Elections under the Shadow of Force

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Abstract:

Some countries, "failed states," are unable to establish any kind of peaceful order. A few maintain order without holding elections. Many celebrate peaceful elections in which opposition is either not allowed at all or not given a chance to win. Finally, in some countries elections are competitive and peaceful. The paper analyzes why sometimes civil peace cannot be established, why it often emerges under the dominance of one party, and why some rulers allow competitive elections and leave office when they lose. We show that when violent conflicts are avoidable -- not always they are -- elections function peacefully only if the electoral chances of competing parties reflect their military prowess: this is the shadow of force. Moreover, elections are competitive and peaceful if something is at stake but not too much is at stake in their outcome.