

Chapter

Election Imbroglia and Democratic Solutions in Africa: A Synopsis on 28 Countries

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Abstract

Elections are important component of a democratic process. It is a popular way of changing government peacefully and ensuring continuity in the political system. When election goes wrong, the election violence becomes inevitable. Election violence makes democracy counterproductive. Election violence occurs in many countries of the world. Many of the developed countries have overcome repeated election violence trend, but many developing countries are still largely affected by repeated election violence. Why do elections in Africa often breed violence instead of democratic sustenance and development? Tyre burning theory and Game theory perspectives are used to analyse the place of citizens' reactions to bad governance. Documentary analysis and descriptive data from the World Bank and time series Afrobarometer data using 28 countries in Africa are utilised for this study. The study finds that government's neglect of the socio-political and economic needs of the citizens often results in election violence. These needs must be catered for across Africa states. The study concludes that good governance and public trust must be built among the citizens. The government must ensure that the reputations of election processes are re-enhanced to minimise election violence.

Keywords: development, election, game theory, tyre burning theory, violence

1. Introduction

Elections are democratic parameters used for regime change or its continuity across many countries in the world. Many countries in the world conduct a form of election or the other to empower a set of representatives or confirm their ascendancy to power. However, there is no absolute perfect election in the world. Regardless of how popular and acceptable or unpopular and not acceptable the election process is, it is a means of validating or revalidating the power of the people's representatives to authoritatively allocate values in every human society.

Across Europe and America, election is a popular means of ensuring that the people are involved in the governance process of choosing who will be the leader of such countries in a peaceful atmosphere [1, 2]. The processes are mostly transparent, free, fair and credible [3–5]. The results are mostly acceptable to all, and the contestants

have little or no litigation. This is partly because the process had been calibrated with the best practice derived from several randomised trials over a period of time.

The election process in Africa, Asian, Middle East and other regions regarded as developing countries is seldom turbulent and often encounters several challenges, debacles and anarchy. These situations cumulate into democratic conundrums and poor sustainable development. The resultant effect of such election makes most people to disgust the electoral processes, and the eventual winners who emerged from the election process are seen as corrupt leaders [6–8]. This is because the processes are mostly not transparent, not free or fair and lack credibility. The results are mostly and highly contested, not acceptable to most people and the post-election judicial litigation is often enormous. This is partly because the process had been calibrated with prejudice, favouritism and nepotism, and it lacks enough continuous random trials over a period of time.

Therefore, elections in the developing countries are often characterised with violence, frauds, voters' disenfranchisement, assassination of opponents, destruction of election-related materials, vote buying, rigging, ballot box stuffing and unlawful election result declarations among others [9]. It is literally a period of 'war among political opponents', and in so doing, the country becomes a battleground, fierce power tussles, resulting in the game theory principle of the 'winner takes all'. These occurrences mostly promote political, economic and social backwardness in the country. If such occurrences goes unabated and elongates, it may result in perpetual stagnancy and democratic governance breakdown.

What are the dimensions of election violence manifestation in developing countries? What are the democratic solutions to election violence in Africa? The study conceptualises election and election violence, and reviews relevant literature through thematic and theoretical analysis using game theory and tyre burning theory. It examines deliberate actions by public actors that are inimical to the development of the society, resulting in citizens' protest and violent actions. Data from the World Bank and Afrobarometer were presented and analysed descriptively. Democratic solutions are provided to reduce the election violence caused by the games of the political actors.

2. Elections and election violence conceptual clarification

2.1 Election

Election is a competitive selection of representatives among several alternatives to a public or private office through a popular means usually ballots. Election can only be said to be correct when popular mandates of the people are not denied in a competitive environment in electing a representative for a period of office tenure.

Election is the active process of appointing and empowering a group of people to occupy public offices through a popular mandate and voters' consensus. This popular mandate emanates from the majority of the people [10]. However, election is also the democratic process of picking, selecting or appointing the most suitable candidate in a free, fair and transparent manner devoid of ambiguity and manipulations so as to occupy an office for a constitutional time frame [11].

Election is the process that emphasises the majority votes, determining the winner and minority having their say on representative democracy. In other words, election centres on the majority having their way while minority has their say through the

ballots. Election is the act of using the ballot and vote to determine and empower a political or organisation leader. This implies that election is a process of choosing a political leader using ballot papers to select the best or popular candidate for a particular office.

2.2 Election violence

Election violence, on the other hand, is the act of disruption of the free flow of the election process. It is the act of truncating a free, fair and credible election process into an appalling process. It is the method of diverting the attention of the voters from the natural course of voting to other things that induce voting decisions [12, 13]. This may be through the instrument of food and monetary bribery of the electorates to peacefully vote against their initial mandates or forcefully vote for a prescribed candidate.

Election violence is the organised process of winning election through other means other than the popular voting medium. It is the opportunistic model of subverting and compromising the election process to suit or favour a candidate or group of people at the expense of the entire system [14, 15]. This may be through technological diversion of votes, election machine vote manipulation, vote buying, technical disenfranchisement of perceived opposition electorates and unlawful disqualification of candidates among others.

Election violence is the use of brute force to kill electorates, destroy election materials and mandate the voters to vote in a particular direction against their personal wishes. It is a kind of game where media propaganda is used to swivel the opinion of the people about the election outcomes that are the product of manipulations, rigging, disenfranchisement, killing of opponents, forceful imputation of election record, forgery of the entire process for an 'anointed or special' candidate and false declaration of election victory.

3. Game theory and tyre burning theory

Game theory explains how actors manipulate the available information to the best of their ability for maximum results. Actors compete for information and how to utilise it for their personal success at the expense of the others [16]. It may be a zero-sum game scenario where an actor's gain is the loss of the other. The total summation of the wins of an actor is the total summation of losses of the other actor. The winner takes all and the loser is left with his fate. Another variant is the non-zero sum game. This explains how the largesse is distributed among the actors. There is no absolute winner but sharing of the common spoils. Another expression of game theory is the prisoners' dilemma. This explains the use of a deceptive way to elicit information and facts from an innocent actor to the advantage of the other actor.

Elections are political games between contestants that give an actor the opportunity to manipulate and maximise the opportunity of the information at hand about the polls so as to win an election. The election game may be a peaceful game, which is free and fair, and it enables all actors to take some stakes in the election. It could be a forceful and violent process where the winner takes all and suppress the loser through all means, which include vote buying, media manipulation and hate speech, and killing of opponents among others election violence. The possibility of having an increase in violence is very high in zero-sum game theory scenarios because winner

takes all. The losing party has to wait until another electioneering period before they may have the opportunity of contesting for public office or gaining political appointments. These deliberate games of the political actors result in violent protests of citizens.

Tyre burning theory, on the other hand, is a postulation that explains how a peaceful process gradually deteriorates and eventually becomes violent. It explains why and how a peaceful election process becomes violent. It explains how a peaceful protest from a phenomenon becomes chaotic and violent to the extent of killing and burning of properties with the symbolic expression of tyre combustion in the venue of the violent epicentre [17–19]. The reason behind the debased and derogatory escalation of riot, crises or violence as professed by the theory, is the perceived unyielding response of the government or the powers that be to a particular lawful societal request. Also, when the force of habit is used against the peaceful process to suppress the will of the people, the peaceful society becomes chaotic, with the burning of substances as characterised in the combustion of tyre in the epicentre of the crises.

Peaceful elections become violent when some individuals disenfranchise the electorate from voting at the polls. Also, when people perceive manipulation of the election process and the false and forceful declaration of forged election results, they protest and it leads to violent escapade [20, 21]. Election violence is very high in regions where respects for the fundamental human rights are low; the tyre burning theory scenario is inevitable in such locations. This phenomenon is prominent in developing countries in Africa, Middle East and Asia.

4. Research methodology

Documentary analysis using content analysis in relevant literature from sources, such as Web of Science and Scopus-indexed journals, is utilised to obtain reasons why election leads to violence in Africa. Data from Afrobarometer and the World Bank data repository were collected and descriptively analysed in this study. Time series data across 28 randomly selected countries (Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) in Africa were obtained from Afrobarometer [22], where time series variables are measured across the 28 countries. The variables used in measuring election violence in developing countries in the descriptive study include; ‘Ethnic group treated unfairly’, ‘Corrupt religious leaders and Trust religious leaders’ and ‘Corruption: government officials’, ‘most important problem-poverty and unemployment’ and ‘most important problem: education’ were analysed. World Bank data [23] on major problems in Africa considering the variables of ethnic, religion, poverty and education in Africa are analysed.

4.1 Analysis of findings: Why elections lead to violence in Africa

Election imbroglio and debacles popularly characterised with election violence have the propensity to expand, escalate and gain momentum over a period of time and under certain favourable circumstances in any part of the world, especially in the developing countries. Evidence from the documentary and content analysis of selected literature reveals the following reasons why election violence occurs in

Africa: ethnic reasons, religious reasons, poverty reasons, educational reasons and technology reasons of election violence gaining momentum.

a. Ethnic favouritism and bigotry: Studies shows that this is a potent dimension that propels election violence to gain momentum in Africa [24, 25]. Ethnicity and all its variants, such as racism and xenophobia, are prominent dimensions that propel violence in elections. The perceived opponents are always at the receiving end of the ethnic chauvinist violence attacks. Much violence in election is fuelled due to ethnic difference from the contestants and their corresponding electorates. The election umpires also have this sentiment, which may affect the choice of the preferred candidate [26]. The perceived manipulation of elections from this dimension leads to violence, which could be protracted.

Afrobarometer [22] time series data across 28 countries in Africa on ‘ethnic group treated unfairly-variable’ in **Figure 1** revealed that over 70% in the selected countries have ethnic sentiments and vote along ethnic lines. Violence is ignited when manipulations are perceived from the process. The World Bank data 2021 also confirmed that ethnic dimension is a prominent reason why election violence is a reoccurring incident in developing countries. It is the causative mechanism of over 90% of violence in developing countries and also has the propensity to escalate if not well managed.

b. Religious chauvinism: This is a potent dimension that propels election violence to gain momentum in Africa. Religion is a very prominent factor driving people and allowing them to form alignments on public and private matters. In fact, every individual in the world is either aligned to a religion or the other. Election opponents are cloned with religious masks and are always at the receiving end of the religious bigots’ violent attacks. Violence in election is fuelled due to perceived religious difference from the electorates to the contestants [27]. The election umpires also have this sentiment, which may affect the choice of the preferred candidate. The perceived manipulation of elections from religious dimension leads to violence, which could be protracted.

Ethnic group treated unfairly by government

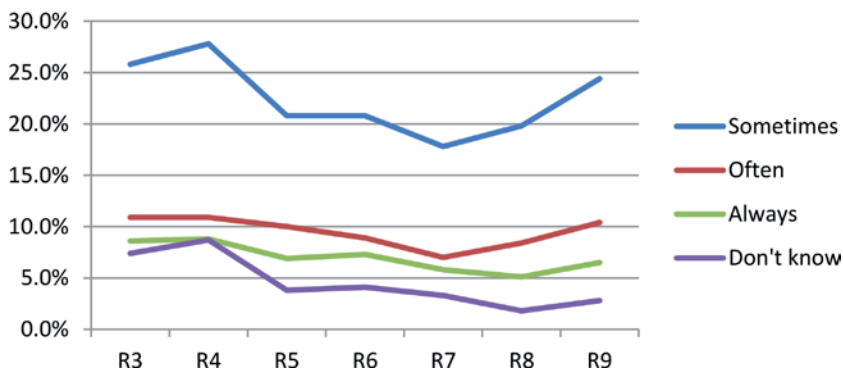


Figure 1.
Source: Afrobarometer [22].

The time series data across 28 countries in Africa from Afrobarometer [22] on ‘Corrupt religious leaders and Trust religious leaders’ variables’ in **Figures 2 and 3** respectively revealed that over 75% of the people have religious sentiments and vote along religion inclinations. Violence is ignited when manipulations are perceived from the process. The World Bank data 2021 also confirmed that religious dimension is a prominent reason why election violence is a reoccurring incidence in developing countries. It also has the propensity to escalate if not well managed.

- c. High poverty rate: This is a very potent dimension that propels election violence to gain momentum in Africa. Poverty is the state of ‘moneylessness’, powerlessness and ‘voicelessness’ of a person or group of people. It is the condition of incapacitation of an individual to do what is lawful due to no accessibility or affordability of the substance. World Bank data 2021 revealed that many citizens (over 50%) of countries categorised as developing are poor because they live below one dollar (\$1) daily spending benchmark. This condition makes the citizens vulnerable to vote buying and election manipulations during electioneering period.

The time series data across 16 countries in Africa from Afrobarometer [22] on ‘most important problem-poverty and unemployment’ variables’ in **Figure 4** revealed that

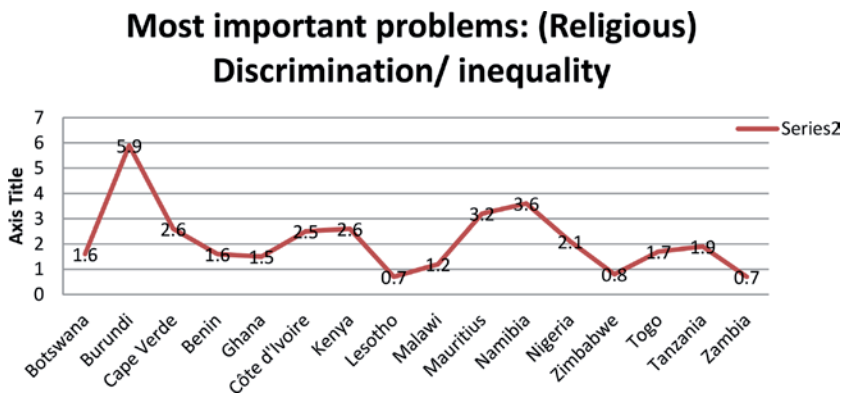


Figure 2.
Source: Afrobarometer [22].

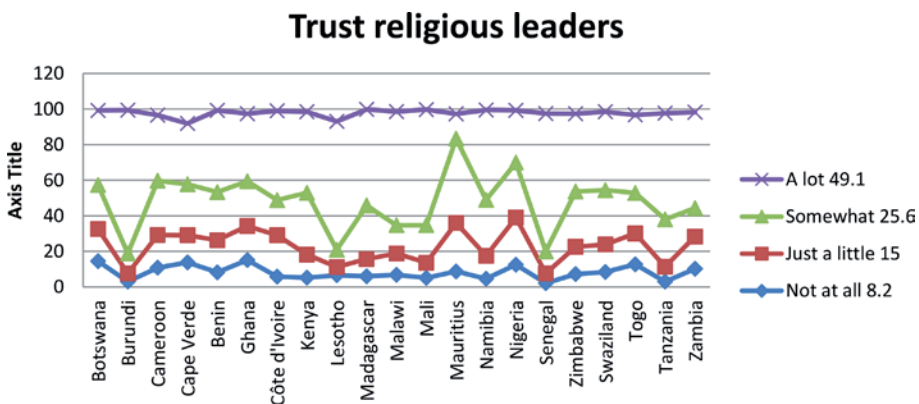


Figure 3.
Source: Afrobarometer [22].

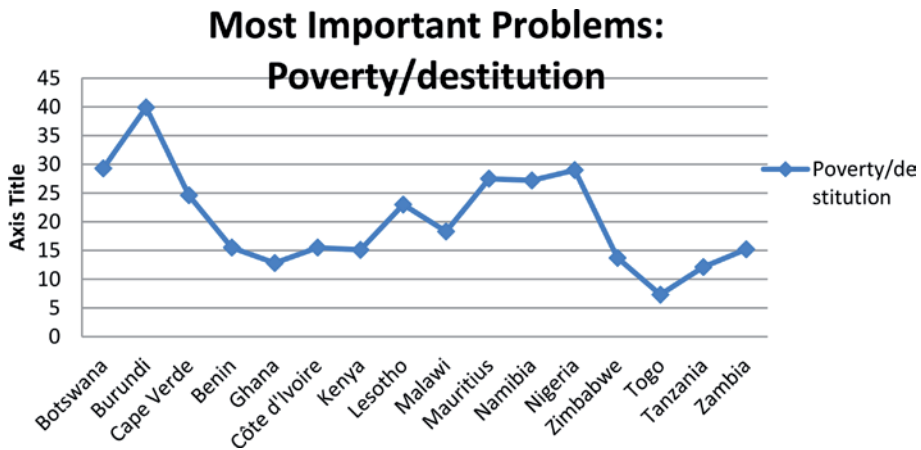


Figure 4.
 Source: Afrobarometer [22].

about 65% of the people are deeply poor and are thus susceptible to the manipulations by political actors. They are induced to vote along the highest bidder's dictate during election. Violence is ignited when rival political actors are competing to get the attention of the electorates through money or food inducement to vote. Much violence erupts when perceived voter that collected a sum of money voted in opposite direction. This trend will continue to expand election violence if the poverty gap between the rich and poor continues to expand in the society and especially in developing countries.

d. Low level of educational standards: This is a potent dimension that propels election violence to gain momentum in Africa. The education level of a community is proportional to their level of development. A country with very high and quality education will have enlightened population that will be able to manage their differences amicably with little or no conflict. They know and acknowledge that the community is a place for mutual growth and everyone needs one another for sustainable development. Therefore, properties are communally protected [28–30]. They also know their rights and civic responsibilities. On the other hand, a country with low level of education will witness more unabated crises because everyone will see their neighbour as an object of obstruction to their progress. They therefore oppose good ideas and fall cheaply for political propaganda and election manipulations.

The time series data across 16 countries in Africa from Afrobarometer [22] on 'most important problem: education' in **Figure 5** revealed that about 31% of the people are not educated and are thus susceptible to the manipulations of political actors to induce them to vote in a manipulative way during election. Violence is ignited when the manipulations are opposed by educated electorates. The World Bank data [23] also confirmed that the education level is below 50% of the entire population in the developing countries. It is a prominent reason why election violence is a reoccurring incidence in developing countries. It also has the propensity to escalate if the level of the uneducated or uninformed in the society continues to soar.

e. Poor technology development and utilisation: This is a potent dimension that propels election violence to gain momentum in Africa. This is the use of technology to sway off the electorates and disenfranchise people from performing their

Most important problem: Low level of Education

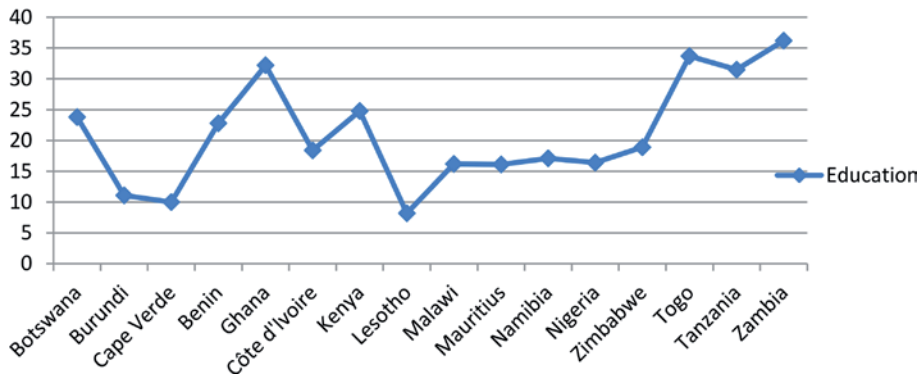


Figure 5.
Source: Afrobarometer [22].

civic responsibilities. Technology in election is mostly new in many developing countries. The operators therefore either use it to screen out some eligible voters to favour a candidate at the expense of the other or use it to manipulate votes [2, 11]. The vote manipulation through the use of voting technology may be by auto subtraction, division, addition, multiplication or any computation errors in the technology calibration [31]. This dimension of election breeds violence to a large extent, especially if the affected group becomes enlightened about the process.

The World Bank data 2021 revealed that e-governance and the use of technology in developing country are at the low ebb. This is because of the level of education and poor electricity logistics. The existing few technologies have skewed many citizens out of service. Time series data across 28 countries in Africa from Afrobarometer [22] on ‘Most important problem-Infrastructure-Technology’ in Figure 6 revealed that

Most important problem: Infrastructures-Technology

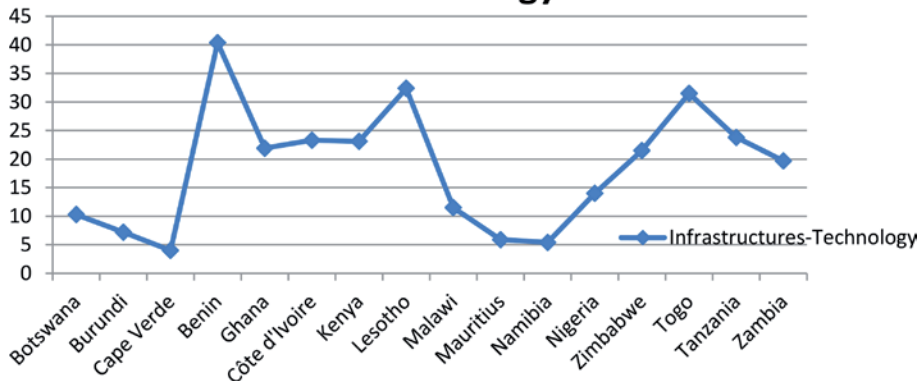


Figure 6.
Source: Afrobarometer [22].

over 63% of the people have the sentiments that government official can manipulate the people to suit their patrons and clients in election and other related matters due to the low level of technology in the executing elections. Violence ignited from manipulations is always difficult to tame. In such cases, government properties are always the prime target perceived to be destroyed from the process. It also has the propensity to escalate if not well managed.

5. Effects of election violence in Africa

Election violence is on a continuous increase in most developing countries as further revealed in the documentary and descriptive analysis. These have led to severe effects on the countries. The following are some of the effects [32, 33];

- i. Poor government credibility effect: The government formed from corrupt trend of election violence and manipulations of the people are low in credibility level in both domestic and foreign levels. No country will want to trust and rely completely on such country. Therefore, their domestic and foreign policy will be monitored closely by friends and foes so as not to fall into such government's corrupt practices.
- ii. Limited democratic peace: Democratic peace is mostly an evidence of democratic governments where regimes will prefer negotiation to violence. This will be limited or absent in such country because violence was used to set up the regime, and only through violence, such regime can be preserved. Cascade of violence, litigations and counter attacks will be a regular interplay of such government.
- iii. Economic backwardness: This is one of the direct offshoots of election violence. Scarce resources meant for continuation of general development will be used for re-construction, reintegration and relocation of victims among others. The money spent to manipulate and bribe electorates will be amassed back in multiple fold when such person assumed political office. This will slow down the rate of development as it would be compared with other countries of no pre- or post-election violence.
- iv. High corruption rate: This will be prevalent because the government ascended to power through corruption, the appointed officers will be cronies and beneficiaries of corruption who will maintain the corrupt status. Government business cannot be effectively done without corrupt practices and the citizens will be using the public offices to enrich the private realms. This will slow down the growth of the country because too much money will be spent on little development.
- v. Continuous poverty: Poverty will be a normal phenomenon in such country because it is the tactics of maintaining the power to control the general public. When the people are poor, they can be easily bought over during elections and neglected after the election. Poor people mostly care about what they will eat for the moment and forget about the future. Deliberate impoverishment of the people is the direct consequence of violent elections that empower corrupt government.

6. Democratic solutions to election violence in Africa

The following are some of the important holistic and systematic solutions to deescalate election violence in developing countries.

- i. **Constitutional solution:** The constitution should clearly stipulate the consequences of election violence. All the dimensions of the election violence elasticity should be listed and updated in the constitution and the punitive measures against anyone that utilises those ways. Government or politician that uses such medium to abrogate power should be constitutionally sanctioned up to the extent of life ban from public offices.
- ii. **Poverty eradication solution:** Poverty eradication schemes should be made to assist the people to have basic necessity of life. This includes food, cloth and shelter. These provisions on regular basis will reduce the extent of dependence on emergency welfare scheme tied to voting direction on the Election Day. When people are fairly comfortable, the extent of scavenging for food and rioting to that effect during electioneering period will be reduced or eliminated.
- iii. **Education and enlightenment solution:** The people should be educated on their rights and the consequences of violence. They should be enlightened on the use of technologies for elections and how to verify it effectively so as to prevent suspicion and violence. Enlightenments on the place of ethnic and religion in the conduct of the national life must be systematically explained to the people. This is to reduce the possibilities of exploring the medium to cause mayhem in the country.

7. Conclusion

Election violence is the result of leaders who deliberately attempt to manipulate elections as presented in the games theory and the citizens' violent response to their actions as depicted in the tyre burning theory. It has the tendency of repeating itself over and over again. It will do so if the leeway paved for it in the initial escapade is still active. At the second opportunity of its occurrence, it will expand to a new frontier and make use of new dimensions. This will keep expanding from year to year if nothing positive is done to stop the trend until the entire country is engulfed in the violent torrents.

This phenomenon is prominent in the developing countries of the world. The documentary and content analysis and descriptive analysis of data from Afrobarometer [22] and World Bank [23] reveal that the tendency of expansion of election violence in developing countries is high because most of the people are poor, uneducated, technologically backward and easily persuaded with primordial issues of ethnic and religious sentiments. Many of such countries will encounter cascade and series of election violence among others.


This study reveals that developing countries can only prevent the election violence and its negative effects through democratic solutions. This includes constitutional proscription of people that instigate violence and make use of corrupt ways to win elections, poverty eradication strategies, rapid education and enlightenment of the people on the need for peaceful co-existence. When such things are instilled in the country, the country will become more peaceful and develop gradually with little or no election violence in the future.

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