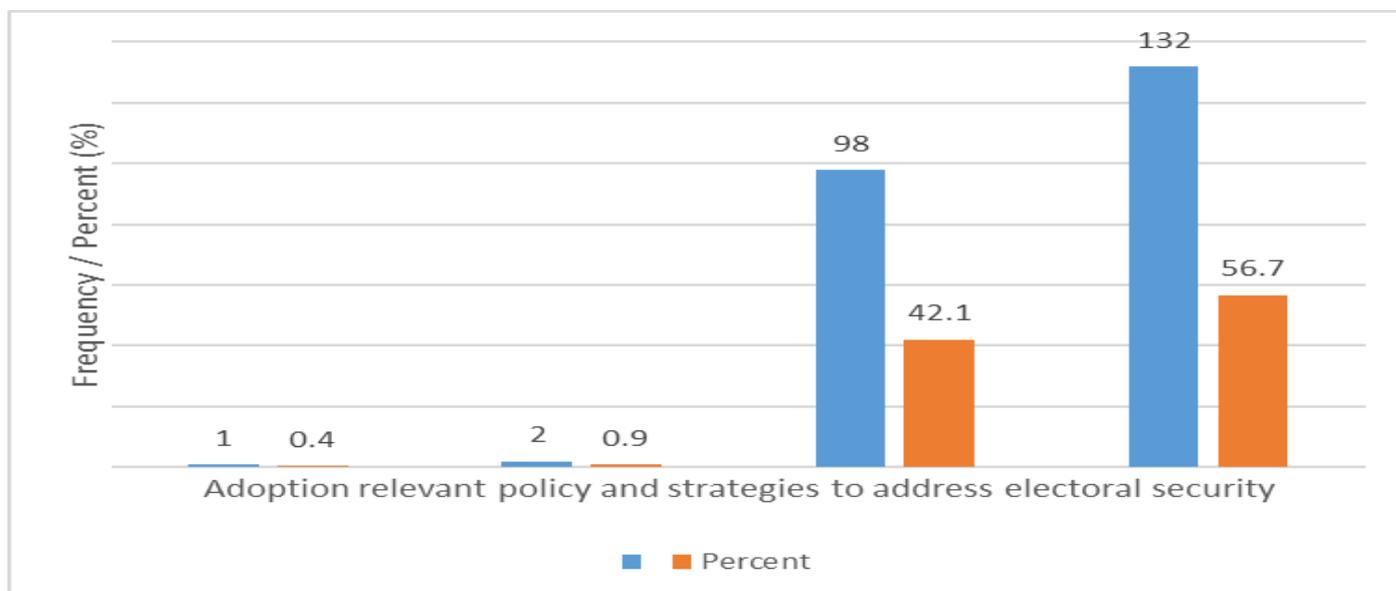


Figure 5
Electoral Policy and Strategies for Security of Election Actors

Findings in Figure 5 reveals that most of the respondents hold the view that adoption of relevant policy and strategies will assist in addressing security therefore allowing party representatives and observers to actively participate in electoral process and therefore enhancing credibility of the electoral process. The representation of 132 (56.7%) of respondents strongly agree with the findings as indicated as well as 98 (42.1%) of those who supported the facts. Therefore out of 233 respondents who were sampled for the study 230 (98.8%) agreed that enactment and application of relevant electoral policies and strategies will improve the process of elections and its credibility. For this reason, solid policy frameworks are crucial for protecting the integrity and validity of voting processes as stressed by Elklit and Reynolds (2002).

4.7 Confidence Building among Election Actors

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with Confidence building among Election Actors as a strategy in relation to management of electoral conflict. The results are as shown below in Figure 6.

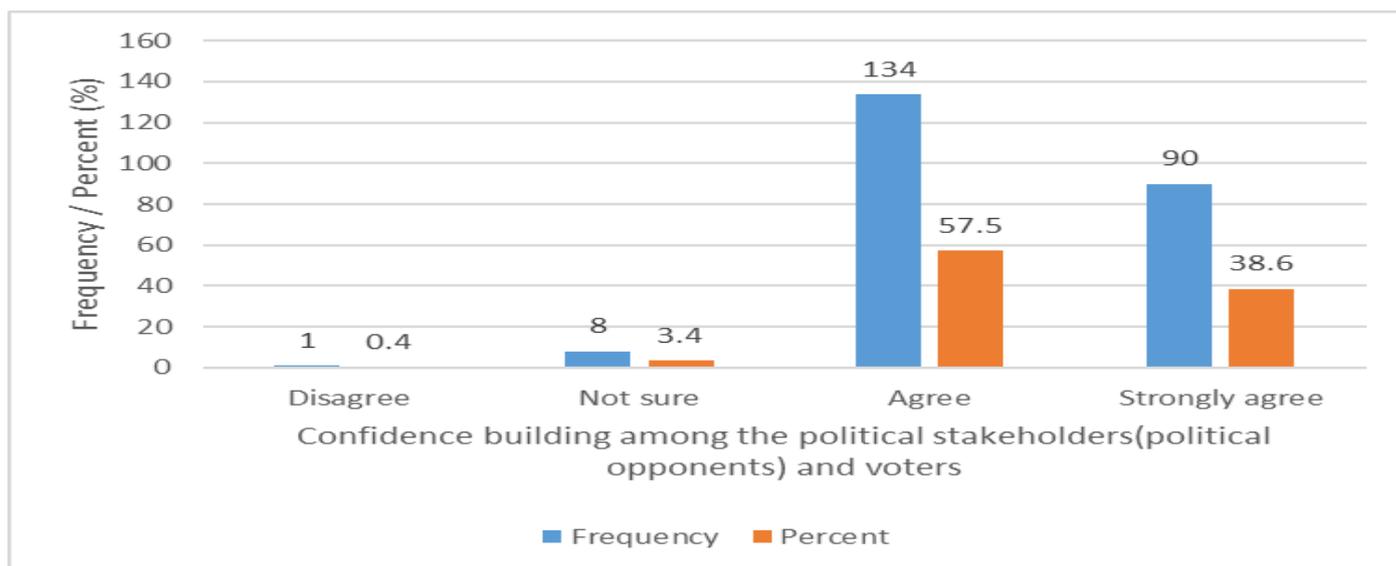


Figure 6
Confidence Building among Election Actors

The results depicted in Figure 6 highlight the crucial significance of fostering confidence among essential participants in the electoral process, such as politicians, political parties, and voters, as a means of mitigating political tensions. Out of the total sample size of 233 participants, a significant proportion of 57.5% (134 persons) expressed agreement with the notion that promoting confidence among electoral players plays a crucial role in reducing electoral conflicts. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of the participants, particularly 38.6% or 90 individuals, expressed that confidence-building programs targeted at political players have a significant role in mitigating political and electoral tensions, while also promoting trust.

This study highlights the significant importance of the Electoral Commission in fostering trust and assurance among various parties involved, through showcasing its readiness to execute elections that are credible, verifiable, and characterized by transparency. This entails participating in regular meetings with stakeholders, distributing information through mass media platforms, and organizing gatherings, particularly with political parties and candidates. Furthermore, the act of asking observers to check the electoral process serves to bolster trust. According to Aderemi and Meko (2017), the implementation of these steps serves to foster trust in the electoral process, thereby playing a crucial role in mitigating electoral tensions.

In support, interview findings indicated that

The root of electoral integrity is a political problem. Electoral integrity depends on public confidence in electoral and political processes. It is not enough to reform institutions; citizens need to be convinced that changes are real and deserve their confidence. Inclusiveness, transparency and accountability are all fundamental to developing that confidence (15/12/2022 Respondent 1, Kitale Town).

Based on the results of the interviews, the statement implies that the most basic problem with maintaining the integrity of the voting process is essentially a political one. The importance of public faith in political and electoral processes is highlighted, as is the fact that electoral integrity is closely related to it. These results are in line with those of Mross (2019), who contends that convincing the public that the improvements made are significant and deserving of their trust is more important than implementing merely institutional reforms. Inclusivity, transparency, and accountability are the key components that have been recognized as essential for promoting this trust.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

In conclusion, the study highlights the efficacy of various peace-building strategies in lowering tensions and avoiding violence before, during, and after elections. These strategies include training, mediation, dialogue, grassroots advocacy, sensitization programs, and attitude-transformation initiatives. It is emphasized that in order to develop confidence and provide a foundation for discussions, it is essential to encourage communication among political parties and their supporters. In order to increase voting participation, decrease the likelihood of fraud, and guarantee educated decision-making, civic and voter education programs are prioritized. In order to promote an atmosphere that is favourable to fair, transparent, and violence-free political processes - which in turn support democratic norms and protect electoral integrity - the extensive findings urge that politicians and electoral organizers use these tactics.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that it would be beneficial for the Government of Kenya to develop a comprehensive framework that can effectively and methodically lead peace-building operations in the region. These efforts play a crucial role in cultivating enduring peace and stability within Trans Nzoia County.

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