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SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report analyzes what went right during the presidential and legislative elections held in the Central African Republic (CAR) between December 2015 and March 2016 that allowed these elections to transpire peacefully.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Elizabeth Murray and Fiona Mangan

The 2015–2016 CAR Elections, A Look Back Peaceful Process Belies Serious Risks

Summary

- The current armed conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) began in 2012 when rebel groups from the north of the country came together as the Seleka (alliance), launched a coup, seized power, and installed rebel commander Michel Djotodia as head of state in March 2013.
- Unable to control the spiraling violence, Djotodia resigned in January 2014 and was replaced by transitional president Catherine Samba-Panza.
- International attention then shifted squarely to elections, which were initially slated for February 2015. Problems with election administration and ongoing instability raised concerns about the possibility of electoral violence.
- The elections ended up taking place in late 2015 through early 2016 without major violence due to citizen commitment to voting peacefully, the efforts of international actors and domestic civil society, the self-restraint and containment of spoilers, and respect for the transitional term limit. Despite reports of irregularities, CAR citizens and political leaders also accepted the outcomes peacefully.
- The belief, though, that the successful elections marked a turning point was misplaced. A year later, CAR continues to experience serious violence in several regions of the country.
- The international community needs to closely monitor violence and redouble peacekeeping and peacebuilding support for the CAR authorities as the country seeks to implement disarmament, security sector reform, transitional justice, and national reconciliation.

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Background

Between December 2015 and March 2016, the Central African Republic (CAR) successfully held peaceful presidential and parliamentary elections. Few had thought it possible. Many feared instability, or worse. In a country plagued by successive coups and waves of violent conflict since its independence in 1960—a place where sectarian violence had provoked fears of potential genocide just two years prior—this report reflects on what went right. It also cautions that elections were a positive step but not a panacea for the many challenges CAR faces, and that the unique combination of conditions that enabled elections to be carried out in peace have not proved sufficient to hold the country back from yet more wracking violent conflict.

The continued conflict in landlocked CAR—particularly in the eastern part of the country—not only is imperiling the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians, but also leaves large stretches of territory ungoverned and vulnerable to a myriad of national and transnational armed groups. These include the Lord's Resistance Army, which has taken advantage of the power vacuum to expand its presence in CAR through the latter half of 2016 and early 2017. These groups also include several ex-Seleka factions whose leaders are easily able to secure arms through the porous borders with Sudan and Chad.

CAR's political history is marked by violent takeover—the country has experienced five successful coups and several attempts since 1960. In 2003, regional powers supported a coup that brought President François Bozizé to power. Bozizé enlisted support from mercenary elements from neighboring countries, including significant numbers from Chad, but failed to fully contain them during his rule. Yet another coup spelled his downfall in 2013 at the hands of a coalition of armed groups known as the Seleka (alliance). Formed in late 2012, the group cited the government's failure to implement the peace agreement that ended the Central African Bush War as a core grievance, alongside underdevelopment and perceived inequality, Bozizé having stacked the civil service and armed forces with people from his tribe, region, and church. Perceived neglect was strongest in CAR's outlying regions, particularly the primarily Muslim northeast.

As they descended from the northeast toward CAR's capital city Bangui, the Seleka made alliances with other armed groups and recruited additional fighters to their ranks. Fighters committed numerous atrocities against civilians as they moved through the country's villages and towns, leading to the formation of primarily Christian "self-defense" groups known as the anti-Balaka (anti-machete). The anti-Balaka in turn committed revenge attacks against the Muslim population, whom they associated with the Seleka. Cycles of retaliatory violence hardened religious identities and introduced a sectarian dimension to the conflict.

The Seleka took control of Bangui in March 2013, forcing President Bozizé to flee and installing Michel Djotodia in his place. Conflicts within the Seleka leadership, however, weakened already tenuous chains of command. It quickly became apparent that Djotodia and the Seleka had scant concrete plans for governance. President Djotodia also found himself unable to control the loose alliance of citizens and mercenaries that had brought him to power. The Seleka continued to loot Bangui and commit abuses against civilians across the country.

As the crisis reached fever pitch, Chadian president Idriss Déby stepped in to broker Djotodia's resignation in January 2014. A National Transitional Council was put in place and the country's first female leader, President Catherine Samba-Panza, was nominated to lead the transition and shepherd CAR through a peace process, which would conclude with popular elections.

As part of this process, Samba-Panza's government participated in the Brazzaville Forum in July 2014, which resulted in a cease-fire agreement signed by the government and seven armed groups but was violated almost immediately. The agreement, however, also provided a roadmap for popular consultations and an inclusive national dialogue process that would engage the broader population on the future of the country—a first for CAR, where power and decision-making has traditionally been centered on a limited set of Bangui elites.

With support from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the Economic Community of Central African States, and other members of the international community, the transitional government organized popular consultations across the country that preceded an approximately eight-hundred-person national dialogue known as the Bangui Forum in May 2015. Popular consultations bringing together more than nineteen thousand participants in towns and villages across CAR were held in all sixteen prefectures despite ongoing armed conflict in much of the country.¹ Citizen input from the consultations was analyzed and sorted into four categories which became the foundation of four thematic debates at the forum: social and economic development, governance, justice and reconciliation, and peace and security. Deliberations during the forum resulted in an outcome document known as the Republican Pact for Peace. On the sidelines, the CAR government also signed a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) agreement with all ten of CAR's major armed groups.

The popular consultations and the Bangui Forum were important milestones in the transition. Although two years later its recommendations remain largely unimplemented, the forum itself was a high point for CAR citizens, who were buoyed by a rare opportunity to participate in public discourse. Once the forum was completed, international attention shifted squarely to elections. National authorities and the international community hoped that they would be able to build on positive momentum generated by the forum and DDR agreement. Many, however, feared that elections were premature and drew energy away from implementation of the forum's outcomes, and that conducting a popular vote prior to disarmament was risky. The country was still gripped by significant waves of instability, and many areas remained under armed group control.

Risks of Electoral Violence

The elections were plagued with delays from earliest planning to execution. Initial delays during the first half of 2015 were pinned to the heavy involvement of transitional authorities in preparing the popular consultations and forum. The forum, held in May, called for the elections to take place in July and August—an unrealistic date by any standard given that the National Elections Authority (ANE) had barely begun voter registration. The ANE struggled with staffing and funding shortfalls, launching voter registration in earnest only in July and August, encountering further delays in several parts of the country and in refugee settlements in neighboring countries due to a combination of technical difficulties, persistent insecurity, and armed groups' refusing access to ANE officials. As registration dragged into October in some locations, ANE president Dieudonne Kombo-Yaya resigned, stating that it was impossible to hold elections in 2015 as mandated. The African Union Electoral Observation Mission to CAR later declared that "the preparation and pasting of electoral lists, the establishment and issuance of voter cards were the major source of technical malfunctions noted during the conduct of the referendum election."²

The candidate registration period in late November was a key flashpoint as the elections approached. Former president François Bozizé attempted to register as a candidate despite

clear guidance that parties to the conflict were ineligible and an international arrest warrant (issued by the transitional government) accusing him of crimes against humanity and incitement to genocide. He was ultimately disqualified on a technicality, but his protestations raised fears that he would mobilize his supporters to violence. A second potential spoiler, Noureldine Adam, the commander of the ex-Seleka group Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (FPRC), threatened to disrupt the elections in the territory controlled by his group, mostly covering northern and eastern CAR.

Adding to concerns, serious insecurity persisted on the ground. Ex-Seleka and anti-Balaka armed groups, splintering and proliferating, continued to control much of CAR, with peacekeeper presence aiding security but confined to major town centers. A serious outbreak of violence in Bangui in September 2015 left dozens dead and caused mass evacuations of international staff. As some semblance of calm returned to the city, Samba-Panza faced protests calling for her resignation and the formation of a third transitional government, an option that was heavily discouraged by prominent CAR civil society and the international community.

Many CAR observers balked as the CAR authorities—pushed significantly by the French, MINUSCA, and the international community in Bangui—proceeded with their plans to launch the election cycle in December with the constitutional referendum and first-round presidential and legislative elections. Critics of the elections timing argued that postponing further would be wiser in order to establish better security and allow time to first accomplish the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration of rebels. Although mass electoral violence is actually rare, several studies have demonstrated that a recent history of violence is one of the best predictors of election violence. Citizens and internationals alike believed that the combination of active armed groups, vocal spoilers, and weak administration could spark further violence. Of equal concern was that even if election day itself proceeded peacefully, holding elections without the buy-in of key constituencies would do nothing to bolster stability in the medium term and would raise risks of another violent transfer of power. Would bad elections be worse than no elections?

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Unrealized Fears

Amid uncertainty, the electoral cycle began in December 2015 with a constitutional referendum held on December 13 and extended to December 14 due to operational delays and insecurity in some areas. The referendum was considered by many to be a dress rehearsal for presidential and parliamentary elections and a potential harbinger of electoral violence to come, allowing the government and the United Nations to assess and recalibrate security and procedural measures. Greater Bangui saw several violent incidents, including an attack on a polling station in the PK5 neighborhood that led to twenty deaths, but violence was not widespread and proved far less than what was feared. Across north central and northeastern CAR, and particularly in Kaga Bandoro, the FPRC disrupted voting, using intimidation to deter voters and officials from reaching the polls. The new constitution was nonetheless approved by 93 percent of the voters, albeit in a low turnout of 38 percent.³ In addition to voter intimidation by armed groups in the north, serious criticism is warranted for the referendum's near farcical prioritization of form over function. To meet electoral cycle deadlines, not only did the government fail to carry out voter education on the contents of the new constitution, it also even failed to make the document public. CAR politicians and civil society interviewed observed that because citizens have historically never voted down constitutional referenda, the government knew it could likely count on a yes vote regardless. Approve the constitution the citizens did—but in a low turnout and with sorely little comprehension of what they were voting on.

The first round of presidential and legislative elections was held concurrently on December 30. Although the moderate violence around the referendum had raised anxiety about violence during the elections, for the most part it did not come to pass. Turnout was 62 percent for the first round and 59 percent for the runoff presidential and new round of legislative elections, which had been nullified after irregularities in the December vote, held on February 14.⁴ Estimated turnout for the March 31 final round of legislative elections was significantly lower, energy and interest were waning, and the date for the run-off was finalized only eight days prior.⁵ On February 20, the ANE announced that Faustin Archange Touadéra had won 63 percent of the vote and the presidency over Anicet George Dologuélé's 37 percent. Dologuélé conceded defeat, paving the way for a peaceful transition.

The elections were peaceful but irregularities were widespread. First, as indicated, voter registration did not progress smoothly. For a start, armed groups presented barriers to registration in some parts of the country. In addition, the level of displacement of CAR's population—both internally and as refugees in neighboring countries—presented significant logistical challenges. The transitional government sought to push ahead with the simpler option of conducting registration within CAR's borders, based on a parliamentary ruling. This, however, raised concerns of disproportionately excluding one group and further inflaming the conflict, given that a large percentage of CAR's displaced and refugees are Muslim. In the end, the ruling was overturned by the Supreme Court and limited efforts were made to register refugees in Cameroon, Chad, and the Republic of Congo, though the Democratic Republic of Congo refused access to ANE officials.

Second, the first round of parliamentary elections had to be nullified after 415 separate appeals were filed, asserting "alleged misconduct by National Electoral Authority field personnel, candidates, local authorities, militias, and armed groups, implicating them in cases of fraud, corruption, and intimidation."⁶ Significant shortages of electoral materials and errors on ballot papers were also recorded, though with no indication that such errors were targeted.⁷ Although the suspension of some ANE personnel and a nationwide training program addressed some of these issues, misconduct and technical difficulties continued to plague the remainder of the electoral cycle, though at a reduced level.

In its February 16 statement, the Economic Community of Central African States congratulated CAR on the February 14 elections and acknowledged improvements from the previous round. At the same time, the statement condemned several irregularities, including the late arrival of voting materials to some polling stations, which delayed the start of voting.⁸ On February 17, local media reported allegations of fraud in Bangui and the ANE's dismissal of its general rapporteur over suspicions that he had violated the ANE's neutrality principal by meeting Dologuélé's brother.⁹ It is particularly striking that CAR's elections and the period following the announcement of Touadéra's victory proceeded with relative calm given the widespread acknowledgment of irregularities.

What Went Right?

Although flawed, elections were indeed mostly peaceful, despite fears and to the surprise of many. Several factors combined to make this possible, including the people power of citizens, tired by years of violence, who turned out en masse to vote peacefully; the minimization of potential spoilers; the preventive efforts of local and international actors; and respect for the transitional government's term limit.

Weary of Violence, Voters Choose Peace

Broad societal weariness of violence—and a sense that violent elections would only further hamper recovery and development—was palpable as the elections approached. In reflecting on the elections, CAR citizens and internationals both cited citizens' decision to vote peacefully as the largest factor contributing to peaceful elections. In some cases, CAR citizens also actively intervened to push community members to reject violence. For example, religious leaders in Bangui's PK5 neighborhood intervened to dissuade a small band of armed youth from their plans to disrupt the elections. Muslim religious and community leaders engaged in dialogue with youth and urged them to reconsider.

This mass societal rejection of electoral violence had a pragmatic element. As rumors swirled about growing corruption within the transitional government, many in CAR were eager to see the transitional period end. The sense was also palpable that the transitional government was preoccupied with crisis management and ill equipped and lacking enough legitimacy to address deeper security and development issues. A democratically elected government, people believed, would have the authority—and provide the necessary stability—to meaningfully address pervasive underdevelopment.

Reaching the Base and the Elite: Preventive Diplomacy and Voter Education

A visit from Pope Francis in November 2015 was critical in generating momentum for peace, galvanizing hope, eliciting vocal commitments to nonviolence from all sides, and turning the tide after September 2015 violence. In particular, the pope's insistence that he visit PK5—a decision that security teams strongly advised against—provoked an emotional response from the Muslim community, heartened by images of the pope praying at the neighborhood's central mosque. Many felt that the pride and good will generated by this visit carried forward into the intense election cycle to follow.

This popular sentiment was reinforced by Central African nongovernmental organizations and local media, which lent practical assistance after realizing that the official voter education campaign led by the government, the United Nations Development Program, and MINUSCA did not have a broad enough reach. They organized their own sensitization campaigns, some of which were supported by international funding. When violence affected the December 13–14 constitutional referendum, civil society worked to redouble its efforts in the final weeks preceding the December 30 presidential and legislative elections.

MINUSCA and the European Union, which provided significant technical support to the ANE, also focused efforts at the senior-most level, facilitating sessions for the presidential candidates to agree upon and commit to a code of conduct. The code of conduct was developed through a one-week participatory workshop in December, signed by candidates and parties, and witnessed by religious leaders. The official involvement of religious leaders lent a moral authority to the process that was perhaps bolstered by the pope's high profile and positive visit to CAR several months prior. MINUSCA continued to encourage regular contact between the candidates as the elections approached, culminating in a candidates' gathering the night before the December 30 first-round vote. The code of conduct and the sustained contact between candidates kept pressure on to maintain a civil discourse. This had a trickle-down effect at the base, where citizens were hearing civil rather than hostile discourse from their preferred candidates. For his part, runner-up presidential candidate Anicet Dologuélé defused a potential trigger for violence from his supporters, particularly youth groups, by immediately conceding the election to Touadéra despite his stated concerns about irregularities in the results.

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Spoilers Sidelined

As of early December, though, the list of powerful spoilers to disrupt the election was nonetheless daunting. When former president Bozizé was ruled ineligible on December 8, he denounced the decision as shameful. Minor unrest in the form of gunfire and barricades erupted on the outskirts of Bangui, prompting fears that Bozizé would further mobilize his numerous supporters to disrupt the election, but the fears were never realized. At the same time, Noureldine Adam, commander of the powerful FPRC ex-Seleka faction, threatened to prevent the elections from taking place in the large swath of FPRC-controlled territory in the northeast of the country. The FPRC's intimidation of voters and poll workers and its burning of voting materials during the December 13 constitutional referendum had demonstrated that Adam was more than capable of following through on his threat. When he failed to disrupt the referendum, he announced the secession of territory held by the FPRC on December 15, calling his new state the Republic of Logone. The next day, hundreds of CAR citizens marched in Bangui to demand that MINUSCA arrest militia leaders who publicly opposed the elections, including Adam.

Behind the scenes, invisible hands seemed at work nullifying these fears. Bozizé's threats quieted through December. The reasons for his standing down, however, remain unclear. It is possible that he was satisfied with the leading presidential candidates—particularly when the field narrowed to Dologuélé and Touadéra—believing that he would be able to influence either candidate in favor of his interests and those of his inner circle. Adding to the sense that both candidates were in Bozizé's sphere of influence was that they both had ties to Bozizé's political party, the Kwa Na Kwa. A former senior party figure, Touadéra had a public conflict with the Kwa Na Kwa after the party accused him of having submitted his candidacy prematurely. Nonetheless, he maintained ties with the party and was perceived as close to Bozizé. For his part, Dologuélé succeeded in obtaining the Kwa Na Kwa's official endorsement and also expressed a sympathetic perspective on Bozizé during the campaign period.¹⁰ An equally plausible explanation is that Bozizé sensed that his base of support was weakening and that his constituency, in keeping with the broader societal desire for peace, had tired of violence and was therefore less likely to mobilize on his behalf.

For his part, Noureldine Adam changed his rhetoric after a meeting in N'Djamena under the auspices of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In a statement released on December 21, Adam announced that the FPRC would make a "positive and sincere" contribution to the upcoming elections. Although the details of the negotiations in N'Djamena were not revealed, the meeting undoubtedly was critical in persuading Adam and the FPRC to stand down.

Another ex-Seleka general, Arda Hakouma, attempted to push his agenda forward to boycott the referendum by kidnapping one of the resident ministers sent by the government to campaign around the country for a yes vote on the referendum. When the local population of Ouandja protested, Hakouma abandoned his efforts and left the area.

Other armed elements in CAR that might have aimed to disrupt elections were either deterred by the international peacekeeping forces or believed that the elections could work in their favor. Ex-Seleka leaders were keen to see a new government take office, which would allow them to make formal demands of representation in government and the national armed forces (FACA). The leaders of the main anti-Balaka groups were reported to be content that both presidential finalists had potential to represent their interests and also hoped to be able to secure positions in government.

Respect for the Transitional Term Limit

The presence of a transitional, fixed-term government—and thus the absence of an incumbent running for an additional term—may have also eliminated another potential spoiler. Catherine Samba-Panza, her cabinet, and the National Transitional Council respected the prohibition on their running for office. So did the general public—there was no widespread call for Samba-Panza to contravene the terms of the transition and run for office. Without an incumbent using state resources to attempt to secure another term, CAR was free of the ruling party-opposition dynamic that leads to oppression and violence in many other elections. Additionally, behind the scenes some National Transitional Council members were encouraged to position themselves for future elections and potential cabinet and ambassadorial positions, generating future opportunities and reducing their incentive to spoil or seek to prolong their mandate.

Fragile Calm Deteriorates

The unique conditions that minimized the impact of spoilers on the election have, a year later, begun to crumble. In the early months of his administration, President Touadéra met with the principal ex-Seleka factions in an attempt to agree on the terms for their participation in the DDR. They voiced frustration that Touadéra had not fulfilled alleged campaign promises to grant them senior roles in the armed forces and government. Touadéra has not acceded to these demands, leaving former Seleka leaders feeling deceived and underrepresented.

Ex-Seleka factions remain well equipped with weapons and munitions trafficked into the country through Chad and Sudan. They also control several important towns, strategic roads, and swaths of territory in the north and east of the country. As months pass and their demands remain unmet, several groups have resorted to violence. Two serious clashes between anti-Balaka, specifically those aligned with Maxime Mokom, and ex-Seleka from FPRC and MPC factions in and around Kaga Bandoro in September and October led to the deaths of more than forty civilians. Additionally, violence broke out in Bangui in early October following the assassination of a senior FACA commander in the PK5 neighborhood.

As the date approached for the October 2016 drawdown of the French mission, from a two-thousand-strong fighting force to a fifty-person military assistance troop, many feared that it presented a serious risk of increased conflict, given that the French force had been the most effective deterrent against the ex-Seleka incursions. This fear proved well founded. In late November, infighting between the FPRC and the predominantly ethnically Peuhl-Fulani Union for Peace in Central Africa (UPC) ex-Seleka factions in the eastern town of Bria descended into violence that left more than eighty dead and took on an ethnic dimension when the FPRC not only targeted UPC fighters but also carried out killings of Peuhl-Fulani civilians in their homes and villages.

After months of speculation about a possible reconciliation of ex-Seleka factions—and an October meeting of these factions in Bria—it appears that the FPRC, the Popular Rally for the Renewal of Central Africa, and the Central African Patriotic Movement are again collaborating. The recent violence in Bria directed against UPC combatants and suspected supporters—and the UPC's subsequent violent reassertion of its power—indicates that the new alliance is seeking to wrest control of Bria and Bambari from the UPC, which has thus far refused to reunify with other factions. This situation points to further instability or possibly additional moves by the ex-Seleka toward wholesale control of the east of the country or declaration of an autonomous zone or federal arrangement. A new process focused on determining the terms of DDR implementation appears to be gaining some momentum fol-

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lowing an April 2017 meeting between the government and fourteen armed groups, though it is too early to tell whether it will produce tangible results.

As ex-Seleka groups continue to increase their profit from mines, cattle markets, and the provision of private security in the northeast, the incentives for them to disarm and demobilize are diminishing. More broadly, disproportionate poverty and underdevelopment in the north and east of the country are legitimate grievances for local communities and will remain a powerful rallying call for militant groups until duly addressed. And because many of the same spoilers who fortuitously stood down before the elections—including Nouredine Adam, other ex-Seleka leaders, and anti-Balaka leaders—have again begun to agitate in recent months, it appears that their restraint before the election may have been a tactical move more than a decision to support peace. Although Bozizé remains at large, many suspect that he is exerting influence through his son, former minister of defense Jean-François Bozizé, who returned to CAR in the summer of 2016, was initially indicted and placed under house arrest, yet still maintains contacts with both anti-Balaka and FACA leadership.¹¹

The powerful desire for peace that inspired citizens to vote peacefully remains quite real in CAR. But alongside it is a growing eagerness to see the newly elected government make tangible progress and a frustration that more has not been accomplished in the first six months of Touadéra's administration. Because the government has remained paralyzed over the reform and composition of the security services and deadlocked with the ex-Seleka factions over the contours of the DDR, little progress has been made on other fronts. In addition to continued insecurity, citizens and advocacy groups express concern over lack of progress on service provision, a national reconciliation program, and the creation of a Special Criminal Court. Citizens will need to see at least the beginnings of a peace dividend in the coming months if they are to remain committed to peace and confident in the current administration.

Conclusion

Peaceful elections and the inauguration of a democratically elected government in CAR were significant milestones after a protracted political transition. Leaders and voters alike demonstrated laudable discipline in bringing peaceful elections to fruition, which may point to a growing commitment to peace that cuts across identity lines. Nonetheless, the notion that the elections have stabilized CAR was illusory. Although citizens evinced a powerful commitment to peace, CAR's numerous armed elements allowed the election to proceed only because they perceived future gain and deterrence was strong.

Beyond the specter of renewed armed conflict, CAR faces several other large challenges: considerable unmet humanitarian need, particularly among displaced persons and returnees; the inability of the state to provide services or security across large sections of the country; the lack of progress on reconciliation and seeking accountability for the violence during and after the Seleka overthrow; and deep dependence on foreign donors. The continued conflict, particularly in central and eastern CAR, has potentially grave consequences for regional stability given that armed groups operate with ever-increasing impunity across large swaths of the country. It has also left unarmed civilians vulnerable and without recourse. This insecurity has become even more acute in southeastern CAR with the conclusion of the U.S. special forces' advisory mission to CAR and the withdrawal of the Ugandan armed forces participating in the African Union Regional Task Force against the Lord's Resistance Army.

The international community offered strong support to CAR during the Bangui Forum and the elections. For the positive momentum of the peaceful elections to be sustained, it is vital that their commitment to CAR continue.

Disproportionate poverty and underdevelopment...will remain a powerful rallying call for militant groups until duly addressed.

Recommendations

The international community needs to document lessons on the politics, electoral logistics, international support, and other enabling conditions that allowed for peaceful elections in CAR despite complex security dynamics.

The success of the peaceful 2015–16 election cycle in CAR should not be overstated. Lessons need to be drawn from key mistakes and failings of the electoral period, for example, the hosting of a constitutional referendum without any voter education campaign or publicly available draft constitution. Such shortcomings should be taken on board by the CAR government and by the international community, particularly as it seeks to support electoral processes in similarly fragile contexts.

Peaceful elections should be viewed as an important step in a transitional process but not an end point. Setbacks to peace, including the emergence of newer armed groups and the ongoing insecurity in the east and elsewhere in the country, demonstrate the importance of continued engagement and support from the international community.

The international community needs to closely monitor violence in eastern CAR and elsewhere in the country, redoubling peacekeeping and peacebuilding support for the CAR authorities, particularly as the country seeks to implement challenging processes of disarmament, security sector reform, transitional justice, and national reconciliation.

Notes

1. “Rapport Consolide des Missions Consultations Populaires à la Base en République Centrafricaine,” Ministère de la Reconciliation National, Bangui, March 2015, 37, <https://jfakiblog.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/rapport-consultations-populaires.pdf>.
2. “Preliminary Statement of the AU Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) on the 30th December 2015 Presidential and Legislative Elections in the Central African Republic,” African Union, January 2, 2016, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2015_car_aucom_preliminary_statement.pdf.
3. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) cites an average turnout of 61 percent for elections in CAR. See *Election Guide: Democracy Assistance and Elections News*, www.electionguide.org/countries/id/42/.
4. UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Central African Republic,” S/2016/505, April 1, 2016, www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2016_305.pdf.
5. “Glissement dans la tenue du second tour des législatives selon l’ANE,” Radio Ndeke Luka, March 23, 2016, www.radiondekeluka.org/politique/item/24875-glissement-dans-la-tenue-du-second-tour-des-legislatives-selon-l-ane.html.
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