‘Watching the Watcher’: An Evaluation of Local Election Observers in Tanzania

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Abstract
The unfolding of the Third Wave of democracy cast a mounting weight on election observation in transition countries, partly due to the inability of regimes in power to conduct free and fair elections. However, observation is not always neutral. Sometimes observers distance themselves from the data they collect, leading to controversial certification of elections. In this case stakeholders may view them as partial, hence downsizing their credibility and trust. Yet observers' reports have rarely been reviewed. This article evaluates three reports by the leading election observer in Tanzania, the Tanzania Election Monitoring Committee (TEMCO) for the 1995, 2000 and 2005 general elections. It notes that despite the prevalence of the same factors that TEMCO considered as irregularities in the 1995 and 2000 general elections when it certified those elections as ‘free but not fair’, it issued a ‘clean, free and fair’ verdict on the 2005 general elections. This conclusion, at variance from the data, reveals problems in assuring observer neutrality.