

RESULTS SUMMARY

Religious Leaders contribute to reduced election violence in Zanzibar

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PROJECT	<i>Title:</i>	Building Resilience Against Violence in Elections and Beyond (BraVE)
	<i>Partner:</i>	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) Eastern and Coastal Diocese
	<i>Country:</i>	Tanzania
	<i>Period:</i>	November 2024 – April 2025

CHANGE	Through the Joint Committee of Religious Leaders for Peace (the Committee), faith leaders contributed to the prevention of election-related violence and strengthening a peaceful political engagement ahead of the elections. For the first time in thirty years, the October 2025 general elections in Zanzibar ended without a single fatality. Alongside the absence of violence, a shift in political behaviour was observed, with leading actors, including the First Vice President, publicly signalling a wish to engage in dialogue across party lines.
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CONTEXT	Since the reintroduction of multiparty elections in 1995, Zanzibar has experienced recurring electoral violence driven by political polarisation, contested results, and the politicisation of religious identities. This has repeatedly led to violence, including the deaths of at least 35 people in 2001 and 14 in 2020. As one resident noted, elections have brought fear and instability every five years. The absence of fatalities in the 2025 elections therefore breaks a thirty-year pattern.
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CONTRIBUTION	The BraVE project was co-designed by ELCT's interfaith centre in Zanzibar, ZANZIC and DM, building on 20 years of collaboration to strengthen the Committee, which represents 12 religious institutions in Zanzibar. This long-term engagement enabled the Committee to build trust and engage senior political leaders ahead of the elections. ZANZIC led implementation, while DM provided peacebuilding expertise and ongoing support. In a majority-Muslim context, DM and ELCT helped ensure a balanced and credible interreligious platform.
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IMAGES	 The Grand Mufti of Zanzibar presents election guidelines, inspired by sacred texts, to then First Vice President and opposition leader Othman Masoud Othman, 2025.  The Committee meets President Hussein Ali Mwinyi after presenting election guidelines and discussing peaceful elections, 2025.
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[See next page for more details](#) →

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACTIVITIES

Between 2024 and 2025, the BraVE project trained Committee members in interfaith peacebuilding, strengthening skills in conflict analysis, mediation, and electoral violence prevention. Religious leaders engaged senior political figures from both ruling and opposition parties using interfaith materials, including a book of nasihi—moral guidance from the Bible and Quran. The project also facilitated dialogue forums to build trust and position the Committee as a platform for electoral mediation, while members encouraged peaceful elections through outreach to their congregations.

LESSONS

This case demonstrates that interfaith unity can serve as a powerful source of political credibility. When religious leaders speak with a shared voice, they can influence the behavior of senior officials. The case also highlights the importance of engaging political actors through moral and value-based dialogue rather than confrontation. The decision to give political leaders a book of nasihi from both the Bible and the Quran was not symbolic, but rather a peacebuilding strategy that met leaders at the level of conscience rather than confrontation. While ZANZIC and the Committee had already been active in during previous elections, the success of BraVE comes from it being implemented at a time where the partners had organizational capacity, and it came from a targeted, tailored and timely project-based intervention as opposed to a general running programme that supports inter-religious dialogue and conflict mediation.

EVIDENCE

The decline in violence and deaths is reflected in post-election data, while a Human Rights Watch (2021) report documents high levels of violence in previous elections. Online sources also show politicians and civil society, including the Committee, advocating for peace ahead of the 2025 elections. A Daily News article described these efforts as a “renewed push for peace” and a “wave of unity [...] giving hope” after a history of violent elections. It further documents meetings between the Committee and senior leaders, including the President and Vice President, and the President’s call for the Committee to facilitate cross-party dialogue. These developments, also captured in a harvested outcome by ZANZIC, highlight the Committee’s contribution to more peaceful political behaviour.
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/29/tanzania-no-justice-zanzibar-election-violence>.
<https://dailynews.co.tz/why-2025-could-be-zanzibars-election-turning-point/>

DOMAINS

Development strategy priorities:

Democratic values and human rights

Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability

x

Changes in laws, policies and practices that affect people’s rights

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Changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support rights

x

Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people’s rights

x

Changes in participation of groups facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability

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Changes in local leadership of development and humanitarian work

x