

UNDERSTANDING ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE IN AFRICA

*Patterns, Causes, Consequences and a Framework for
Preventive Action*

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ABSTRACT

From Algeria to South Africa, passing through Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe, election-related violence has imposed itself as a full component of Africa's political landscape in the past two decades. The prevalence of such violence in Africa has led to the production of abundant literature dedicated to the matter. This research seeks to contribute to the existing academic literature by focusing specifically on the patterns, causes and consequences of election-related violence on the continent. The central argument of the article is that, although the patterns, causes and consequences of election-related violence do not necessarily follow the same trends in different African countries (due to, among other factors, inter-country historical, socio-economic and political differences), there are commonalities in the types, causes and consequences of such violence on the continent. While a thorough understanding of the patterns and causes of election-related violence in Africa constitutes an important point of departure in addressing the problem, an effective prevention strategy should embrace a multi-level approach targeting all significant stakeholders in any electoral process, including the political leadership, the electoral management body, civil society organisations, the general public and external partners.

INTRODUCTION

The changes brought about by the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s resulted in virtually all African countries gradually opening up their political systems to some principles, values and practices of liberal democracy. Innovations introduced

to this effect included, among others, the adoption of multiparty political systems and the liberalisation of the media sector.

The adoption of liberal democracy brought about the logic of periodic renewal of government leadership (at local, provincial and national levels) through elections. In this regard, two important observations need to be made in order to grasp the context of the emergence of liberal democracy in many African countries.

Firstly, the advent of liberal democracy in Africa took place against the backdrop of the single-party system that had prevailed in many countries for at least two decades. The quick change between these two almost antithetical political models meant that virtually all African citizens (both the political elite and the populace) moved into liberal democratic practices with political attitudes and mindsets reminiscent of the single-party monolithic regime and conflicting with the emerging pluralist political model.

Secondly, the new liberal democratic model in almost all countries was ushered in by the very autocrats who had been the architects of the repressive and dictatorial single-party state model, the very people Carothers (2007, p 23) considers ill-equipped to undertake this momentous task. Given the poor political and socio-economic record of the single-party state in most countries it was not an exaggeration to argue that the liberal political model adopted was in apparent conflict with the interests of those expected to work towards its entrenchment in society. In fact, as Burnell (2008, p 272) observes,

[p]olitical liberalization usually refers to a top-down process, made by political leaders aiming to maintain power for themselves and not willing to accept that institutionalized uncertainty over electoral outcomes should be the determining principle of who governs (and the possibility of alternation in office that implies).

Since 1990 elections in the majority of African countries have thus taken place within the context of societies that are yet to internalise adequately the fundamental principles, values and rules of liberal democracy and of political leaders who are inclined to bend such values, principles and rules in order to ensure their continued presence at the helm of state institutions.

One of the consequences of this state of affairs has been the resort to violence by both political leaders and ordinary citizens as a medium of political engagement and interaction. The situation is compounded by the perception of elections held by both the political elite and ordinary citizens in many African countries. Elections are generally regarded as a zero-sum game in which loss amounts not only to political exclusion but to marginalisation from the socio-economic benefits expected to accrue to those in charge of the political system.

This perception was entrenched in many African societies by the single-party regimes that used neo-patrimonialism and political clientelism – generally based on religious, regional and/or ethnic affinities – as a strategy of socio-political control and domination.

From Algeria to South Africa, passing through Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zimbabwe and Lesotho, election-related violence has, in the past two decades, imposed itself as a component of Africa's political landscape. The violence witnessed in many African countries since the advent of liberal democracy in 1990 has led many people to question the very essence of democracy and multiparty politics for societies still dominated by leaders who are ill prepared to abide by democratic rules, principles and values (Atuobi 2008, p 11).

However, it appears that the most virtuous path with regard to the issue of election-related violence in African countries does not need to be explored through the essence of democracy and multiparty politics for Africa and its people. Rather, attention should be paid to devising a comprehensive understanding of the root causes behind each instance of election-related violence, to be followed by the formulation of holistic strategies to address them.

'Until recently,' the UN General Assembly (2010, p 6) reports,

there has been little academic research on the subject of election violence. Research gaps that have been generally identified include work on causes and effects of election violence, cross-national studies, efforts to understand the specific forms or variations of violence, work that is both theoretical and case-oriented, and research on the scope, gravity and timing of election violence.

This research seeks to contribute to filling some of these gaps as far as Africa is concerned by focusing specifically on the patterns, the causes and the consequences of election-related violence on the continent. Grounded in a problem-solving approach, the study further proposes a framework conducive to preventing election-related conflicts and disputes from degenerating into violence.

The central argument of the research is that, although election-related violence is a widespread phenomenon on the African continent, its patterns, causes and consequences do not necessarily follow the same trends in different countries. Such inter-country differences are, to a large extent, dictated by the historical, socio-economic and political conditions specific to a given polity. Yet there are commonalities cutting across different countries insofar as the types, causes and consequences of election-related violence on the continent are concerned.

Before delving into the discussion of the main patterns, causes and consequences it appears essential to set the background and context to the research

by discussing the democratic developments that have unfolded in Africa since 1990.

OVERVIEW OF DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENTS IN AFRICA SINCE 1990

With very few exceptions, the vast majority of African states remained under single-party rule until 1990,¹ when the impact of political liberalisation in Eastern Europe and Western donors' newly-crafted aid conditionality model compelled African leaders to embrace multiparty politics.²

To date, virtually all African countries have embraced multiparty democracy and have subsequently been able to hold regular competitive elections. However, while the quantitative aspect of democracy in Africa has frequently been praised, its qualitative dimension still leaves much to be desired.

From a quantitative point of view virtually all constitutions in African countries give citizens the right to form and/or adhere to political parties of their choice. In so doing, they qualify, under conditions clearly stipulated by the law, to vote and compete for political office. Political liberalisation in Africa has also permitted the burgeoning of private media that provide an alternative voice and view to that of the government-controlled public broadcasting network.

On the social front there has been an increasing number of 'independent' labour unions, non-governmental organisations and interest groups of all kinds that not only seek to improve the socio-economic conditions of ordinary citizens but also to provide them with important channels through which to participate in decision-making processes.

The most visible quantitative manifestation of democratic practice on the African continent remains, undoubtedly, the regular elections being held in African countries. According to data from the Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa (EISA), there have been elections in at least 20 African countries every year between 2005 and 2012. In 2013, 22 African countries were set to hold elections at different levels.

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- 1 However, it should be recalled that the vast majority of African countries achieved independence within the framework of multiparty democratic systems, generally copied from their respective colonial metropolitan models. It is only by the mid-1960s that the first post-independence sub-Saharan African leaders, starting with Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah in 1964, embarked on replacing multiparty democratic systems (accused of being divisive and even 'un-African') with single-party regimes. It should be noted, however, that Egypt's second president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, had banned multiparty politics in that country as early as 1953.
 - 2 This research does not underestimate the contribution of internal democratic forces to the struggle for the emergence of multiparty democracy in Africa. Instead, the research emphasises that, notwithstanding the role played by national actors, it is the extensive links between the vast majority of African single-party rulers and Western powers and donors that led the former to bow quite unconditionally to international pressure and embrace multiparty democracy at the critical juncture of the end of the Cold War.

Although elections are an important component of democratic practice in individual African countries, the holding of elections does not represent the exclusive medium for measuring the consolidation of democracy. In fact, 'elections can be instruments of political control rather than devices of liberalisation' (Aalen & Tronvoll 2009, p 193) or be used as a process aimed at 'the legitimization of autocracy through the ballot box' (Good 2002, p 6).

The qualitative dimension of democracy relates to the content of democratic practices and their real significance with regard to the consolidation of democracy in individual African countries. It has been observed that the practice of democracy in many African countries remains confined to the margins of the national political system without necessarily succeeding in altering or transforming it.

This is the case, for instance, in countries where the ruling class (party) maintains tight control over the national security forces and uses them to curtail the free development of opposition political parties and 'unfriendly' interest groups, including non-governmental organisations, private media houses and so on.

The quality of democracy in Africa has equally been questioned with reference to the low level and sluggish speed of democratic development in many countries. In fact, it has been observed that not only are democratic institutions (including political parties) taking far too long to entrench themselves, even in countries that hold regular elections, national socio-political stakeholders (including government, political parties and educational institutions) are yet to devote adequate attention and resources to democratic education. The persistent failure in this regard has contributed to the emergence in many African countries of party systems devoid of adequate ideological grounding and characterised by identity-based loyalties.

Lastly, Africa's democratising states have been criticised for failing to match progress on the political and civic rights front with substantive improvements in the socio-economic rights of the citizenry (Lynch & Crawford 2012, p 23).

In their 20-year (1990-2010) assessment of the democratisation process in Africa, Lynch & Crawford (2012, pp 1-22) identify seven areas of progress and setbacks. These are: increasingly illegitimate but ongoing military intervention; regular multiparty elections and occasional transfers of power, but democratic rollback and hybrid regimes; the institutionalisation of separate powers, but ongoing presidentialism and endemic corruption; the institutionalisation of political parties and significance of issue-based politics, but widespread ethnic voting and the rise of an exclusionary (and often violent) politics of belonging; increasingly dense civil societies, but local realities of incivility, violence and insecurity; precarious political rights and pro-rich economic growth; and the donor community's mixed commitment to and, at times, perverse impact on, democracy promotion.

However, it would be misleading to assume that the above characterisation of the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of multiparty democracy in the post-Cold War era in Africa applies to all African countries in similar ways. Instead, there is a need to highlight inter-state differences and even to acknowledge the existence of several categories of states insofar as the practice of multiparty democracy in post-1990 Africa is concerned. Table 1 identifies five categories of countries in this regard.³

Table 1
The practice of multiparty democracy in Africa since 1990

Consolidating democratic states	Progressing democratic states	States in advanced transition	States attempting transition	Persistent autocratic states
Benin; Botswana; Cape Verde; Ghana; Mauritius; Seychelles; South Africa; São Tomé y Príncipe	Kenya; ⁴ Lesotho; Mozambique; Namibia; Senegal; Tanzania; Zambia	Algeria; Angola; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cameroon; Comoros; Congo-Brazzaville; Côte d'Ivoire; Gabon; Liberia; Malawi; Morocco; Niger; Nigeria; Rwanda; Sierra Leone; Togo; Uganda	Central African Republic; Chad; Democratic Republic of Congo; Djibouti; Ethiopia; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Libya; Madagascar; Mali; Mauritania; Somalia (including Somaliland and Puntland); South Sudan; Sudan; Tunisia; Zimbabwe	Equatorial Guinea; Eritrea; Gambia; Swaziland

Source: Author's own compilation, taking into consideration other models, including the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, the Freedom House ratings, the Peace Index, the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index and the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme.

3 Just as it is difficult to agree on what democracy ultimately means, it is virtually impossible to rate countries on the very complex process of democratisation or democratic transition. The classification contained in Table 1 remains, thus, open to criticism, re-evaluation and revision.

4 The decision to include Kenya as a 'consolidating democratic state' may seem very controversial, as many still remember the unprecedented post-electoral violence the country experienced in late 2007 and early 2008 as a consequence of what appeared to be blatant rigging of the presidential elections in favour of an incumbent unwilling to leave office following what seemed a clear electoral defeat. But not only has Kenya since recovered from its 2007-2008 ashes, more importantly, the rigging of the 2007 elections could not erase the country's achievements in other aspects of the democratic process, including individual and public liberties and media freedom, as well as ongoing efforts to deliver on the socio-economic expectations of ordinary Kenyans.

Consolidating democratic states

Consolidating democratic states are those that have succeeded in entrenching the principles, rules and values of democratic process and where national stakeholders across the entire socio-political spectrum have repeatedly displayed commitment through their actions to upholding such principles, values and rules. Not only have countries ranked in this category proved their ability to run elections that are endorsed by virtually all national stakeholders, their successive governments have, equally, embraced an understanding of democracy that goes beyond the mere holding of periodic elections to work toward the emergence of responsive and accountable governance as well as the promotion and protection of human rights, the rule of law and individual and public liberties, among other elements.

Progressing democratic states

Such states display the majority of features applicable to 'consolidating democratic states'. However, the distinguishing feature between the two is the fact that in progressing democratic states national socio-political stakeholders do not always perceive the democratic process (in terms of both electoral management and accountable governance) as conducive to equitable participation for all parties. In this regard, incumbency represents a critical instrument employed by the ruling elite to weaken the opposition and curtail public liberties and media freedom as well as to design the democratic system (including the electoral process) so as to ensure that it remains in power.

States in advanced transition

These states base their actions on self-imposed constitutional prescriptions grounded in some of the fundamental principles and values of liberal democracy. They therefore hold regular elections, as prescribed by the Constitution, while, at the same time, delivering on the socio-economic public expectations of democracy in terms of social welfare.

However, although democratic processes (including elections) are presented as the key determinant of social orientations, the real forces in this category of state are generally the ruling political party (or coalition) and/or the security forces that seek to determine the outcome of the democratic process in advance.

In this context the incumbent regime uses money and (direct and indirect) force as important strategies to ensure the continued weakening of (perceived or real) opposition political and social groupings. But, especially in countries

emerging from protracted armed conflict, the problem may simply lie in the weakness of state institutions, which are unable to manage effectively the democratisation process and therefore allow forces formerly involved in civil violence to seek to influence the outcome of the country's democratic processes.

States attempting transition

Such states look at democracy from a quantitative perspective, seeking to please the international community so as to enjoy international acceptance. While most of the countries in this category have been engaged in the democratisation process for a long time, they fail to entrench democracy because of their obsession with designing the new system in a way that suits the incumbent leader (as opposed to the ruling party, as is the case with 'advanced transition states').

The collusion between the national security forces and the ruling elite is a dominant feature of this category of states, although some, such as Libya, Mali and Tunisia, find themselves in this category mainly as a consequence of their recent political development as countries emerging from armed conflict.

Advanced transition states and states attempting transition appear to share the characteristics of what Levitsky & Way (2005, p 20) term 'competitive authoritarian regimes'. In such regimes,

formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy

Levitsky & Way 2002, p 52

This article has only identified four African countries as 'persistent autocratic states', namely, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, the Gambia and Swaziland. The dominant features of these countries include autocratic rule by leaders vested with extensive powers, the ongoing repression of dissent, tight control by the regime over the media and significant restrictions on individual and public liberties.

Unlike 'states attempting transition', states in this category do not concern themselves with international legitimacy sought through the deployment of a 'façade democracy'. In the case of Swaziland, for instance, the monarch has simply dismissed the very idea of liberal democracy as antithetical to 'his' people's culture and tradition.

It must be admitted that the boundaries between the five categories of states identified above are not rigid, but blur, as countries are able to swing from one category to another (both forward and backward) depending on their internal political and socio-economic developments at a particular time.

For instance, in its 2010 Freedom in the World report, the American-based Freedom House listed Mali among Africa's 'free' or full liberal democracies. However, the intensification of war in the northern part of the country, followed by a military coup in 2012, highlighted the important shortcomings in Mali's apparent progress toward democracy.

Furthermore, the five categories listed above are not scaled on a rigid linear mode, compelling a country, for instance, to move gradually from the 'persistent autocratic states' category to the 'consolidating democratic states' category. Nor is the listing of a state in a particular category regulated by time considerations. Instead, an autocratic state that embraces meaningful democratic reforms may move quickly to a more advanced democratic stage.

In similar vein, it should be borne in mind that the fact that two or several countries find themselves in the same category does not necessarily mean that their respective democratisation processes may be equated in absolute terms. Instead, it simply means that they share more features among them than any one of them would have with other countries located in categories slightly above or below them.

Lastly, it ought to be noted that all countries, irrespective of the category into which they fall, are susceptible to instances of election-related violence, as events around the continent in recent years have shown. Yet, 'the more consolidated a democratic system is the less likelihood that political violence will be employed by contenders for power as a way to retain or attain office' (Sisk 2008, p 4).

The phrase 'election-related violence' applies to

[a]cts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arises [sic] in the context of electoral competition. When perpetrated to affect an electoral process, violence may be employed to influence the *process* of elections – such as efforts to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll – and to influence the *outcomes*: the determining of winners in competitive races for political office or to secure approval or disapproval of referendum questions.

Sisk 2008, pp 5-6

Fisher (2002, p 4) defines electoral violence as 'any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence an electoral process'. As a sub-type of political violence, election-related violence is more likely to occur in societies with legacies of political and structural violence.

Election-related violence may target people and symbols directly linked to the electoral process, such as candidates, party supporters and electoral officials,

as well as voting materials, polling stations and the headquarters of the election management body.

However, it can also target symbols of government and private property. Although experience in Africa has shown that national security forces and the ruling elite play a significant role in waging election-related violence, it should be admitted that opposition politicians and other individual candidates also revert to violent tactics, either in retaliation or in an attempt to force their way into the electoral process.

But it would be a mistake to restrict the definition to physical violence. Rather, it should be extended to include indirect (psychological, ideological ...) violence, which encompasses, for instance, cases where opposition candidates are unfairly barred from contesting the elections or are denied the necessary freedom to travel in order to campaign. Nuances in patterns of election-related violence are discussed in the section below.

PATTERNS OF ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE IN AFRICA

The liberal democratic model that began in the early 1990s and has been adopted by the vast majority of African states is based on the multiparty political system. It entails ongoing free debate among all socio-political stakeholders about a diversity of policy proposals as well as the 'right to difference'. In this context, while politics is, in essence, competitive, the free expression of differences that multiparty democratic systems seek to advance contributes to making them even more competitive.

However, the legal guarantees and protections multiparty democratic systems provide for the free expression of differences equally contribute to reducing the likelihood that political competition will degenerate into violence. So, what may account for the instances of election-related violence that African societies have continued to experience since the return to multiparty politics in the early 1990s?

Previous literature has envisaged democratisation as a phased process (Huntington 1991; Wise & Brown 1998, p 116) involving the breakdown of the authoritarian or non-democratic regime, the transition and the consolidation.

This study follows Khathamzi's (2007, p 55) division of the democratisation process in Africa into two phases, namely, the transition and the consolidation phases. In the vast majority of sub-Saharan African countries the transition phase started in the early 1990s when the Cold War ended. It was inaugurated with the decree by the incumbent regime of a democratisation process.

It must be emphasised here that our understanding of the political transition goes beyond the restricted scope assigned to it by African governments, which,

in most cases, lasted from two to five years. Instead, the transition should be regarded as the period during which the society acquaints itself with the new democratic values and principles and establishes political, economic and social institutions consistent with the democratic system.

This process may go on for a decade or longer, depending on circumstances specific to a particular country, rather than being limited to the organisation of the first post-democratisation elections. The transition is thus the interval between the dismantling of the authoritarian regime and the emergence of a fully-fledged consolidated democratic system (Healy & Robinson 1994, p 128). The consolidation phase entails the maturation of the democratisation process. It involves not only the entrenchment of political, economic and social institutions related to democracy within society but also the embrace by the citizenry of democratic principles, values and norms.

Although this article adopts a phased approach to democratisation, there is a need to acknowledge that democratisation cannot be assumed to be merely an 'inevitable sequence of events' (Burnell 2008, p 272). Similarly, it should be emphasised that, rather than approaching the transition and consolidation phases of the democratisation process as two rigidly separated moments, there is a need to identify the 'umbilical' connection between the two (Khathamzi 2007, p 67).

Inasmuch as political liberalisation and the process of democratisation pursue the long-term goal of establishing a free society where individual and collective rights are protected and guaranteed, it would be a mistake 'to present democratisation as a unilinear movement from political authoritarianism to democracy ...' (Burnell 2008, p 269). Yet there is need to acknowledge that, as a process, democratisation brings about a feeling of uncertainty among all socio-political stakeholders in a given polity, leading them to explore an array of mechanisms for survival.

It exposes the deficit of legitimacy within the ruling regime and contributes to eroding its internal cohesion. These two factors, combined with the lack of trust among socio-political stakeholders, have the potential to increase socio-political tensions.

The fact that many countries shift their political systems towards embracing liberal democracy against the backdrop of economic decline, social hardships, past marginalisation and a contraction in the capacity of the state to deliver on its core responsibilities and project itself onto society heightens the risk that these tensions will lead to manifest crises and even overt violence.

Elections in countries undergoing a democratisation process are thus held in the context of uncertainty, the severity of which depends on the commitment of role players on all sides to managing the specific socio-economic, political and historical predicaments characterising the society at a particular juncture. This

point helps to explain the differences in the experiences of African countries with election-related violence, in spite of the fact that they share similar socio-economic, political and historical experiences. Just as the patterns of election-related violence vary from country to country, so it is helpful to analyse this violence in terms of the phases of the electoral process, before, during and after the vote.

Patterns of election-related violence prior to the vote

Much of the election-related violence prior to the vote takes place during the election campaign, as political role players attempt to convince potential voters to support their programmes or candidacies. At this stage, violence may take the following forms:

- Clashes between supporters of opposing parties: Clashes between supporters of opposing sides in the pre-vote period usually occur when parties and/or candidates are allowed by public officials to hold campaign rallies in the same area – sometimes even in the same venue. They can also erupt when one side's rally crosses into a 'stronghold' of the opposing camp, which may view the rally as a blatant act of provocation that warrants a strong response.
- Clashes between opposition supporters and state security forces: In several African countries state security forces are perceived – not without good reason – as an extension of the ruling party or elite. The fact that security forces are deployed at an opposition rally to ensure public order can, in itself, turn into a bone of contention between the deployed security force officials and party members, especially the youth. In other cases violence simply erupts because the opposition did not receive the required permission to hold a meeting in a particular place at a particular time. However, violence may also emerge as a result of biased security forces officials determined to advance the agenda of the incumbent regime against the opposition.
- Rejection of the candidacy of opposition leaders: Although it may not involve direct violence in the form of physical harm, the rejection of the candidacy of opposition leaders on dubious legal grounds should be regarded as a case of election-related violence. Not only does such rejection generally lead to direct violence between supporters of the rejected candidate and state security forces it also exposes the rejected candidate to further violence from the state, including, sometimes, house arrest, as the rejected candidate is denied free movement while his/her house is surrounded by state security forces. This was the case in Nigeria during the 2007 national elections, when the country's sitting vice-president and

presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, saw his candidacy rejected by the Independent National Electoral Commission. Officially, he had been accused of embezzling public funds. However, the real reason was his fall out with outgoing President Olusegun Obasanjo, starting in 2005 when Abubakar denounced Obasanjo's bid to revise the Constitution in order to seek a third consecutive term. It was only five days before the election that the Supreme Court declared that Abubakar's name should be included on the presidential candidates' list. He eventually lost the election to Obasanjo's anointed successor, Umaru Yar'Araduwa, in a poll described by many observers as significantly flawed.

- Organised attacks by thugs from the opposing side. It has become common in some countries in Africa, especially, but not limited to, those emerging from protracted civil wars, to witness the rise of violent 'youth groups' operating on behalf of parties and/or individual candidates during the election campaign. Those that operate covertly are generally structured like urban militias and are tasked with directing organised attacks against identified political opponents. Although incumbents and ruling parties are generally behind these violent mercenary networks, the opposition can also make use of such groups as a strategy to counter victimisation visited upon it by biased state security forces.
- Arrest and imprisonment of opposition leaders: In some African countries there have been instances of the arrest and imprisonment of opposition leaders some months or weeks before the vote. These arrests and imprisonments are generally based on trumped up criminal charges. In some cases those arrested are released just a few days prior to the poll so as to lend some sort of legitimacy to the process.
- The abduction and assassination of candidates and other political officials: In some places candidates and other political officials become targets of electoral violence. A clear indication of political intolerance and a deficit of democratic culture, the abduction and murder of candidates and political officials can serve to intimidate opposing voters or get rid of a more popular competitor.
- Preventing opposition leaders and candidates from moving freely: In many African countries during election campaigns the incumbent prevents opposition members from travelling freely around the country to interact with the electorate. These tactics are generally justified on dubious security grounds. In other cases, especially in countries with deficient communications networks, the ruling party simply books all the seats on an aircraft, leaving the opposition with no viable alternative. This was partly the case during the 2011 elections in the DRC. If some elements within the

opposition are able to mobilise private aeroplanes, the regime may counter-attack with issues relating to licences and other flight rights, to ensure that the imbalance is maintained.

- Intra- and inter-community violence and subsequent population displacement: There are also cases where political contenders target communities (or members of the community) who are perceived to support the opposing side. This takes the form of instigating intra- or inter-community violence, generally focused on issues not directly linked to the elections, including disputes over grazing land, cattle rustling, water sources and even citizenship. The objective is to sow discord within these constituencies and provoke the displacement of populations prior to the vote. Such displacement is designed to deny an opponent the total number of his/her potential voters in the area and thus improve one's own chance of success.

Patterns of election-related violence during the vote

In most cases, voting days tend to be more or less peaceful in many African countries, even when the pre-vote and post-vote periods are characterised by high levels of violence. Kenya's 2007 election is an interesting example of this. There were very few cases of violence during the pre-vote period and the voting process was overwhelmingly peaceful throughout the country. This contrasted sharply with the widespread post-election violence, triggered by the mishandling of the vote-counting process as well as the elections results, that led to more than 1 000 deaths and an estimated 250 000 displacements along with significant destruction of physical infrastructure.

Violence on voting day generally assumes the following forms:

- Attacks on voting materials and installations: Such attacks generally take place early – while voting materials are being ferried to the polling station, or late – while they are being shipped to the compilation centres. The aim is to ensure that ballot papers are destroyed or damaged to such an extent that the process of vote classification and counting becomes impossible. These attacks are often carried out by groups which doubt the fairness of the electoral process and the violence is a means of expressing their rejection of the entire process. In some cases, the target of the attacks becomes the polling stations, with the aim of preventing the vote from taking place. These attacks are expressions of anger by groups of election stakeholders who believe the electoral outcome has been decided in advance and the voting is designed as a mere formality to achieve that goal.

- Attacks on election officials: Like politicians and candidates, election officials may become targets of electoral violence. Election officials are generally attacked simply because they are perceived to represent the interest of one political group (generally the ruling party) or when they are caught attempting to alter election results in favour of a specific political grouping or candidate.
- Clashes between supporters of opposing camps: Although virtually all countries in Africa forbid any form of campaigning on voting day, political parties and candidates (especially presidential candidates) find it difficult to abide by this cardinal principle, both intentionally and unintentionally. As a result, large groups gather (generally in the vicinity of specific polling stations) either in anticipation of electoral victory or in order to denounce the electoral process. This increases the possibility of opposing camps clashing should their gatherings be held in the same area.

Patterns of election-related violence after the vote

The period following the vote represents the most uncertain moment in many African countries. As argued above, although instances of violence occur before and during the voting, it is generally after the announcement of the results that much election-related violence takes place. Some of the different factors that may trigger the violence at this stage are:

- Clashes between the losing camp and the security forces: It is common in Africa for the losing side (generally the opposition) in an election to call for public demonstrations by its supporters in order to express its disapproval of the official election results. Such demonstrations are generally held without prior permission from public officials in charge of matters relating to public gatherings as the losing side regards such officials as biased in favour of the winners (generally the incumbents). As a result, these demonstrations generally end in violent clashes between state security forces and the protesting group.
- Victimization of those suspected of having voted for the opposing side: The announcement of the results and the disappointment it brings can also lead supporters of the losing side to target neighbours and neighbourhoods believed to be sympathetic to the winning camp. This trend was prevalent in the 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya. In both the Rift Valley and Kisumu areas (more favourable to presidential candidate Raila Odinga), members of the Kikuyu ethnic group were targeted for sharing an ethnic identity with President Mwai Kibaki and on the general assumption that they might have voted for Kibaki.

- Clashes between supporters of opposing camps: In these instances, violence can be triggered by the winning camp taking its celebrations into an opposition stronghold. Violence can also erupt in the street as cheering victors come across supporters of the losing side who intend to protest against the results. In most of these cases state security forces become involved as they seek to separate the two sides. Such intervention by the security forces may aggravate the matter, as they are perceived, rightly or wrongly, as favouring one particular group (generally the one close to the regime).
- Attacks on the offices of the electoral commission, government buildings and other infrastructure: Violence following the announcement of the election results can also be aimed at property. Sometimes the violence turns into random destruction, targeting anything the protestors come across. Such uncontrolled violence generally drags in criminal networks and other elements, who view the violence as an opportunity to loot shops, businesses and even private property.
- Coup d'état, armed confrontation and/or resumption of civil war: Persistent disagreements over election results in electoral processes perceived to be unfair can trigger the direct intervention of the military in politics in the form of a coup d'état. This scenario remains rare in Africa, although it materialised in Madagascar after the 2001 presidential elections. Following an inconclusive first round, opposition candidate Marc Ravalomanana succeeded in forcing the hand of the country's High Constitutional Court to proclaim him the outright winner, thanks to a favourable switch of allegiance within the national army command. In countries attempting to emerge from protracted civil war the violence can take the form of military confrontations between soldiers loyal to the two major candidates (generally former leaders of armed factions), or even degenerate into the resumption of the civil war. In Angola the rejection by opposition candidate Jonas Savimbi of the 1992 presidential election results signalled the resumption of the country's civil war. In Côte d'Ivoire the stalemate brought about by the disagreement over the 2010 election results led to widespread violence, culminating in the arrest of outgoing president Laurent Gbagbo in April 2011. In the DRC after the 2006 election there was a direct military confrontation in Kinshasa in March 2007 between troops loyal to the two presidential candidates.

As stated in the previous section, experience in Africa in the last two decades shows that no country, whatever the level of its 'democratic development', is totally spared from election-related violence. Yet it should be admitted that these

instances of election-related violence, as well as their extent, vary according to the specific conditions (historical, political and socio-economic) of a state and the nature of its electoral system.

In this regard, 'consolidated democratic states' tend to be less likely to experience instances of large-scale election-related violence due to the openness and fairness of their electoral processes. 'Persistent autocracies' are, equally, less likely to experience instances of large-scale election-related violence because of the tight control they exercise over society and, in most instances, the absence or weakness of dissenting groups.

'Advanced transition states', and especially 'states attempting transition', are thus the most likely to experience large-scale election-related violence (although Kenya seems to have proved to be an exception to this interpretation). The fact that the political and electoral systems in the majority of these states are designed to favour the incumbents contributes to creating frustrations among groups not aligned to the ruling elite. Depending on the opportunities derived from the perceived or real capacity of the state to contain the public expression of these frustrations, this can lead to widespread explosions of violence in society and even trigger a civil conflict.

EXPLORING THE CAUSES OF ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE IN AFRICA

Like political violence, of which it is but one form, the reasons for election-related violence are complex. Its causes are multifaceted and require a multilevel analytical approach in order to be well understood. Although instances of election-related violence are generally triggered by factors specific to a particular electoral process there can be no doubt that, in most cases, these triggers thrive on conditions and predicaments laid down in a particular society over a long period.

A thorough review of instances of election-related violence throughout the African continent in the past two decades identifies four sets of causes, namely, structural or root causes, political causes and technical and logistical causes, as well as immediate causes or triggers.

Structural or root causes

Structural or root causes are located in the social fabric of a society. They relate to the enduring characteristics of a society which predispose it and/or its components to particular political behaviour or choice. Structural causes of election-related violence can thus be located in the factors below:

Unequal political representation and socio-economic development

Societies with a legacy of unequal political representation and socio-economic development among regions are vulnerable to political violence in general and election-related violence in particular. This is mainly due to the fact that regions perceiving themselves as victims of long periods of political exclusion and economic marginalisation come to regard elections not merely as a process of selecting the country's leaders but as a precious tool to overcome their unfortunate predicament.

Such a perception of the electoral process contributes to raising the stakes and the related tensions, which, unless properly managed, can lead to highly charged emotions and conflicts that can degenerate into violence.

Like any other structural cause, unequal political and socio-economic development does not cause election-related violence. In fact, a very pro-active ruling class can actually use elections and the larger design of the political system as important building blocks for addressing some of the problems relating to unequal political representation and socio-economic development in the country.

However, in cases where the political and electoral systems are perceived as designed to entrench the existing unequal political representation and socio-economic development among regions, marginalised groups are likely to adopt strategies aimed at undermining the electoral process, including recourse to violence.

While unequal political representation denies the excluded (or under-represented) group the space to influence adequately the political and electoral systems of the country and protect itself from further exclusion by the privileged group, imbalanced socio-economic development provides the privileged group with the resources (finances, information, education, infrastructure, and so on) to monopolise power. For this reason elections tend to be regarded by the marginalised as a mere formality aimed at entrenching their marginalisation. Without much to gain from the electoral process these groups may revert to violence in order to delegitimise the entire process and voice their grievances.

Legacy of intra- or inter-community resentment

Societies with a history of resentment among their constituent communities are equally likely to become sites of episodic political violence, including election-related violence. Different communities in several African countries find themselves involved in internal disputes and/or other conflicts with their neighbours over resources, disagreements over power control at the local level, memories of past confrontations, and so on.

In societies with low levels of entrenchment of democratic culture such divisive issues have the potential to escalate during electoral seasons. In this

context the probability of election-related violence is likely to increase when major stakeholders (political parties and leaders, civil society leaders, the media, and so on) use these issues as a means of political mobilisation and recruitment.

In such circumstances elections cease to be merely a matter of dignified political competition, becoming instead a zero-sum game, an opportunity to settle long-held scores by all means available. The situation is aggravated when the electoral system is designed so the winner takes all, turning loss not only into an electoral defeat but, more importantly, into collective humiliation and the beginning of an era of marginalisation.

However, in some cases, the problem can simply lie in ethnic or sub-ethnic diversity in a country that has both a low sense of nationhood and a high level of ethnic politicisation or polarisation.

Unresolved problems relating to migration and citizenship

From northern Côte d'Ivoire to the eastern DRC, passing through central Nigeria, questions relating to migration and/or citizenship have been central to fuelling political violence in general and election-related violence in particular.

In Côte d'Ivoire significant immigration from neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso has been turned into a crucial citizenship matter for some 'indigenous' Ivoirians terrified by the demographic weight of the immigrant population and its potential implications for the elections. The eastern region of the DRC experiences the same predicament as it hosts a large immigrant population from Burundi, but, more importantly, from Rwanda, whose demographic weight represents a significant threat to the rest of the region's ethnic communities.

In both countries the problem is exacerbated by the fact that the immigrants have joined similar populations that have been established in the host country for a long time and the host country has failed to articulate clear and effective policies on the integration of immigrants beyond simply granting some of them citizenship.

Nowhere in Africa has the collusion among immigration, citizenship and electoral mobilisation been as devastating as in Côte d'Ivoire, with the December 2010 presidential elections representing the climax and the post-election violence resulting in the deaths of an estimated 3 000 people and the displacement (both within and outside the country) of approximately 500 000 others (BBC News Africa 2011).

However, in the Plateau State of central Nigeria, as is often the case in the vast majority of African countries, internal migration represents the bone of contention. The communities (Hausa-Fulani 'migrants' and Yoruba 'indigenous') do not dispute their respective right to Nigerian citizenship, instead, the dispute is shaped by the fear triggered by a growing migrant population in the area and its political (and especially electoral) implications.

As stated above with regard to unequal political representation and socio-economic development among regions, issues relating to migration and citizenship (even when badly managed) should not necessarily lead to inter-community violence. However, it is the politicisation by stakeholders on both sides of the political spectrum of the issue of identity that contributes to turning ethnic identity into a central issue of political and electoral mobilisation.

Political causes

Political causes of election-related violence relate to state capacity as well as decisions taken by government, Parliament and other state institutions that have an implication for the electoral process, its management and, to some extent, its outcome. Such causes apply to the aspects below:

State capacity

The regular organisation of elections forms part of the duties of the government of every country. For this reason the capacity of the state has as many implications for its ability to plan and run credible elections as it has a direct impact on its ability to deliver on its core responsibilities, including the provision of security, public order and basic social services.

In this regard, the chronic weakness of state institutions in many African countries hampers the ability of many African governments to run electoral processes that are free, fair and credible enough to deserve the full support of all electoral stakeholders. As Khadiagala (2010, p 13) argues, 'while election violence reflects the subversion of rules of competition and participation, the fundamental problem revolves around the absence of solid institutions to manage the fragmented nature of African politics'.

There is thus a mutually reinforcing relationship between state weakness and election-related violence in that the state's weak institutional capacity constrains its ability to manage credible electoral processes effectively, increasing the likelihood of election-related violence, while the violence contributes to eroding the legitimacy of state institutions, thus disrupting the process of their affirmation within society.

The problem of political culture

Democratic institutions and procedures, including elections, have been introduced in virtually all African countries without the requisite meaningful transformation of the underlying structures of power in society as well as the norms governing the political system (Adolfo, Kovacs, Nyström & Utas 2012, p 1). As a result, the newly embraced multiparty politics tends to operate in many African countries on

the fringes of behavioural matrices reminiscent of the authoritarian single-party system, characterised by intolerance and total rejection of difference as well as the resort to violence as a means of political expression.

The legacy of the single-party system thus contradicts sharply the very essence of elections under multiparty democratic systems, which are competitive, conflict-prone and usually characterised by high levels of uncertainty. 'In societies where the non-violent norms of mature democracies are not [yet] fully developed,' Adolfo, Kovacs, Nyström & Utas (2012, p 2) argue, 'there is risk that the electoral context will contribute to intensifying and polarising existing socio-economic cleavages and other divisions in society.' In such contexts electoral processes are war-like periods, with protagonists on all sides resorting to any means available not only to defeat but also to humiliate and annihilate their opponents.

The stakes involved in the elections

As a legacy of the authoritarian single-party system, neo-patrimonial tendencies seem to permeate the vast majority of political regimes in African countries. The common characteristic of such regimes is the disturbing overlap between the political and economic spheres of the society, with those in charge of the state using their privileged positions to 'privatise' public goods and distribute them to those they believe are prepared to support the regime.

In such societies political competition – including elections – ceases to be a mere question of selecting those who will lead the society. Instead, it becomes a matter of political and socio-economic survival, sometimes regarded as an issue of life and death.

The situation becomes even more complex in countries with a history of political allegiance and preferences following ethnic or racial lines as well as a legacy of inter-group tensions or conflicts. In such societies electoral competition turns into an inter-community struggle where defeat is not an acceptable outcome, for it brings about political exclusion and socio-economic marginalisation of the losing community.

As Sisk (2008, p 9) argues,

[a] common cause of election violence is that the stakes of winning and losing valued political posts is [sic] in many situations, especially in conditions of high scarcity and underdevelopment, incredibly high. When winning a state office is the key to livelihood not just for an individual, but for their entire clan, faction, or even ethnic group, the stakes involved in prevailing in electoral competition are incredibly high.

The delineation of constituencies

The issue of the delineation of constituencies is at the heart of the electoral process, especially in countries applying constituency-based electoral systems focused on individual candidates. Since constituencies generally tend to coincide with the existing politico-administrative boundaries of a country, they appear to bear an (ethnic) identity bias, since most of these boundaries date back to the colonial era which used identity as the main criterion in the determination of administrative boundaries. The problem is made more difficult in heterogeneous constituencies with a clear dominant ethnic group.

The nature of the electoral system

The nature of the electoral system in any electoral democracy is critical, as it has the potential to influence significantly the electoral outcome. Societies such as Burundi and Rwanda, where very disproportionate ethnic groups live in the same constituencies, cannot afford to base their electoral system on the simple majority, first-past-the-post (FPTP) model as this may lead to the total exclusion of the minority group.

Instead it has been proposed that such societies should either use proportional representation or even design a political system based on the consociational theory. In similar vein, countries such as South Africa, Namibia and Botswana, which are ruled by one dominant political party, should base their electoral system on the proportional representation model so as to guarantee inclusiveness in the country's political system.

But more interesting has been the case of the Kingdom of Lesotho. For many years the country used the FPTP system, resulting in post-electoral contestations by opposition parties. In 1998 these conflicts led to the intervention of the military and the short exile of King Letsie III to South Africa.

Although the armies of South Africa and Botswana, acting on behalf of the Southern African Development Community, were able to reverse the coup and reinstate the exiled king, the event triggered a debate over the relevance of the electoral system itself. Ultimately the country shifted to a mixed electoral system, combining aspects of proportional representation and FPTP. Lesotho has not experienced post-election conflict since the introduction of the new electoral system (Interview with a Mosotho electoral official, Pretoria, 31 July 2013).

The role of national security forces throughout the electoral process

In many African countries national security forces are perceived – often correctly – to be biased in favour of the incumbent regime. Throughout the electoral process such perceptions contribute to severing relations between national security forces

and opposition parties and their supporters. In this context, rallies organised by opposition parties tend to turn into episodes of confrontation between party supporters and the national security force teams deployed to ensure public order at these events.

In some cases the security forces are used by the incumbents and are purposely deployed to disrupt rallies and other gatherings organised by the opposition. In other cases the security forces are called upon to prevent unauthorised meetings organised by opposition parties even when the parties have been denied such authorisation in spite of having complied with all the requisite formalities.

In some instances, including in Uganda, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, the problem of the neutrality of the national security forces arises as a result of their historical link to the ruling political elite. As was revealed in the 2008 elections in Zimbabwe, national security forces with a significant stake in the political sphere may share the fear of the ruling political elite of losing crucial socio-economic privileges and benefits as a consequence of a change in the status quo.

In order to prevent this from happening in Zimbabwe in 2008, the country's national security forces colluded with youth groups supportive of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front to launch widespread campaigns of intimidation and violence targeting supporters and, in some cases, leaders of the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change.

Technical or logistical causes

Technical or logistical causes of election-related violence, as far as Africa is concerned, relate to the actual management aspects of the electoral process.

Inexperienced electoral management bodies

There are ongoing efforts around the African continent to develop election management as an area of competence and specialisation in its own right. But at the same time there is a need to acknowledge that election management in Africa continues to be hampered by problems relating to the lack of adequate expertise among those tasked with this important activity.

The lack of experience and expertise in the area of democratic election management has its roots in the legacy of the single-party system. However, in the contemporary context it is caused by inadequate national funding for the institutionalisation of democracy.

In many African countries not only do governments not allocate sufficient financial resources to civic and democratic education, they are yet to accommodate election management bodies as full components of national institutions. This has

resulted in the flight of former electoral officials in search of better employment opportunities.

In turn, the continued renewal of electoral officials within the election management bodies around the African continent denies these institutions the accumulation of experience that is critical to better management of the electoral process.

Under-funding resulting in short cuts and delays

Elections are very costly, particularly for the majority of African countries, which already rely on foreign financial aid, including in the area of budget balancing. For instance, the international community – led by the United Nations – contributed funds to the tune of more than US\$466-million to the successful organisation of the 2006 presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections in the DRC (Kadima & Tshiyoyo 2009, pp 132-133).

The reliance by African countries on external financial aid for the organisation of elections means that the availability and timing of the disbursement of such funds – rather than simply national election needs and socio-political dynamics – become significant factors in the determination of priorities and timelines. Disagreements among stakeholders about election-related activities and timelines can contribute to heightening tensions and the possibility of these tensions degenerating into violence.

Poor planning

Cameroon held its legislative and municipal elections on 30 September 2013, more than a year after they were due (Agence France Presse 2013). The DRC will hold senatorial and provincial elections in 2014, despite the fact that the term of office of the current senate and provincial assemblies expired in 2012. These two cases, among many others in Africa, attest to the ad hoc manner in which elections are organised in some countries.

Unless electoral timelines are set well in advance and are upheld, election planning in a context of financial constraints may become a very difficult issue to handle. However, even in countries where election timelines are generally observed, planning remains an unresolved issue, as many governments wait until the election year to roll out election-related activities, including voter registration and the updating of the voters' roll.

Zimbabwe was caught in just such a scenario prior to its elections in July 2013. Poor planning, as is blatantly the case in Zimbabwe, leads to accusations among stakeholders and the loss of trust in the electoral management body – all ingredients contributing to losing parties disputing the credibility of the elections.

Material errors

Election-related violence may be caused by material errors in communicating election results. It should be noted that material errors are unintended mistakes made by election officials in the performance of their duty. They should not be mistaken for intentional falsifications undertaken by parties and intended to rig the elections.

Problems of communication and transport

The quality of the communication and transport infrastructure has a direct bearing on the electoral process and may be a factor in the eruption of election-related violence. In some African countries election materials have to travel through derelict infrastructure systems in order to reach remote, far-flung locations.

While the failure of election materials to reach such places may, in itself, lead to tensions and the possibility of violence, the challenges involved in getting election results and used election materials from these areas to the compilation centres may also become an issue of contention among the main electoral stakeholders.

Immediate causes or triggers

As argued above, immediate causes or triggers refers to aspects of the electoral system and actions undertaken by election stakeholders during the election period that may lead to violence in the short term.

Negative media reporting

Media play a significant role in influencing political processes in any society. In competitive electoral processes the media can serve as an extended arm of the propaganda machinery of particular parties and/or candidates seeking to maximise their chances of success. But as a rule of ethics, media corporations are requested to abide by high standards and the values of objectivity, fairness and accuracy as they report on election-related processes.

However, the ownership of some media organisations by politicians or politically connected individuals as well as the high stakes generally involved in elections in Africa tend to rob the media of their role as nation builders and turn them into a threat to national cohesion.

The case of Kenya during the 2007 elections is very revealing in this regard. In highlighting the negative role played by media corporations in the post-election violence, the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted Kass FM journalist Joshua Arap Sang alongside the country's current president (Uhuru Kenyatta)

and his deputy (William Ruto) as well as former Public Service chief Francis Muthaura.⁵ Arap Sang stands accused of having used the radio platform to play a 'crucial part' – alongside two politicians from his native Rift Valley region – in planning the violence by using coded messages to collect and direct supporters (Waitatu 2010).

The nature of political mobilisation and campaigning

Virtually every electoral process is organised within boundaries set by election-related laws and principles and norms established by the electoral code of conduct forbidding specific attitudes and behaviour by the different stakeholders.

The establishment of such legal boundaries and the principles and norms are based on the understanding that, unless adequately checked, the competitive nature of elections and the emotions they evoke may easily escalate election-charged tensions into instances of large-scale violence.

Although the universal practice of regulating attitudes, speech and behaviour during the election period, as explained above, extends to Africa, there is still a gap in many African countries between legal and regulatory provisions on the one hand and the actions of socio-political leaders on the other.

Political mobilisation and campaigning in some countries in Africa still involve references to identity (ethnicity, citizenship, religion), divisive claims and, in some instances, direct incitement to violence. In countries recovering from civil wars, rebels-turned-politicians may exploit their wartime links with inadequately demobilised armed groups to lead election campaigns based on threats and even violent confrontation.

Perception of the recourse or appeal system

Elections are complex processes, making them susceptible to errors that can generate protests and objections by parties competing for political positions. In anticipation of these inevitable errors, electoral processes are generally endowed with recourse mechanisms that aggrieved parties may exploit to redress perceived or real injustices.

In this regard, a lack of trust in the recourse or appeal mechanisms poses a major challenge to the electoral process as well as to security and social peace. In most cases it is this lack of trust that leads aggrieved parties to choose street protests as the preferred means of voicing their discontent instead of following the formal judicial route.

⁵ The ICC dropped the case against Francis Muthaura in March 2013 after a key witness admitted lying in his incriminating testimony against Muthaura (*The Guardian* 2013)

In post-electoral settings filled with claims of electoral fraud, as was the case in Togo in 2005, Kenya in 2007-2008 and Gabon in 2008, streets protests to challenge the official election results have always led to violence, with dire consequences for human lives and for infrastructure.

Blatant rigging of election results

Election rigging on the African continent has become so sophisticated in recent years that it warrants serious academic research. It takes several forms, prominent among which are the inflation of the voters' roll, the monopolisation of the public media by the incumbent, the use of public resources by the incumbent and direct falsification of the election results (very often by the incumbent).⁶

In its worst form, election rigging can lead to the annulment of the elections by an establishment (incumbent regime acting in conjunction with the national security forces) reluctant to lose its privileges, as was the case in Algeria in 1991 and in Nigeria in 1993. The blatant falsification of election results by incumbents represents a case of political violence which is very often met with counter-violence from those on the losing side (Algeria in 1991, Nigeria in 1993, Kenya in 2007). It deepens 'the linkage between democratization, social violence and insecurity on the continent as a whole' (Adebanwi & Obadare 2012, p 40).

ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE IN AFRICA: ANALYSING THE CONSEQUENCES

Existing literature on election-related violence in Africa has tended to emphasise its material (physical, measurable, quantifiable) consequences, while downplaying its immaterial (non-measurable, non-quantifiable) consequences.

This article argues that, although they may seem less perceptible, the immaterial consequences of election-related violence are as destructive as their material counterparts.

As far as the material or physical consequences of election-related violence are concerned, the literature is filled with accounts of death and injury, destruction of infrastructure, population displacement (internally displaced persons and refugees), the withdrawal of foreign investment, the deterioration in the humanitarian situation and economic decline.

6 Taking into consideration the different forms election rigging can assume it becomes a very delicate exercise to identify electoral processes on the African continent that truly qualify as genuinely free and fair.

Death, injury and population displacement

As a form of political violence, election-related violence causes death and injury to human beings and also leads to population displacement, both within and outside the country in which it takes place. The case of Kenya after the December 2007 elections stands out as the deadliest instance of post-election violence in Africa in recent years (Maina 2011, p 3; Njogu 2009, p 2).

But it must be acknowledged that deaths caused by election-related violence may be the result of clashes between supporters of different candidates or parties or clashes between specific supporters and the security forces. Given its generally random nature and the responsibility often borne by government for its eruption, election-related violence seldom leads to prosecutions, leaving its victims to bear the resulting frustration for a long time.

Destruction of infrastructure

Election-related violence also destroys socio-economic infrastructure. In some cases, infrastructure may be directly targeted by protestors as it is perceived as the extension of the contested order. Government buildings, offices of the ruling party and property linked to the security forces are included in this scenario.

However, infrastructure can also be targeted randomly as uncontrolled mobs use destruction simply as a means of making a statement. During the 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya mobs uprooted part of the railway line linking the country with Uganda, resulting in the paralysis of activities related to the sector in both countries.

Economic decline and withdrawal of foreign investment

Election-related violence has a net negative impact on the economic activity of the societies in which it takes place. It disrupts economic activity, delaying import and export processes. The post-election violence in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010-2011 prevented the exportation of cocoa, the country's largest foreign-currency earner.

Similarly, the uncertainty brought about by post-election violence – depending on its intensity – may lead to the withdrawal of established foreign investment or delay future investment.

Deterioration in the humanitarian situation

In countries recovering from civil war and already facing a humanitarian crisis election-related violence may contribute to aggravating the humanitarian crisis.

As argued above, there is a need for further investigation of the immaterial or non-physical consequences of election-related violence in Africa. The aspects highlighted below are, therefore, designed to trigger the discussion in that regard. Election-related violence can lead to the undermining of democratic institutions and processes as well as of the legitimacy of the sitting government, the disruption of national cohesion and exacerbation of inter- and intra-community conflicts, the intervention of the military in politics and the eruption or resumption of civil war, as well as placing strains on diplomatic relations with external partners.

Undermining of democratic institutions and processes and of government legitimacy

Election-related violence represents, first and foremost, a challenge to the process of establishing democracy, especially in countries emerging from undemocratic systems. As Adolfo, Kovacs, Nyström & Utas (2012, p 1) argue, election-related violence 'not only poses a threat to peace and security on the continent, but also risks undermining the long-term sustainability of ... democratisation processes'.

It diminishes the credibility of institutions entrusted with entrenching democracy. It even serves as a barometer of the inadequate entrenchment of democracy within the society in which it takes place. But above all, it undermines the legitimacy of the government, either because it is perceived as the perpetrator of the violence or because it is unable to address it effectively.

Disruption of national cohesion and exacerbation of inter- and intra-community conflicts

In both Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire the strong imbrication between politics and ethnicity turned the post-election violence into confrontations between ethnic groups, as they were regarded as aligned to the two final presidential candidates. The result was that the two countries found themselves not only led by governments whose legitimacy could be disputed by many in the society, but also with societies that had lost their sense of unity.

Intervention of the military in politics and the eruption/resumption of civil war

Election-related violence represents a significant case of disagreement and lack of trust among the political role players. If the crisis persists for a long time it may open the door to the interference of other (internal and external) forces using the excuse of seeking to contribute to the resolution of the conflict.

For instance, the inconclusive presidential election in Madagascar in 2001 led to a stand-off between the two leading candidates, Didier Ratsiraka and Marc Ravalomanana, each mobilising his supporters. The inability of the political role players to find a solution to the crisis resulted in the intervention of the military, which, ultimately, decided to back Ravalomanana.

Yet, as recent events in Guinea-Bissau have demonstrated, intervention by the military can also be motivated by their fear of losing long-standing privileges. After a successful first-round presidential election in March 2012, won by Carlos Domingos Gomes, the military took over power and arrested Gomes as well as the country's interim president, Raimundo Pereira, thus preventing a run-off set for 29 April 2012 from taking place (CNN 2012).

The reasons given by the military to justify the coup included their dismay over a secret deal struck between Gomes and the interim president for the deployment of Angolan soldiers to the country as well as Gomes's intention to reduce the size of the army once he was in power (Reuters 2012). However, according to Abdel-Fatau-Musah (cited by Voice of America 2012), the decision by the military to seize power at this critical juncture could be explained by its determination to maintain Guinea-Bissau as a failed state in its own interests.

In countries recovering from civil war election-related violence can bring about the resumption of the war. This was the case in Côte d'Ivoire after the contested December 2010 presidential poll.

Strained diplomatic relations with external partners

Election-related violence also contributes to strained diplomatic relations between the country involved and its external partners. This may come as a result of external partners disapproving of the controversial process that led to the violence, especially in cases where the actions of the country's government are considered to be at the root of the violence.

FRAMEWORK FOR PREVENTING ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE IN AFRICA: A PROPOSAL

Why focus on prevention? Conflict studies and practice in the field of conflict emphasise the primacy of prevention as the most relevant strategy to deal with (violent) conflict. Indeed, conflict prevention is far more cost effective than conflict management, conflict resolution and, more importantly, conflict transformation.

With regard to election-related violence in Africa the cases of Kenya in 2007-2008 and the DRC in 2006, to mention only two, are clear testimonies to the urgent necessity for election stakeholders on the African continent to invest in prevention.

As stated above, the post-election violence in Kenya resulted in many deaths and the displacement of thousands of people within and outside the country as well as in the destruction of property and infrastructure, the disruption of socio-economic activity and strained relationships among communities.

In the DRC election-related violence took the form of direct confrontation between armed troops loyal to the two presidential contenders, President Joseph Kabila and his deputy, Jean-Pierre Bemba. This research argues that election stakeholders in Africa should focus on prevention in order to avoid the consequences described above, the implications of which no African country can afford either in terms of the financial cost or the destruction of the social fabric of societies already experiencing diverse forms of fragmentation.

The proposed preventive action should be based on a multi-level approach focusing on elections as a long-term cycle and not a single event and should target all electoral stakeholders, as discussed below.

Political leaders

National political leaders, both the opposition and the ruling elite, in any society are the primary stakeholders in an electoral process and hold the key to the success or failure of the election. For this reason it is incumbent on the ruling elite to regard the effective and efficient handling of the electoral process as one of their key areas of responsibility as a national government.

In order to achieve this, they must provide the resources necessary to enable the elections to be organised successfully. They must be prepared to accept the uncertainties inherent in elections in any multiparty competitive setting and to handle the elections in line with strict principles of transparency, fairness, inclusivity and accountability.

More importantly, the ruling elite should strive to demarcate itself unequivocally from the country's security forces, which should be empowered to perform their duties in a professional, objective and impartial manner throughout the electoral process.

Opposition leaders also have a responsibility to ensure the success of the electoral process, especially in those African countries which are yet to entrench democratic practices. Opposition leaders should approach the process as a competition limited to the selection of political office bearers as opposed to a struggle for control of the means of social mobility.

They should thus mobilise their constituencies and supporters in accordance with national and electoral legislation and in a manner that does not threaten peace, national stability or social cohesion. They should display trust in the national security forces and explore the possibility of engaging with them on issues relating to the electoral process.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that striking such a balance will always prove very difficult in countries where the national security forces are more or less an extension of the ruling party, as the case of Zimbabwe attests.

Both the ruling political elite and the opposition should display willingness and commitment to seeking inter-party convergence. They should build and maintain lines of communication and establish permanent consultation platforms as a way of defusing tensions and dispelling adversarial perceptions among their supporters and the general public. They should agree on values, principles and norms to be observed by all parties throughout the electoral process. Similarly, they should commit wholeheartedly to the electoral code of conduct established according to the electoral law. Lastly, both sides should commit to working in harmony with the election management body, while, at the same time, allowing that body ample space to discharge its responsibilities independently.

Election management body

The dominant trend in the vast majority of African countries following the third wave of democratisation has been to entrust the running of the elections to a special permanent body. Generally referred to as the electoral commission, the election management body (EMB) is the most critical institution in the electoral process.

The public's general perception of the body and its actual performance are critical elements in the attitude electoral stakeholders adopt toward the electoral process and, more importantly, the results.

There have been sustained efforts in different African countries to ensure that the election management bodies are established in an inclusive and transparent manner and acquire a high level of professionalism. Yet there is also a need to acknowledge that the complexity of running elections in unstable environments and amid dire shortages of the necessary resources, as was recently the case in Mali, means that the task of establishing fully-fledged professional EMBs throughout the African continent is far from complete.

The quest for the professionalism of EMBs cannot be separated from the broader question of their independence from the ruling political elite and their overall integrity vis-à-vis all electoral stakeholders.

As a starting point, the selection of the members of the EMB must be transparent. Their term in office should be longer than that of political office bearers. The body should establish mechanisms for permanent interaction with all electoral stakeholders. These may include consultation platforms with political parties, civil society organisations, including faith organisations, academic institutions, the media (public and private), donors and other international governmental and non-governmental partners.

Furthermore, in its interaction with the general public, the body should emphasise capacity-building initiatives and programmes. Ample resources should be dedicated to civic and voter education, including explanations of the working of the election management body.

However, it should be acknowledged that, while it is important to ensure transparency, meritocracy and inclusiveness in the recruitment of individuals to serve within the EMB, the personality of those selected to serve at the most senior levels is key to the enforcement of the independence of the body. This means that beyond regulations and legislations EMBs will only earn the respect of other election stakeholders if they are seen to be operating in a professional, impartial and objective manner. Furthermore, the need for high levels of professionalism, impartiality and objectivity should not rest with senior management alone. Rather it should filter down to all permanent and temporary electoral officers.

Civil society

Civil society has an important role to play in the process of democratic consolidation in African countries. As far as electoral processes are concerned, civil society organisations (CSOs) are expected both to contribute to the success of the electoral process and to assess whether the process conforms to national and international norms and standards.

Civil society organisations contribute to the success of the electoral process through an array of activities including civic and voter education and frequent interaction with the election management body (including submissions and proposals), political parties, and so on. CSOs should also follow every step of the electoral process and alert the EMB and all other electoral stakeholders to possible deviations, inconsistencies and other violations.

This monitoring task should be undertaken throughout the electoral cycle. Furthermore, CSOs should train their members and other ordinary citizens to serve as election observers during the voting period. The more significant the capacity of CSOs to observe an electoral process, the more likely they are to derive critical lessons that may be learnt and used in the planning of future elections.

Civil society organisations should also play a meaningful role in the area of election-related dispute prevention and resolution. To achieve this goal, CSOs can either set up their own electoral dispute prevention and resolution mechanisms or offer their services to the election management body.

However, it should be emphasised that the impact of civil society organisations on the electoral process depends, to a large extent, on their ability to unite and act as a coherent group. To this end they should set up a national civil society electoral forum (complemented by provincial or regional and local

civil society electoral forums) through which they can meet to share information and carry out concerted interventions vis-à-vis the electoral process.

The general population

In liberal democracies civil society organisations claim to speak on behalf of the people, as they generally act as the interface between government representatives and the general population. While there is relevance in this claim, its persistence may actually result in disempowerment, the very 'evil' civil society organisations seek to combat.

In this regard, while ordinary citizens will rely on civil society organisations to strengthen their capacity with regard to election-related and other issues, they also need to take the lead in their daily engagement with all election stakeholders, including the election management body, political parties and candidates, security forces and government officials, as well as civil society organisations.

Ordinary citizens acting within the framework of their respective communities should be able to establish community-based consultation mechanisms to deal with issues relating to the electoral process. The ultimate goal should be to prevent the manipulation of ordinary people by politicians, thus minimising the possibility of election-related violence.

The rationale behind the need for ordinary members of the community to assume leadership positions in electoral processes stems from the understanding that it is they who are, generally, the perpetrators and victims of election-related violence, which also often has detrimental effects on peace, harmony and stability within their communities. Citizens' empowerment is therefore regarded as the most proactive strategy for preventing election-related violence.

External stakeholders

External actors, whether governmental, inter-governmental or non-governmental institutions, play a significant role in electoral processes in many African countries.

Their contribution takes an array of forms, including financial disbursements and logistical and technical support as well as the provision of expertise in the overall process of election planning and management. As a way of ensuring that their contributions have optimal impact, external stakeholders should adopt an interventionist perspective based on an electoral cycle approach.

They should focus their actions on monitoring rather than merely observing, while, at the same time, seeking partnerships with all national electoral stakeholders (government, political parties, civil society organisations, media, security forces and so on).

CONCLUSION

The last decade of the twentieth century saw democratic rule embraced in virtually all African countries. Although this new trend was first and foremost a consequence of dramatic changes in international politics after the end of the Cold War and the re-alignment of the policies of Western powers in relation to Africa, the path to liberal democracy has emerged as an irreversible journey African people are committed to undertake.

But, as might have been anticipated, the road to democratisation has not always been smooth. This is partly because of the long-term legacy of the single-party system that prevailed in much of Africa for decades prior to the advent of democracy as well as the drive by incumbents to stay in power in spite of the changing political environment.

One of the consequences of the inadequate assumption by the citizenry, both governors and governed, of democratic principles, attitudes, values and norms in many African countries has been the resort to violence as a means of political mobilisation, competition and protest. Election-related violence is but one example of this political violence that Africa is grappling with as it moves towards entrenching democracy as the dominant political system on the continent.

Election-related violence may occur throughout the electoral process – prior, during and after the vote. Its patterns vary according to the specific historical, political and socio-economic conditions of a particular country. However, overall, it may involve clashes between supporters of different parties and/or candidates, clashes between supporters of parties/candidates and the security forces, arrest and imprisonment of opposition candidates, abduction and assassination of candidates and other political or electoral officials, inter- and intra-community violence, attacks on voting materials and installations, and so on.

Four different sets of causes of the eruption of election-related violence have been identified. They are: structural or root causes, political causes, technical or logistical causes and immediate causes or triggers. This article has sought to re-align the debate on the consequences of election-related violence on the African continent by shedding adequate light on its non-physical aspects.

In addition to causing death and injury, population displacement, the destruction of infrastructure, the withdrawal of foreign investment, economic decline and a deterioration in the humanitarian situation, election-related violence also leads to the undermining of democratic institutions and processes and of the legitimacy of the sitting government, the disruption of national cohesion, the exacerbation of inter- and intra-community conflict, the intervention of the military in politics, the eruption/resumption of civil war and strained relations between a country and its external partners.

Inasmuch as efforts have been made to resolve cases of election-related disputes and violence throughout Africa, including by adopting power-sharing models, prevention is the most cost-effective tool for dealing effectively with the challenges posed by the violence. Such preventive action should espouse a multi-level approach, focusing on elections as a long-term cycle and targeting all significant stakeholders in any electoral process, including the political leadership, the electoral management body, civil society organisations and the general public, as well as external partners.

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