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## Democratization Trapped in Electoral Violence: Is Sub-Saharan Africa a Dangerous Place for Democracy?

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### Abstract

The third wave of democratization that hit the African region in the early 1990s left in its wake termination of authoritarian rule, and consequent enthronement of democratic regimes. This momentous event raised high hopes of enduring democracy in a region with egregious authoritarian past. Three decades after the epochal transition that has been aptly dubbed Africa's 'second liberation', prospects of democratic consolidation have not only waned considerably, but also initial hopes of democratic deepening have evaporated. While there is a plethora of factors that account for this democratic recession, electoral violence has been implicated in the literature as a key causative factor. Whereas Africa has seen an impressive increase in the frequency of elections in the post-third wave period, this democratic gain has been eroded by a corresponding increase in the incidence of violence in African elections. By comparing Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe—three countries with different decolonization and democratization experiences—the paper shows that electoral violence is neither a recent phenomenon in Africa nor an exclusive strategy of a specific fraction of the power elite. The paper argues that electoral violence is promoted by such factors as politicization of land access, ethnic marginalization, patrimonialism, state-backed violence, and youth unemployment. These factors combine to make the Sub-Saharan Africa a 'risk environment' for electoral democracy. The paper concludes by proposing some reform measures capable of protecting the ballot against the bullet.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Democratization, Election, Electoral Violence, Sub-Saharan Africa

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The third wave of democratization that hit the African region in the early 1990s left in its wake termination of authoritarian rule, and consequent enthronement of democratic regimes. This momentous event raised high hopes of enduring democracy in a region with egregious authoritarian past. Three decades after the epochal transition that has been aptly dubbed Africa's 'second liberation', prospects of democratic consolidation have not only waned considerably, but also initial hopes of democratic deepening have evaporated. While there is a plethora of factors that account for this democratic recession, electoral violence has been implicated in the literature as a key causative factor. Whereas Africa has seen an impressive increase in the frequency of elections in the post-third wave period, this democratic gain has been eroded by a corresponding increase in the incidence of violence in African elections. By comparing Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe—three countries with different decolonization and democratization experiences—the paper shows that electoral violence is neither a recent phenomenon in Africa nor an exclusive strategy of a specific fraction of the power elite. The paper argues that electoral violence is promoted by such factors as politicization of land access, ethnic marginalization, patrimonialism, state-backed violence, and youth unemployment. These factors combine to make the Sub-Saharan Africa a 'risk environment' for electoral democracy. The paper concludes by proposing some reform measures capable of protecting the ballot against the bullet.

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## Résumé

La troisième vague de démocratisation qui a déferlé sur la Région africaine au début des années 1990 a entraîné la fin des régimes autoritaires et, en conséquence, l'intronisation de régimes démocratiques. Cet événement très important a suscité de grands espoirs de démocratie durable dans une région avec une histoire autoritaire flagrante. Trois décennies après la transition d'époque que l'on a justement appelée la "seconde libération" de l'Afrique, les perspectives de consolidation démocratique se sont non seulement considérablement assombries, mais les espoirs initiaux d'approfondissement démocratique se sont également évaporés. Bien qu'il y ait une pléthore de facteurs qui expliquent cette récession démocratique, la violence électorale a été mise en cause dans la littérature comme un facteur clé de causalité. Alors que l'Afrique a connu une augmentation impressionnante de la fréquence des élections dans la période post-troisième vague, ce gain démocratique a été érodé par une augmentation correspondante de l'incidence de la violence dans les élections africaines. Tout en comparant le Kenya, le Nigeria et le Zimbabwe – trois pays avec des expériences différentes en matière de décolonisation et de démocratisation – l'article montre que la violence électorale n'est ni un phénomène récent en Afrique ni une stratégie exclusive d'une fraction spécifique de l'élite au pouvoir. L'article soutient que la violence électorale est favorisée par des facteurs tels que la politisation de l'accès à la terre, la marginalisation ethnique, le patrimonialisme, la violence soutenue par l'État et le chômage des jeunes. Ces facteurs se combinent pour faire de l'Afrique subsaharienne un "environnement à risque" pour la démocratie électorale. L'article conclut en proposant quelques mesures de réforme capables de protéger le scrutin contre la balle.

**Mots-clés :** Démocratie, démocratisation, élection, violence électorale, Afrique Subsaharienne

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## Introduction

Development scholars have long established a positive relationship between democracy and development with the argument that democracy facilitates societal development (Annaka and Higashijima (2017; Sikuka, 2017). Their contention is premised on their conviction that democracy not only improves social welfare, but also its sustenance enhances human development. The basic logic of this contention is the notion that popular participation in public governance, which democratic rule avails, empowers the citizens to compel elected officials to be accountable to the interests of the citizens. Ake (2000) has shown that all critical stakeholders in Africa agree to the instrumental and transformational capacity of democracy. This consensus is driven by the shared feeling that democracy remains the best solution to the life-threatening economic mismanagement and brutal repression unleashed on the continent by Africa's successive authoritarian rulers.

It is a well acknowledged fact that Africa's first attempt at democratic rule in the immediate post-independence period woefully failed in launching Africa on the path of development with the elite failure ultimately leading to the collapse of the anti-colonial alliance between the African people and the nationalist leaders (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2000). Accounting for the utter failure of the early independence African leaders to deliver on the promises of independence, Ake (1996) argues that the political context of early post-independence Africa was inimical to development. The intra-elite struggle for power was so involving that what pre-occupied the governing elite was how to survive the contradictions of the politics of that period. The fraction of the elites in control of state power was so determined to retain power that they had no time to initiate or implement development agenda. The out-of-power elites on their own were so absorbed in either creating a counter-balance force capable of challenging the ruling elite or at best minimize their vulnerability to the oppression and high-handedness of the state that was obviously above constitutional or institutional restraint (Ake, 1996). Thus, the democratic deficit inherent in Africa's post-independence democratic governance denied the continent the much-touted developmental promises of democracy.

The third global democratic wave that swept through Africa in the early 1990s provided another opportunity for the continent to harvest the developmental gains of democracy. However, three decades after global democratic pressure compelled the re-introduction of multi-party democracy aptly dubbed 'second liberation' (Diamond, 1999), Africa is still trapped in the crisis of transition "where elements of democratic participation are intertwined with authoritarian rule and political repression" (Laakso, 2007).

Africa has seen an impressive increase in the frequency of elections in the post-third wave period. This feat is deserving of celebration; given that, when the wave of democratic revolution surged in the early 1990s, Sub-Saharan African countries were mostly personal authoritarianisms, military dictatorships and one-party states (Huntington, 1991). However, this democratic gain has been blighted by a corresponding increase in the incidence of violence in African elections (Kovacs, 2018; Fjelde and Hoglund, 2014). Burchard (2015) has shown that of all the elections organized in Sub-Saharan Africa between 1990 and 2014, electoral violence occurred in about 55% of the national elections.

Popular expectations among African citizens were that the 'second independence' would lead to "the defeat of personal, autocratic rule within the framework of a system of political monopoly either by a single party or by the military" (Olukoshi, 1998). Evidence today across the continent shows that Africa is still struggling to consolidate democratic rule and attain sustainable development. While the argument of some analysts that the first decade of democratic wave in Sub-Saharan Africa "produced mixed results" (Basedau, 2007; Bates, Fayad and Hoefler, 2012) may be valid, the reality of post-wave democratization across the continent is that prospects of consolidation have considerably waned and hopes of the people have substantially evaporated.

Electoral violence has been implicated in the literature as a major inhibitor to Africa's attainment of democratic consolidation which is a necessary condition for development (Busari and Mekoa, 2017; Kovacs and Bjarnesen, 2018). Several African elections in the last two decades have witnessed micro-level (Bob-Milliar, 2014; Kumah-Abiwu, 2017) and macro-level (Burchard, 2015a; Boone, 2011) electoral violence across the continent including those held in Ivory Coast (2010), Kenya (2007, 2013 and 2017), Malawi (2014), Zimbabwe (2018), and Nigeria (2011 and 2019). The Mozambican elections of 2019 was the most recent African election marred by violence. In the elections held after the death of veteran opposition leader, Afonso Dhlakama, a series of pre-poll conflicts left about 300 people dead in the Cabo Delgado province of the East African country (DeutscheWelle, 2019). Preliminary report of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) released on 8 November 2019 alleged serious irregularities in the election process, which reinforced the opposition party RENAMO's allegations of fraud, violence and ballot box snatching during the elections. Out of all Africa's violent elections, the Kenyan 2007 election has received the widest scholarly attention (Mevilainen, 2012; Shilaho, 2013; Kovacs, 2018) on account of its high casualty. Post-election violence that followed Kenya 2007 polls according to some sources claimed 1,133 lives with about 600,000 people internally displaced (Barkan, 2013; Amnesty International, 2008). The election impasse which almost eroded political order in Kenya was

brought to an end after two months of negotiation, brokered by international mediators led by former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan. The ensuing peace deal known as the National Accord, among other things, led to Raila Odinga, major opposition leader, becoming Kenya's Prime Minister.

The paradox of Africa's current reality in which electoral democracy is paralleled by violence and conflicts approximates what some scholars call "violent democracy" (Arias and Goldstein, 2010; von Holdt, 2013). A major consequence of this reality is that Africa is locked in 'permanent' transition to democratic consolidation even though the continent has scaled, fairly successfully though, the tests of transition and inauguration phases of democratization. Yet, as Bleck and van de Walle (2019) contend, electoral violence affects democratic consolidation. When electoral violence becomes widespread or pervasive, it tends to produce such consequences as low system support and citizen dissatisfaction with democracy (Norris, 2014). It is against this backdrop that this paper engages the question of election-based violence in Africa's democratization. What are the primary drivers or triggers of electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa? In what way(s) does the character of African state incentivize or discourage electoral violence? What policy, institutional and regulatory measures can be put in place to combat electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa? These are the questions that this paper attempts to examine by analyzing the experiences of three African democracies: Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. The paper argues that pervasive nature of electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa could be linked to politicized land rights, ethnic marginalization, patrimonialism, state-sponsored violence and youth unemployment. Though decolonization processes and democratization experiences in the three cases have varied, the cases of these three countries demonstrate a mixture of authoritarianism and constitutional democracy at least in the post-third wave era.

In Kenya where political liberalization of the 1990s led to multi-party elections in 1992, periodic elections have occurred simultaneously with electoral manipulation and large scale violence. Kenya has a troubling history of electoral violence dating back to small-scale violence that marred the independence era elections and the widespread violence that currently characterizes Kenyan multi-party democracy (Lynch, Cheeseman and Willis, 2019). In Nigeria, the first post-third wave attempt at constituting a democratic government was rudely terminated in 1993, with the annulment of that year's presidential vote and the eventual overthrow in November 1993 of the Interim National Government (ING), deposited by the departing Babangida military administration (Muhammed, 2009). The country however returned to full civilian rule in May 1999 and has remained a constitutional democracy for an unbroken 20-year period even though successive civilian administrations have not sufficiently upheld constitutionalism. Zimbabwe easily goes as the most authoritarian democratic state of the three cases, even as the country retains its pride as one of Africa's stable democracies given its long years of multi-party democratic practice (Bratton, 1999). Ousted President Robert Mugabe who rose to power as the Prime Minister of the country in 1980, after a prolonged liberation struggle, saw to the collapse of British colonialism, remained in power till 2017 with his 37-year rule characterized by rights abuse, corruption, repression and state-sponsored violence (Laakso, 2007). Out of the three cases, only two, Kenya (2002) and Nigeria (2015), have witnessed alternation of party in power in their democratization processes.

### **Democratization in sub-Saharan Africa and the conundrum of electoral violence**

Election-based violence is a global phenomenon, troubling both mature and nascent democracies. As revealed by Quantin (1998), the 19<sup>th</sup> Century France experienced electoral violence, similar to what is currently witnessed across the African region. He contends that violence is often predicated on the 'meaningfulness' of elections particularly in terms of power, influence and privileges that electoral victory accrues to the winning electoral contestants.

Electoral violence, as an electoral strategy can be employed by those in control of state power (political incumbents) as well as by those struggling to wrestle power from the ruling elites (Kovacs, 2018). In the case of the former, Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski (2014) have shown that political incumbents will resort to violence when they are confronted with the prospect of electoral loss in a context of weak institutions and low consequences of violence. Acemoglu and Robinson (2008) also suggest that political elites tend to undermine democratic change when they are not confronted with strong and effective institutional restraints. On the other hand, electoral violence can also be employed by a losing candidate, party or coalition to delegitimize the electoral mandate of the winning party or coalition (Laakso, 2007).

Acts of violence include, but not limited to murder, arson, abduction, assault, rioting, violent seizure and destruction of electoral facilities (Straus and Taylor, 2012; Harish and Toha, 2019). These varieties of election violence undermine the foundational elements of democracy such as choice and consent, civic participation, accountability, and rule of law. Electoral violence could be physical, psychological or structural. It is physical when bodily harm or injury is inflicted on political opponents or election workers, or when offices of candidates, parties or election management bodies come under armed attack. Electoral violence is psychological when the threat of, or actual use of violence against political opponents affect their psychological readiness for and participation in elections (Bekoe, 2011). In psychological terms, perceived threat of violence may coerce voters

into a particular behavior, even without overt physical violence. The case of Nigeria's 2007 elections in which the outgoing president Olusegun Obasanjo described the polls as "a do or die affair" for his party is a useful illustration here (Ikelegbe, 2014). Structural violence involves using institutional power (including regulatory, legislative and coercive powers) to manipulate the electoral process against specific aspirants and candidates (Bekoe, 201).

Four basic elements define the conceptualization of electoral violence. These are motive, timing, users and targets (Hoglund, 2009). Motivation for electoral violence is usually premised on the desire to influence electoral outcome which could be achieved through varieties of political exclusion, including exclusion from candidacy, exclusion from campaigning, exclusion from electoral information, exclusion from electoral participation, exclusion from electoral victory, as well as exclusion from power (Birch, Daxecker and Hoglund, 2020). Time of occurrence is usually during the electioneering spanning the entire election cycle. Users of violence are major actors in the electoral process who are interested in, and will be affected by, its outcome. These include the ruling party, its members and support groups, opposition parties and their supporters, state security services, militia groups, youth wings of political parties as well as private armies funded by politicians. These major actors, that is, election management bodies and their workers, election infrastructure as well as voters, are the usual targets of electoral violence (Birch and Muchlinski, 2017).

Electoral violence as a concept has been approached in varying perspectives by scholars, influenced by their socio-cultural milieu. Albert (2007) refers to election violence as "all forms of organized acts or threats--- physical, psychological and structural--- aimed at intimidating, harming, and blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying or otherwise influencing an electoral process". Fischer (2012) describes electoral violence as any pre-determined act that is aimed at influencing an electoral process through all forms of assaults. On his own, Sisk (2008) defines electoral violence as any intense act, which in most cases is physical, directed at affecting an electoral process which occurs during elections.

When broadly conceived, electoral violence would refer to a coercive force intended at actors in the election process within the context of electoral competition. Electoral violence may occur before election, during polling or after voting, targeting electoral candidates, poll workers, voters, election reporters, poll observers and election facilities (Seeberg, Wahman and Skaaning, 2018). Although the three phases of election cycle constitute risk periods for election violence, Bekoe (2011) has reported that election day appears the safest of them as this period records fewer fatalities than pre and post-election periods. This may be due to the presence of election monitors across the polling units. Differing opinions in the literature on what precisely constitutes electoral violence notwithstanding, there is a consensus that electoral violence is one major element of the "menu of manipulation" available to those engaged in electoral manipulation (Schedler, 2002; Birch, 2020).

Mehler (2007) has shown that apart from deploying violence to affect electoral outcome, election violence can also be used to "prevent the elections from being held..." thus frustrating the election or the transition process entirely. Experience in Nigeria during the preparations for the 2011 and 2015 general elections provides useful example of this different motivation for election violence. Shortly before the 2011 polls, there was a bomb explosion targeted at the headquarters of the Independent National Electoral Commission in Abuja, suspected to be the handiwork of Boko Haram insurgents. Also, as Nigeria inched towards the 2015 historic elections, attacks by the Boko Haram insurgents dramatically increased not only casting huge doubt on the feasibility of the elections, but also forcing the polls to be postponed for six weeks. Fischer (2012) also reports that the separatist Revolutionary United Front (RUF) unleashed a series of violence on civilian population before the 1996 elections in Sierra Leone with the aim of keeping away voters from the elections in which the RUF was not competing. However, whether the motivation for electoral violence is to influence the outcome of an election or to prevent the election from holding, electoral violence is usually strategic, consciously planned and creatively executed to accomplish its objective (Burchard, 2015).

Evidence across the African continent suggests that pre-election violence and post-election violence exhibit different dynamics in terms of motivation and perpetrators. Whereas the basic motivation for pre-election violence is to influence electoral outcome, post-election violence is often unleashed to protest perceived or real manipulation of the electoral process. Straus and Taylor (2012) argue that pre-election violence in Sub Saharan Africa is most often perpetrated by the incumbent regimes, while post-election violence, which is usually higher in scale and much more severe than pre-election variety, is usually perpetrated by the opposition elements and their supporters. Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe have witnessed both dimensions of electoral violence in their electoral history. In Nigeria for instance, while the historic 2015 general elections were marred by large scale pre-election violence, the 2011 elections were accompanied by post-election violence which though was restricted to the northern half of the country. The 2019 elections also witnessed pockets of pre-election and election day violence the most prominent, of which was the murder on election day of a sitting federal parliamentarian in Ibadan, South West of Nigeria. In Kenya, the build-up to the 2017 presidential election was characterized by pre-election violence including the murder of a senior election official, Christopher Msando

(Fjelde and Hoglund, 2018). The pre-polling period was also characterized by egregious rights violation and state-sponsored violence, leading to the death of at least 12 persons with over 100 others seriously wounded (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Post-election period however witnessed violence of greater proportion with Kenyan police killing at least 24 persons during nation-wide protests orchestrated by the opposition, which were brutally suppressed by the state (Lynch, Cheeseman, and Willis, 2019). Similarly, the 2018 presidential election in Zimbabwe was marked by both pre- and post-election violence. While President Emerson Mnangagwa narrowly escaped a bomb blast which killed two people during a campaign rally of Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front, ZANU-PF on June 23 2018, at least three people were reportedly killed in Harare when security forces shot live ammunition, water cannons and tear gas at protesting opposition-supporters— after the announcement of election results (Beadsworth, Cheeseman and Simukai, 2019).

### **Interrogating explanatory factors of electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa**

There is a consensus in the theoretical literature that democracy and violence bear no relationship, given that election is an institutional mechanism of resolving conflicts peacefully in a democratic setting (Laakso, 2007). Tester, Young and Mullins (2017) have shown that democracy as a system of political rule has an attribute of reducing risks of violence through its provision of participation avenues, as well as infusion of accountability into ways political power is dispensed. Theoretical literature assumes that democracy and peace are mutually reinforcing (Paris, 2004). Thus, if election as the heartbeat of representative democracy permits institutionalized peaceful transfer of power between regimes, violence can not be accommodated within such context. Put differently, with election serving as a conflict mitigation tool, democracy delegitimizes violent reaction as a measure of expressing citizen discontent (Eckstein and Gurr, 1975).

Reychler (1999) has however cautioned that democratization process is inherently risky with each phase of the process capable of being a catalyst of conflict and violence. Omotola (2008) has also suggested that the capacity of democratization to influence the structure of state's distributive and re-distributive systems could have security implications that may incentivize or discourage violence. We now turn to some of the key causative factors of electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Land rights**

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the state and its agents play a critical role in land allocation which is often elevated to a patronage resource during election season (Boone, 2011). Politics of land allocation is a major trigger of election-based violence across the African continent. Political incumbents exploit unfair land allocation regulations/policies to cause disaffection within the polity, particularly between indigenous and settler populations. Kenya and, to a lesser degree, Zimbabwe illustrate this tendency to politicize land access. In Kenya where allocation of land has remained "the deepest and worst divisive issue" (Boone, 2011) in electoral politics, state power of land allocation is exploited by the governing elites to advance political interests. For instance, in the early years of Kenya's independence, politicians belonging to the ruling Kenya African National Union of President Jomo Kenyatta used state allocating powers over land to pacify and reward non-indigenous constituencies who were supporters of KANU (Boone, 2011). In the same vein, Daniel arap Moi who succeeded Kenyatta after the latter's demise in 1978, re-defined land allocation policies in a manner that favoured the indigenous people of the Rift Valley. The grievances emanating from politicized land allocation have generated animosity and tension between natives and settlers which are manipulated by politicians to incite violence as witnessed in 1992 and 1997 elections (Klopp, 2002). In Zimbabwe, the character of politicization of land for electoral gain takes a similar pattern. At independence, Zimbabwe had a racially unequal land distribution system in which minority whites not only owned majority of land, but also white farmers produced the lion share of Zimbabwe's export income (Moyo, 2000). Faced with unprecedented electoral uncertainty particularly from year 2000, the ZANU-PF government of President Robert Mugabe overtly supported the occupation and seizure of land owned by whites who were strong supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), and re-allocated the land to blacks with the aim of securing their electoral support (Boone and Kriger, 2010). These dynamics of land access rights underline the geographic character of election-based violence in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and are appropriated by opportunistic political office seekers and their supporters for political gains. The usual pattern is either using land as a reward for political/electoral support or as a weapon to oppress the opposition.

### **Ethnic marginalization**

Ethnic marginalization which derives from identity politics and the attendant implications for state access is another major driver of electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa and Africa in general. Being a predominantly ethnically segmented society, rival claims to power take the character of inter-ethnic competition. Thus, the zero-sum character of politics on offer fuels the perception of the state as an institutional expression of sectional (ethnic) interests (Ibeanu, 2012). Against the backdrop of winner-takes-all character of electoral competition therefore, electoral loss equates what Mueller (2010) calls “exclusionary ethnicity”. This fear of exclusion from arena of power, writes Burchard (2015b), raises electoral stakes and provides incentive for elective office seekers to resort to violence. Kenya is one African country where ethnic contradictions easily trigger electoral violence. In Kenya, ethnicity is a salient governance feature which plays critical role in political mobilization (Fjelde and Høglund, 2018). Klopp (2002) underscores the salience of ethnicity in Kenya’s early independence and contemporary politics when he writes that ethnicity ‘has become a routine aspect of Kenyan politics, and “ethnic clashes” are now part of the elite bargaining process’. For instance, the large-scale violence that greeted the 2007 Kenyan elections started with well-coordinated attacks by the Kalenjin ethnic militias who were mainly supporters of the Party of National Unity of incumbent President Mwai Kibaki, from Kikuyu ethnic group. Kikuyu groups carried out retaliatory attacks against the Kalenjin and Luo (opposition candidate Raila Odinga is from Luo) ethnic identities (Dercon & Gutierrez-Romero, 2012). In Nigeria, though ethnicity is less salient in power competition than the Kenyan case, political support is still mobilized through ethnicity, and electoral outcome that does not favour ethnic reasoning can trigger violence. The post-election violence that followed the 2011 Nigeria general elections could be understood within this context. The fact that the violence started from, and was restricted, to the northern region of the country tends to support the argument that the north was expressing its frustrations over the electoral loss of Muhammadu Buhari, (a Northerner) through the violence which claimed 800 lives and socially displaced 65,000 persons (Dundas and Ojo, 2014).

### **Patrimonialism**

Patrimonialism and the accompanying patron-client structures tend to make electoral loss costly in Africa’s emergent democracies (Bratton, 2007). These patron-client relations built on the exchange of patronage for electoral support increases electoral stakes, both for the providers of patronage and its recipients. On the part of distributing patron, capacity for distribution is contingent on the control of state power with the opportunities for resource allocation and rent-seeking (Fjelde and Høglund, 2014). For the recipient client, continued access to state patronage resources depends on having benefactor in political office. Zimbabwe presents a good case of patrimonial politics. Under the regime of former President Mugabe, war veterans seeking for an increase in pension and integration into Zimbabwean formal security services became a client to the Zimbabwean state (Coltart, 2008). Before the 2002 presidential election, the War Veterans Association, assisted by hired unemployed youths and funded covertly by the Zimbabwean state, unleashed terror on strongholds and supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The aim of the armed attacks was to intimidate MDC and its supporters, and thus give ZANU-PF electoral advantage. This aim was partially achieved as the number of voting stations in MDC’s strongholds during the election got substantially reduced (Laakso, 2007), and this largely contributed to the disputed victory of President Mugabe’s disputed victory at the poll.

### **State-sponsored repression**

Pervasive electoral violence in Africa can also be accounted for by state-sponsored violence and repression which may be physical, psychological and structural all, with the aim of advancing the electoral prospects of political incumbents while undermining the electoral chances of the opposition. Case studies of all the three countries under review manifest this tendency. In Zimbabwe and Kenya, murderous activities of the War Veterans and ethnic militias represent a clear example of physical dimension of state-sponsored violence. In Nigeria, the 2007 statement of former President Olusegun Obasanjo that the 2007 elections were “do or die affair” typifies psychological dimension of electoral violence. Omotola (2008) suggests that the statement not only unearthed the desperation of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), but also aimed at intimidating both the opposition and the voters. The Nigerian case also illustrates the structural dimension of electoral violence which involves using state administrative resources, including media and coercive institutions to undermine the opposition. One case that readily comes to mind was the spirited effort made by former President Obasanjo to prevent his vice president, Atiku Abubakar, from contesting the 2007 presidential election. The Obasanjo government instituted an administrative panel which investigated and quite expectedly found Atiku guilty of alleged corruption. It took the intervention of the judiciary before Atiku could appear on the ballot though on the platform of an opposition party (Muheeb, 2016). Another instance of structural repression that manifested in the build-up to the 2007 elections in Nigeria was the denial of access to state media to the opposition

candidates by the incumbent party at the state and national levels through their control of state media resources (Collier & Vicente, 2014). In Kenya, the 1992 and 1997 elections were characterized by state-backed physical violence, which resulted into several deaths even as the state made little efforts to stem the violence (Flede and Høglund, 2018). Structural violence also manifested during the 1992 elections when KANU exploited its control of state machines to manipulate the voter registration exercise and to deny opposition state permits to hold campaign rallies (Barkan, 1993).

### Youth employment

Economic context of democratization in Africa in a way incentivizes political violence. Pervasive poverty, occasioned partly by declining social citizenship has over the years exposed African citizens to chronic economic deprivation. A direct relationship between poverty and political violence has been established in the literature (Henriques and Zwitter, 2008; Miguel, Satyanath and Sergenti, 2004), and thus people faced with a high level of hopelessness materially are easily mobilized for political violence. Poverty and unemployment remain two potent development challenges in Africa. The social inequality caused by high incidence of poverty and mass unemployment continues to be veritable sources of instability in the continent. Sub-Saharan Africa not only has the highest rate in global poverty at about 41%, but also 27 out of 28 world's poorest nations are in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2018).

The 2019 Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria Report recently released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) indicates that poverty rate in Nigeria stands at 40.09%, representing about 82.9 million persons living below the poverty line. The World Bank has revealed that Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rate which averaged 7.2% between 2000 and 2004 plunged to 2.7% in 2015 and -1.6% in 2016. While Nigeria experienced a modest GDP recovery in 2017, its annual growth rate is below those of other low-income countries (The World Bank, 2019).

In Kenya, while the country has registered impressive GDP growth rates standing above 5% in the past decade (World Bank, 2018), 2019 Human Development Index (HDI) indicates that 34% of Kenya's 47.9 million people live below poverty line (UNDP, 2019). Such economic context as outlined here is a congenial atmosphere for exploiting social inequality for violence during elections.

How does the character of African states represent a push factor for electoral violence? Three defining elements of the nature of African state are relevant to the explanation of the inherent violent character of African elections. These are: the perception of state power by Africa's governing elite; the absolutist character of post-colonial African state; and the central role of the state in Africa's political economy. African elite perceive the state as a 'resource' which could be exploited for primitive accumulation. The instrumental perception of the state and its allocating powers as a license for economic prosperity by the governing elites reduces election and electoral contest to warfare, where every means is deployed to ensure electoral victory. The immensity and ubiquity of state power ensure that those who succeed in capturing political power in the bestial struggle for the control of the state have succeeded in capturing all other things within the state, as the state plays a dominant role within the political economy in the face of the underdevelopment of private capital (Omotola, 2008).

The post-colonial African state is patrimonial and rentier both in character and *modus operandi* (Olukoshi, 1998). These salient attributes of the state challenge the emergence of an impersonal state rooted in the rule of law (Karl, 2007). This patrimonial nature of African state which provides incentive for politics of patronage rather than public good is a major driver of political violence and inter-group conflicts on the continent (Shittu, Obiora, Mohammed and Dattijo, 2018) with the state perceived as the institutional expression of the dominant groups. A rentier economy substantially relies on external rent as a reward or income for resource ownership (Ibrahim, 1997). In a rent-based economy, government is a major collector of rent, while those who control the state do not share value of production efficiency. Thus, as Beblawi and Luciani (1987) suggest, there is a weak link between individual earnings and production engagements given that "the rent circuit is more profitable than attainment of production efficiency". Within this context, access to state power becomes a major determinant of economic prosperity, thereby raising political stakes in a manner that encourages power contenders to resort to violence. This tendency is illustrated by the desperation of incumbent leaders in Africa to remain in power at all costs through the manipulation of the electoral process or deployment of state violence. Nigeria and Zimbabwe particularly stand out in this tendency. In Nigeria, after the failure of former President Obasanjo to secure tenure elongation through orchestrated constitutional review, he willfully manipulated the nomination process of the ruling party to facilitate the emergence of Umaru Musa Yar'adua as the party's presidential standard bearer for the 2007 polls. In the elections proper, Obasanjo's infamous statement of "do or die" elections earlier cited in the paper was a form of psychological violence aimed at giving Yar'adua a head start at the polls. In Zimbabwe, the heavy-handed repression of the opposition elements and their supporters by state security workers particularly from 2002 was a desperate action by the Robert Mugabe government to retain power in the face of declining legitimacy of his regime and increasing popularity of the opposition MDC.

Ake (1996) has noted that Africa's formal independence from the colonialists did not radically change the absolutist and repressive character of the post-colonial state as the state has remained totalistic in scope and statist in economic orientation. This character of African state is a potential trigger of electoral violence.

### **Violence of voting in sub-Saharan Africa: protecting the ballot against the bullet**

The foregoing analysis demonstrates in bold relief the undesirable state of health of electoral democracy in the sub-continent. This reality not only challenges efforts at democratic sustenance, but also it is capable of eroding the faith of the people in democratic governance. It is therefore imperative that pro-active measures aimed at combating the conundrum of election violence across the continent are designed. It is against this background that the following proposals are put forward to guard the electoral field against the merchants of violence.

Political actors need to de-emphasize the perception of electoral competition in 'market place' terms, where actors try to undo one another to maximize 'profits' (Laakso, 2007). If political practitioners in Africa respect and play by the institutionalized rules of electoral competition while perceiving election in a 'non market' terms, African elections will become violence-free. This can be achieved by encouraging African leaders to attend democratic leadership trainings organized by reputable academic institutes with a view to instilling in African leaders the values of selfless public service and development-oriented leadership.

Economic context of democratization in Africa in a way incentivizes political violence. Pervasive poverty occasioned partly by declining social citizenship has over the years exposed African citizens to severe economic hardship. African regimes need to pay greater attention to economic foundation of democracy in the continent. The current poor living standards of majority of African people represent a potent threat to democratic stability. African governments should therefore design policies that guarantee social citizenship, aimed at granting African citizens access to basic social needs.

There is a need to devise more creative election violence containment strategies. While national efforts in some countries in which major electoral candidates are made to sign a pre-election peace pact (as obtained in Nigeria in 2015 and 2019) with collaboration of international actors are commendable, more needs to be done to orient politicians towards a shared value of violence-free election.

In African society that lacks the non-violent norms associated with democratic competition in consolidated democracies coupled with its pluralist character, electoral politics may aggravate existing socio-economic cleavages (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2012). Overcoming this will require consciously designed electoral frameworks and electoral institutions that do not only mediate inter-group competition but also promote inclusivity through effective mechanisms of political incorporation. Whereas electoral rules may not guarantee enduring democracy, institutional theorists insist that these rules fundamentally influence political strategies and options of political actors in their quest for political power (Hartmann, 2007). Introduction of electoral regimes such as proportional representation could be one major way of achieving such social inclusion.

Evidence across Sub-Saharan Africa suggests the failure of political inclusion, evidenced by the waning capacity of the central state to maintain order and territorial control in the face of the ruinous activities of insurgents and separatist movements. In order to re-invent or enhance political inclusion, integrative mechanisms such as broader representation and devolution of powers should be designed by African regimes.

Peace advocacy and peace building efforts of civil society organizations and the donor community should be complemented with post-election follow-up activities, aimed at encouraging peaceful co-existence outside of election cycle.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted an analysis of the challenge of electoral violence to democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa through the experiences of three constitutional democracies in the sub-continent. While democratization processes and periods of transition vary among the selected democracies, they are all united in electoral violence as a major element in their democratization processes. It is however striking to note that elections that brought opposition to power in 2002 and 2015 in Kenya and Nigeria respectively were peaceful.

While post-third wave African democracy has survived serious threats to the democratization project in some countries; attempted democratic reversal through failed coups in others (Sudan 2012; Gabon 2019; Niger 2010; Guinea 2008; and Mali 2012); and despite the fact of election now holding regularly on the continent, the context of electoral politics does not promote violence-free election, and thus trenchantly challenges prospects of democratic consolidation. If organizing credible polls that conform with regional and international standards is an important ingredient of building a politically capable state (EISA, 2016), then the recognition of Africa as world's largest and most ethnically segmented region should provide incentive for African regimes and aid community to enhance the capacity of African governments to deliver transparent and violence-free elections to checkmate election-related conflagrations on the continent.

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