

Electoral Violence in Africa: An Analysis of Factors, Dimensions, Effects and Mitigating Factors

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Abstract

Elections are key elements of democratic processes. This article aims at providing reasons for election-related violence in Africa, their dimensions, effects, and mitigating factors. Elections are supposed to provide for a transparent and peaceful change of government, the distribution of power, and the promotion of democracy, but most elections in Africa are characterized by violence at various stages of the process. In war-torn countries and even in some stable African countries, incumbents are often manipulating or believed to be tampering with the electoral processes. The opposition parties also have incentives to further their strength through the use of violence. Such violence is potentially damaging democratic processes and undermining progress towards democratization. Electoral violence has varied causes, as highlighted in this article. Beyond direct effects such as hindering people from casting their vote and preventing candidates from participating in the electoral process, electoral violence can have long-term effects. Thus, managing election-related violence would build a strong, democratic, and peaceful society based on the rule of law, accountability, and transparency. Various strategies are used by different actors to achieve this. This article uses a qualitative research design. Information on the research is gathered purely from the review of scholarly articles and reports on the topic. The information presented is based on a synthesis of findings from these sources. From the synthesis of information from other reviews, we have in this article gathered and presented the main causes, effects, dimensions, and some mitigating factors of electoral

violence in Africa.

Keywords: electoral violence, factors, dimensions, effects, mitigating factors

1. Introduction

In the modern world, the institution of elections is almost ubiquitous. Citizens can choose their leaders in national elections through elections. The use of these elections to choose leaders is meant, in theory, to offer a peaceful substitute for the use of force to mediate disputes between competing claims to power. It should also be a system that gives voters more control over their government. However, in actuality, these expectations have frequently fallen short of what has happened. Many elections are violent, especially those in newly emerging democracies like those in Africa, either during the campaign trail, on election-day, or in the aftermath of voting. It is believed that elections hold governments more accountable to the people, which encourage the adoption of better policies that should eventually support economic expansion and development. However, when elections were introduced in the developing world at the end of the 20th century, they lacked any of the complementary democratic institutions, like the rule of law, which limited the behavior of rival candidates. As a result, the elections were tainted by irregularities like vote-buying, ballot fraud, and intimidation of voters.

Elections in several African nations, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, have historically provoked ethnic tensions and bloodshed rather than acting as a force for peace, political stability, and economic success. This has resulted in political instability and economic degradation (Collier, 2009). Following violence after the 2010 elections in Ivory Coast, there were 100,000 internally displaced people, 100,000 refugees in neighboring countries, and over 1,000 civilian deaths as a result of post-election violence (Birch, Daxecker, & Høglund, 2020, pp. 3–4). This means that, even if elections are essential and one of the instruments for consolidating democracy, they are frequently tainted by violence, particularly in the majority of African nations. It is important to remember that elections are the sole legal pathway to political office or leadership and that elections are necessary to enable proper governance procedures in democracies. The electorate is expected to freely express its will and sovereignty through elections that are free, fair, transparent, and devoid of any kind of violence by granting legitimacy to the political leaders. This situation has always presented difficulties because violence of one kind or another has frequently disrupted elections in the majority of African nations.

Therefore, electoral violence refers to coercive acts against people, property, and infrastructure that are used by political players with the intention of influencing the course and result of elections (Bekoe, 2012; Harish & Toha, 2019; Høglund, 2009). It can occur during any stage of the electoral cycle, such as voter registration, party primaries, and election announcements (Seeberg, Wahman, & Skaaning, 2018; Soderberg, 2018). Both state and non-state actors may support it (Staniland, 2014). According to Fischer and Albert, electoral violence is defined as acts that include physical harm, intimidation, or threats of coercion committed with the intention of influencing the election process or its result (Fischer & Albert, 2007).

During the colonial era, competitive elections were introduced throughout Africa. These elections were imposed, according to Lindberg, as a protective democracy that Africans would have to absorb before gaining freedom (Lindberg, 2008). Through these contested and peaceful pre-independence elections, certain African pioneer leaders came to power. Paradoxically,

these same officials later asserted that the one-party state was the most effective form of governance for achieving these goals and that stability and unity were essential for national integration and growth (Kiven & Ngah, n.d.). But there was an extraordinary rise in the number of new democracies in the second half of the 20th century. As a result, numerous African republics abandoned their one-party systems. Many Africans were enlightened by the democratic wind of change, which allowed them to embrace multipartyism instead of this one-party system. They may now cast their votes for the leaders they want. Nevertheless, there has been a lot of electoral violence during recent elections. This study, as such, will seek to understand why there is rampant electoral violence in most African states, analyze the dimensions of electoral violence, examine the effects of electoral violence on African democracy, and identify the mitigating factors to reduce electoral violence in Africa.

1.1 Literature Review

Numerous studies have looked into the origins, manifestations, and effects of electoral violence in Africa, which has been a chronic concern. With an emphasis on important topics and takeaways from academic writings, this study of the literature seeks to give a brief overview of the body of knowledge about electoral violence in Africa. “Electoral violence affects willingness to [not] vote, but this effect differs by partisan attachment and specific electoral context” (Burchard, 2015, p. 143). As per Burchard’s findings, voters who witnessed acts of violence during an election are more likely to vote for the opposition than for the incumbent (Burchard, 2015, p. 139). Election-related violence can be used for a variety of purposes, such as identifying the identity of the perpetrators and/or the message they want to get through to voters, mobilizing voters to cast ballots, punishing winners to keep them from doing so, and more (Bekoe & Burchard, 2017). According to Bjornlund (2018) and other scholars, electoral violence is generally understood to include any type of violence or intimidation that takes place prior to, during, or following an election with the intention of affecting the electoral process or its result. Several manifestations of electoral violence have been recognized, such as assaults on candidates and their supporters, damage to campaign materials, and compulsion of votes by intimidation and threats (Ndlovu, 2016).

Several elements have been recognized by academics as contributing to election violence in Africa. These include rivalry for limited resources and political power (Ibrahim, 2011), historical ethnic conflicts (Mamdani, 2009), and inadequate institutional capacity for conflict resolution (Sisk, 2013). Furthermore, the role played by political elites in causing and sustaining elections is fundamental (Bratton & van de Walle, 2007). The environment in which people live can be used to predict their behavior. Context matters, as Goodin and Tilly assert (Goodin & Tilly, 2006). People’s views and actions are influenced by context, which leads to violence. It is thought that residents of party systems in power will enjoy fewer democratic goods, such as equality and liberty, which are necessary for participating in politics generally and elections specifically. This is because dominant parties undermine democracy's quality as well as its prospects for liberal democracy (van de Walle & Buttler, 1999). Due to their propensity for violence and decline into hegemonic or dominant authoritarian parties, they pose the greatest threat to the consolidation of third-wave democracies (Huntington, 1996). According to Norris (2014), elections “too often around the globe are deeply flawed,”

indicating a lack of integrity. In Africa, the situation is alarming. Bleck and van de Walle claim that the opposition journal was shut down and that there was “extensive intimidation of the opposition” during the 2016 elections in Zambia and the Gambia (Bleck & Van de Walle, 2019, pp. 2–3). Zimbabwean districts were gerrymandered before the 2008 election, and it was found that candidates from Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana, and Kenya had lavishly distributed and bought votes (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018, pp. 42, 61–92).

Election-related violence has far-reaching effects that impact not just the current electoral process but also larger societal and political dynamics. Research has demonstrated how electoral violence exacerbates societal differences (Nnoli, 2014), undercuts democratic legitimacy (Lindberg, 2009), and impedes governance and reconciliation following elections (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018). As a result, academic studies have looked into possible tactics for stopping and lessening electoral violence in Africa. These include improving civic education and voter empowerment (Kasara, 2015), encouraging inter-party discussion and dispute resolution processes (Oloo & Wanjala, 2017), and fortifying electoral institutions and legal frameworks (Chinhanu & Makumbe, 2015).

1.2 Methods of Research

The article uses a qualitative research design. Information on the research is derived purely from the review of scholarly articles and reports on the topic. The information presented is based on a synthesis of findings from these sources. Data for this work is thus gathered from already-released sources, including books, government publications, scholarly articles, and statistical databases (Johnson et al., 2017). To build a comprehensive grasp of the research issue and make significant findings, we critically assess and synthesize this data (Robinson, 2019). We did an extensive reading on electoral violence globally before focusing on Africa. We did an electronic search to have adequate information on the topic.

2. African Election Violence Factors

Electoral violence in African just as in other parts of the world has a series of factors contributing to it. However, some factors are almost unique to African countries.

2.1 Election Laws and Institutions

One may argue that electoral violence is a good indicator of how institutionalized democracy is in practice, with less violence occurring in nations with stronger democratic systems. Democracy needs dependable, well-respected institutions to be strong. As should be expected, most political activity in consolidated democracies is mediated peacefully, with losers prepared to concede the polls because they have faith in the election administration. Generally speaking, losers contest the results of the elections and cast doubt on the democratic process as a whole when the institutions in charge of conducting them are not credible; some opponents may even incite electoral violence and damage the entire system (Fjelde & Höglund, 2016a). Since stable, well-respected institutions are necessary to maintain democracy, a number of studies on electoral violence have found that irregular or shifting electoral laws may result in significant electoral violence.

The government executive, posing as an impartial election commission or administrator, oversees the majority of elections in Africa (Kiven & Ngah, n.d.). This explains why, in nations like Cameroon, Togo, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR), Angola, Chad, and others, a larger portion of the populace and opposition parties have disdain for these election administrators. Despite election regulations that prohibit their members from being supporters or members of any party, these institutions are primarily seen as “party branches” of the ruling party in some of these nations (Kiven & Ngah, n.d.). Holding a senior position in an election administration organization is considered a privilege, and when a neo-patrimonial government selects someone to join that organization, that person must support the goals of the patron they are serving (Kiven & Ngah, n.d.). Consequently, it is clear that this might cause mistrust for the Election Management Body (EMB) and, as a result, electoral violence, as soon as a candidate or party seeking office already has a direct or indirect role in the EMB’s management.

The majority of opposition leaders have questioned the impartiality of the institution in each of the elections held in Cameroon since 2011 under the auspices of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), arguing that the majority of those appointed to positions of leadership are supporters of the ruling Cameroon People Democratic Movement (CPDM). For instance, following the 2018 presidential election, Kamto, the head of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC), charged ELECAM with collaborating with the country’s ruling party, the CPDM. This sparked protests in the streets, to which the security services retaliated violently. Additionally, disputes broke out during the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) elections in 2011. Pastor Ngoy Mulunda, the head of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), was portrayed by Mavungu as a representative of civil society, but in reality, most people saw him as the incumbent’s close buddy (Mavungu, 2014). He was charged with taking part in the manipulation of elections to benefit the ruling party, which led to electoral violence. The 2007 and 2017 post-election violence in Kenya has also been partially attributed to election management (M’Inoti, 2011).

2.2 Diversity of Ethnos

One of the main causes of electoral violence in Africa is ethnic diversity. Good examples are the obvious ethnic factors that have been present in a number of well-known high-violence incidents, including those in Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria. There is evidence that competitive elections tend to entrench ethnic divisions in emerging nations such as Africa. The 2011 Nigerian election serves as a prime example of how ethnic diversity has contributed to electoral violence. The election was marked by clashes between supporters of different political parties, often divided along ethnic and religious lines. The Boko Haram insurgency in the northern part of the country further exacerbated ethnic and religious tensions, leading to numerous incidents of violence and unrest (Obi, 2014). Violence was propagated by local social networks that were nourished by ethno-religious grievances. This led to a harsh election battle in which the factional elite groups representing ethno-religious and regional interests fought for dominance (Angerbrandt, 2018).

Certain groups are excluded on the basis of their ethnicity in certain African nations. Violence

is likely to occur in situations where significant economic disparities and the exclusion of ethnic minority groups from power exist. Ethno-political marginalization is the root cause of widespread electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, perpetrated by both government and opposition actors (Fjelde & Höglund, 2016b). Ethno-political divisions influence political parties' voter mobilization strategies in Kenya, a factor that is correlated with electoral violence (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2014). In general, ethnic diversity has been a major factor in the spread of election violence across Africa.

2.3 Elections with Competition and Stakes

Violence during the election process is quite likely to be caused by competitive elections. Gaining victory in a fiercely contested election requires a lot of work. In Africa, competitive elections—especially those with uneven playing fields—have frequently led to some sort of electoral violence. For instance, political parties in Ghana used state resources to enlist what they refer to as party foot soldiers, or youth activists, who then used low-intensity violence to win elections and keep control of state resources (Bob-Milliar, 2014). Similar to this, the incumbent's weaker opponent in the election will be keen to use the more aggressive preelection rivalry against him. But because so many African incumbents are unwilling to relinquish their positions of authority, they will resort to employing violence to protect their dominance. There is proof that, in a close race, the formidable opposition party will, like most incumbents in Africa, attempt to manipulate the results. In extremely competitive African elections, the majority of incumbent candidates frequently turn to election manipulation, which ultimately sparks electoral violence (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2014). The 2018 presidential election violence in Zimbabwe is attributed to the electoral rivalry between the incumbent and opposition candidates. Thus, there is a positive correlation between electoral rivalry and post-election violence (Hickman, 2011). Potential voters are discouraged from casting ballots by acts of violence and intimidation. Because of this, candidates rely on the influential villagers for support, and this might even lead to an increase in violence during a campaign (Höglund, 2009). In a system where the legislative and executive branches are elected, the incumbent faces excessive stakes in the electoral contest. Since they are victorious, the opposition resorts to violence to seize little windows of opportunity. When the stakes are high, the competition gets so fierce that each party develops aggressive, goal-oriented plans to win elections by sending political operatives to seize control of polling places and/or stop the other party from manipulating the results. Due to the intense political rivalry in Nigeria, electioneering is often associated with warlike conditions and violence, both between and within political parties, and typically takes place prior to polling day rather than during or after elections (Reeder & Seeberg, 2018). However, politics devolves into intraparty strife over nominations when opposing parties are not as competitive locally or nationally. Political parties' ability to institutionalize and become better equipped to handle the intense competition on the ticket is seriously hampered by intraparty violence (Wanyama & Elklit, 2018).

2.4 Fraud in Elections

In most African countries, electoral fraud is prevalent throughout the entire political process. Numerous academics have argued that electoral fraud is crucial to internal conflicts (Crost et

al., 2013). The general election in December 2007 and the Kenyan post-election crisis in 2008 aided in examining the foundations of political responsibility in developing democracies. The opposition party and society are made aware of the election's result when electoral observers report instances of electoral fraud. Consequently, it raises the possibility of more violence. Many people think that there is electoral violence when elections are manipulated (Dercon & Gutiérrez-Romero, 2012). However, the incumbents and their party will attempt to utilize ballot fraud or bribery if they notice that they are not receiving any electoral support in any specific location. Thus, it is evident that election violence is a direct result of vote-buying fraud. Because incumbents dislike losing their positions of authority, election fraud is widespread in Africa. They frequently make every effort, even resorting to violence, to maintain their position of authority.

2.5 Authority over State Resources

Since election competition is the only means of controlling state resources, its main goal is control of the state. For this reason, the majority of African incumbents desire to hold onto their positions of authority, while the opposition desires to win an election. In light of this, they don't think twice about utilizing any opportunity or means, even if doing so means killing people, to gain control. In order to gain control of the state and access to resources, a number of political parties and incumbents exploit the violent tactics of their supporters to win elections. Violence has historically been used by the state in Nigeria to settle disputes over who will have access to public resources (Angerbrandt, 2018). However, in Ghana, in order to win an election or keep control of public resources, the ruling political party enlists party members as foot soldiers to engage in electoral fraud and low-intensity violence (Bob-Milliar, 2014). Prior to elections, there is a struggle between the main political contenders for control of critical cities and areas with significant oil and economic resources in both North and South Sudan, which are contested by the government and rebel forces (Höglund, 2009). Therefore, it is not unfounded to claim that political candidates in the majority of African nations, whether they are incumbents or challengers, use violence in the electoral process in an effort to seize or hold onto power. In order to maintain their hold on power, incumbents in nations like Zimbabwe have resorted to electoral violence. Political parties or non-state armed groups are the main perpetrators of organized violence in Nigeria during elections (though they may also call in the military and police). In order to achieve their political goal of seizing power, non-state armed groups—rebel groups in particular—participate in attacks during election seasons.

3. Election Violence's Dimensions

By breaking down electoral violence into distinct dimensions, scholars can more readily comprehend the root causes of the problem and determine the best course of action for policy. Previous research indicates that there are a minimum of four crucial aspects that require more investigation: 1) the intensity of the violence; 2) the time of the violence; 3) the individuals who commit the violence; and 4) the victims of the violence.

3.1 How Serious the Violence Is

There are multiple ways to understand the degree of violence, and different coding schemes

have been established by scholars to categorize violence as more or less severe. Straus and Taylor, for instance, categorize violence into three severity levels (Straus & Taylor, 2012, pp. 21–22). On the lower end of the spectrum, violence is characterized by police dismantling protests, party members fighting in public, seizing opposition media, disqualifying candidates, and making brief arrests of political opponents. High-level killings and targeted assassinations, combined with prolonged detentions of party officials, the persistent use of violent intimidation and harassment, and the application of torture, characterize a second degree of violence. At its most severe, violence takes the form of a very aggressive campaign with generalized violence, which entails frequent, extensive physical attacks that result in a significant number of fatalities. According to Goldsmith (2015), additional studies that assess severity take into account the quantity of violent incidents surrounding an election that are reported in the media and by newspapers. A higher number of incidents is indicative of a higher degree of severity. The duration of the event, the degree of physical damage, and whether any fatalities occurred during the event can all be used to further categorize this kind of event data. Election violence is categorized by severity by Mochtak as well; however, he suggests further breaking down violent severity based on two factors: the importance of immediate harm and the degree of coordination between the violence’s perpetrators (Mochtak, 2017, pp. 18–20). Electoral violence is described as “a noisy, demonstrative, or coercive action by individuals or groups of people that interferes with, or disrupts, the proceedings of an election cycle” at the lower ends of both damage and coordination. Depending on the degree of damage and coordination, electoral violence can be defined as “an outbreak of collective violence, including the implicit or explicit use of extensive force of great intensity in relation to the organization of an election.” An incident is defined as a relatively short-lived event that involves violence and prompts a limited official response. This conceptualization has the potential benefit of adding a dimension of organization and planning to the severity of the violence rather than just the observed damage or physical harm. Usually, it is accompanied by intimidation and coercion, which together may result in physical damage to persons or property or the immediate fear that such would occur. In a similar vein, Burgard (2015) contends that electoral violence needs to be divided into two categories: “strategic” violence, which is organized and directed by political elites, and “incidental” violence.

3.2 When Acts of Violence Occur

Violence related to elections can occur either before or after they take place. But the reasons behind each are frequently very dissimilar. Violence committed before elections is frequently used to sway people’s decisions to vote, either by preventing them from casting a ballot or by pressuring them to back a certain candidate. This was the situation in the just concluded general elections for 2023 in Nigeria, where members of Boko Haram and other armed groups in the country issued repeated warnings to the populace to stay indoors and abstain from voting. Violence following an election is frequently committed to protest the outcome of the vote or quell demonstrations by followers of the losing party. Research indicates that there are differences in the dynamics of violence before and after elections. According to Straus and Taylor (2012), the majority of election-related violence in sub-Saharan Africa has occurred before elections and is typically carried out by the administrations in power. On the other hand,

post-election violence is probably going to be considerably more severe and is more likely to involve supporters of the opposition. Suppressive and mobilizing electoral violence are the first two forms of strategic electoral violence. They can be seen as components of a larger electoral strategy used by a candidate or party to try to purposefully influence a particular result. Evidence demonstrates that election violence has been used both to motivate voters and to decrease turnout, despite some people's claims that its primary purpose is to prevent people from voting. The same objective can be met by either action: distorting public preferences in order to increase electoral competition and increase one's chances of winning office.

3.3 Those Who Commit Violent Crimes

One important aspect of electoral violence is knowing who commits the violence. According to Collier and Vicente (2012), incumbents turn to violence when they can no longer afford to buy the votes they need to stay in office. Violence, then, is really a tactic used by a government that is weak and has few resources. Likewise, the use of violence by opposition parties, at least prior to elections, is a show of weakness, implying that they are unable to match the government's advantage of being in power and must instead turn to a tactic akin to terrorism. There are some noteworthy examples to support this idea, such as the Nigerian election of 2007. Nevertheless, a number of further studies indicate that electoral violence is not solely a tactic employed by the weak. According to Straus and Taylor, even in cases where the incumbent administrations are quite powerful, the majority of election-related violence in Africa has been committed by them and their allies. This includes governments that can easily outspend their rivals and benefit from large oil revenue rents, such as Sudan and Equatorial Guinea. Though incumbents are still more likely to be involved in post-election violence than opposition members, opposition supporters do become more likely to commit violent crimes during this time (Straus & Taylor, 2012). Different approaches are probably needed when there are various violent offenders in various situations. Political party collaboration with civil society organizations and law enforcement, for instance, may be the most successful strategy in situations where violence is largely disorganized and consists of street fights amongst partisan followers. This is unlikely to work in situations where the security forces are the main perpetrators of violence against the opponents of the state.

3.4 Victims of Aggression

Not every victim of electoral violence experiences it in the same way. Politicians and voters are two distinct targets for violence, and each has quite different strategies for handling the danger of violence. According to the data currently available, some demographic groupings are also more vulnerable to particular forms of electoral violence. Höglund in 2009 showed that activists from lower socioeconomic classes suffered more severe forms of violence than local elites, indicating the significance of socioeconomic class in explaining the various forms of violence seen in their study of electoral violence in Sri Lanka. Regardless of their political affiliation, those involved in politics but from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were the ones most frequently targeted for physical and arson attacks (Höglund, 2009, p. 296). An increasing body of research has examined the gendered aspects of election violence and contends that women's experiences differ significantly from men's. For instance, sexist campaign rhetoric

intended to frighten and silence female candidates is frequently absent from male-oriented and non-gendered understandings of electoral violence (Bardall, 2011). Physical violence can also be a result of gendered targeting. According to USAID research on women's political empowerment in Kenya, “the extensive threats of violence and actual violence experienced by women political aspirants as well as leaders is perhaps the factor that has the most influence on women's political leadership” (Tripp et al., 2014, p. 17). Almost all of the female politicians who were interviewed for this report shared a personal story of experiencing violence—not only against herself but also against her family and allies. Women had to deal with verbal abuse, property destruction, and intimidation, including insulting language. Standard definitions also fail to address intimate violence that occurs in the home, where women may be threatened with violence by family members if they are politically involved or disagree with their families' political decisions. Additionally, a lot of definitions fail to specifically address sexual assault, which frequently goes unreported or is dismissed as having political motivations (Bardall, 2011). Bardall also discovered that gender dynamics need to be taken into account, even when researchers employ more traditional definitions of electoral violence (Bardall, 2011). The possibility that women will be the targets of violence has tended to rise along with the diversification and prominence of women's participation in politics (Ballington et al., 2017). Election violence can occur in public or private settings, such as among families, the broader community, online, or through the media, and it can also be instigated or approved by the government. It can also occur between the date of voter registration and the inauguration of a new government.

4. Election-related Violence's Effects on African Democracy

Numerous African nations that have experienced electoral violence have suffered as a result. It has harmed African democracy, and some of the detrimental repercussions of election violence will be discussed here. African democracy is seriously threatened by electoral violence, which also has detrimental effects on the political and economic stability of the continent. Using scholarly literature and empirical data as references, this section of the paper addresses the effects of electoral violence on African democracy.

4.1 Implications for Security

First, there are security implications for both the impacted nations and the continent at large from electoral violence. The security of the participating countries, as well as that of other nearby countries, becomes extremely unstable when electoral violence occurs. The complete collapse of law and order, an increase in internally displaced people (IDPs), a rise in refugees, and the militarization of society are a few of the major security issues that arise during electoral violence (Omotola, 2008). Omotola provided evidence for her claim by pointing out that following the 2007 Nigerian election, violence, law, and order completely collapsed in states that were already unstable. The democratic movements in many African nations have suffered serious setbacks as a result of these security consequences. While other issues of national security are neglected during the unrest, the state focuses its resources on suppressing the opposition leaders and their organizations, which might result in porous borders being penetrated by terrorists and other armed groups. For the nations implicated in the election

violence, this might result in total pandemonium and further security issues (Omotola, 2008).

4.2 Violating Human Rights

Human rights violations are a consequence of election violence in Africa, which is another detrimental effect. The government must use military personnel and law enforcement to uphold order in an effort to bring some calm to the violent scenes. These security personnel harassed, abused, and even killed some of the victims during the 2007 Nigerian election violence (Omotola, 2008). In Africa, incidents of rape, torture, extortion, and intimidation are frequently linked to electoral violence. Governments use media restrictions and information censorship during elections to control the narrative and silence critics. For instance, during Zimbabwe's 2008 presidential election, the government detained journalists covering opposition activities and closed down independent media outlets.

Intimidation and harassment of voters, especially those who favor opposing parties, can also be considered forms of electoral violence. Threats, actual physical harm, and even forced relocation are examples of this. During Kenya's 2007 presidential election, hundreds of thousands of people were displaced, and over 1,000 people died as a result of violence and intimidation directed at supporters of opposition candidate Raila Odinga (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Because they are more likely to experience sexual harassment or attack during demonstrations or voting, women are frequently disproportionately affected by political violence. There have been allegations of political thugs sexually abusing women during campaign rallies in Nigeria during the 2011 presidential election. In severe circumstances, extrajudicial executions of opposition leaders or their followers, or acts of torture, can result from election violence. For instance, during Burundi's 2015 presidential election, Amnesty International (2016) reported that government security forces had killed and tortured opposition activists.

4.3 Crisis of Legitimacy

Furthermore, the majority of the legitimacy issues that the African continent is currently experiencing are a result of election violence. Following the violence in Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe in 2007, the opposition and non-political individuals frequently questioned the legitimacy of the administrations (Omotola, 2008). Famous forms of protest include both peaceful and violent ones. Peaceful protests take the form of demonstrations and legal action in electoral courts, whereas violent protests lead to the militarization of society and the state, as well as killings, arson, looting, and property destruction that necessitate curfews. The credibility of democratic institutions and procedures is compromised by electoral violence. Voters lose faith in the electoral process, and democratic institutions are undermined when violent elections taint them. Election violence, according to Nwankwo and Onuoha (2018), undermines public confidence in electoral institutions, which lowers voter turnout and increases apathy toward democratic processes. Political instability may result from a lack of confidence in democratic institutions, as citizens may turn to illegal means of voicing their complaints.

4.4 Prevents Involvement and Competition in Politics

Moreover, effective political competition and participation are hampered by electoral violence. This is due to the fact that it elevates only the powerful, just as in the Hobbesian theory of nature, where those with sufficient might rose to prominence. According to Omotola (2008), most of these nations' democratic processes are gradually eroding, and the populace is reduced to nothing more than spectators rather than active participants in the political process. The resulting political apathy culture poses a serious danger to the advancement of democracy. By fostering an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, electoral violence can weaken democracy by discouraging people from taking part in politics. A lack of political competition and a consolidation of power in the hands of a small number of elites may result from this. For instance, violence and intimidation caused the opposition party in Zimbabwe's 2008 presidential election to boycott the runoff, resulting in the establishment of a one-party state.

5. Reducing African Election-Related Violence

The peace and democracy of the majority of the continent's countries are threatened by the persistent problem of electoral violence. Political tensions, racial and religious divides, and a lack of confidence in the election process are frequently the causes of violence. In order to guarantee free and fair elections, advance democratic governance, and avoid the loss of life or property, electoral violence in Africa must be reduced.

5.1 Institutional and Legal Structure

The design of the electoral system, the establishment of electoral institutions and bodies, and the conduct of electoral activities are governed by a set of laws, regulations, and procedures that make up the legislative framework. A step toward successful and peaceful elections in Africa can be taken by creating a legislative and institutional framework that is inclusive, equitable, succinct, and uncontested. Relevant legislation governing the security sector agencies' (SSAs') electoral engagement should include information on their roles, protocols, and collaboration with electoral institutions in addition to electoral legislation. In order to address identified weaknesses and reduce electoral violence in Africa, an EMB (Electoral Management Body) and SSAs should implement institutional and legal reforms after analyzing and evaluating the previous electoral cycle. When necessary, they should also collaborate with other stakeholders. The promotion of national consensus and public discourse over the institutional and legislative framework may be greatly aided by additional state and non-state players. The reform must take into account a number of factors, including the suitability of the electoral process, the reliability of the EMBs, the efficacy of the mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes, the integrity of the procedures for registering voters, political parties, and candidates, the caliber of the laws governing the functions and duties of political parties, the presence of procedures for the replacement of elected officials, the availability of procedures for exchanging information with the security sector and other pertinent agencies and citizen groups, and so forth. EMBs are well-positioned to lead, advise, and impact these developments.

The kind of EMB that will work best in a particular country's context and what will increase its credibility need to be carefully considered. There are three main types of organizational structures: mixed, governmental, and independent. Ensuring the credibility of EMBs requires

the establishment of essential standards within the legal framework. Independence, impartiality, integrity, transparency, efficiency, professionalism, and service-mindedness are some of these values. This is a widely used system. Legal disputes are brought before judicial authorities, which could include administrative or regular courts, constitutional courts, or legally designated special electoral courts. Legislative challenge systems facilitate the resolution of electoral disputes by legislative bodies or other designated political assemblies.

5.2 Better Peace-Promoting Infrastructure

Installing enduring capacities for fostering peace and averting violence at all levels, from the local to the national, is a key component of improved infrastructure for peace. The mobilization and coordination of state and non-state actors, such as civil society organizations (CSOs), traditional and religious leaders, respectable people, and other groups and individuals with the ability to assist in averting and defusing social conflicts, may be one of these strategies. It is commonly known that the infrastructures of peace have a crucial role in both preventing and lessening election-related violence in many national settings. Various state and non-state entities can participate early in the electoral process during the first phase, which discusses the institutional and legal foundations for organizing and conducting elections. They can facilitate the development of a national consensus about electoral laws, or they can support and push for the recognition of the potential role that traditional leaders and civil society organizations can play in mediating electoral disputes.

It may be essential to include a variety of stakeholders in the debate on the revision of the electoral legal framework if future legal disputes are to be avoided. These stakeholders have a common goal of promoting peaceful elections. Non-state actors can take the initiative to organize cooperative forums with the goal of bringing together pertinent stakeholders, such as EMBs, political parties, traditional or customary governance structures, and civil society organizations, when formal systems are not inclusive and trustworthy.

5.3 Instruction and Training

The development of various electoral actors' comprehension, knowledge, abilities, and competencies with regard to election processes is referred to as electoral education and training. Voter information seeks to provide voters with pertinent information about the voting process. Generally speaking, anyone assigned specific responsibilities related to the execution, security, oversight, or reporting of electoral procedures receives training. It is crucial that all participants are aware of the protocols and have access to pertinent, timely, and accurate information, especially regarding the registration, polling, and counting processes, given the delicate and intricate nature of electoral processes. Election-related training and education should also increase the understanding and sensitivity of electoral officials and CSOs about particular electoral risks and preventive and mitigation techniques when elections are held in societies that are prone to conflict. Efforts in training and teaching should be continued from the pre-election phase through the election and post-election phases of the electoral cycle. Election officials ought to participate in ongoing professional development initiatives. EMBs will hire a lot of temporary workers to help with voter registration, polling, and/or counting during election years. It is common practice in certain nations to assign public employees to serve as

poll workers and tallying officers. In some cases, temporary employees are hired specifically for this function. Election officials must get instruction in protocol and professional behavior requirements (Wall, 2006, pp. 151–162). A sufficient level of knowledge and expertise lowers the possibility of procedural errors. There are two ways to implement training. Professional growth should include training for permanent electoral officials. In order to train a large number of staff members at a lower cost, the training approach for temporary personnel may use cascade training, which can be duplicated at several levels. To learn more about concurrent training or training conducted by mobile teams (Wall, 2006, p. 161).

5.4 Changing Social Norms and Behaviors

The unwritten, informal rules that specify what is proper, acceptable, and required behavior in a group are known as social norms. According to Baccheirri (2016), social norms arise when a group of people in a community choose to act in a particular way because they think other people in the community will also act in that same way (empirical expectations) or because they think other people in the community expect them to act in a particular way (normative expectations). Social standards have a big impact on how people behave, both individually and as a group. When someone upholds or deviates from a norm, they anticipate societal benefits or punishment. They adhere to what they perceive to be the group-specific norms because they also want to use those signals to identify themselves as members of that group, either to themselves or to others. People occasionally internalize the standards of particular behaviors that are accepted in a particular setting (Cialdini et al., 1998).

Interventions for mitigating electoral violence can center on invoking norms through the presentation of empirical data, the moral case for alternative behaviors (which are probably more acceptable in a community), or the illustration of the discrepancy between a norm and particular behaviors (Biccheiri et al., 2009). When people believe in the apparent legitimacy of institutions and when the desired change is moderate—that is, not significantly different from current norms—top-down interventions—like government directives or legal approaches—are more likely to be successful. However, informational campaigns that use social media to encourage positive behavior and progressive messaging on TV and radio are thought to be more effective. Similarly, societal norms and behaviors are likely to be reshaped by open debate that permits people to freely discuss norms without being constrained by power dynamics or fearing manipulation.

6. Conclusion

Although there are many different and complicated causes of election violence in Africa, political tensions, racial and religious tensions, and a lack of confidence in the democratic process are frequently identified. Numerous aspects of electoral violence, such as physical violence, intimidation, and electoral process manipulation, can be attributed to these reasons. Election-related violence thus has serious and wide-ranging repercussions. These may involve the destruction of democratic institutions, the loss of life and property, and a decline in public confidence in the political process. Therefore, it is essential to mitigate electoral violence in order to guarantee free and fair elections, advance democratic government, and stop electoral violence's harmful effects.

A multifaceted strategy is therefore, needed to reduce electoral violence in Africa. This entails bolstering security measures throughout the election process, encouraging communication and reconciliation among political players, and fortifying the electoral process through transparency, inclusion, and legitimacy. In order to facilitate these initiatives and encourage peaceful elections, civil society organizations can be extremely important. In general, reducing election-related violence in Africa is crucial to the continent's democratic consolidation. African nations can guarantee that their elections are credible, peaceful, and enhance democratic institutions by tackling the causes of electoral violence, addressing its different manifestations, and putting into practice efficient mitigating measures.

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