




Chapter 21

Election-related Violence in Africa: A Reflection of the African Union's Response

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Introduction

Postcolonial Africa has struggled in operationalising liberal democracy, marked by recurring incidents of electoral violence leading to significant loss of lives and destruction of property throughout the continent. This has imposed a responsibility on continental and regional actors, such as the African Union (AU) to intervene. Thus, the AU has made significant strides in creating several frameworks that foster peace and security on the continent. For instance, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), which was proposed in 2007 and enacted in 2012, has been instrumental in the governance and conduct of African elections. Most countries have adopted electoral democracy, with elections held cyclically every four to five years. Despite these initiatives, African elections are marred with election-related violence (ERV) ranging from protests to civilian deaths.

During the Zimbabwean post-election period in 2018, six people were shot dead by the army during unorganised protests while waiting for the announcement of election results (Human Rights Watch 2018). In the 2021 presidential election in Uganda, the opposition party, National Unity Platform, led by Robert Kyagulanyi, experienced electoral violence in the pre-election



period. This ranged from arrests of the party candidates, the disruption of political rallies with tear gas in some areas, and, on the extreme, the murder of a party supporter. As a result, Kyagulanyi suspended his campaigns at a point during the electoral race (The East African 2020). In 2017, during the pre-election period, Cameroon faced election violence that led to 400 civilian deaths, as the predominantly English-speaking regions announced the boycott of the poll (Maclean & Kiven 2018). These incidences have become a norm in many countries. According to Chikwanha and Masungure (2012:1), the AU “has often arrived at the scene rather late and without much coercive authority to enforce its prescriptions”.

Thus, this chapter aims to evaluate the AU’s role since the enforcement of the ACDEG on election-related violence in 2012. It commences by conceptualising election-related violence and providing an overview of Africa’s democratic experiences and democratic reversals by specifically highlighting the causes and consequences of electoral violence. It analyses the AU’s role in resolving electoral violence through tools, such as early warning systems and preventative diplomacy, election observation and monitoring, mediation, and the Panel of the Wise. Lastly, it concludes and outlines important recommendations on how the AU should effectively respond to ERV. This chapter utilises process tracing¹ to assess the AU’s role, including data provided by the Armed Conflict Location and Events Data (ACLED) to operationalise ERV. To calculate the incidences of ERV (number of occurrences of ERV and fatalities related to ERV) from the ACLED data set, ERV falls under the category of political violence, and the sub-types include violence against civilians, protests, and abductions or forced disappearances.

Conceptualisation

ERV has become a common phenomenon in Africa, prompting an interest in different aspects of the concept. Multiple factors

1 Process tracing is a causal mechanism using details within case empirical analyses of how a casual] process plays out in an actual case. In the methodology, there is no co-variation to show causality (Brady & Collier 2010)

trigger ERV, which leads to numerous definitions/explanations of ERV. According to Fisher (2002), election-related violence is the threat of harm to individuals and property during the electoral cycle. Moreover, Laakso (2007) views election violence as an event that occurs to impact election results by manipulating electoral procedures and interrogating the legitimacy of the electoral results. Hoglund (2009:417) succinctly holds that electoral violence is separated from other forms of political violence by a combination of timing and motive. The time aspect relates to violence carried out during the election period. The objective of election violence is to influence the electoral process and its outcome. Hoglund's (2009) understanding of election violence combines both Laakso (2007) and Fisher's (2002) standpoints, which all allude to timing and motive.

Furthermore, some scholars have presented more detailed definitions of election violence, such as Sisk (2009), who defines ERV as acts that threaten, intimidate, or perpetrate physical harm to others, which is motivated by elections. Kehailia (2014) categories election violence into eight different forms: 1) party-on-party electoral violence; 2) party-on-voter electoral violence; 3) party-on-state electoral violence; 4) voter-on-voter electoral violence; 5) voter-on-state electoral violence; 6) state-on-voter electoral violence; 7) state-on-party electoral violence; and 8) state-on-state electoral violence. In his article titled 'Voices, Votes, and Violence: Essays on Select Dynamics of Electoral Authoritarian Regimes', Bardall (2016) infers that election violence is a sub-type of political violence. He maintains that "political violence controls and suppresses an individual or group's right to participate in political processes through emotional, social, or economic force, coercion or pressure, and physical and sexual harm. It may occur in the public or private sphere, including in the family, the general community, online, and via media, or be perpetrated or condoned by the State (Bardall 2016).

ERV has a specific timeframe that motivates 'who did what and to whom', which is called the electoral cycle. As shown in Figure 21.1 below, the electoral cycle or the electoral process

involves three periods: the pre-electoral, the electoral, and the post-election periods.



Figure 21.1: The Electoral Cycle

Source: EISA (n.d.)

The pre-electoral period occurs before the election day and involves various preparations. These preparations include voter registration, registration of political parties, and registration of electoral observers. Additionally, the electoral commission sets a budget to allocate funds to each political party for campaigning purposes. This stage provides only a glimpse into the activities of the pre-electoral period (Norris *et al* 2014). Moreover, the election period encompasses campaign activities by different political parties before the election day. It further includes when people cast their votes on this day, and subsequently, followed by the announcement of the election results. Lastly, during the post-electoral period, the elections undergo a review process with which an audit takes place to assess the fairness and integrity of the election results (Norris *et al* 2014). This phase aims to ensure that the elections are free and fair.

Concerning African elections, violence has occurred in all three stages of the electoral cycle for different reasons and based on the timing of election violence. For example, in the pre-electoral period, acts of election violence include the 'disappearance' of opposition leaders and their candidates when the incumbent party feels primarily threatened. It may also involve the disruption of the political rallies of the opposition party. This is a form of coercive campaigning (Birch *et al* 2020). Zimbabwe has a reputation for inciting electoral violence during the pre-electoral period, as manifested during the 2008 election. In that timeframe, the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF), adopted a slogan that implied the use of force, not dialogue. Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai reported that, during this period, 86 civilians had been killed and 10 000 injured in the ensuing violence (Mail & Guardian 2012).

The ruling parties can unleash this type of violence because they have the state security forces at their disposal. During the electoral period, there are instances whereby the opposition political parties have protested at polling stations to demonstrate electoral irregularity and sway international election observers in their favour. According to Sisk (2008) and Høglund (2009), violence on election day is often an attempt to influence election outcomes as a form of fraud. During the post-electoral period, election-related violence could be perpetrated by the opposition parties, particularly if election results are not favourable to them. For example, in the 2020 Tanzanian election, the two main opposition groups, the Party for Democracy and Progress known as Chadema and the Alliance for Change and Transparency commonly referred to as the ACT Wazalendo, called for their supporters to protest the re-election of President John Magufuli, who was declared the winner of the election by 84% of the votes (Blandy 2020). To squash these protests, governments viewed as autocratic may use excessive force.

The timing of election-related violence has different motives, and there is equifinality when it comes to what motivates electoral violence at different stages of the electoral cycle. The following section offers a synopsis of the African political

landscape. Unpacking Africa's history lays a solid foundation for the current political situation in the quest for democratisation.

Africa's Experience of Democracy and its Reversals

Africa's colonial history has shaped its political landscape. Predominantly, the francophone countries experienced direct rule, and their colonial power, France, has continued to actively influence its former colonies. In the case of Mali, as much as it has become an independent state, France still had a military base in the country until after the military coup in 2021, when the military sacked President Conde and ordered France out of the country. African countries subjected to indirect rule were primarily English-speaking countries under British colonial rule. After these countries gained independence, Britain had little influence or presence in these states. The francophone countries have a history of military coups to remove underperforming or oppressive governments, while in anglophone countries, this has waned over the years.

Democracy is a paradoxical ideology with several characteristics, depending on the context. For most African countries that have had to fight for democracy due to their colonial history and years of autocracy, the most befitting definition is a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" (Lincoln 1863). Mainwaring (1993) views democracy as a combination of three aspects, which include open, competitive elections; the presence of universal suffrage; and lastly, the guarantees of traditional civil liberties such as freedom of organisation, and due process of law. Linz (1996:139) posits that "democracy is a government *pro tempore*, a regime in which the electorate at regular intervals can hold its governors accountable and impose change". These definitions all point to some form of representation through elections. Irrespective of this critical aspect of democracy, the question of why elections matter lies in the promise of electing representatives into government.

The third wave of democracy in Africa occurred between the 1960s and early 1990s, with one-party states being the norm in many African countries. For example, the Democratic Union of

the Malian People held on to power between 1976 and 1991; Niger was ruled by the Nigerien Progress Party–African Democratic Rally between 1960 and 1974; the Socialist Party of Senegal was in power between 1966 and 1974; and Tanzania was governed by Chama Cha Mapiduzi between 1977 and 1992. In the late 1990s, the rise of democratic movements led to transitions of many autocratic regimes, while single-party states embraced multiparty democracy (Cyllah 2010). Since this wave, most African countries have held elections every four or five years, which highlights the success of periodic electoral democracy. While there have been power transitions through multi-party elections on the continent, the majority of them have been marred with ERV

According to Merilainen (2012), “a fifth of the elections in sub-Saharan Africa” result in ERV. As of 2020, Africa saw a rise in political violence in comparison to the previous year (Raleigh & Kishi 2021). In 2020, there were more than 17 200 events of political violence, which accounted for 37 600 fatalities (Raleigh & Kishi 2021). The question remains: why did these events occur, especially during the electoral cycle? Undoubtedly, the occurrence of ERV and political violence in Africa is linked with the failure of democratisation.²

Democracy is associated with governance by the majority through voting, but this principle has been eroded in Africa over time. Most constitutions highlight that a president cannot rule for more than two terms (African Center for Strategic Studies 2018). However, illegal or illegitimate changes in constitutions have been occurring, with incumbent presidents elongating their terms in office. Consequently, elections have failed to preserve the people’s will, as incumbent leaders have been manipulating the constitutions to remove term limits. For instance, in Cameroon, Paul Biya, who has been in office for 41 years, eliminated the two-term presidential limit, enabling him to consolidate power for decades.

2 Democratisation refers to the inception and expansion of citizen privileges and the establishment a democratic nation. The concept of citizenship rights involves the introduction of fundamental individual liberties like the right to gather, religious autonomy, unrestricted journalism, and the ability to run for governmental positions (Makombe 2022).

Similarly, Yoweri Museveni, who has been in power for 37 years, abolished Uganda's constitutional term limit clause in 2005. Djibouti's Ismail Omar Guelleh, who has been in power for 24 years, influenced the lawmakers to approve a constitutional amendment in 2010 that paved the way for his third term bid and allowed him to be in power since (Africa News 2019). As a result, these countries have witnessed electoral violence due to the people's strong desire for a change in leadership. Even though they participate in regular elections, the outcomes often do not meet their expectations, indicating a challenge in the democratisation project.

Mainwaring (1993) maintains that democracy involves open, competitive elections that determine who will govern. However, there has been a growing phenomenon of national unity governments, whereby the incumbent governments decline to relinquish their positions following fiercely disputed elections. To avert tensions between the competing political parties, the opposition factions are often included in the government (Makombe 2018). While power-sharing agreements are a gap measure to mitigate conflicts between competing political parties, they do not tackle the root cause of the problem.

Power-sharing agreements primarily aim to diminish majoritarianism, thereby reducing the risk that a single party or ethnic group might pose to the security of a country's citizens (Miti *et al* 2013). It is crucial to highlight that the democratic process is compromised, increasing the possibility of instability, when specific parties gain power, particularly through illegitimate electoral processes. Kenya in 2007 and Zimbabwe in 2008 are examples of elections that could have determined who was to govern. However, the formation of a government of national unity or coalition government is evidence of democratic reversals, which may be viewed at the time as an opportunity cost to foster peace and stability.

In addition to the political freedoms inherent in the democratic process, there are other socio-economic prospects for democracy. As argued by Matlosa (2017), the social-structuralist interpretation of democracy broadens the scope of democratic

theory and practice, transcending the procedural, electoral, and institutional aspects. In a democratic state, socio-economic development and structural power distribution fall under second-generation rights to be enjoyed by the citizens. In Africa, these rights and liberties remain an unfulfilled aspiration. Across Africa, citizens have almost resigned to the increasing poverty rates. Such high levels of multidimensional poverty and hopelessness explain why a young vegetable vendor in Tunisia, harassed by the police in the central business district, resorted to setting himself on fire in 2010 (Lageman 2020). This became one of the main sparks for the Arab Spring, as waves of protests and public revolts against authoritarian regimes, corruption, and poverty spread across Northern African countries such as Tunisia and Libya.

Following this occurrence, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated poverty rates in Africa, highlighting the impact of poor governance. During the pandemic in 2020, nearly 30 million more Africans slid into extreme poverty (living on less than US\$1.90 a day) and before the pandemic, over 445 million people (34%) of Africa's population lived below the poverty line (Aikins & McLachlan 2022). The increase in poverty, even before COVID-19, has led to riots and calls for a change in governments, mainly in the Central and West African regions, which recorded 54.8% and 36.8% poverty, respectively (Aikins & McLachlan 2022).

It is not a coincidence that between 2019 and 2023, Central and West Africa experienced unprecedented military coup d'états. Table 21.1 illustrates the occurrence of successful military coups in Africa since 2019. The reasons for these military coups differ from one country to another. However, they all stem from poor governance, insecurity, abuse of power, and tenure elongations. Apart from poor governance, there are other immediate causes of democratic reversals, including greed of the political elites, personalising the state by the ruling class, corruption by the ruling elites, and mismanagement of state resources.

Table 21.1: Evidence of Democratic Reversals through Military Coups in Africa Since 2019

Year	Country	Reasons
2019	Sudan	protests for the removal of President Omar al Bashir who was in power since 1989 dramatic rise in the cost of living and the deterioration of the economy
2020	Mali	protests calling for the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita who had been in power since 2013 insecurity and proliferation of insurgent groups corruption, souring economic conditions, and dilapidating healthcare facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic
2021	Tunisia	President Kais Saied seized power in July 2021, dismissing Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and suspending the parliament, due to what Saied called a deteriorating economy and inability to effectively manage the COVID-19 pandemic
2021	Guinea	former president Alpha Conde wanted an extension of his term after a two-term tenure. He allegedly manipulated the election results and declared himself the winner, leading to massive protests that claimed 12 lives Guinea's natural resource wealth was personalised by the elite and the general population continued to suffer economically tax was increased between 13% and 15% in 2019 an increase in petrol prices was followed by a second tax hike in 2021
2022	Burkina Faso	in January 2022, the military removed President Roch Marc Christian Kabore in a coup, and installed Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damba, citing rising insecurity in September 2022, President Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damba was also removed by the military. Ibrahim Traoré became the interim president.
2023	Niger	insecurity and rising cost of living in the country and governance challenges President Bazoum's plans to replace the head of the presidential guard

Year	Country	Reasons
2023	Gabon	the military, under General Brice Oligui, removed President Ali Bongo after his 14-year rule poor governance electoral malpractices. President Ali Bongo was removed a few hours after his government announced his re-election. Continuous degradation of social cohesion, risking pushing the country into chaos

Source: Author's compilation

Overview of Election Violence in Africa

According to Mares and Young (2016), 48% of all voters from 33 African countries in the fifth round of the Afrobarometer expressed fear of violence during elections. Moreover, Daxcecker (2012) reveals that 81.48% of elections conducted between 1997 and 2009 experienced at least one incident of pre-election violence, and 65.7% had at least one incident of post-election violence. Thus, election violence in Africa is highly prevalent and associated with the type and expression of democracy in the country. Theoretically, most advanced democracies rarely face election violence because of the institutionalisation of competition. After all, the governing party usually fulfils a significant part of its social contract, unlike the case in Africa.

On the other hand, authoritarian civilian regimes stifle the presence of opposition parties, and their elections are not competitive (Huntington 1991). For example, Cameroon's president, Paul Biya, who is the second longest-serving president in Africa, "has remained in power by selecting elites who do not challenge his authority, corrupting state institutions to his will, including but not limited to electoral bodies and the courts, and discrediting already fragmented opposition parties" (O'Donnell & Gramer 2018). However, states with hybrid regimes are more prone to electoral violence because of their inability to democratise, which is very prevalent in most African countries (IDEA 2019).

Levitsky and Way (2002:52) posit that hybrid regimes have what they coined 'competitive authoritarianism', which is defined as "formal democratic institutions widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority while the incumbents violate the rules so often that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy". As a result, they have weak electoral institutions like the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, which claimed to be ready for the August 2023 election. However, they needed more ballot papers in the metropolitan cities of Harare and Bulawayo on election day. Hence, the elections failed to meet the Southern African Development Community (SADC)'s standard of holding elections (Garber 2023). As a result, an authoritarian environment flourishes within a multiparty system. The ZANU-PF has been in power since Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 and had a national unity government in 2008, in its quest for regime consolidation.

In addition to the type of regime in each African country, the type of electoral system also contributes to electoral violence. Countries like South Africa, which have proportional representation as their electoral system, are less likely to experience election violence, as all the political parties have seats in parliament depending on the percentage of votes they receive. On the other hand, countries with a 'first past the post' electoral cycle, and a 'winner takes it all' attitude, are more likely to experience election violence. Nigeria, Kenya, Eritria, and Uganda are examples of the latter.

Primarily, when significant ethno-political groups are denied political representation, elections held under majoritarian systems are more susceptible to violence. The propensity arises because an opposition that possesses a substantial electoral base can pose a more convincing challenge to the ruling party, potentially driving both sides to adopt violent tactics in the pursuit of victory (Fjelde & Hoglund 2016). Furthermore, majoritarian institutions will notably adversely impact countries characterised by substantial economic disparities. In such contexts, the stakes of electoral contests may rise significantly, and the costs associated with electoral defeat will become more pronounced, especially

when both political influence and economic prosperity impact each other.

With all the differences and lack of compliance with democratic norms in Africa, it is questionable why African countries continue to aspire for democracy and interesting to identify their motivations. In 2011, the African Union Commission (AUC) introduced the concept of 'shared values', as the norms, principles, and practices developed to provide the basis for collective actions and solutions (Omozuafoh 2021). These shared values seek to address the political, economic, and social challenges that hinder Africa's integration and development. Thus, the AU is a major instrument in promoting democracy and combatting electoral violence on the continent. After the ratification of the Constitutive Act of the Africa Union (AUCA) of 2000, the provisions of the Act became legally binding on African states. Hence, the AU plays a fundamental role to foster democracy and end election violence through different institutions and instruments.

The Role of the AU in Electoral-related Violence

In 2002, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was transformed to the AU, with the mandate to increase co-operation and enhance integration among African states. The vision of this continental organisation is "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena" (AU n.d.). The AUCA is the founding treaty that commits AU member states to democratic, representative, and responsive governance, under conditions of peace and stability (AU 2000b). Articles 3 and 4 of the AUCA state the unequivocal embrace of a popularly elected government and outright rejection and condemnation of unconstitutional government changes, which the Lome Declaration elaborates on in 2000. Thus, the AU enforces the democratic principle that elections are legitimate to express popular sovereignty. In addition, the AUCA recognises that sustainable democracy on the continent requires an environment that fosters political stability, peace, and security.

The AU establishes extensive normative frameworks to foster sustainable democracy. These include the Lome Declaration of 2000, the African Charter on Democracy Elections and Governance (ACDEG) of 2007, the Ezulwini Framework of 2009, and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). As the AU has reached its 20-year milestone, this chapter analyses the AU's frameworks to manage electoral conflict. The AU operationalises APSA with the guidance of the AU's Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) Protocol, which was adopted in July 2002 and entered into force in 2003. All these frameworks represent the founding aspirations of the AU to promote peace and security as far as ERV is concerned. On the other hand, achieving this aspiration is costly, and one of the consistent barriers the AU has is raising enough internal funding for their projects. A significant part of their budget is funded by the EU and European states, which provide 75% of their running costs as of 2021 (ISS 2021). The inability of the AU to fund its projects has hurt their effectiveness. This section will focus on the AU's progress through the following initiatives: i) early warning system and preventative diplomacy; ii) election observation and monitoring; iii) mediation of post-election disputes; and iv) the Panel of the Wise.

Continental Early Warning System

Election-related violence is not a spontaneous occurrence. The underlying issues that predate its occurrence is the motivation for the establishment of the Continental Early Warning Systems (CEWS). Early warning systems, by definition, use open-source material and generally aim to serve human security, not national or state interests (IGAD 2021). As a result, the AU intended to monitor these situations, especially during election seasons. In some countries, conducting elections can incite violent conflicts due to long-standing political rivalries among the candidates, particularly within political parties, negatively impacting peace, stability, and security (AU 2010). Thus, during the pre-electoral cycle, the AU usually dispatched fact-finding and pre-election assessment missions to the country holding the election.

Beyond the fact-finding aspect, the relevant information is used to mitigate and prevent violent conflict by communicating

the analysis and policy options to relevant end-users. At the continental level, the end-users are the AUC chairperson, the PSC, and other relevant policy organs of the AU and the PSC. In this context, early warning aims to enhance the latter and former institutes and entities like the Panel of the Wise's ability to recognise significant developments promptly and formulate effective response strategies to prevent or mitigate violent conflict (Cilliers 2005).

Thus, the PSC introduced the CEWS to facilitate the early warning systems mechanism. The CEWS falls under Article 12 of the protocol establishing the PSC. It was envisioned that the CEWS would consist of a "situation room", which is "the observation and monitoring centre" found explicitly in the Conflict Management Directorate of the AU and "responsible for data collection and analysis based on appropriate early warning indicators module" (PSC 2002). The CEWS would have an established link with existing regional economic communities (RECs) across regions. As such, under Article 12(2)(b), "specific provision was made for the observation and monitoring units of the Regional Mechanisms (RMs), which are to be linked directly through appropriate means of communications to the 'Situation Room', which shall collect and process data at their level and transmit the same to the Situation Room" (PSC 2002).

However, the CEWS could not be effectively activated in the 2007 Kenyan case, leading to devastating electoral violence that claimed more than 1 000 fatalities (Gettleman 2008). In the case of Kenya, the CEWS had a porous country network, which made it difficult to access information relating to the development of the conflict at an earlier stage (Kungu 2018). Furthermore, the CEWS did not have links to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which would have been able to capture instances of pre-election violence. For example, the Kenya Human Rights Commission documented 36 incidents of political violence that led to the fatalities of 20 individuals and left 60 others wounded across 79 constituencies (Amao *et al* 2014). These findings could have been invaluable for the CEWS in anticipating the conflict, and it was only on 10 January 2008, when the AUC Chairperson, His Excellency Alpha Oumar Konaré, issued a statement relating to

the conflict and calling for the Kenyan leaders to end the conflict (Moody 2008). Unfortunately, the conflict had already started, and the CEWS failed to prevent it.

The CEWS's failure in the 2007 Kenyan election led to a coalition between the CEWS and the EU's Joint Research Centre to strengthen their research capacity. They increased their staff members to include analysts, enabling them to act more efficiently and timely (EU Commission 2017; Noyes & Yarwood 2013). The 2012 election in Guinea-Bissau presented the CEWS with the chance to test the increase in its operational capacity. Early warning signs were evident in early March 2012, when a joint mission of the Economic Community of West African States/African Union/United Nations monitored the election and prevent electoral conflict in Guinea Bissau. However, it was too late, as a military coup occurred while the joint mission was present in the country on 12 April 2012 (African *et al* 2012). Overall, this mission was unsuccessful due to poor timing and the occurrence of a military coup d'état.

These two incidents reinforced the failure of the CEWS in Africa. While the CEWS had made strides in enhancing its data collection in 2012, there was a further need to enhance its operational capabilities. According to Engel (2018), some of the challenges included the limited connection between the CEWS and civil society organisations operating within AU member states, financial overdependence on external partners, the underperformance of some organs and institutions, and the ambiguous working relations between the AUC and regional entities and member states (Engel 2022). Ultimately, these challenges led to its redundancy. Further to this, the CEWS was “unfortunately obliterated under the broad AU reforms in 2021 that created a new Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security”, and it is unclear how they will revive this system under the new department (Engel 2022). Despite the collapse of the CEWS, the AU has managed to monitor and observe most African elections. However, the AU should revive the CEWS and make it operational to prevent the outbreak of conflicts and unconstitutional changes of governments on the continent.

Election Observation and Monitoring

Since its inception in 2002, the AU has developed frameworks for election observation and monitoring. The framework guiding this includes the 2002 Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, the 2002 Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring Missions, and the ACDEG. These three instruments guide all election observer missions of the AUC and the Pan-African Parliament. According to the AU (2010:51), election observation relates to “information gathering, or on-site fact-finding aimed at assessing the electoral process’s credibility, legitimacy, and transparency. External agencies often carry out observation missions but cannot intervene in the voting and counting operations”. The term ‘monitoring’ refers to information gathering, examination, and evaluation of the electoral process (AU 2010:51-52).

Election observation and monitoring missions in Africa include conducting technical evaluations of election processes and addressing and managing political tensions. This is important because of the significant connection between elections and potential conflicts. Consequently, as a continental organisation, the AU has consistently approached election observation with a preventive diplomacy perspective to avoid the potential outbreak of conflict. Notably, the head of mission in election observation and monitoring (EOM) missions encompasses diplomatic efforts to prevent electoral violence and conflict.

Makombe (2018) reveals a causality between the longevity of an election observation mission and the level of election violence perpetrated. In a paper titled, ‘Election Observation and Monitoring in the Midst of Kenyan Elections: The Case Study of 1997 to 2013 Elections’, Makombe (2018) suggests that the presence of international observers in all three stages (long-term election observation) of the electoral cycle lessens the severity of violence. Countries are more likely to witness increased electoral violence when there are short-term observer missions, which occur during the week of election day and a few days post-election day. Kenya experienced very violent elections in 1997 and 2007, and the presence of election observers was

short-term. Conversely, in Kenya’s 2002 and 2013 elections, the elections experienced less electoral violence, as the election observer mission stayed longer. This conclusion was drawn based on the longevity of EOM periods as significant outliers, despite significant pre-existing conditions that were constant factors which created grounds for the occurrence of election violence. These pre-existing conditions included high poverty rates, corruption, poor service delivery, and high inflation (Makombe 2018). Figure 21.2 illustrates the severity of election violence in Kenya.

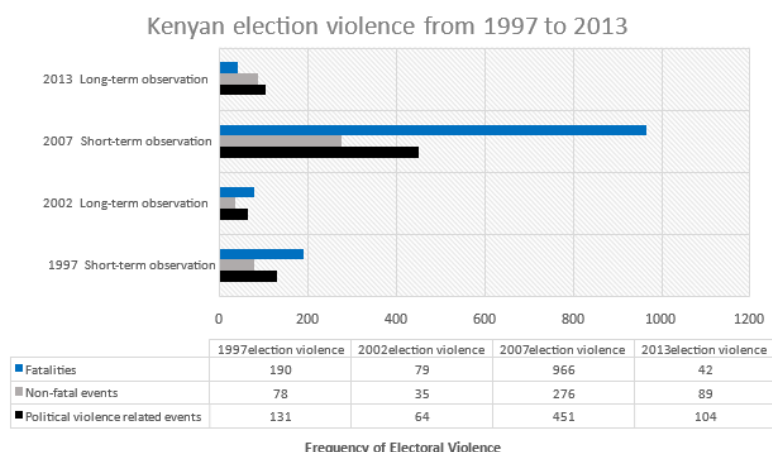


Figure 21.2: Election Violence in Kenya in Correlation with the Longevity of the International Election Observers

Source: Customised by Author from ACLED³

The two main findings mentioned earlier were supported by additional factors, such as state legitimacy conferred by other nations when they endorse the election. Consequently, the ruling party tends to be more cautious about inciting violence, seeking legitimacy in the eyes of observers (AU 2010). Election observation and monitoring are essential as they ensure the credibility of elections, transparency, integrity of the electoral process, and legitimacy of the outcome by key electoral stakeholders.

3 Available online at <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

Hence, when election violence occurs, it raises concerns about the election's credibility, especially if there are pre-existing conditions.

The process of election observation and monitoring takes place upon invitation from the country hosting the election. In most cases, the AU is invited to observe several presidential elections. Their role as a continental body is to observe and monitor elections within a country, which results in the submission of two reports on whether the elections were free and fair and if the country holding the election has adhered to the provisions of the ACDEG. Overall, the AU has endorsed most of the elections on the continent, while disputing electoral violence and contentious elections. For example, the continental body endorsed the Kenyan election of 2007, which later ended up as a government of national unity. In Malawi's 2019 election, the AU endorsed the election as well, and the victory of the president-elect was later overturned by the Malawian courts, giving power to the opposition party.

Mediation of Post-election Disputes

Election observation and monitoring ends with the publishing of the final report by observer missions. In cases where election disputes or election violence occurs post-election day, there is a need for mediation by a neutral external party. Mediation plays a significant role in the contingency model, particularly concerning the mediator and their approach. There is an ongoing debate regarding which mediation style leads to the most favourable outcomes. Elangovan emphasises that the mediation strategy is a crucial factor in evaluating mediation results (cited in Bercovitch & Houston 2000), while Beardsley *et al* (2006) argue that the mediator's style substantially impacts the strategic bargaining environment. The three primary styles are facilitation or communication, formulation, and manipulation. Brown and Shraub (1992) describe the first style as "completely procedural" and involving a "passive" role in facilitating information exchange. This approach also entails the mediator perceiving the conflict as a breakdown in communication, making it the mediator's primary task (Zartman 1996:279).

Conversely, formulation sees the mediator taking on a more substantive role in negotiations, including suggesting practical solutions to disputes (Brown & Shraub 1992). Manipulation goes further by actively and fully engaging and integrating the mediator with the solution (Brown & Shraub 1992). The mediator wields significant influence in this approach to drive the process toward a specific outcome (Brown & Shraub 1992). The AU has played the role of mediator in multiple instances to mitigate conflict between incumbent and opposition parties.

The continental body relies on the RECs to handle electoral-related disputes. In 2008, the AU reluctantly made use of the SADC political leadership to mediate the post-election dispute between the ruling party, ZANU-PF, and two opposition parties, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) factions MDC-T led by Morgan Tsvangirai, and MDC-M led by Arthur Mutambara. According to Borger (2008), “Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia, Senegal, and Botswana all questioned Mugabe’s legitimacy in the wake of a government-backed campaign of violence that forced Tsvangirai to withdraw from the election. They argued that the AU should live up to its charter that aspires towards democratic government”. Hence, the international community assigned former South African president Thabo Mbeki the task of mediating the political tensions in the country. Mbeki’s role was to normalise the political environment, which included the right of political affiliation and public protest (Anstey 2007).

A vital aspect of this mediation process was the mediation style used to negotiate peace and stability in Zimbabwe. In the 2008 Zimbabwean election crisis, the mediation style used was quiet diplomacy. According to scholarly and theoretical points of view, ‘quiet’ or ‘soft’ diplomacy possesses several characteristics, as elucidated by Graham (2006:117):

1. personal or direct diplomacy between heads of state or government or senior officials;
2. little (or no) media involvement;
3. the appearance of limited action or even inaction;
4. calm and tactful but persistent negotiation or dialogue in a non-threatening atmosphere;

5. constructive engagement with the target country to help solve the problems as quietly as possible; and
6. these can be carried out in the context of bilateral or multilateral efforts.

During Malawi's election in 2019, the Malawi Electoral Commission announced the incumbent President Peter Mutharika as the winner, securing 38.6% of the votes. In a closely contested race, opposition candidate Lazarus Chakwera from the Malawi Congress Party received 35.4%. At the same time, Saulos Chilima, Mutharika's vice-president and the leader of the United Transformation Movement, garnered 20.2% of the vote (African Centre for Strategic Studies 2020). According to the ACLED (2023) and as illustrated in Figure 2, there were 26 incidences of ERV during the first election in 2019. The AU (2019) stated that its "mission had not noted any serious concerns with the process, either witnessed or observed".

In addition, former president Thabo Mbeki, a noted Pan-Africanist, endorsed this election in the Commonwealth Observer Group (Gruenbaum 2020). However, the Malawian constitutional court rejected these results due to election fraud. President Mutharika also had less than the required percentage of votes to assume power. As provided in the Malawian constitution, a president can only assume power if the candidate wins the election by 50% +1 of the total votes (African Centre for Strategic Studies 2020). Due to these factors, Malawi held a second round of elections, and Lazarus Chakwera won the presidential seat by 55% after allying with the two main opposition parties and other smaller parties.

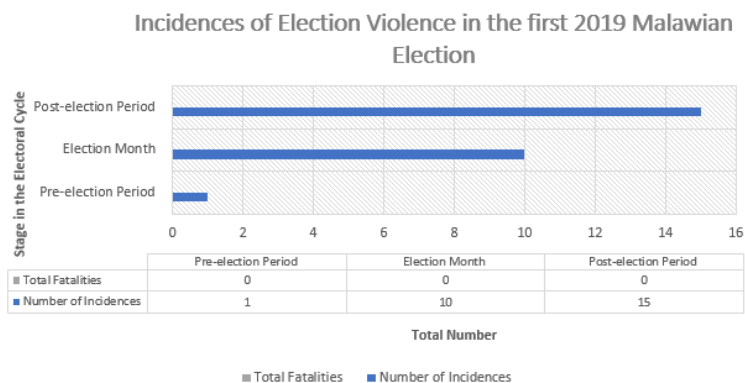


Figure 21.3: Election Violence in the First 2019 Malawian Election

Source: Customised by Author from ACLED⁴

Regarding the AU, their lack of “any notes” for the first election in Malawi highlights the institution’s need for more practical engagement with their instruments of electoral conduct and the required knowledge of the constitution of the country. As a result, it makes the institution’s credibility questionable when they endorse flawed election results and seem to have supported illegitimate power consolidation, as was the case in the Zimbabwean election in 2008 and the 2019 first Malawian election.

The Panel of the Wise

The Panel of the Wise (PoW)⁵ is the AU’s most esteemed structure for conflict prevention, on-the-ground and fact-finding instruments, and agreement brokering mechanisms. It comprises five highly respected African personalities (representing each of Africa’s five regions) who leverage their experience and moral influence to promote peace (AU 2010). Examples of appointed members include Ahemed Ben Bella from Algeria, whose tenure was from 2007 to 2010; in the second tenure, Salim Ahmed Salim from Tanzania was reappointed and his tenure ended in 2013;

4 Available online at <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

5 The AU consultative body comprises of five members for a three-year tenure.

Marie Madeleine Kalala-Ngoy from the Democratic Republic of the Congo was part of the third panel appointed from 2013 to 2018; and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was part of the fourth panel, which ran from 2018 to 2022 (AU 2018). The panel can act at the request of the AU council, chairperson or at its initiative on any issue “relating to promoting and maintaining peace, security, and stability in Africa” (Harbeson & Rothchild 2018).

The first two tenures of the panel, 2007–2010 and 2010–2013, framed essential themes for the AU, including election-related disputes and political violence (AU 2010). During these terms, the panel undertook numerous missions. For instance, in 2007, it facilitated talks between rebels and then-president Françoise Bozize of the Central African Republic. In subsequent efforts, the PoW mediated a truce between President Joseph Kabila and opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, following contentious elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (AU 2013). To accomplish these objectives, the panel collaborates extensively with RECs, including the ECOWAS Council of the Wise, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)’s Mediation Contact Group, the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA)’s Committee of Elders, and the SADC’s Mediation Reference Group.

However, the PoW has faced several challenges as a mediating body for the AU. First, its secretariat is located within the Political Affairs, Peace, and Security Department (formerly Peace and Security). This arrangement has impacted its autonomy, as the PoW members rely on the co-operation of the Peace and Security commissioner to carry out their duties. Secondly, the panel needs a budget. Thus, they must seek external assistance whenever they want to engage independently. This became more problematic and evident in the third and fourth panels (2014–2017 and 2017–2020), because of the decline in funding (The Conversation 2022). As a result, they became less effective and somehow marginalised. Based on their experience and charismatic dispositions, the members of the panel could have been more functional in resolving several conflicts on the continent, especially regarding unconstitutional changes of government and tenure elongations.

Concluding Reflections

This chapter has interrogated the AU's response to elections and electoral violence on the African continent. The AU has made significant strides to create instruments that support democratic principles, from the ACDEG to the Ezulwini Framework. These mechanisms highlight a well-thought-out plan aligning with 'African Solutions for African Problems'. However, ERV poses a threat to peace, security, and democracy in Africa. When electoral processes involve violence, the AU fails to take decisive action against perpetrators, as seen in the case of Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Kenya. It establishes a hazardous precedent and undermines the consolidation of democracy. The presence of ERV and the reinforcement of autocratic systems has adverse effects on the human rights of African citizens, making it imperative for the AU to prioritise addressing these issues.

There is a pressing need for enhanced co-ordination among the AU organs to tackle these challenges across the continent. Instead of reacting to violence and its consequences, the organs should concentrate on proactive methods of mitigation. Moreover, the AU needs to acknowledge that ERV takes different forms in each African country due to diverse histories and socio-political statutes; hence, the AU must embrace a multilevel approach, targeting all stakeholders that uphold the electoral process. The AU needs to uphold democratic principles and values within its structures, ensuring a clear separation of powers and functions. This approach will foster a conducive environment.

To successfully combat ERV, the AU needs to revive the CEWS, increase its capacity for information gathering, and allocate a separate budget for this instrument. While the increase in its capacity was germane, there is also a need to decentralise the CEWS system. Researchers and monitoring teams should not only be sent to states to monitor political tensions and report back to the AU, similar to how they conduct election monitoring and observation. The AU should establish dedicated offices in each country that understand the local culture thoroughly, enabling them to provide timely and accurate information to the AU. This hands-on approach will facilitate early mitigation efforts to

ease tension, rather than waiting for mediation processes after violence has erupted, as witnessed in cases like Kenya in 2007, Zimbabwe in 2008, and the CAR in 2021.

The AU needs to play a more active role on the continent based on a well-structured and widely consulted principle, and not on loyalty to the leaders of its member states, who are decisive actors within the continental body. Understandably, the shared history of colonisation experienced by the member states binds them together. However, this has created a breeding ground for the personalisation of the state's power and resources by the ruling elites, the majority of whom have failed in their respective countries. The AU needs to follow through with the instruments they have put in place when incumbent presidents who have lost elections refuse to step down. The PoW has the potential to negotiate with leaders who refuse to step down from power. A good example is the case of The Gambia's 2017 election, when former president Yahya Jammeh refused to step down. It forced the Nigerian president at the time, Muhammadu Buhari, and a mediation team to intervene. This eventually led to Jammeh's resignation and restoration of peace and stability in the West African country. The AU truly has the potential to eradicate ERV in the continent. However, a lack of consistency in following through with its self-established mechanisms remains its main hindrance.

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