Electoral violence in Africa's shrinking civic space: Nature, magnitude and remedies

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Abstract
Purpose: This study investigates the nature, magnitude, and potential remedies for electoral violence in Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, with the aim of offering evidence-based insights for mitigating its occurrence.

Methods: A descriptive survey design was adopted. Data were collected using the Comprehensive Electoral Violence Questionnaire (r = 0.82), which was developed to measure stakeholders' perceptions of electoral violence. A total of 1,800 participants (600 from each country) responded to items addressing the nature, scale, and possible solutions to electoral violence in the three countries.

Results: The findings revealed that the most prominent features of electoral violence include poor civic education, the misuse of state resources by incumbent governments, and the influence of foreign actors. The magnitude of violence is reflected in the widespread use of firearms, the involvement of large, organized groups, and the targeting of specific ethnic or religious communities. Key remedies identified were ensuring judicial independence for peaceful resolution of disputes, promoting civic education, and strengthening electoral commissions.

Conclusions: Electoral violence in Africa is multifaceted, deeply rooted in governance weaknesses, and exacerbated by systemic and external factors. Addressing this requires institutional reforms, public education, and impartial legal mechanisms.

Limitations: The study relied solely on self-reported data from selected stakeholders, which may have introduced perception bias and limited generalizability.

Contributions: This study offers comparative insights into three African democracies and provides actionable policy recommendations for reducing electoral violence and strengthening democratic resilience.

Keywords: *Africa, Democracy, Electoral Violence*

1. Introduction

Africa's civic space, once vibrant and full of potential for democratic engagement, has significantly diminished over the past two decades. This has been attributed to various political, social, and economic factors. One of the most significant contributors to this decline is electoral violence (Borzyskowski & Kuhn, 2020). This undermines democratic processes, stifles political participation, and contributes to an atmosphere of fear, repression, and distrust (Höglund, 2009). Electoral violence in Africa over the last 20 years has not only exacerbated political instability but also eroded the confidence of citizens and civil society organizations in the electoral process, thus leading to a vicious cycle of diminishing civic engagement. According to various scholars like Daxecker (2012) and Von Borzyskowski and Wahman (2021), electoral violence remains a significant impediment to the consolidation of democracy and the promotion of inclusive governance in Africa. This is because it manifests in various forms, including

physical attacks, intimidation, vote buying, and large-scale civil unrest, often triggered by contested elections or political exclusion.

Electoral violence is not unique to Africa; its persistence and magnitude in the region have raised concerns about its implications for political stability, socioeconomic development, and the preservation of civic spaces (Söderström, 2018). For clarification, in a global democracy, civic space is the realm in which individuals and groups organize, express opinions, and engage in social and political activities (Birch, Daxecker, & Höglund, 2020). This is because it is essential for democratic governance, as it allows citizens to participate in decision-making processes, hold leaders accountable, and advocate for their rights. However, civic spaces across Africa are shrinking due to various factors, including authoritarian tendencies, restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, and the proliferation of repressive laws (Collier & Vicente, 2008). This contraction of civic spaces exacerbates electoral violence by limiting citizens' ability to voice grievances through nonviolent means, thereby fostering an environment of frustration and mistrust in democratic processes.

Electoral violence has been one of the most damaging forces undermining democratic consolidation in Africa (Klaus, 2017). In many African countries, elections are not seen as opportunities for peaceful political transitions but as battlegrounds where violence becomes an integral tool for political parties to secure power. The period between 2000 and 2020 witnessed escalating levels of electoral violence in countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Côte d'Ivoire, which have contributed significantly to the shrinking of civic spaces across the continent (Okyere, 2016). In countries such as Kenya, the violence that erupted after the 2007 elections, with ethnic clashes and widespread political instability, remains a vivid reminder of how elections can spiral out of control. Similarly, political violence often targets opposition parties, activists, and civil society organizations, thereby making it increasingly dangerous for citizens to engage in the electoral process without fear of reprisal.

In such an environment, voters are less likely to freely express their political preferences, knowing that doing so could lead to personal harm, property destruction or even death. This, in turn, undermines the legitimacy of election results and weakens the overall democratic process (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018). To buttress this, the violent suppression of political opposition during elections has also led to a shrinking space for opposition parties, media outlets, and civil society groups. In countries such as Zimbabwe and Uganda, opposition parties face significant hurdles in campaigning freely due to threats of violence or state-sponsored intimidation (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2021). This violence often extends to journalists and media houses that attempt to report on electoral processes or expose electoral fraud, which further shrinks the space for independent reporting and the free flow of information in the country. Media outlets become either complicit or increasingly silenced, contributing to a situation in which the public is unable to access impartial, unbiased information (Höglund, 2009).

2. Literature Review

The literature is replete with the fact that the manipulation of electoral violence by political elites further exacerbates the shrinking of civic space in Africa. For instance, several African leaders have employed violence as a strategic tool to maintain their grip on power or to delegitimize their opponents (Onapajo, 2014). In countries such as Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia, electoral violence has been used to suppress dissent and intimidate voters into compliance (Wahman, 2024). This is because political elites often exploit ethnic, religious, and regional divisions within society to incite violence, thereby preventing peaceful transitions of power. By dividing the population along these lines, they create an environment in which violence is perceived as a legitimate form of political struggle. Moreover, some governments actively use state apparatus, including security forces, to perpetuate electoral violence (Afolabi 2019). In such situations, law enforcement and military forces often operate in ways that undermine the neutrality of these institutions (Henry 2023).

Few studies, such as Brosché, Fjelde, and Höglund (2020), affirmed that security forces are sometimes deployed to protect the interests of the ruling party, violently cracking down on protestors and opposition parties, as seen in Zimbabwe during the 2008 elections and in Ethiopia during the 2020 elections. This politicization of security forces directly contributes to the shrinking of civic space, as it

forces citizens to withdraw from political engagement due to the dangers posed by such institutions. Beyond political violence, broader socioeconomic factors have contributed to the shrinking of civic space in Africa. This is because of persistent inflation, high levels of poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality, which often play a significant role in escalating violence in elections. For instance, in Nigeria and Kenya, poverty and unemployment are seen as key drivers of youth involvement in electoral violence (Höglund, 2009). Many young people, who are often unemployed or underemployed, are manipulated by political parties to engage in violent activities during elections.

This violence is often fueled by the promise of financial rewards or material gains, which further entrenches a sense of desperation and powerlessness among youth (Matlosa & Zounmenou, 2011). Economic instability has contributed to the erosion of public trust in political institutions. In societies where people struggle to meet their basic needs, the electoral process is often perceived as a futile exercise in the face of entrenched poverty (Orji, 2013). This is because citizens, particularly those in marginalized communities, often feel that elections are merely a facade, serving the interests of political elites rather than the common man. Furthermore, the lack of economic development in some African countries means that basic services, including education, healthcare, and infrastructure, are often not adequately provided. This lack of investment in social services further alienates the population and diminishes public engagement in the political process. Several citizens are less likely to participate in an electoral process that they perceive as failing to address their economic concerns.

This disillusionment creates fertile ground for the escalation of electoral violence, as people become less likely to use peaceful means to address grievances and are more inclined to resort to violent tactics. In addition, Laakso (2019) explains that the legal and institutional frameworks governing elections in many African countries are often weak, poorly enforced or selectively applied. This is because many African countries face challenges in ensuring that their electoral laws are transparent, fair and consistently enforced. In cases where these laws are not adhered to, electoral violence becomes more likely. For instance, electoral commissions in some African countries are often underfunded, understaffed, and politically compromised (Goldsmith 2015). This is because they lack the capacity to checkmate electoral violence in the country. It was also discovered that it can go unchecked, and the perpetrators of violence are rarely held accountable. In countries without a reliable system for resolving electoral disputes or where courts are politically compromised, violence becomes a viable tool for resolving political conflicts. This perpetuates the cycle of violence, further shrinking civic space by discouraging citizens from peacefully engaging in political processes.

The use of repressive legal measures, such as laws that curtail the activities of civil society organizations, media outlets, and opposition parties, also contributes to shrinking civic space. In many African countries, governments have passed laws that restrict the operation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), limit freedom of expression, or curtail peaceful demonstrations (Simati & Burchard, 2021). These legal frameworks make it difficult for citizens to engage in legitimate political activities without facing legal repercussions, further silencing dissent and shrinking the space for open political discourse in China. Despite numerous efforts by governments, civil society organizations and international actors, these interventions to curb electoral violence in Africa have yielded mixed results. While some countries have implemented reforms to enhance electoral transparency and accountability, others continue to grapple with impunity and a weak rule of law. The contraction of civic spaces further explains these efforts by limiting the capacity of citizens, activists, and civil society organizations to advocate for reforms and hold political actors accountable.

Electoral violence has become a recurring challenge in Africa, posing a significant threat to democratic consolidation, social cohesion and sustainable development. The persistent nature and magnitude of electoral violence in Africa raise critical questions about the underlying factors fueling this phenomenon and the adequacy of existing remedies to address it. Compounding this challenge is the shrinking civic space across Africa. The contraction of civic spaces denies citizens the opportunity to express their grievances, participate in peaceful political processes, and hold leaders accountable. This has exacerbated frustrations, pushing some groups toward violent actions as a means of expressing their discontent or challenging perceived injustices. The interplay between electoral violence and shrinking

civic spaces remains underexplored in the existing literature. Many studies have examined the causes and effects of electoral violence, focusing on factors such as ethnic divisions, weak institutions, and political manipulation. However, limited attention has been paid to how the erosion of civic freedoms fuels electoral violence by suppressing non-violent avenues for political expression and participation. Additionally, there is a need to critically evaluate the effectiveness of current interventions aimed at mitigating electoral violence in the context of restricted civic space. The primary objective of this study is to examine the nature, magnitude, and remedies for electoral violence in the context of Africa's shrinking civic spaces. The specific objectives were as follows:
1. To analyze the nature and patterns of electoral violence in Africa, particularly in relation to shrinking civic spaces.
2. To assess the magnitude of electoral violence in selected African countries
3. To evaluate existing mechanisms and interventions for addressing electoral violence in Africa

3. Research Methodology

A cross-sectional descriptive research design was used, which allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time from a diverse sample of participants. A quantitative approach was adopted, utilizing a self-designed structured scale titled Comprehensive Electoral Violence Questionnaire (r=0.82) with sub-scales, which was designed and used to measure stakeholders' ratings of the nature, magnitude, and remedies to electoral violence. The target population for this study included individuals with direct or indirect experience of electoral violence in Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, including voters, civil society organizations (CSOs), government officials, political party members, and electoral observers.

A purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study. The criteria were as follows: participants must be of legal voting age (18 years or older in all three countries); participants should have direct or indirect experience of electoral violence in previous elections, such as witnessing violence, being victims of violence, or being involved in electoral processes (e.g., as voters, electoral officers, or civil society activists); lastly, participants must be willing to provide informed consent to participate in the study. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires (both online and physical surveys), which lasted for four months. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations.

Categories of Participants

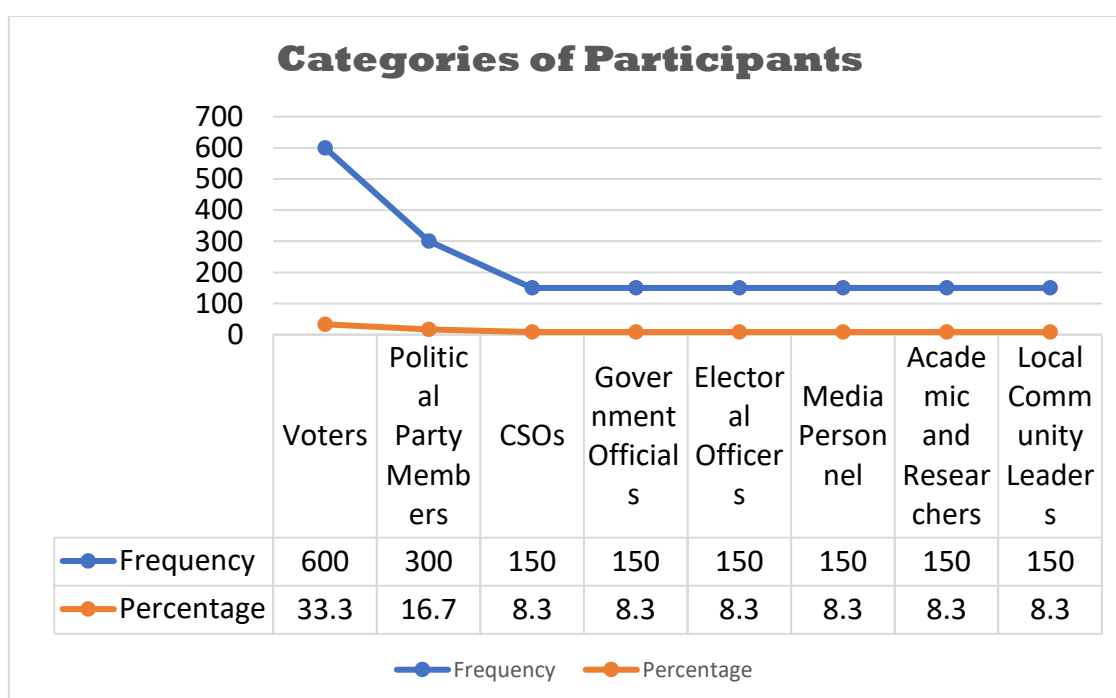|	Voters	Political Party Members	CSOs	Government Officials	Electoral Officers	Media Personnel	Academic and Researchers	Local Community Leaders
Frequency	600	300	150	150	150	150	150	150
Percentage	33.3	16.7	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.3

Figure 1. Chart showing the categories of participants

This diverse participant base ensured a comprehensive representation of the different sectors involved in or affected by electoral violence in Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya.

4. Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What is the nature of electoral violence in Africa?

Table 1. Mean Response of The Nature of Electoral Violence in Africa

Sn	Items	5	4	3	2	1	x̄	Std	R
1	Electoral violence is a recurring issue during elections in African countries.	50 2.8	989 55.1	620 34.6	135 7.5	0 0.0	3.53	.675	6th
2	Ethnic divisions significantly contribute to electoral violence in Africa.	0 0.0	986 55.0	628 35.0	129 7.2	51 2.8	3.42	.747	9th
3	Youth are often mobilised as agents of electoral violence in African elections.	55 3.1	933 52.0	695 38.7	94 5.2	17 0.9	3.51	.688	7th
4	Electoral violence is primarily driven by political rivalry among elites.	10 0.6	814 45.4	573 31.9	200 11.1	197 11.0	3.13	1.005	17th
5	Pre-election violence is common in many African countries.	25 1.4	914 50.9	545 30.4	194 10.8	116 6.5	3.30	.918	13th
6	Election-day violence often involves intimidation of voters at polling stations.	50 2.8	1011 56.4	674 37.6	59 3.3	0 0.0	3.59	.604	5th
7	Post-election disputes frequently escalate into large-scale violence.	0 0.0	925 51.6	725 40.4	134 7.5	10 0.6	3.43	.654	8th
8	Electoral violence in Africa often results from the manipulation of election outcomes.	75 4.2	753 42.0	688 38.4	133 7.4	145 8.1	3.27	.956	15th
9	The use of hate speech during campaigns contributes to electoral violence.	10 0.6	377 21.0	414 23.1	763 42.5	230 12.8	2.54	.979	22nd
10	Politicians use financial incentives to recruit individuals for violent acts during elections.	47 2.6	1069 59.6	374 20.8	191 10.6	113 6.3	3.42	.942	10th
11	Weak law enforcement encourages the perpetuation of electoral violence.	4 0.2	872 48.6	679 37.8	189 10.5	50 2.8	3.33	.777	12th
12	Electoral violence is more prevalent in countries with weak electoral commissions.	20 1.1	804 44.8	750 41.8	104 5.8	116 6.5	3.28	.854	14th
13	The lack of accountability for perpetrators fuels repeated electoral violence.	40 2.2	728 40.6	609 33.9	256 14.3	161 9.0	3.13	.990	17th
14	Media bias and propaganda exacerbate electoral violence in African elections.	11 0.6	563 31.4	658 36.7	225 12.5	337 18.8	2.82	1.09	20th
15	Electoral violence often stems from long-standing socio-economic inequalities.	46 2.6	428 23.9	627 34.9	303 16.9	390 21.7	2.69	1.132	21th
16	Marginalised groups are more likely to be victims of electoral violence.	13 0.7	769 42.9	711 39.6	138 7.7	163 9.1	3.18	.930	16th
17	Political parties use violence to suppress voter turnout in opposition strongholds.	30 1.7	709 39.5	569 31.7	304 16.9	182 10.1	3.06	1.017	19th
18	Electoral violence often includes the destruction of campaign materials and infrastructure.	20 1.1	849 47.3	777 43.3	87 4.8	61 3.4	3.38	.748	11th
19	Violence during elections disrupts the democratic process in African countries.	11 0.7	281 15.7	565 31.5	94 5.2	843 47.0	2.18	1.204	30th
20	Religious and ethnic leaders play significant roles in fueling or mitigating electoral violence.	24 1.3	210 11.7	425 23.7	763 42.5	372 20.7	2.30	.970	27th
21	Electoral violence in Africa frequently results in the displacement of communities.	997 55.6	612 34.1	125 7.0	43 2.4	17 0.9	4.41	.799	4th

Sn	Items	5	4	3	2	1	x̄	Std	R
22	The militarisation of elections contributes to heightened tensions and violence.	10 0.6	613 34.2	0 0.0	981 54.7	190 10.6	2.25	.659	28th
23	Incumbent governments often use state resources to perpetuate electoral violence.	1345 75.0	449 25.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	4.75	.433	2nd
24	Electoral violence discourages citizens from participating in future elections.	180 10.0	0 0.0	539 30.0	627 34.9	448 25.0	2.35	1.153	25th
25	Electoral violence is more likely to occur in politically unstable countries.	537 29.9	0 0.0	0 0.0	540 30.1	717 40.0	2.50	1.687	23rd
26	Foreign body stokes incidence of electoral violence in Africa	1015 56.6	629 35.1	120 6.7	30 1.7	0 0.0	4.47	.695	3rd
27	Social media platforms are increasingly being used to incite electoral violence in Africa.	0 0.0	0 0.0	625 34.8	989 55.1	180 10.0	2.25	.622	29th
28	Poor civic education contributes to the prevalence of electoral violence.	1345 75.0	449 25.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	4.90	.832	1st
29	Women are disproportionately affected by electoral violence in African elections.	180 10.0	0 0.0	539 30.0	627 34.9	448 25.0	2.35	1.153	26th
30	Electoral violence has long-term effects on the trust citizens have in democratic institutions.	537 29.9	0 0.0	0 0.0	540 30.1	717 40.0	2.50	1.687	24th
Threshold: 3.0					**Weighted Average**			**3.20**	

Table 1 reveals the mean responses to the nature of electoral violence in Africa. It has a weighted average of 3.2 against a threshold of 3.0. The following 'Poor civic education contributes to the prevalence of electoral violence', 'Incumbent governments often use state resources to perpetuate electoral violence.' 'Foreign body stokes incidence of electoral violence in Africa' was rated first, second, and third for the nature of electoral violence in Africa.

Research Question 2: What is the magnitude of electoral violence in Africa?
Table 2. Mean Response of The Magnitude of Electoral Violence in Africa

Sn	Items	5	4	3	2	1	x̄	Std	R
1	Electoral violence in Africa often leads to widespread loss of lives.	17 0.9	412 23.0	132 7.4	842 46.9	391 21.8	2.34	1.085	12th
2	Displacement of populations is a common outcome of electoral violence in Africa.	6 0.3	450 25.1	112 6.2	595 33.2	631 35.2	2.22	1.183	17th
3	Electoral violence affects both urban and rural areas in Africa.	21 1.2	394 22.0	168 9.4	194 10.8	1017 56.7	2.00	1.283	30th
4	The scale of electoral violence has increased over the past two decades in Africa.	21 1.2	443 24.7	119 6.6	720 40.1	491 27.4	2.32	1.153	16th
5	Electoral violence in Africa often disrupts economic activities nationwide.	39 2.2	463 25.8	99 5.5	665 37.1	528 29.4	2.34	1.209	13th
6	The impact of electoral violence is felt more acutely in marginalized communities.	52 2.9	444 24.7	119 6.6	619 34.5	560 31.2	2.34	1.232	14th
7	Electoral violence results in significant property destruction in African countries.	0 0.0	396 22.1	166 9.3	623 34.7	609 33.9	2.19	1.130	25th
8	In some African elections, electoral violence has escalated into civil conflicts.	69 3.8	411 22.9	151 8.4	598 33.3	565 31.5	2.34	1.243	15th

#	Statement						Mean	SD	Rank
9	Electoral violence often involves mass protests and riots in African cities.	0 0.0	380 21.2	182 10.1	635 35.4	597 33.3	2.19	1.116	26th
10	The use of firearms and other lethal weapons is common in electoral violence.	569 31.7	412 23.0	133 7.4	680 37.9	0 0.0	3.48	1.282	1st
11	Electoral violence frequently affects critical national infrastructures, such as roads and polling centers.	7 0.4	345 19.2	217 12.1	662 36.9	563 31.4	2.20	1.095	24th
12	Violence during elections in Africa often leads to widespread fear and voter suppression.	3 0.2	340 19.0	187 10.4	718 40.0	546 30.4	2.18	1.072	27th
13	Electoral violence has a long-term psychological impact on affected communities.	19 1.1	237 13.2	325 18.1	743 41.4	470 26.2	2.22	1.011	18th
14	Large-scale violence is more likely during highly contested elections in Africa.	4 0.2	271 15.1	254 14.2	668 37.2	597 33.3	2.12	1.042	29th
15	Electoral violence often draws the involvement of international peacekeeping forces.	20 1.1	254 14.2	255 14.2	812 45.3	453 25.3	2.21	1.010	22nd
16	Electoral violence in Africa frequently results in disruptions to public services, such as education and healthcare.	0 0.0	344 19.2	166 9.3	739 41.2	545 30.4	2.17	1.065	28th
17	Electoral violence in some African countries has resulted in military interventions or coups.	0 0.0	375 20.9	172 9.6	722 40.2	525 29.3	2.22	1.085	19th
18	The scale of electoral violence in Africa is worsened by the lack of adequate conflict resolution mechanisms.	0 0.0	393 21.9	152 8.5	712 39.7	537 29.9	2.22	1.100	20th
19	Electoral violence often leads to the imposition of curfews or states of emergency in African countries.	0 0.0	396 22.1	148 8.2	681 38.0	569 31.7	2.21	1.114	23rd
20	Post-election violence can last for months, affecting national stability.	0 0.0	391 21.8	169 9.4	681 38.0	553 30.8	2.22	1.107	21st
21	Electoral violence often results in significant financial costs for governments and citizens alike.	0 0.0	438 24.4	987 55.0	285 15.9	84 4.7	2.99	.768	4th
22	Electoral violence frequently involves large groups of organized perpetrators.	0 0.0	1004 56.0	543 30.3	96 5.4	151 8.4	3.34	.914	2nd
23	Electoral violence affects both high-profile politicians and ordinary citizens.	156 8.7	433 24.1	412 23.0	569 31.7	224 12.5	2.85	1.176	6th
24	The magnitude of electoral violence is often underestimated in national statistics.	53 3.0	732 40.8	277 15.4	246 13.7	486 27.1	2.79	1.305	8th
25	Electoral violence in Africa sometimes necessitates international humanitarian aid.	0 0.0	720 40.1	245 13.7	319 17.8	510 28.4	2.65	1.264	10th
26	Electoral violence disrupts cross-border trade and regional economic activities in Africa.	0 0.0	426 23.7	991 55.2	293 16.3	84 4.7	2.98	.767	5th

Sn	Items	5	4	3	2	1	x̄	Std	R
27	Electoral violence often involves the targeting of specific ethnic or religious groups.	0 0.0	1008 56.2	543 30.3	92 5.1	151 8.4	3.34	.913	3rd
28	The aftermath of electoral violence can destabilize neighboring countries in Africa.	156 8.7	425 23.7	416 23.2	573 31.9	224 12.5	2.84	1.174	7th
29	Electoral violence contributes significantly to Africa's global reputation for political instability.	36 2.0	736 41.0	282 15.7	239 13.3	501 27.9	2.76	1.297	9th
30	Electoral violence often leads to a decline in public trust in political institutions for years afterward.	0 0.0	712 39.7	249 13.9	323 18.0	510 28.4	2.65	1.261	11th
Threshold: 3.0	**Weighted Average**							**2.50**	

Table 2 reveals the mean response of the magnitude of electoral violence in Africa. It has a weighted average of 2.50 against a threshold of 3.0. The following 'The use of firearms and other lethal weapons is common in electoral violence.', 'Electoral violence frequently involves large groups of organized perpetrators.' 'Electoral violence often involves targeting specific ethnic or religious groups.' were rated first, second, and third in the nature of electoral violence in Africa.

Research Question 3: What are the remedies for electoral violence in Africa?

Table 3. Mean Response of The Remedies to Electoral Violence in Africa

Sn	Items	5	4	3	2	1	x̄	Std	R
1	Strengthening electoral commissions can significantly reduce electoral violence in Africa.	53 1.8	1299 72.4	430 24.0	16 0.9	16 0.9	3.73	.551	3rd
2	Promoting civic education reduces the likelihood of electoral violence.	17 0.9	1551 86.5	173 9.6	18 1.0	35 2.0	3.83	.543	2nd
3	Addressing socio-economic inequalities can help prevent electoral violence.	3 0.2	1346 75.0	372 20.7	61 3.4	12 0.7	3.71	.565	4th
4	Ensuring the independence of the judiciary is critical for resolving election disputes peacefully.	30 1.7	1606 89.5	137 7.6	16 0.9	5 0.3	3.91	.383	1st
5	Enforcing strict penalties for perpetrators of electoral violence can deter future occurrences.	13 0.7	1330 74.1	372 20.7	67 3.7	12 0.7	3.71	.581	5th
6	Encouraging political parties to sign peace accords reduces electoral violence.	38 2.1	1256 70.0	379 21.1	105 5.9	16 0.9	3.67	.660	6th
7	Providing equal opportunities for political participation reduces the risk of electoral violence.	41 2.3	1232 68.7	425 23.7	61 3.4	35 2.0	3.66	.675	7th
8	Enhancing voter education campaigns improves electoral transparency and reduces violence.	20 1.1	1028 57.3	495 27.6	239 13.3	12 0.7	3.45	.759	25th
9	Deploying security forces during elections is an effective way to prevent electoral violence.	19 1.1	1061 59.1	603 33.6	106 5.9	5 0.3	3.55	.636	13th
10	Strengthening regional organizations' mediation efforts can reduce electoral violence in Africa.	7 0.4	979 54.4	595 33.2	204 11.4	12 0.7	3.42	.721	27th
11	Addressing the root causes of ethnic and religious tensions reduces electoral violence.	21 1.2	1000 55.7	696 38.8	16 0.9	61 3.4	3.50	.704	16th

No	Statement						Mean	SD	Rank
12	Developing conflict resolution mechanisms for pre-election disputes is essential for peaceful elections.	7 / 0.4	1165 / 64.9	524 / 29.2	63 / 3.5	35 / 2.0	3.58	.662	10th
13	Promoting inclusive governance helps reduce electoral violence.	18 / 1.0	1083 / 60.4	584 / 32.6	97 / 5.4	12 / 0.7	3.56	.645	11st
14	Empowering women in politics can contribute to reducing electoral violence.	11 / 0.6	950 / 53.0	694 / 38.7	134 / 7.5	5 / 0.3	3.46	.654	20th
15	Encouraging youth participation in peaceful political processes reduces electoral violence.	3 / 0.2	1030 / 57.4	651 / 36.3	98 / 5.5	12 / 0.7	3.51	.635	15th
16	Monitoring political party activities during campaigns can reduce instances of violence.	3 / 0.2	942 / 52.5	600 / 33.4	188 / 10.5	61 / 3.4	3.36	.804	30th
17	International observers play a key role in reducing electoral violence.	3 / 0.2	1077 / 60.0	571 / 31.8	63 / 3.5	80 / 4.5	3.48	.769	18th
18	Repealing repressive laws that shrink civic spaces helps in addressing electoral violence.	3 / 0.2	803 / 44.8	870 / 48.5	106 / 5.9	12 / 0.7	3.38	.630	29th
19	Engaging civil society organizations in election processes mitigates electoral violence.	21 / 1.2	1047 / 58.4	527 / 29.4	149 / 8.3	50 / 2.8	3.47	.779	19th
20	Media regulation to curb hate speech and misinformation reduces electoral violence.	8 / 0.4	1252 / 69.8	428 / 23.9	94 / 5.2	12 / 0.7	3.64	.620	9th
21	Strengthening local communities' conflict mediation capacities can prevent electoral violence.	3 / 0.2	1146 / 63.9	457 / 25.5	55 / 3.1	133 / 7.4	3.46	.871	21th
22	Providing economic opportunities for marginalized groups can deter their involvement in electoral violence.	12 / 0.7	1112 / 62.0	579 / 32.3	21 / 1.2	70 / 3.9	3.54	.721	14th
23	Promoting transparency in the use of campaign funds reduces political manipulation and violence.	12 / 0.7	1100 / 61.3	569 / 31.7	101 / 5.6	12 / 0.7	3.56	.643	12th
24	Advocating for peaceful post-election dispute resolution mechanisms reduces electoral violence.	12 / 0.7	1201 / 66.9	514 / 28.7	62 / 3.5	5 / 0.3	3.64	.574	10th
25	Establishing early warning systems for electoral violence is effective in preventing conflicts.	12 / 0.7	961 / 53.6	665 / 37.1	144 / 8.0	12 / 0.7	3.46	.680	22nd
26	Educating political leaders on the importance of peaceful elections helps mitigate violence.	12 / 0.7	949 / 52.9	706 / 39.4	108 / 6.0	19 / 1.1	3.46	.668	23rd
27	Increasing public trust in electoral processes reduces the incidence of violence.	23 / 1.3	1005 / 56.0	526 / 29.3	168 / 9.4	72 / 4.0	3.41	.834	28th
28	Incorporating indigenous conflict resolution practices into electoral processes mitigates violence.	11 / 0.6	987 / 55.0	636 / 35.5	112 / 6.2	48 / 2.7	3.45	.738	26th
29	Encouraging interfaith and interethnic dialogue can foster peace during elections.	23 / 1.3	910 / 50.7	786 / 43.8	67 / 3.7	8 / 0.4	3.49	.614	17th
30	Strengthening partnerships between governments, civil society, and international actors is crucial for addressing electoral violence sustainably.	9 / 0.5	1063 / 59.3	518 / 28.9	155 / 8.6	49 / 2.7	3.46	.772	24th
Threshold: 3.0					**Weighted Average**				**3.55**

Table 3 reveals the mean response of the magnitude of electoral violence in Africa. It has a weighted average of 3.55 against a threshold of 3.0. The following statements were rated first, second, and third in terms of the nature of electoral violence in Africa: 'Ensuring the independence of the judiciary is critical for resolving election disputes peacefully',' 'Promoting civic education reduces the likelihood of electoral violence', and 'Strengthening electoral commissions can significantly reduce electoral violence in Africa.'

4.1 Discusion of findings
4.1.1 Nature of Electoral Violence
The study found that the nature of electoral violence is multi-faceted. Political parties and their supporters frequently engage in violence to secure electoral victories. In Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, political rivalry, ethnic tension, and manipulation of public opinion were identified as major contributors to violence outbreaks. In Nigeria, competition among political elites often triggers violent clashes, especially in regions with deeply entrenched ethnic or religious divisions. This is supported by Fjelde and Höglund (2016) and Omoniyi (2023). Similarly, in Kenya, ethnicity-based violence has historically been a major issue during elections, with certain ethnic groups using violence as a tool to protect their political interests. This is also not in variance with the works of Höglund (2009) and Wahman and Goldring (2020). In Ghana, while the incidence of electoral violence is relatively lower than that of its neighbors, the study revealed that sporadic violence is still fueled by political polarization and competition for political control. This is in agreement with the study by Albaugh and Deacon (2021).

4.2.2 Magnitude of Electoral Violence
The results show that the magnitude of electoral violence is significant in all three countries, albeit with variations in its intensity and impact. In Nigeria, electoral violence often leads to widespread physical and psychological harm, with many individuals being displaced from their homes and forced into refugee camps. This is supported by the studies of Bekoe and Burchard (2017) and Daxecker (2012). In Kenya, the magnitude is similarly grave, especially following the 2007-2008 post-election violence, which resulted in over 1,000 deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. This is buttressed by the studies conducted by Claes (2022) study. Although Ghana is less affected by electoral violence, it still faces localized incidents of violence, often concentrated around election-related protests or disputes over election results. This result is in accordance with the works of Gallego (2018) and Höglund (2009). The economic impact of electoral violence is also noteworthy, as it disrupts economic activities, prevents voter participation, and hinders long-term development. This is corroborated by the work of Daxecker and Jung (2018).

4.2.3 Remedies for Electoral Violence
The remedies proposed by the participants in this study reflect a strong consensus on the need for systemic changes to address the root causes of electoral violence. Among the most frequently cited plausible solutions were strengthening electoral commissions to ensure greater transparency and fairness, establishing conflict resolution mechanisms to address grievances before they escalate, and empowering civil society organizations to monitor elections and promote peaceful campaigns. This corroborates the results of Bratton and Masunungure (2018) and Anglin (2018). International actors, including the African Union and the United Nations, were also seen as critical players in providing support and mediation during periods of high electoral tension. This is affirmed by Flores and Nooruddin (2012) and Barkan (2015). Civic education emerged as a particularly important strategy to equip citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate peacefully in the electoral process. One of the most striking findings was the recognition of the media's role in both exacerbating and mitigating electoral violence. Media outlets in all three countries were found to sometimes fuel violence by spreading divisive messages and inciting political hatred. However, they were also seen as having the potential to play a key role in fostering peace by promoting responsible journalism and fair coverage of electoral processes. This is supported by Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski (2012) and Fjelde and Höglund (2016).

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This study aims to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of electoral violence in Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya. The shrinking of Africa's civic space is a deeply troubling phenomenon significantly exacerbated by electoral violence over the past two decades. The use of violence by political elites, coupled with the manipulation of security forces, economic instability, and weak legal frameworks, has created an environment in which citizens, opposition parties, and civil society groups are increasingly marginalized. This erosion of civic space undermines the integrity of democratic processes, stifles political engagement, and perpetuates cycles of political violence. It demands strengthening democratic institutions, improving the economic conditions of marginalized communities, ensuring the independence of electoral commissions and safeguarding the rights of citizens to peacefully engage in the political process.

Only by addressing these structural challenges can Africa hope to restore its civic space and allow democratic ideals and peaceful political engagement to flourish. Electoral violence in Africa remains a persistent challenge that undermines democratic governance, disrupts national stability, and inhibits socioeconomic development. However, through comprehensive reforms, including strengthened electoral institutions, improved conflict resolution strategies, and widespread civic education, there is potential to reduce the occurrence of violence and ensure peaceful democratic processes. The findings of this study provide valuable insights that can inform policymaking and guide future efforts to address electoral violence in Africa.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed to mitigate electoral violence in Africa:

1. Electoral commissions should be given more autonomy and resources to oversee elections impartially, focusing on ensuring fairness and transparency in the voting and counting processes.
2. Governments and civil society organizations should invest in comprehensive civic education campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of peaceful elections and the dangers of violence.
3. Local communities should be equipped with conflict resolution skills, and mechanisms should be established to address electoral grievances before they escalate into violence.
4. Political parties should adopt inclusive practices that give marginalized groups—particularly women and youth—a voice in the electoral process and reduce the likelihood of exclusionary violence.
5. Media outlets should be regulated to prevent the spread of inflammatory content that can incite electoral violence in Nigeria. Journalists should be trained to report responsibly, particularly during elections.
6. Regional and international bodies, such as the African Union and the United Nations, should play a more active role in monitoring elections and providing mediation support during periods of high electoral tensions.

5.3 Limitation/s and study forward

Further studies should cover other geographical regions in Africa.

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