

Chapter 12

Civic Integration, Desistance From Crime, and Lessons Learned From the Zanzibar 2015 General Elections

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ABSTRACT

Criminological studies provide evidence from the existing literature to support research on the correlation between economic and social stability and desistance from crime. Ex-offenders who acquired stable work and family relationships were able to develop positive identities and became productive and responsible law-abiding citizens. Although no research study has correlated desistance from crime and voter inclusivity, it is logical to assume that voter inclusivity is similar to work and/or family reintegration. This chapter attempts to examine the correlation between voter inclusivity and desistance from crime while reflecting on the Zanzibar general elections 2015. The choice of Zanzibar as a case study is arbitrary but a rich case study because the archipelago is a tourism hub in East Africa and has a youthful population. Moreover, democratic space in Zanzibar has provided room for coalition governance and political tolerance. The chapter concludes that voter inclusivity contributes to lower crime rates, economic empowerment, social harmony, and safer communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature exists on the political implications relating to voting disenfranchisement (Schafer & Shwander, 2019; Aneja & Avenancio-Leon, 2019; Rigby & Spinger, 2011). However, there are scarce or limited research studies that attempt to examine the relationship between political participation or non-participation in elections (voter inclusivity) and criminal activity and/or recidivism. Literature on the correlation between economic and social (in)stability and crime shows that ex-offenders who acquire stable work and family relationships desist from crime (Sampson and Laub 1990; Uggen 2000; Laub, Nagin, and Sampson 1998).

The right to vote is considered the cornerstone of any democratic society. The right to vote enables citizens to be active participants in government decision-making by choosing candidates, which would resolve and/or respond to the present and future needs of the voters, such as human development and economic empowerment. While the violation of the right to vote may amount to a criminal offense in some jurisdictions, the disenfranchisement may also explain the etiology of crime. The theoretical framework adopted in the chapter is the democratic theory and the rights-based approach to voter inclusivity. The theoretical framework approach is the attempt to show the interdisciplinary nature of criminology (criminal justice) and human rights studies.

Zanzibar is a semi-autonomous region of the United Republic of Tanzania (Tanzania). For the first time in the history of Tanzania, in the year 2000, two thousand (2000) citizens became refugees in Kenya, escaping deadly clashes between citizens and law enforcement, which resulted in thirty-five (35) people dying and six hundred (600) people suffering life-threatening injuries.¹ Allegations of vote-rigging, illegal voting, and excessive use of force by law enforcement was reported.²

During the 2015 Zanzibar general elections, it was reported that opposition parties and other civil society organizations were frequently attacked by the Zanzibar Special Forces (ZSF). The ZSF forces also allegedly beat civilians during election day. It is reported that victims were beaten and thirty (30) homes burned down. A militia group known as “zombies” who allegedly is affiliated with ZSF also participated in the violence. The “zombies” were identified by their assailants by their masks and ZSF uniform (United States Department of State report, 2015). There have been allegations of censorship on freedom of expression where newspapers that report news against the government have been shut down.³ The alleged censorship violates Article 18 of both the Constitution of Zanzibar and that of the United Republic of Tanzania.⁴ The censorship may have violated international instruments, which Tanzania is a party to. For example, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966. Tanzania is bound to ensure that she fulfills the obligations that arise under the provisions of the treaty. Article 2, 17, 19, 21, 22, 25, and 26

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