



# Electoral violence and voter turnout in Africa: The necessity for electoral education

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## Abstract

Low voter turnout is becoming a global problem given its inherent danger. This study examines the nexus between electoral violence and voter turnout in Africa to ascertain whether a relationship exists between election violence and the dwindling turnout of voters in Africa. We test the hypothesis with linear regression against data generated from 48 presidential and National Assembly elections in twelve African countries between 2004 and 2022. The result shows that violent conditions affect how the electorate turns out to vote. Where the voters perceive violence, they are likely to stay away from voting. Voter turnout decision is contingent on the perceived security situation on the election day. In planning the electoral process, the governments in Africa should provide adequate security to ward off threats of violence by overzealous politicians and their criminal supporters. Again, the Election Management Bodies (EMB) should make effective use of security agencies in the area of intelligence gathering to elicit information on security threats before, during and after the voting process. In an

extreme case, the electoral system should go electronic in its voting process, as this will ward off physical attack on voters as they are likely to vote at convenient locations.

**Keywords:** Election security, voter turnout, democracies, electoral violence, insecurity.

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## Introduction

Voter turnout is an important factor in entrenching electoral legitimacy and a major indicator of the vitality of a democracy. Unfortunately, this aspect of democracy is waning fast across Africa. Election outcome globally indicates that voter turnout has been on the decline even in advanced democracies. Low turnout on election day is considered undesirable as it challenges the legitimacy of elected officials. Bonica and McFaul (2018) opine that political scientists generally agree that when more people vote, democracies will perform better. While low voter turnout could be traceable to weak institutional checks in weak democracies such as those in Africa that are saturated with leadership depravity, it is not so in established democracies.

European countries have been facing poor voter turnout in their elections. EU parliamentary elections have witnessed a steady drop in voter turnout over the years. Voter turnout for the five-yearly

elections has progressively fallen. About 57 per cent of the voters abstained in the 2014 election (France 24, 2019).

In the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections in the United States, only four out of ten eligible voters cast a ballot. The majority did not vote in these elections. In other words, the American democracy also witnesses poor voter turnout. Just as the global average voter turnout has steadily decreased since the 1990s, African elections have also witnessed a drastic decline in voter participation in the election day exercise. Cape Verde, for instance, had a record low of 35.5% voter turnout in the 2016 election. Egypt recorded 40.79% in the 2018 election, Tunisia had 11.22% turnout in the Assembly of People's Representatives election, while Senegal had 46.64% turnout in the 2022 National Assembly Election (IFES, 2022). As part of the African experience, Nigeria has been seen as a striking example. From a peak of 69% in the 2003 general elections, voter turnout dropped to 34.74% in the 2019

general election. What could account for this poor voter turnout? Scholars have identified a number of factors responsible for low voter turnout. They include, among others, disillusionment, indifference, a sense of futility, voter fatigue and negative campaigns (Kosteika & Blais, 2021). The doubtful integrity of elections in Africa also accounts for the continuous decline in the level of political participation (Omeh et al., 2024). In all these factors, there was no mention of violence/insecurity as a defining factor in voter turnout in Africa. Hence, the need for the study. Election security is the process where EMBs put in place measures to guarantee the safety of observers, candidates, voters, poll workers, and other actors involved in the election process so as to be free from fear or harm, as well as to ensure that sensitive election materials are protected. In violence-prone places such as Nigeria, election security will require a large deployment of security forces such as the military, police or other paramilitary forces to protect individuals and electoral materials.

In this article, we examine the relationship between election violence and voter turnout in Africa to ascertain whether election violence has an effect on voter turnout. The study attempts to

provide answers to the following questions: Who propagates election violence in Africa? Could ignorance and limited awareness of electoral sanctity among the teeming masses promote involvement in election violence? The study is guided by the logic of the withdrawal hypothesis, which explains the reason people refuse to go out to vote on election day.

The necessity of studying the relationship between election violence and voter turnout in Africa is diverse. First, election violence increases in every successive election in Africa. Several deaths are recorded during these cataclysms. Kenyan election violence in 2007 recorded 1,200 deaths (Human Rights Watch, 2017) and over 626 deaths were recorded in the 2019 election violence in Nigeria (Oyewole & Omotola, 2021), among others. The continent is replete with election violence on an unabated scale. This scenario is becoming a recurrent decimal in the electoral politics of Africa, hence it is important to understand how this could affect voter turnout on the continent.

Second, Africa provides a clear setting for correlating election violence and voter turnout in third-world countries. Almost all elections in Africa are tainted with

violent outcomes – an occurrence that stands out from other third-world democracies. How this contributes to the dwindling voter turnout in Africa is the concern of this study.

The study hypothesizes that electoral violence/security challenges do not significantly discourage the electorate from turning out to cast ballots in Africa. The primary objective of the study, therefore, is to ascertain whether a significant relationship exists between election violence/security challenges and voter turnout in Africa. The secondary objective is to establish a robust approach to reduce electoral violence and improve voter turnout in Africa.

### **Exegesis on voter turnout**

Political scientists have conceptualized voter turnout to mean the percentage of eligible voters who cast their votes during an election. This involves the number of eligible voters who actually come out to cast their votes on the election day. The turnout rate varies from country to country.

A number of studies have explored the declining voter turnout in many democracies. Achen and Wang (2019) studied the declining voter turnout in Taiwan and discovered a fifteen percent point decline since the 2000s. The study

revealed that the drop was more severe among younger voters. Desilver's (2018) study of US voter turnout also suggests a relatively low turnout when compared with countries such as Belgium, Sweden and Denmark. About 55.7 percent Voting Age Population (VAP) cast ballots in the 2016 presidential poll, which was less than the record in the year 2008. By International standards, the US voter turnout is low. This has been attributed to the nature of the electoral system, low social capital and voting procedure among others (Roberts, 2009). Low voter turnout produces a bias in public policy and reduces government responsibilities (Blais & Dassonneville, 2020). What causes low voter turnout? Scholars seem to be divided on the answers. Agabe (2015) attributed the low voter turnout in the 2015 general election in Benue State, Nigeria, to preconception by the electorate that the outcomes of such elections are predetermined. They believe their votes will not count.

Morrow's (2015) study of low voter turnout of the Hispanic population in southwest Texas pointed to a general distrust in government, a deficiency of civic education in the public school system and little understanding of the voting process. Promotion of positive social change is needed in this context to

address the challenges. A tight registration deadline has also been seen as a factor in low voter turnout (Knee & Green, 2011). Loosening registration deadlines will be a policy option to deal with these challenges. Security plays an important role in the electoral process, especially in less developed democracies such as Africa. The spate of electoral violence in Africa makes the interrogation of security as a major factor in voter turnout a necessity.

In Nigeria, for instance, the 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections were characterized by massive violence leading to deaths of members of the electorate and truncation of the voting process. Nigeria's elections have been excessively deadly even after the elections (Angerbrandt, 2018). Oyewole and Omotola (2021) assessed the manifestation of violence in Nigeria's 2019 general elections. They studied 2177 incidents of conflict during that period of elections and analyzed 275 cases of electoral violence. The study concluded that the 2019 election was replete with electoral violence.

Ezeibe (2021) attributes election violence in Nigeria to hate speech. He concluded that the implementation of existing anti-hate speech laws presents an opportunity

for protecting the rights of minority groups, promoting political inclusion and preventing election violence in Nigeria and beyond. The study by Kalu and Gbervbie (2018) concludes that election violence in Lagos state, Nigeria, during the 2011 and 2015 elections was caused by "lack of internal democracy within political parties, inefficiency of the electoral commissions, inadequate voter education, voters' bribery and rumour of rigging" (p.60). In Nepal, the factors affecting free and fair elections in the country, as posited by Kharniya and Sharma (2018, p.37), are "anti-election elements, agitating groups attempting to achieve their rights, lack of law and order, and banditry". These are some of the security challenges bedeviling election conduct in Nepal.

Guaranteeing security has the potential to encourage voters and stakeholders to participate effectively in the election process. Studies have shown a near absence of this very important aspect of elections in Nigeria. Awopeju (2020, p.681) concluded in his study of election security and the strengthening of democratic elections in Nigeria, "that the Nigerian government has not adhered to the practice of deploying security personnel for elections in Nigeria. Therefore, it is a continuation of politics

by other means". A similar study by Agbo and Ugwuanyi (2019) blamed it on the politics of security deployment during the election process. They argued that "though the role of security is paramount in the conduct of elections, yet it is always used as an instrument by the ruling party for election benefits" (p.188), a common factor associated with incumbent advantage in African election administration. Does election violence affect voter turnout? In this article, we examine the effect of electoral violence on voter turnout in Africa.

### **The underpinning theory**

This study is anchored on the thesis of the withdrawal hypothesis (Hirschman, 1970; Brody & Sniderman, 1977). The hypothesis with respect to elections denotes the tendency of eligible voters deliberately staying away from voting on election day. When governments fail to address the economic needs of society, citizens become disenchanted and uninterested in politics (Rosenstone, 1982; Radcliff, 1992; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Cox, 2003). Poor management of the economy by the government can trigger disenchantment in the electorate, who may express this by showing disinterest in the voting process as they consider it time-wasting for them. This disenchantment may make them lose

trust in the electoral process (Mishler & Rose, 2001), which may lead to the decision not to take part in the voting process. This scenario played out in South Africa, where those who were dissatisfied with the government's handling of unemployment did not likely vote in the 2014 election (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2019).

Abstaining voters feel they have more important things to do at home than wasting their time going out to vote (Gronlund & Setala, 2007). Why do voters withdraw from casting ballots? Several factors account for this electoral behavior. Voters may have the conviction that their votes do not count; a common notion held among African electorates, challenging the security situation expressed in rampant electoral violence. Voters will not want to risk their lives participating in an election process that may turn out deadly. This pattern has been observed in the African electoral process. The electoral landscape of Africa is a theater of violence, as approximately 20 - 25 percent of its elections are plagued with violence (Bekoe, 2010). Unprecedented electoral Violence in the recent past in Côte d'Ivoire (2010 - 2011), Kenya (2007 - 2008) and Zimbabwe (2000 - 2008) resulted in the death of about four thousand persons and the displacement of hundreds of

thousands of persons. (UNHCHR, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2008; United Nations, 2011).

The difficulty in conducting free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria and indeed Africa by election management bodies, especially in off-season elections, has been attributed to ineffective and inefficient security systems (Okoye, 2021). There is also the factor of apathy, where eligible voters feel that going to cast a ballot makes no economic sense to them. They would rather use that period to do something that improves their economic wellbeing.

There is an avalanche of studies on elections in Africa. However, none of the studies carried out a systematic investigation of the implications of election violence on voter turnout in Africa. This is the gap this study has come to fill. Violence/insecurity seems a serious challenge in the African electoral process, and how it conditions voter turnout is the concern of this study. The study contributes to scholarship in diverse ways. First, it contributes to the growing literature on security and voter turnout in Africa. Second, it demonstrates that electoral behavior in Africa is consistent with the withdrawal hypothesis.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research design***

The study adopts a correlational design. The design examines the relationship between two or more variables that are not controlled or manipulated by the researcher. It is appropriate for testing the strength of association between variables. The design allows for limited control to enable other variables to play a role in the relationship. It has a high external validity in that the researcher can conveniently generalize his conclusions to other settings. It is ideal for gathering data from natural settings. It can be used to evaluate whether a tool consistently captures the concept it determines to measure (Bhandari, 2021). In this study, an attempt is made to examine the relationship between electoral violence and voter turnout in Africa.

### ***Sample size and sampling technique***

In constructing the sample, we considered fair representation of the different regions of Africa (north, west, south and east). Island nations of Africa were not considered because of their population size. Countries whose populations are less than one million were not considered in the sample. Simple random sampling was used to

select the countries that were studied after isolating the ineligible countries from the population. In all, twelve countries were selected for the study. We considered only presidential and national assembly elections for analysis. These categories of elections are important for Africa because it is through these two election processes that state officials who determine and execute public policies that affect the welfare of the entire citizens are elected.

### ***Method of data collection***

The documentary method was used to collect data on election violence and insecurity, as well as voter turnout statistics. We retrieve data on voter turnout from IFES, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEAS) and the African Election Database. These databases have comprehensive information on African elections. On election violence, we retrieved data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project (ACLED). This database is a comprehensive repository of conflicts in Africa.

### ***Method of data analysis***

The hypothesis was tested against data generated from 48 elections conducted in 12 African countries between 2004 and 2022. Data collected were described in

percentages and presented in tables and charts. Linear regression analysis was used to test the relationship between election violence (independent variable) and voter turnout (dependent variable).

In determining voter turnout, we used votes cast over registered voters to ascertain whether the percentage of voter turnout was high or low. This method is considered preferable for this study as against studies that apply the vote cast against the voting age population. African populations are largely inaccurate with headcounts occurring every ten years or even more. Relying on the voting age population will open the study to faulty population projections that could make the result inaccurate.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Violence in African elections**

African elections are replete with violence of debilitating magnitude. From Egypt to South Africa and from Nigeria to Kenya, the picture of electoral violence remains the same. Hardly would any election pass without a trail of violence. As a dominant political formation, democracy and its process of enthroning public officials are considered a required standard for Africa's stability and democratic progress. Yet Africa's electoral



democracy is tainted with violence and manipulations that render its democratic exercises a travesty. The love for power has made its multiparty elections excessively contentious. Human Rights Watch (2019) reports that 626 people were killed during the 2019 general elections cycle in Nigeria, with about 2,177 cases of electoral violence recorded during the same period (Oyewole & Omotola, 2022). Previous elections in the country were also marred by violence and insecurity (Obakhedo, 2011). Campbell (2010) reports that about 300 persons were killed in the violence that greeted the 2007 general elections. The electoral body responsible for the conduct of elections in Nigeria also concludes that the 2011 elections were marred by widespread killing, arson, abductions, assault, looting and destruction of property. Egobueze and Ojirika's (2017) later study confirmed this spate of violence.

Egypt's electoral violence under Mubarak's authoritarian democracy was nasty. Violence was more prevalent in locations where the government's capacity to co-opt local elites and competitors was low and the strategy of buying votes was costlier and less effective (Mohamed, 2022). The condition deteriorated further under Al-Asisi, where

the 2010 parliamentary election witnessed massive violence and death. Ten persons were reported dead and scores of human rights abuses recorded (Amnesty International, 2010). Rather than protect Egyptian voters, security forces became a threat to their safety as they beat voters with sticks, batons and knives as well as cordoned off polling stations, refusing people to cast their ballots (VOA, 2009). In the 2000 elections, ten deaths were recorded. Eight persons were killed in the 2005 elections, while 80 persons were massacred in the 1995 elections (Faraq & Slackman, 2005; Aljazeera, 2005; Thabet, 2006).

The East African country of Kenya expresses a plethora of election violence and insecurity. Since the 1990s, Kenya's elections have been fraught with violence and human rights abuses. The outcome of the 2007 elections recorded approximately 1,100 deaths perpetrated by state security forces, gangs and individuals. An estimated 900 people survived gender-based violence, and another 650,000 were displaced during the cataclysm that followed the election (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Physicians for Human Rights, 2022). The presidential election of 2017 was also marred by widespread violence and wanton killing. Human rights abuses were high and

included the killing of at least 12 persons by the police and badly injuring over 100 persons (Human Rights Watch, 2017). In Angola, the multiparty election of 1992 was followed by violence that broke into an intensive civil war.

In Uganda, the 2022 election brought about massive unrest in Luanda. Following the release of the preliminary results of the general election, protesters were reported to have blocked streets and burned vehicles to denounce the election results. The police attempted to arrest the situation by using live ammunition to disperse protesters (Crisis24, 2022). Zambia has a limited pedigree of election violence and tends not to have a high level of violence during elections (Straus & Taylor, 2012). However, there are isolated cases of election violence occurring in most of the elections before the introduction of multipartyism in 1991 (Sichone & Wahman, 2021). Prior to 1991, violence was mainly between the dominant party and the opposition. Intra-party crisis was also common and often instigated by internal nomination disagreement (Macola, 2018). Intra-party crisis, especially about zoning arrangements, has been common in

Africa's political party administration (Ibanga & Ataire, 2022). Electoral violence has been growing steadily between 2006 and 2016 (Sichone & Wahman, 2021). The 2016 election violence, mainly caused by inter and intra-party conflicts, is adjudged one of the most devastating electoral violence in Zambia (Golding & Wahman, 2018). Election violence in Zambia, though not extremely deadly when compared to countries such as Kenya, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, is gradually becoming intense in its electoral landscape and is largely connected to increasing regional polarization (Sichone & Wahman, 2021).

We contend here that authoritarian democratic regimes in a multiethnic state of Africa, which is characterized by love for power, are discriminatory and exclusionary in the distribution of public wealth. In dealing with this, violence is considered a viable electoral strategy to retain power by the dominant group or to change the status quo by the oppressed groups and nationalities. Table 1 captures the number of deaths from electoral violence in some African countries. The distribution, according to countries, is presented in Figure 1.

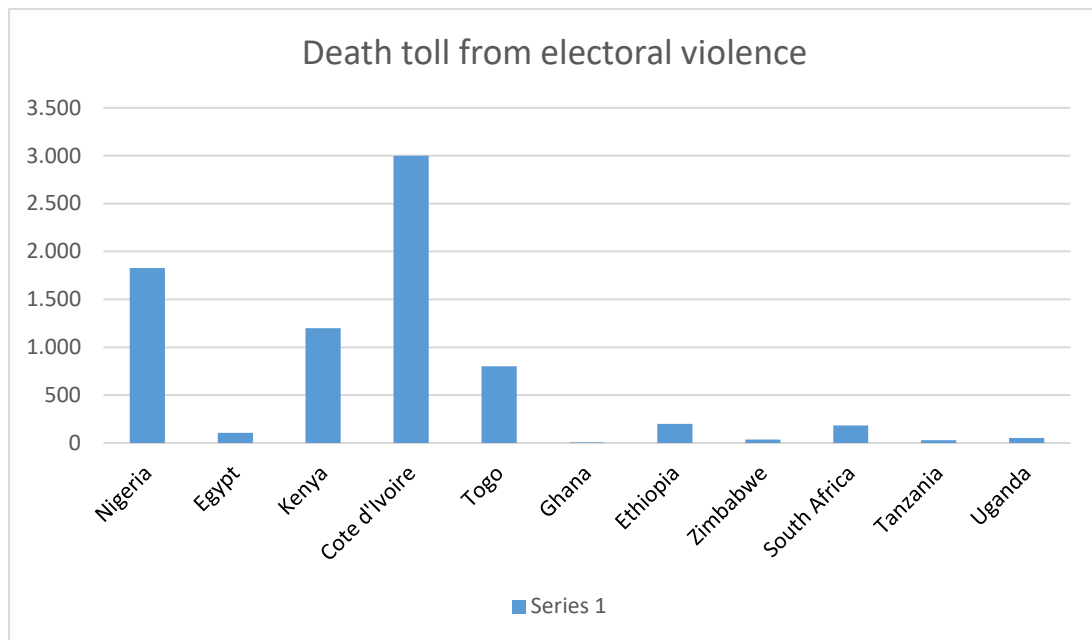
Table 1

| S/<br>N | COUNTR<br>Y    | 1964 | 1993 | 1995 | 1999 | 2000 | 2005 | 2007  | 2008 | 2010  | 2011 | 2015 | 2016 | 2019 | 2020 | 0202<br>1 | TOTA<br>L |
|---------|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|-----------|-----------|
| 1       | Nigeria        | 200  | 100  |      |      |      |      |       |      |       | 800  | 100  |      | 626  |      |           | 1,826     |
| 2       | Egypt          |      |      | 80   |      | 10   | 8    |       |      | 10    |      |      |      |      |      |           | 108       |
| 3       | Kenya          |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1,200 |      |       |      |      |      |      |      |           | 1,200     |
| 4       | Cote d'Ivoire  |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |      | 3,000 |      |      |      |      |      |           | 3,000     |
| 5       | Togo           |      |      |      |      |      | 800  |       |      |       |      |      |      |      |      |           | 800       |
| 6       | Ghana          |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |      |       |      |      |      |      | 5    |           | 5         |
| 7       | Ethiopia       |      |      |      |      |      | 200  |       |      |       |      |      |      |      |      |           | 200       |
| 8       | Zimbabwe       |      |      |      |      |      |      |       | 36   |       |      |      |      |      |      |           | 36        |
| 9       | South Africa   |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |      |       | 150  |      | 33   |      |      |           | 183       |
| 10      | Tanzania<br>*0 |      |      |      | 30   |      |      |       |      |       |      |      |      |      |      |           | 30        |
| 11      | Uganda         |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |      |       |      |      |      |      |      | 54        | 54        |
|         | TOTAL          | 200  | 100  | 80   | 30   | 10   | 1008 | 1,200 | 36   | 3,010 | 950  | 100  | 33   | 626  | 5    | 54        | 7,442     |

Note: Adepegba (2022), Adebayo (2022), Human Rights Watch (2021), Dube (2021), AFP (2020), Isola (2018), Bekoe (2010), IDEA (2022)

The table shows that about seven thousand four hundred and forty-two deaths were recorded through electoral violence in selected African countries studied. Cote d'Ivoire has the highest death toll of 3,000 in one election, followed by Nigeria with 1,826 deaths in five elections, and Kenya with 1,200 deaths in one election. Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Ghana had fewer cases of death from electoral violence.

Figure 1: Death toll from electoral violence in some African elections



#### 4.2 Results of voter turnout in selected elections in Africa

Table 2: Percentage voter turnout in 48 elections in Africa

| COUNTRY              | TYPE OF ELECTION  | YEAR | REG. VOTERS | VOTES CAST | PERCENTAGE TURNOUT |
|----------------------|-------------------|------|-------------|------------|--------------------|
| ALGERIA              | National Assembly | 2017 | 23,251,503  | 8,624,199  | 37.09              |
|                      | Presidency        | 2014 | 22,880,678  | 11,307,478 | 49.42              |
|                      | National Assembly | 2012 | 21,645,841  | 9,339,026  | 43.14              |
|                      | Presidency        | 2009 | 20,595,683  | 15,356,141 | 74.56              |
| <b>AVERAGE TOTAL</b> |                   |      |             |            | <b>51.05</b>       |

|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------|------------|------------|--------------|
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
| <b>EGYPT</b>             | Presidency           | 2018 | 59,078,138 | 24,097,092 | 40.79        |
|                          | Peoples<br>Assembly  | 2015 | 53,786,762 | 15,206,010 | 28.27        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2014 | 53,909,306 | 25,578,223 | 47.45        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2012 | 50,958,794 | 26,420,763 | 51.85        |
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>42.09</b> |
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
| <b>TUNISIA</b>           | Peoples<br>Assembly  | 2022 | 9,136,502  | 1,025,418  | 11.22        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2019 | 7,074,566  | 3,820,825  | 54.01        |
|                          | Peoples<br>Assembly  | 2019 | 7,066,940  | 2,946,628  | 41.70        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2014 | 5,236,244  | 3,189,672  | 60.92        |
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>41.96</b> |
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
| <b>SOUTH<br/>AFRICA</b>  | National<br>Assembly | 2019 | 26,778,025 | 17,671,616 | 65.99        |
|                          | National<br>Assembly | 2014 | 25,362,023 | 18,654,457 | 73.55        |
|                          | National<br>Assembly | 2009 | 23,181,997 | 17,919,996 | 77.3         |
|                          | National<br>Assembly | 2004 | 20,674,926 | 15,863,554 | 76.73        |

|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------|------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>73.39</b> |
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
| <b>ZAMBIA</b>            | Presidency           | 2021 | 7,023,499  | 4,983,099  | 70.95        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2016 | 6,698,372  | 3,781,505  | 56.45        |
|                          | National<br>Assembly | 2016 | 6,698,372  | 3,752,879  | 56.03        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2015 | 5,166,084  | 1,671,662  | 32.36        |
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>53.84</b> |
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
| <b>ANGOLA</b>            | National<br>Assembly | 2022 | 14,399,391 | 6,454,109  | 44.82        |
|                          | National<br>Assembly | 2017 | 9,317,294  | 7,093,002  | 76.13        |
|                          | National<br>Assembly | 2012 | 9,757,671  | 6,124,669  | 62.77        |
|                          | National<br>Assembly | 2008 | 8,256,854  | 7,213,281  | 87.36        |
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>67.77</b> |
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
| <b>KENYA</b>             | Presidency           | 2022 | 22,120,458 | 14,326,751 | 64.76        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2017 | 19,611,423 | 7,616,217  | 38.83        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2002 | 10,451,150 | 5,975,910  | 57.17        |
|                          | Referendum           | 2005 | 11,800,000 | 6,158,072  | 52.18        |

|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------|------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>53.23</b> |
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
| <b>UGANDA</b>            | Presidency           | 2021 | 18,103,603 | 10,350,819 | 57.18        |
|                          | National<br>Assembly | 2021 | 17,658,527 | 9,998,554  | 56.62        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2016 | 15,277,198 | 9,701,738  | 63.5         |
|                          | Presidency           | 2011 | 14,000,000 | 8,272,760  | 59.09        |
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>59.09</b> |
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
| <b>TANZANIA</b>          | Presidency           | 2020 | 29,754,699 | 15,091,950 | 50.72        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2015 | 23,254,485 | 15,193,862 | 65.34        |
|                          | National<br>Assembly | 2015 | 23,254,485 | 15,193,862 | 65.34        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2010 | 19,670,631 | 8,398,415  | 42.70        |
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>56.02</b> |
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
| <b>NIGERIA</b>           | Presidency           | 2019 | 82,344,107 | 28,614,190 | 34.74        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2015 | 67,422,005 | 29,432,083 | 43.65        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2011 | 73,000,000 | 39,469,484 | 54.07        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2007 | 61,567,036 | 35,397,517 | 57.49        |
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>47.48</b> |
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |

|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------|------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>GHANA</b>             | Presidency           | 2016 | 15,712,499 | 10,781,917 | 68.62        |
|                          | Parliament           | 2016 | 15,712,499 | 10,029,923 | 63.83        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2012 | 14,158,890 | 11,225,188 | 79.28        |
|                          | Parliament           | 2012 | 14,158,890 | 11,225,188 | 79.28        |
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>71.54</b> |
|                          |                      |      |            |            |              |
| <b>SENEGAL</b>           | National<br>Assembly | 2022 | 7,036,466  | 3,281,583  | 46.64        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2019 | 6,683,043  | 4,426,344  | 66.23        |
|                          | National<br>Assembly | 2017 | 6,219,446  | 3,337,494  | 53.66        |
|                          | Presidency           | 2012 | 5,302,349  | 2,735,135  | 51.58        |
| <b>AVERAGE<br/>TOTAL</b> |                      |      |            |            | <b>54.52</b> |

*Note:* International Federation for Electoral Systems (2022)

Table 2 presents the results of selected elections in Africa, showing voter turnout figures and percentages. Four recently conducted elections in each of the selected countries were picked for analysis. The average voter turnout for Algeria was 51.05 per cent. The least turnout was recorded in the 2017 National Assembly election with 37.09 percent; a decline from the 2012 National Assembly election result of 43.14 percent. Egypt's average in the four

elections was 42.09, with the least turnout seen in the 2015 presidential election with 28.27 percent. This was a drastic decline from the 2014 result of 47.45 percent. Tunisia's average was 41.96 percent with the least turnout recorded in the 2022 Assembly of People's Representatives election (11.22 percent), compared to the 2019 result (41.70 percent). South Africa's average turnout for the four elections covered was 73.39 percent. The least turnout of



65.99 percent was recorded in the National Assembly election in 2019. This is a decline from the 2014 result of 73.55 percent. The South African results show a remarkable improvement when compared with the results of other countries studied. The Zambian average turnout was 53.94 percent. The least turnout was observed in the 2015 presidential election with 32.36 percent. The turnout improved in the 2021 presidential election to 70.95 percent. The Angolan turnout was better than that of Zambia, with a turnout of 67.77 percent. The least turnout was in the 2022 National Assembly election (44.82 per cent); a decline from the 2017 election with a 76.14 percent turnout rate. From East Africa, the Kenyan average turnout was 53.23 percent, with the least turnout of 38.83 percent seen in the 2017 presidential election. The turnout sharply rose to 64.76 percent in the 2022 presidential election.

Uganda has an average turnout of 59.09 percent. The 2021 presidential election had a turnout of 57.18 percent, which was a decline from the 2016 presidential election, with 65.50 percent. Tanzania had an average turnout of 56.02 percent.

The 2020 presidential election had a percentage turnout of 50.72 percent, which was a drop from the 2015 presidential election with 65.74 percent turnout.

From the West African countries covered, Nigeria's average turnout was 47.48 percent for the sampled elections. The 2019 presidential election turnout was 34.74 percent. This result shows a drastic drop from the 2011 and 2007 elections with 54.07 percent and 57.49 percent respectively. Ghana's four-count average turnout was 71.54 percent. The 2016 presidential election turnout of 73.62 percent shows a decline from the 2012 turnout of 79.28 percent. Senegal's average turnout from the four elections studied was 54.52 percent. The turnout of the 2022 National Assembly election was 46.64 percent, showing a drop from the 2017 National Assembly election result of 53.66 percent. This analysis shows that voter turnout keeps declining in every successive election in Africa.

Table 3: Voter turnout statistics in 12 African countries

| S/N   | COUNTRY      | REGION          | NO OF ELECTIONS COVERED | % OF VOTER TURNOUT | REGIONAL % VOTER TURNOUT |
|-------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 1     | Algeria      | North Africa    | 12                      | 53.85              | 49.28                    |
| 2     | Egypt        | North Africa    | 29                      | 33.41              |                          |
| 3     | Tunisia      | North Africa    | 13                      | 60.58              |                          |
| 4     | South Africa | Southern Africa | 6                       | 76.57              |                          |
| 5     | Zambia       | Southern Africa | 13                      | 57.51              | 67.28                    |
| 6     | Angola       | Southern Africa | 4                       | 67.77              |                          |
| 7     | Kenya        | East Africa     | 14                      | 68.52              |                          |
| 8     | Uganda'      | East Africa     | 12                      | 60.13              |                          |
| 9     | Tanzania     | East Africa     | 8                       | 66.04              | 64.89                    |
| 10    | Nigeria      | West Africa     | 21                      | 49.78              |                          |
| 11    | Ghana        | West Africa     | 15                      | 72.32              |                          |
| 12    | Senegal      | West Africa     | 12                      | 54.28              |                          |
| TOTAL |              |                 | 159                     | Ave. 60.06         |                          |

Note: IFES (2022)

Table 3 presents results on all elections covered by IFES and captured in their database. With 159 elections covered, the average percentage of voter turnout in the 12 African countries studied was 60.06 percent. The country with the least voter turnout was Egypt, with 33.41 percent from 29 elections covered. This was closely followed by Nigeria with 49.78 percent from 21 elections. South

Africa and Ghana have the highest percentage of voter turnout, which include 76.57 percent and 72.32 percent from the 6 and 15 elections covered, respectively. Other countries with fair voter turnout were Kenya, 68.52 percent from 14 elections, Angola, 67.77 percent from 4 elections, Tanzania, 66.04 percent from 8 elections, Tunisia, 60.58 percent from 13 elections and Uganda, with

60.13 percent from 12 elections. Countries with a little above 50 percent turnout include Zambia, 57.51 percent from 13 elections, Senegal, with 54.28 percent from 12 elections and Algeria, with 53.85 percent from 12 elections covered. In terms of regional voter turnout, the analysis indicates that the

southern African region has a higher voter turnout of 67.28 percent followed by the East African region with 64.89 percent. The regions with the least voter turnout were North Africa with 49.28 percent and West Africa with 58.79 percent. These results are further expressed in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2: Percentage of voter turnout in 12 African countries

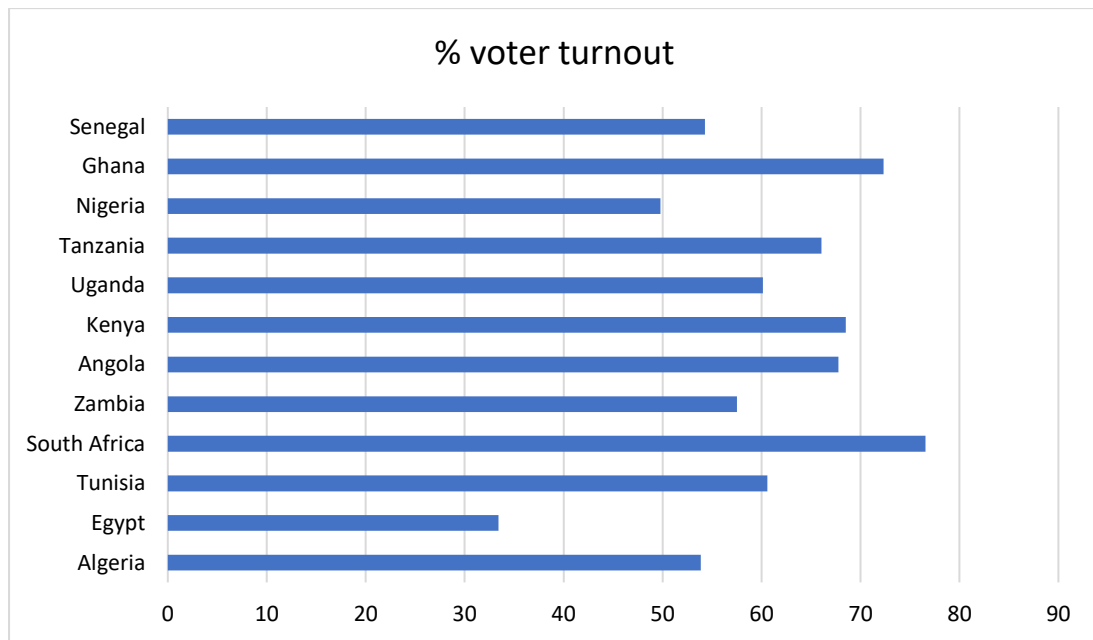
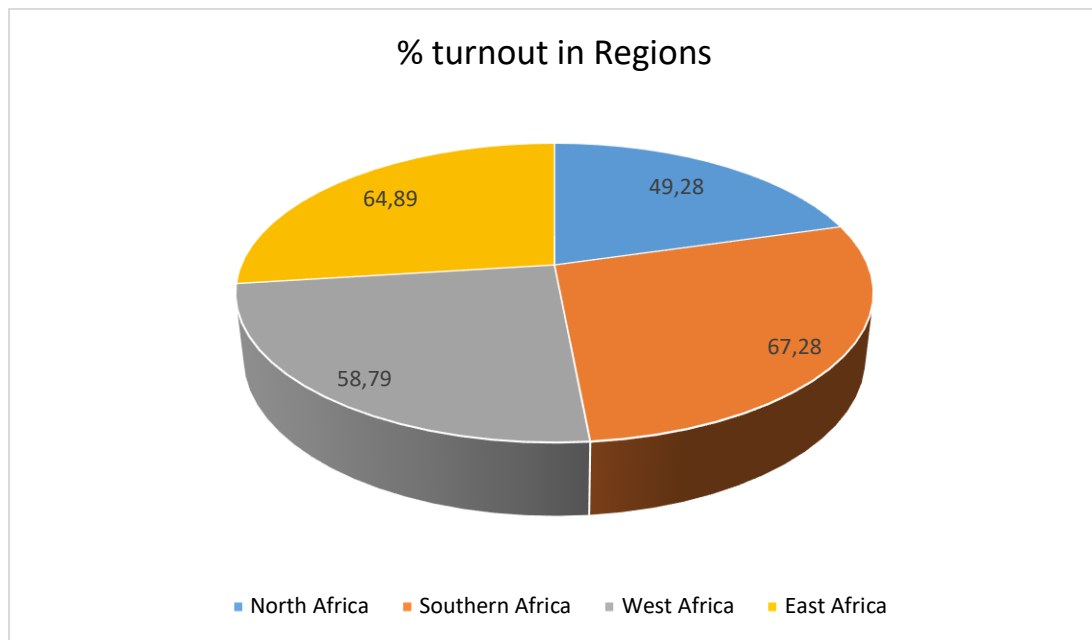


Figure 3: Percentage of voter turnout according to regions.



### Regression analysis of electoral violence and voter turnout

Table 4: Linear regression result

| Country      | Number of violent cases | % voter turnout | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | F      | p-value |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------|------|----------------|--------|---------|
| Algeria      | 44                      | 51.05           | .756 | .571           | 13.330 | 0.004   |
| Egypt        | 38                      | 42.09           |      |                |        |         |
| Tunisia      | 39                      | 41.96           |      |                |        |         |
| South Africa | 70                      | 73.39           |      |                |        |         |

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|          |    |       |
|----------|----|-------|
| Zambia   | 52 | 53.84 |
| Angola   | 59 | 67.76 |
| Kenya    | 55 | 53.23 |
| Uganda   | 62 | 59.09 |
| Tanzania | 55 | 56.02 |
| Nigeria  | 64 | 47.48 |
| Ghana    | 60 | 71.54 |
| Senegal  | 50 | 54.52 |

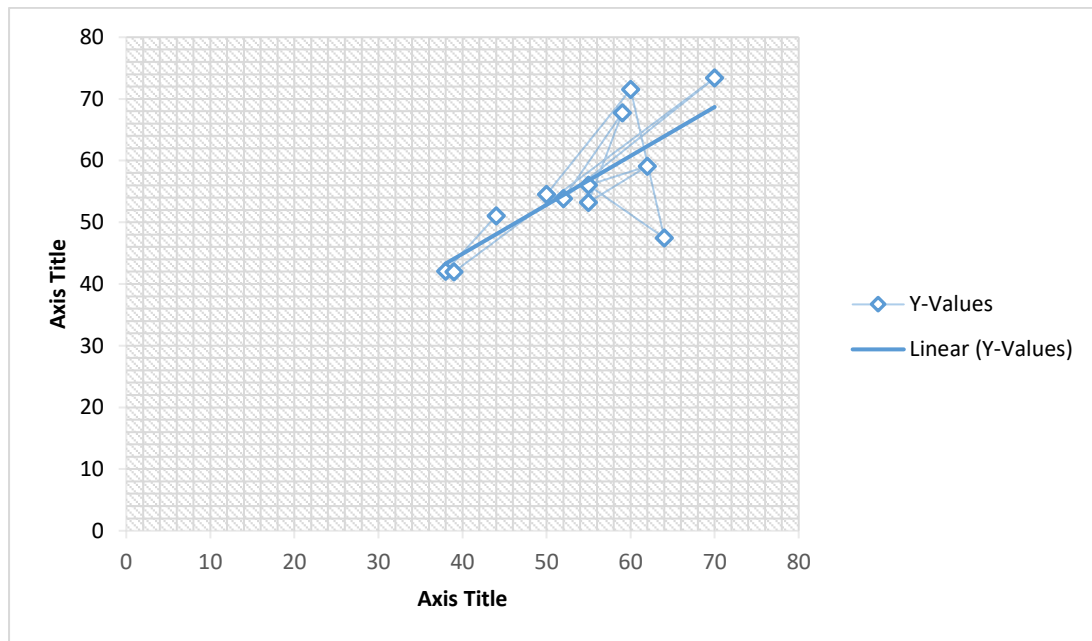
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Simple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis that electoral violence/security challenges does not significantly discourage electorates from turning out to cast ballots in Africa, with electoral violence as the independent variable (predictor) and voter turnout as the dependent variable (outcome). The linear regression established that electoral violence could statistically significantly predict voter turnout in Africa,  $F = 13.330$ ,  $P = 0.004$ , with an  $R$  value of .756, which indicates a high degree of correlation. The regression

model predicts voter turnout significantly well. Electoral violence accounted for 57.1 percent of the explained variability in voter turnout. ( $R^2 = .571$ ). According to Cohen's (1988) classification, 57.1 percent is a high effect size. Therefore, at 57.1 percent, the effect size of electoral violence on voter turnout in Africa is significantly high.

Figure 4 is a scatter plot showing the suitability of the regression model predicting the dependent variable (voter turnout).

Figure 4: Scatterplot showing the relationship between election violence and voter turnout



## Discussion

Voter turnout is not only dwindling in Africa; it is also a common problem in America. In America, the turnout as a percentage of the Voting Age Population (VAP) has never exceeded 62.8 percent. This score was recorded in 1960, followed by the 2020 elections which was 62.0 percent (Wikipedia, 2021). This is considered a dwindling voter turnout and a challenge to American democratic expressions. Increasing voter turnout is

important because, as Bonica and Mcfaul (2018:7) contended, "democracies perform better when more people vote". United States voter turnout is among the lowest in the world. Representatives have to be chosen by a representative set of voters (Bonica & Mcfaul, 2018). A representative set of voters should not be less than 80 percent to reflect a majority choice in a representative democracy. Singapore can be seen as a standard for high voter turnout with 95.81 percent recorded in the 2020 general elections

and 95.91 percent in the 1997 elections (Wikipedia, 2022). Adequate voter turnout should be measured along the Singapore experience. With an average percentage turnout of 60.06 percent in 159 elections studied, Africa's voter turnout is low compared to the United States and Singapore.

The results of the linear regression analysis have shown that insecurity expressed in election violence, among others, largely accounts for why voter turnout is low in Africa ( $p=0.004$ ). This, however, is not unconnected with the serial violence associated with the electoral process in Africa. The 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 elections in Nigeria, the 2007 election in Kenya, among others, have been described as being monumentally violent with records of death and destruction of property. Electoral violence is one of the strategies employed by politicians to intimidate voters from turning out so as to hijack election materials for personal advantage. As argued by Yahaya and Bello (2020), Kofi and Ibanga (2018), idle youth and stark illiterates are recruited by overzealous politicians to unleash terror on the opposition with the view to manipulating election results. Past election cycles, as observed by Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart (2010), have featured

political assassinations, voter intimidation, intra- and inter-party clashes and communal unrest. These are disturbing security conditions that discourage eligible voters from performing their civic duties on election day.

Security is an important factor in entrenching electoral legitimacy and has to be taken seriously by the state throughout the entire electoral process. The security architecture during elections is weak and, in most cases, not available. Police officers are merely sent to polling units to secure elections without arms. In very discouraging cases, only one police man with a baton is sent to man a voting station of over 1000 rowdy stakeholders. They are easily overpowered when violence erupts. Election materials are easily hijacked by stronger opposition because there is often no adequate security to escort sensitive materials, especially to the hinterlands with difficult terrains. No reasonable eligible voters will risk their lives to participate in a process where security is not guaranteed.

The necessity of election day security cannot be overemphasized. Among others, it will encourage voter turnout and legitimize the democracy involved in elections. Electorate will not entertain

any fear of being harmed in the process of casting a ballot, and therefore, will be encouraged to get involved in the voting process. It will make an election to be participatory, competitive and inclusive. The process will largely reflect the will of the people. Stakeholders will participate effectively without fear of physical harm. It will reduce the incidence of manipulation and increase public trust in the electoral process. Election outcomes in this regard are easily accepted, thereby reducing election litigation common in the African electoral process. When stakeholders, especially voters, are subjected to attacks and threats in the election process, the outcome of such elections is compromised and can never reflect the will and choices of the majority. These results align with Bratton's (2008, p.629) thesis that "for an average African, with other variables held at their mean, a threat of violence reduces the odds of intending to vote by 52 percent". This study, therefore, submits in this light that violence or its threat creates the feeling of insecurity and fear and is likely to impact adversely on voter turnout.

## **Conclusion**

Security in volatile terrains such as Africa has been very disturbing. From Boko

haram (terrorists) insurgency in the Nigerian case to banditry, herdsmen attacks, cultism and terrorist attacks across Africa, the continent remains saturated with debilitating security challenges. Adequate security is considered important in entrenching voter confidence on election day. Where this is not guaranteed, as the Nigerian, Kenyan, Egyptian, Cote d'Ivoire, etc, cases show, many eligible voters will not risk their lives on election day to cast a ballot.

The study explores the question of election violence/security challenges in 12 African countries and how they inhibit voter turnout on the continent. In the African electoral process, low voter turnout is a harsh reality. The turnout rate, for instance, in Nigeria keeps dropping from a peak of 69 percent in 2003 to 34.8 percent in 2019 and 26.72% in 2023, showing that there is a problem. The consistently low voter turnout in Nigeria shows how dissatisfied Nigerians are with the entire electoral process, owing to unmitigated violence associated with elections.

The intent of electoral violence is to influence the outcome of the election process by frightening voters, election officials, contestants and other stakeholders by using force to cause harm



to persons or property during the electoral process. Election violence could be intra-party or inter-party among contestants and their supporters in a desperate effort to gain access to state offices. It could also occur by attacking electoral property such as election materials and election management body offices, where sensitive materials are kept. In planning election security, all these variants have to be taken into consideration if the confidence and effective security of the electorate must be secured

In planning the electoral process, the government should deploy adequate security men with enough arms to ward off threats of violence by overzealous politicians and their criminal supporters. Again, the Election Management Bodies (EMB) in the African countries should make effective use of security agencies in the area of intelligence gathering. State Intelligence Departments should be commissioned to gather information on security threats before, during and after the voting process. In an extreme case, electronic voting system should be adopted for voting process. This will enable the electorate to vote from the comfort of their homes without a threat of violence. All these measures are likely to increase the confidence of the

electorate in the security of the electoral process and possibly improve voter turnout in Africa.

Scholars have conducted research on what causes low voter turnout in Africa and how it can be increased, yet nothing seems to change, even at the level of voters' behavior. Apathy is still in the increase. None of these studies looked at the factor of security challenges in determining voter turnout in Africa. This study has carefully interrogated this factor and has come to the conclusion that poor security conditions on the election day largely account for why eligible voters abstain from casting their ballot in Africa. The African election landscape is replete with violence and will, therefore, require adequate violence mitigation plans. The starting point could be to identify early warning signs such as intra-party disagreement on choices of flag bearers, which often turn violent, hate campaign speeches as well as the state security institutions turning support only to a particular political party, and do something about them. This is important for developing preventive measures.

Despite the difference in the electoral landscape, African political regimes operate authoritarian democratic structure. We conclude that incumbent

powers employ violence to intimidate voters from casting ballots in the opposition strongholds. Oppositions also instigate violence as an option to destroy votes suspected of being rigged by the ruling party. We submit that the propagation of election violence in Africa is bi-directional. While the political leadership constructs and instigates the violence, the masses implement the act of violence. In all, elections in Africa are fraught with violence and fear, which deters eligible voters from coming out on election day to cast their ballots. Constructed violence is a major tool in election manipulation in Africa.

We conclude also that electoral violence in Africa tends to be conditioned by authoritarian legacies that shape democratic experiences, which see violence as the sure means of attaining and retaining political power. We further conclude that voter turnout and domestic support for democratic consolidation are likely to increase when violence is repudiated in African elections. As succinctly put by Bratton (2008, p.629), "citizens living within violence-infested environment are less likely to participate in voting during elections". Hence, violence has an inhibiting effect on voter turnout in Africa.

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