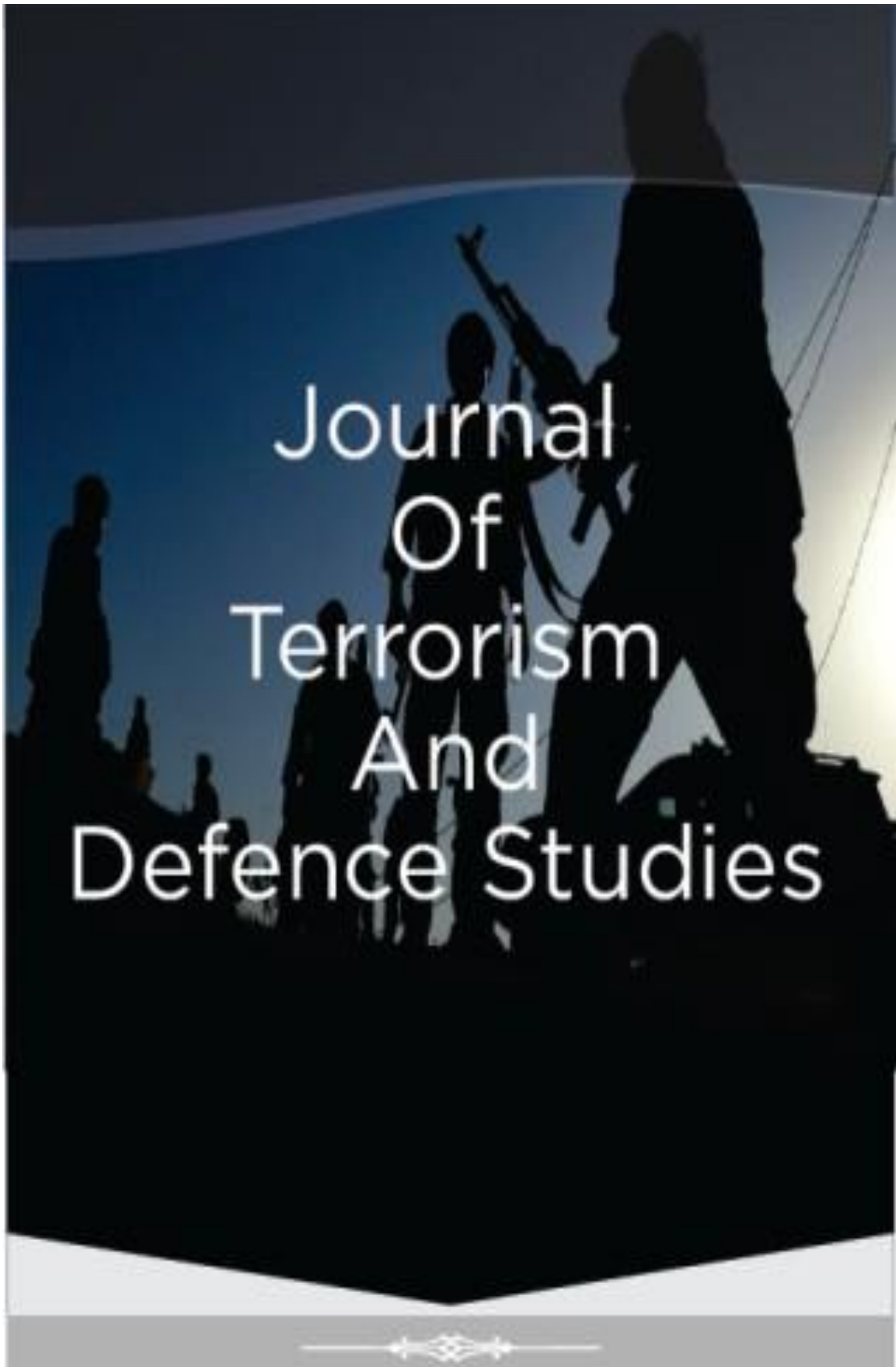




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Editorial Note

Rethinking Security Beyond the Bullet

The Journal of Terrorism and Defence Studies inaugurates this issue with a bracing premise: that security is not merely a tactical problem but a philosophical one. The five articles collected here, spanning Nigerian poverty dynamics, West African coups, and the axiology of peacebuilding, collectively argue that the defence community must move beyond kinetic metrics toward structural and ethical diagnostics.

Nwadike and **Ani's** lead article, *Insecurity and Poverty in Nigeria 1980–2024*, establishes the volume's empirical spine. Using simultaneous equation modelling, they demonstrate that terrorism activity indices directly affect both undernourishment and agricultural output. The policy implication is stark: security spending without poverty reduction is self-limiting. Their call for “security literacy” as a national strategy reframes defence as a civic, not merely coercive, enterprise.

Gontor's *Axiology of Peacebuilding* elevates the discourse into political philosophy. The critique of liberal peace orthodoxy that elections and markets do not automatically produce stability is timely given recent coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea-Bissau (the seventh since 2020, which Njoku documents). Gontor's proposal to elevate National Peace Institutions to statutory “Policy Governors” with veto power over conflict-generating legislation is provocative and, in the post-kinetic era, necessary. Peacekeeping opens the gate; axiological governance inhabits the house.

The econometric rigour continues in Nwadike et al.'s VAR analysis of security shocks on Nigerian investment growth (1980–2024). Their finding of positive shock elasticity meaning security disruptions produce measurable, persistent negative responses in investment offers quantitative grounding for what field officers already know: insecurity is a tax on development. The recommendation that security literacy become a “fundamental national strategy” echoes the lead article, suggesting intra-volume consensus.

Njoku's *ECOWAS at 50* provides the geopolitical canvas. Seven coups since 2020, the exit of AES states, jihadist expansion, and renewed great-power resource competition threaten fifty years of regional integration. The Regional Security Complexes framework usefully centers Nigeria as a pivotal state. But the article quietly asks: if ECOMOG's peacekeeping legacy is to survive, what happens when the guarantor state faces its own profound internal crises? That question hangs over the entire issue.

Gontor's second contribution, *Prevention of Post-Election Conflict in Africa*, completes the architecture. Comparing ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD, ECCAS, and AMU, it argues that post-election violence stems not from flawed ballots but from structural injustices exclusion, patrimonialism, and weak accountability. RECs cannot prevent what they cannot diagnose. The insistence on “positive peace” (justice, inclusion, accountability) rather than mere ceasefire is the volume's unifying ethical thread.

Taken together, these five articles move terrorism and defence studies away from exclusive focus on insurgent tactics and toward the deeper question: what makes a political order worth defending? The answer emerging here; value-based governance, security literacy, empowered peace institutions, and regionally anchored conflict prevention is not soft. It is hard in a more demanding way.

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PREVENTION OF POST-ELECTION CONFLICT IN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES.

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Abstract

Electoral While the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s marked a continental trend, countries like Nigeria had experienced multiparty systems as early as the post-independence era and the late 1970s, though these were often interrupted by military rule.. While elections have become a central mechanism for legitimizing political authority, they have also been accompanied by recurrent episodes of violence, intimidation, and instability. Post-election conflict undermines democratic consolidation, erodes public trust in governance, and threatens regional peace and security. This article critically examines the role of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) specifically Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in preventing post-election conflict in Africa. Drawing on liberal structuralist theory, rational choice perspectives, and political economy frameworks, the study interrogates the structural causes of electoral violence, the institutional capacities of RECs, and the challenges they face in conflict prevention. Through comparative case studies and empirical analysis, the article highlights both successes and limitations of RECs in managing electoral crises. It concludes with policy recommendations for strengthening regional institutions to achieve sustainable “positive peace” in Africa, emphasizing justice, accountability, and inclusive governance as prerequisites for democratic stability.

Keywords: Electoral Violence; Regional Economic Communities (RECs); Conflict Prevention

Introduction

Elections are widely regarded as the cornerstone of democratic governance. They provide citizens with the opportunity to choose leaders, hold governments accountable, and legitimize political authority. In Africa, the proliferation of multiparty elections since the 1990s has generated optimism

about democratic consolidation. However, this optimism has been tempered by the persistence of electoral violence, particularly in the post-election period. From Côte d'Ivoire to Kenya, Nigeria to Zimbabwe, electoral contests have frequently degenerated into violent confrontations, undermining peace, stability, and development.

The significance of electoral systems in shaping political behavior and state stability remains a critical concern. As Cheeseman and Fisher (2021) argue, contemporary African political systems often reflect a "colonial genealogy" where authoritarian norms were institutionalized long before the current democratic era. They suggest that elections in many African states are not merely instruments of democracy but are frequently used by "political entrepreneurs" to consolidate power through "ideas of national unity" that often mask repressive practices. In this context, electoral contests are not just competitions for office but high-stakes battles where "authoritarian regimes have adapted to competitive elections by deploying an extensive menu of manipulation". A healthy electoral system fosters trust, inclusivity, and legitimacy, while a flawed system breeds suspicion, exclusion, and violence. In Africa, the stakes of elections are particularly high because political offices often provide access to state resources, patronage networks, and economic opportunities. Consequently, electoral competition is frequently perceived as a zero-sum game, where losing equates to political and economic marginalization.

The recurrence of post-election conflict in Africa raises critical questions about the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for conflict prevention. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) have emerged as key actors in managing electoral disputes.

These organizations, originally established to promote economic integration, have increasingly incorporated peace and security mandates into their agendas. Their interventions in electoral crises, ranging from mediation and observer missions to sanctions and military deployments, underscore their growing importance in Africa's governance architecture.

Yet, despite these efforts, post-election violence remains a recurring phenomenon. Why have RECs struggled to prevent electoral conflict? Are their current structures adequate for the task? How can they be strengthened to ensure sustainable peace? These questions form the basis of this study. By situating electoral violence within broader theoretical frameworks liberal structuralism, rational choice, and political economy this article seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the causes of post-election conflict and the role of RECs in addressing them.

The rationale for this research is clear: the costs of electoral violence are immense. Beyond the immediate loss of lives and property, electoral violence undermines democratic legitimacy, deters investment, displaces populations, and destabilizes entire regions. It perpetuates cycles of insecurity that hinder socio-economic development and erode public trust in democratic institutions. As Chambers (2004) notes, peace imposed through coercion is merely "negative peace," lacking the justice, accountability, and inclusivity necessary for sustainable stability. Africa requires a paradigm shift towards "positive peace," as conceptualized by Galtung (1990),

which entails the elimination of structural inequalities and the promotion of justice and human rights.

This article contributes to the discourse on electoral governance and conflict prevention in Africa by critically analyzing the role of RECs in managing post-election crises. It argues that while RECs have made notable strides, their effectiveness is constrained by structural, financial, and political limitations. Strengthening these institutions requires not only reforms in their mandates and capacities but also reorientation towards inclusive, justice-based approaches to peacebuilding. Ultimately, the prevention of post-election conflict in Africa hinges on the ability of regional institutions to foster democratic resilience, promote accountability, and ensure that elections serve as instruments of peace rather than triggers of violence.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Liberal Structuralism

The liberal structuralist perspective remains a foundational pillar for understanding how conflict is embedded in societal organization. Modern scholars like Richmond (2020) and Omeje (2013) argue that electoral violence in Africa is a systemic manifestation of deep-seated political and economic exclusion rather than isolated incidents of lawlessness. These "structural defects" including poverty and institutionalized injustice create a fragile environment where elections act as a trigger for existing grievances.

Johan Galtung's (1990) distinction between "negative peace" (the mere absence of direct violence) and "positive peace" (the removal of structural inequalities) continues to be vital. However, recent critiques by Mahmoud and Fabiano (2022) emphasize that African security institutions like the AU and ECOWAS have historically prioritized "negative peace" through militarized stabilization. This article advocates for a paradigm shift toward "positive peace," which modern scholarship defines as a process of "peace formation" rooted in indigenous legitimacy and inclusive governance rather than external coercion.

Realism and Its Limitations

In contrast, realist theory, as articulated by Morgenthau (1973), views conflict as inevitable due to the selfish and power-driven nature of human beings and states. Realists argue that states will always pursue their national interests, defined in terms of power, leading to inevitable clashes. This perspective underpins the coercive approaches of many African security institutions, which prioritize force over reform. While realism explains the persistence of conflict, it offers limited guidance for sustainable peacebuilding, as it neglects the structural injustices that fuel electoral violence.

Rational Choice Theory

In contrast, realism views conflict as an inevitable result of power-driven human and state nature.

While classic realism (Morgenthau, 1973) explains some state behavior, Levorato and Donelli (2024) argue that this perspective fails to account for the agency of non-state actors and the unique "inverted legitimacy" often found in African domestic institutions. A purely realist approach neglects the structural injustices that fuel electoral violence, offering only short-term containment rather than sustainable peacebuilding.

Rational choice theory provides a lens into the strategic calculations of political actors. Building on earlier frameworks, Cheeseman and Fisher (2021) demonstrate that electoral violence is often a rational strategy used by "political entrepreneurs" to maintain power in contexts where the "payoffs" of manipulation outweigh the costs of peaceful participation. In these high-stakes environments, violence is not a sign of irrationality but a deliberate tool for regime survival when institutional checks are weak.

Contemporary strategic interactions in African elections are increasingly defined by digital mobilization and the weaponization of state law. Building on modern game-theoretic applications, Cheeseman and Fisher (2021) highlight how "political entrepreneurs" use a strategic "menu of manipulation" ranging from internet shutdowns to judicial interference to alter the perceived payoffs of opposition. As seen in recent cycles in Senegal (2024) and Cameroon (2025), the outcome of electoral crises depends on whether the institutional costs of repression outweigh the benefits of regime survival for the ruling elite.

Political Economy Framework

Finally, the finally, a contemporary political economic approach moves beyond simple ethnic variables to examine the "development bargain." Stefan Dercon (2022) argues that electoral stability in states like Ghana or Ethiopia hinges on whether the ruling elite has made a credible "gamble" on long-term growth versus short-term rent-seeking. Furthermore, Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) emphasize that inclusive institutions are the primary safeguard against the "extractive" political cycles that fuel violence. This framework situates electoral violence as a symptom of a failed elite bargain where political incentives remain misaligned with national stability.

Operationally, this research adopts the Institutional Adaptive Framework (Omeje, 2013), which analyzes how Regional Economic Communities (RECs) navigate emerging "geo-strategic imperatives" like the 4th Industrial Revolution and coup contagions. This allows for a nuanced understanding of how RECs act as critical mediators between national governments and a digitally active civil society to manage modern electoral crises.

Synthesis: The Integrated Institutional Framework

While liberal structuralism, realism, and rational choice theory provide distinct lenses, this study adopts an Integrated Institutional Framework to analyze the observed outcomes. This framework posits that while structural inequalities (Liberal Structuralism) provide the underlying

grievances, the "spark" for post-election violence is triggered by the rational, power-seeking calculations of political elites (Realism/Rational Choice). Within this model, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) serve as the decisive institutional "intervenor" that can shift the payoff structures for these actors, moving them toward "positive peace" through credible mediation, sanctions, or technical validation of results.

CAUSES OF POST-ELECTION CONFLICT IN AFRICA

Structural Inequalities

Electoral violence in Africa is often rooted in structural inequalities. Political exclusion, economic marginalization, and social injustice create grievances that erupt during elections. When certain groups are systematically denied access to power and resources, elections become flashpoints for expressing these frustrations. Liberal structuralism emphasizes that unless these inequalities are addressed, electoral violence will persist.

High-Stakes Political Competition

In many African countries, political office is synonymous with access to state resources and patronage networks. Elections are therefore perceived as zero-sum contests, where losing equates to exclusion from economic opportunities. This perception incentivizes actors to resort to violence to secure victory or contest defeat. The absence of strong institutions to regulate competition exacerbates this dynamic.

Weak Institutions

Institutional weakness is a recurring theme in African electoral governance. Electoral commissions are often underfunded, politicized, or lacking independence. Judicial systems may be unable or unwilling to adjudicate disputes impartially. Security agencies may be complicit in violence or biased towards ruling parties. These institutional deficiencies undermine trust in the electoral process and fuel post-election conflict.

Ethnic and Identity Politics

Ethnic heterogeneity, while not inherently conflictual, becomes a source of violence when politicized. Political elites often mobilize ethnic identities to secure support, framing elections as contests between groups rather than policies. This mobilization can lead to violent clashes, particularly when results are perceived as favoring one group over another. The cases of Kenya (2007–2008) and Côte d'Ivoire (2010–2011) illustrate how ethnic polarization can escalate into widespread violence.

Economic Mismanagement

Economic grievances also contribute to electoral violence. High unemployment, poverty, and inequality create fertile ground for mobilization. Rebel groups and opposition parties may exploit these grievances to challenge incumbents, while ruling parties may use state resources to suppress dissent. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue that greed-driven insurgencies often intensify civil wars, highlighting the

economic dimensions of conflict.

External Influences

Finally, external factors such as foreign interventions, transnational biases, and global economic pressures shape electoral violence. International agencies may impose models of governance that are ill-suited to African contexts, while foreign interests may exacerbate divisions. The unequal global order, as noted by Kiely (2007), must therefore be considered in analyzing African electoral conflicts.

ROLE OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES (RECS)

ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been one of the most proactive RECs in managing electoral crises. Its interventions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and The Gambia demonstrate its willingness to deploy mediation, sanctions, and even military force. ECOWAS has established mechanisms such as the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), which prohibits unconstitutional changes of government and mandates free and fair elections. However, ECOWAS faces challenges of enforcement, resource constraints, and political will among member states.

SADC

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has also played a role in electoral governance, particularly in Zimbabwe,

Madagascar, and Lesotho. Its Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation coordinates conflict prevention and resolution. SADC has deployed observer missions and facilitated negotiations, but its effectiveness has been questioned due to perceptions of bias and reluctance to confront authoritarian regimes. The principle of non- interference often limits its capacity to act decisively.

IGAD

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has been active in the Horn of Africa, addressing conflicts in Sudan, Somalia, and Kenya. IGAD's mediation efforts, particularly in South Sudan, highlight its role in regional peace processes. However, IGAD's capacity is constrained by limited resources and internal divisions among member states. Its interventions in electoral crises have been less prominent compared to ECOWAS and SADC.

ECCAS

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) has struggled with institutional weakness and limited capacity. While it has established mechanisms for peace and security, its interventions in electoral crises have been sporadic and often ineffective. The persistence of authoritarian regimes and recurrent conflicts in Central Africa undermine ECCAS's credibility and effectiveness.

AMU

The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) has been largely inactive in electoral governance due to political divisions among its member states. The unresolved conflict between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara has paralyzed the organization, limiting its ability to address electoral crises. As a result, AMU’s role in preventing post-election conflict has been minimal.

METHODOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION

The cases of Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and

Mali/Guinea-Bissau represent "Critical Cases" selected to illustrate the diverse operational landscapes of Africa’s primary RECs. These cases were chosen because they provide a representative cross-section of geographic regions (West, East, Southern, and Central Africa) and offer varying degrees of intervention success. This allows for a rigorous comparative analysis of how different institutional capacities ranging from ECOWAS’s military-diplomatic hybrid to SADC’s mediation-heavy approach influence the durability of peace outcomes.

CASE EXAMPLES AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

To move beyond descriptive narratives, the following matrix systematically evaluates REC performance across the

selected cases based on response speed, enforcement mechanism, and outcome durability:

REC Involved	Primary Case	Response Speed	Enforcement Capacity	Outcome Durability
ECOWAS	Côte d'Ivoire	High	High (Military/Economic)	Sustainable
SADC	Zimbabwe	Moderate	Low (Diplomatic/Moral)	Fragile
IGAD	Kenya	High	Moderate (Peer Mediation)	Moderate
ECOWAS	Mali / Guinea-Bissau	High	Variable (Sanctions/Suspension)	Low

Côte d’Ivoire (2010–2011)

The 2010 presidential election in Côte d’Ivoire marked a turning point in the country’s fragile democratization process. The contest between incumbent Laurent Gbagbo and

challenger Alassane Ouattara culminated in a disputed result, with both candidates claiming victory. The Constitutional Council declared Gbagbo the winner, while the Independent Electoral Commission and

international observers recognized Ouattara. This institutional contradiction triggered widespread violence, resulting in over 3,000 deaths and the displacement of more than a million people.

ECOWAS played a central role in attempting to mediate the crisis. It issued strong statements recognizing Ouattara as the legitimate winner and imposed sanctions on Gbagbo's regime. However, ECOWAS lacked the capacity to enforce its decisions without external support. Ultimately, French military intervention, alongside UN peacekeepers, tipped the balance in favor of Ouattara. This case highlights both the normative strength of ECOWAS its clear stance against unconstitutional governance and its practical limitations in enforcement. It underscores the need for stronger institutional mechanisms and independent enforcement capacity within RECs.

Kenya (2007–2008)

Kenya's 2007 presidential election between incumbent Mwai Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga descended into chaos after disputed results. Electoral irregularities and perceptions of fraud sparked ethnic violence, leading to over 1,000 deaths and the displacement of approximately 600,000 people. The violence revealed the fragility of Kenya's institutions and the dangers of politicized ethnic mobilization.

IGAD, in collaboration with the AU, facilitated mediation led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The negotiations resulted in a power-sharing agreement, creating a coalition

government between Kibaki and Odinga. While the agreement ended immediate violence, it was a reactive measure rather than a preventive one. The Kenyan case demonstrates the importance of preventive mechanisms, such as early warning systems and institutional reforms, to avoid violence before it erupts. It also illustrates the potential of regional organizations to mediate effectively when supported by credible international actors.

Nigeria (2011 and 2015)

Nigeria's 2011 elections were marred by post-election violence, particularly in the northern states, where riots claimed hundreds of lives. The violence reflected deep-seated grievances over political exclusion and economic marginalization. ECOWAS deployed observer missions and issued statements, but its role was limited. The Nigerian state itself bore the primary responsibility for managing the crisis.

In contrast, the 2015 elections marked a milestone in Nigeria's democratic trajectory. For the first time, an incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, peacefully conceded defeat to opposition candidate Muhammadu Buhari. This peaceful transfer of power was facilitated by domestic reforms, strong civil society engagement, and international pressure. ECOWAS's observer mission contributed to legitimacy, but the success was primarily driven by national institutions. The Nigerian case underscores the importance of domestic reforms in complementing regional efforts.

Zimbabwe (2008)

Zimbabwe’s 2008 elections epitomize the challenges of authoritarian resilience in Africa. The contest between Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai was marred by violence, intimidation, and economic collapse. SADC facilitated negotiations that produced a power-sharing agreement, temporarily stabilizing the situation. However, the agreement failed to produce lasting reforms, as Mugabe retained significant control and continued to undermine democratic institutions.

SADC’s role was criticized for perceived bias and reluctance to confront Mugabe’s regime. The principle of non-interference limited its capacity to act decisively. The Zimbabwe case illustrates the limitations of regional mediation when structural issues such as authoritarian entrenchment and economic

mismanagement remain unresolved. It highlights the need for RECs to adopt stronger normative frameworks and enforcement mechanisms.

Mali and Guinea-Bissau (2012)

The coups in Mali and Guinea-Bissau during electoral processes revealed the fragility of democratic institutions in West Africa. In Mali, soldiers overthrew President Amadou Toumani Touré, citing government failures in addressing insurgencies. In Guinea-Bissau, a coup disrupted elections, perpetuating instability. ECOWAS responded by imposing sanctions and suspending membership, demonstrating its commitment to democratic norms. However, the recurrence of coups suggests that punitive measures alone are insufficient. Structural reforms, capacity-building, and preventive strategies are necessary to address underlying grievances.

Comparative Table: Case Examples

Country	Year	REC Involved	Intervention Type	Outcome	Lessons Learned
Côte d’Ivoire	2010–11	ECOWAS	Sanctions, mediation	Violence ended after external intervention	Need for stronger enforcement capacity
Kenya	2007–08	IGAD/AU	Mediation (Kofi Annan)	Power-sharing agreement	Importance of preventi

					ve mechani sms
Nigeria	2011	ECOWA S	Observer mission	Post- election violence	Domest ic reforms critical
Nigeria	2015	ECOWA S	Observer mission	Peaceful Transfer of power	Comple mentari ty of national and regiona l efforts
Zimbabwe	2008	SADC	Mediation, power-sharing	Temporar y stability, no reforms	Limits of mediati on under authorit arian regimes
Mali/Guinea- Bissau	2012	ECOWA S	Sanctions, suspension	Continue d instability	Punitiv e measur es insuffic ient

CHALLENGES FACING RECS IN ELECTORAL CONFLICT PREVENTION

Sovereignty and non-interference

The principle of sovereignty remains a major obstacle. Member states often resist external intervention, viewing it as an infringement on national autonomy. This challenge is particularly acute in SADC, where reluctance to confront Zimbabwe undermined credibility.

Resource Constraints

RECs lack adequate financial and human resources. Observer missions, mediation efforts, and peacekeeping operations require significant funding, often unavailable. Dependence on external donors compromises autonomy and effectiveness.

Political Will

The effectiveness of RECs depends on the political will of member states. Divisions among members weaken collective action, as seen in IGAD's struggles in South Sudan. Without political consensus, interventions lack legitimacy and impact.

Institutional Weakness

Weak institutional frameworks undermine REC effectiveness. ECCAS suffers from limited capacity and credibility, reducing its ability to manage electoral crises. Strengthening institutional structures is critical.

External Influences

Foreign interventions and transnational biases complicate REC efforts. International actors may impose solutions lacking local legitimacy, while global economic pressures exacerbate grievances. RECs must navigate these influences carefully.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively mitigate post-election conflict, African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) must transition from reactive diplomacy to a proactive, institutionalized framework of "positive peace." First, institutional capacity must be professionalized by moving beyond ad-hoc mediation led by former heads of state toward the establishment of permanent Standing

Mediation Expert Pools equipped with technical expertise in digital forensic auditing and electoral law. To ensure operational autonomy, RECs should move away from donor-centric funding models by implementing a mandatory 0.5% "Stability Levy" on regional imports, creating a self-sustaining Peace Fund capable of financing rapid-response interventions without external interference. This must be supported by an enhanced legal framework that updates the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and its equivalents in SADC and EAC to include an Automatic Sanction Trigger (AST). This mechanism would legally mandate the suspension of a member state's voting rights upon any attempt at a "constitutional coup," such as the unilateral manipulation of term limits, thereby addressing the root causes of unconstitutional changes of government before they escalate into violence.

Furthermore, preventive mechanisms must be modernized to include Regional Fact-Checking Hubs that utilize AI-driven social media sentiment analysis to detect and neutralize "digital arson" and election-related disinformation in real-time. By partnering with local civil society, RECs can fill the information vacuum that typically sparks street violence during the critical window between voting and the announcement of results. To foster political will, these interventions should be linked to a Governance Integrity Index that ranks member states based on their adherence to regional electoral standards, where low-ranking states face restricted access to regional infrastructure funding or leadership roles within African Union Agenda 2063 projects. Finally, inter-agency

collaboration should be restructured toward a Tripartite Election Certification model, where a joint REC-AU-CSO body provides a technical validation of the electoral process. This multi-layered oversight provides the necessary neutral ground for losing parties to accept results in environments where trust in national institutions has eroded, ensuring that regional stability is prioritized over narrow elite interests.

Conclusion

Theoretical and Empirical Reflections

This study demonstrates that electoral violence in Africa is not an inevitable byproduct of competition, as suggested by realist theory, but a systemic manifestation of structural inequality and exclusion. While Liberal Structuralism identifies the underlying grievances, Rational Choice Theory explains how political "entrepreneurs" exploit these fractures to maintain power. As both a symptom and a cause of instability, post-election conflict undermines democratic consolidation, deters investment, and displaces populations across the continent.

The empirical evidence from Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Mali reveals a spectrum of regional effectiveness. ECOWAS has emerged as a proactive normative leader, yet it remains hampered by enforcement limitations. IGAD has shown success in

high-pressure mediation, while SADC continues to struggle with the tension between regional intervention and the principle of non-interference. Collectively, these cases prove that while Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are the most viable framework for African-led solutions, their current impact is uneven and often reactive.

A Path Toward Positive Peace

To ensure Africa's democratic future, RECs must transition from "negative peace" the mere absence of violence toward Galtung's vision of "positive peace." This requires a fundamental shift from ad-hoc, reactive diplomacy to a proactive, institutionalized framework. By implementing technical reforms such as permanent mediation expert pools, "Stability Levies" for financial autonomy, and AI-driven fact-checking hubs RECs can address the "digital arson" and structural injustices that fuel modern crises.

Ultimately, the prevention of post-election conflict is not merely a technical exercise but a political imperative. Strengthening the institutional capacity of RECs and fostering genuine political will among member states is essential to ensuring that elections serve as instruments of peace rather than triggers of violence. By embracing justice, accountability, and inclusive governance, regional institutions can transform the electoral process into a cornerstone of sustainable stability for the continent.

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