

Preventing and Managing Electoral Violence as a Threat to Democracy in South Africa

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ABSTRACT South Africa is a country of overlapping multi-party divisions that has its origin in the historical antecedents of the apartheid regime. Rifts within and between political parties have often produced severe levels of violence, especially after the 1994 election and have resulted in arson, looting and loss of lives. This study that utilized the Przeworski Democratic Peace Theory argued that the outbreak of electoral violence in South Africa is a reflection of the failure of democratic institutions, norms, values, and democratic ideals that do not meet the expectations of the people and is thus promoting a vision of chaos and violence in the country. It recommends a fight against poverty and youth unemployment, provision of justice, opening up of political space to accommodate all sections of the country and equitable distributions of resources coupled with the strengthening of democratic institutions are tools needed for sustainable national peace in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, electoral violence is a leading cause of instability in every democratic society and remains a palpable threat to the consolidation of democratic ideals, especially in a multi-party democracy (Basedau et al. 2007b; Dugas 2010; Marais 2011; Straus 2012; Daxecker 2012; Harish and Little 2017; Cheibub and Hays 2017). South Africa having endured decades of the apartheid regime that was characterised by violation of fundamental human rights that eventually culminated to the return to democratic rule in 1994, and led to the birth of the new South Africa built on the ideas of representative democracy, is not an exemption in this orgy of electoral violence (see Alence 2004; Hoglund and Jarstad 2011). However, the republic that started amidst significant expectations is yet to convince the generality of South Africans, of its democratic credentials especially in the conduct of elections that is devoid of violence and are free, fair and credible (Mattes 2002; McEwan 2003; Pillay 2004). The history of political development in South Africa is ridden with numerous incidents of (Laura 2016). Blaise et al. (2015) and Mainwaring and Torcal (2016) argued that elections have become an essential feature of representative democracy globally the credibility of

elections has become the yardstick to measure the process of transition from one civilian administration to another. They further argued that the high rate of electoral violence in post-apartheid South Africa, has turned a new corner, with an attendant waste of lives and properties (Mattes et al. 1999). The conduct of free, fair and credible periodic elections by an unbiased electoral body and the adherence to democratic principles of governance remain major factors responsible for the avoidance of electoral violence in any democratic society (Bishop and Hoeffler 2016; Bowler et al. 2015; Robbins 2015; Van Ham 2015). These two factors are the challenges that the paper seeks to interrogate and perhaps offer solutions to the menace.

So far, none of the general elections conducted, except the 1994 election that ushered in the democratic South Africa has been violent-free (see for example Basedau et al. 2007a). The return to multiparty democracy in 1994 was locally and internationally celebrated because of the long and tortuous history of apartheid in South Africa. After series of intense consultations and years of liberation struggles, the first democratic election took place on the 27th of April, 1994 in South Africa. The election changed the history of South Africa, flagging off a new democratic order, and ushering a new constitution

for South Africa. All races in the country, for the first time, went to the polls to elect their representatives to form the post-apartheid government. Contrary to fears of electoral violence, the election took place in a festive atmosphere (www.southafrica.info). Among South Africans, the significant expectations of dividends of democracy were and remain very high (Bedasso et al. 2016; Burger et al. 2016; Kynoch 2016; McMann 2016). Everatt (2016) and Salehyan and Linebarger (2015) however noted that the hope and expectations of people have been threatened by incessant violence and conflict that have resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and destruction of public properties worth millions of rands. In the build up to the 2016 mayoral elections in South Africa, between June 20th and 21st for example, rampaging party supporters after the announcement by the Africa National Congress (ANC) of the flagbearer in the election, protesters in parts of Tshwane embarked on a violent demonstration that culminated in the looting of shops and destruction of properties. In the Tshwane protest, five deaths were reported amidst the arrest of many of the protesters. In the North West Province, at Mabolo-ka outside Brits, Thabo Moroa, a member of ANC was reportedly gunned down at his home, on June 18. About this time, members of the ANC and that of Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) clashed over allegations by the EFF that the ruling ANC is behind the killings of two of its members at the Sethokga hostel in Tembisa. In the Cape Town region on the 29th of June, two buses in the fleet of Golden Arrow were burned down as protesters took to the streets to protest over ANC flagbearers list (Eye Witness News, July 1st 2016).

The country that was once lauded for conducting one of the most peaceful elections devoid of violence in Africa, in 1994 is now, contending with pockets of violent protests associated with elections (Carter and May 2001; Møller 1998). Against the backdrop of the 1994 free, fair and credible elections adjudged to be free of any electoral violence, South Africa has seemingly acquired a new culture of electoral violence as four of the five parliamentary elections conducted after the end of apartheid have been violence-ridden (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998; Collier and Vicente 2012; Eifert et al. 2010; Lindberg 2005; Mozaffar et al. 2003; Reilly 1997, 2002).

This study relied on data from secondary sources, and adopted the historical approach in its analysis.

Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives

Most third world democracies have been labeled as pseudo or minimalist democracies as a result of the absence of or insufficient critical democratic features expected to be present in an ideal democracy. Several scholars have described minimalist democracy as an abridged concept of democracy that eliminates some of the pre-determined objectives of the classical democratic doctrines that have at its core characteristics including but not limited to political participation, political rights, fair elections and accountability (Przeworski 2000; Cheibub et al. 1996; Leftwich 1993). While agreeing with the above, Larry Diamond went ahead to describe minimalist or pseudo-democracy as a type of democracy that can be seen as repressive. He argued that in a pseudo-democracy only a party dominates the political process and that elections in a pseudo democracy may be free, but not fair. There are many variants and different degrees of repressiveness (Diamond 1999). Arnsen (2012) submitted that in a weak democratic state where a little monopoly of violence exist, and the government appointment is seemingly subjugated to the practice of patronage and racial divisions and the failure or unwillingness to deliver the necessary amenities and facilities to the publics, these elements may constitute fundamental structural imbalance that could fuel electoral violence in any society.

The literature is silent on what role democracy should play reducing the incidence of electoral violence. The Theory of Democratic Peace has its root in the writings of Immanuel Kant in one of his essays written in 1795, titled "Perpetual Peace". Kant in the theory advocated that liberal form of democracies need not engage one another in wars and also suggested that they maintain internal peace, order and harmony. Russett (2005) building on the principle of Democratic Peace Theory suggested, however, that the primary function of democracy is to bring about peaceful social coexistence. Rummel (1997) also argued that modern democracies remain the only weapon that can be used to reduce all forms of violence, including genocide and mass murder, which have no place in a democracy. There-

fore, the relationship that exists between collective domestic violence, foreign violence and genocide involving government is to be one of cause and effect (Rummel 1997). Remmer (1998) while supporting the argument insisted that the third wave of democratic principle is the spread and expansion of its values, norms and ideals globally.

The expansion of the ideas that started in the 1970s up until the 1990s marks the success of the development and has been viewed as the only panacea to solving the global conflict and also has the potential to create world peace. Moaz and Russett (1993) are also of the view that the advent of democracy has the probable function of reducing militarised conflict to the minimal low level. The development can be achieved through democratic norms and institutionalized that are prevalent in a peaceful relationship among countries that are practising democracy worldwide.

It is, however, not contestable that democracy remains the only solution to ensure peace globally. Collier and Rohner (2007) opined that rebellion is easier in a democracy and limits the technical possibility of repression because of the constraints weaved around democracy. While aligning himself with the argument put forward by Collier et al. (2005), he agreed that democracy remains the best approach needed to guarantee world peace. He, however, went further to explain that political office seekers in a democracy who decide to read racial meanings to elections may indirectly be building racial hatred and give room for violent acts among the populace. For Chua (2003), globalization and democratization in the presence of market dominant minorities could lead to volatility and create a racial violence. To buttress the principal place of carrying everyone along in a democracy, Huntington (1968) stated that political instability might arise in a society the moment the people who occupy political offices in a government begin to be resented by individuals who are not catered for by the system, and this can be prevented if institutions that could restrain or check the ensuing violence are in place. According to Przeworski (1995), if the exercise of citizenship is to be predictable, democratic governments and officials must act by the laws of the land. It is, however, important to point out that, peaceful private relationships can only be guaranteed in an atmosphere where laws are predictably enforced.

Democracies as a matter of necessity must, therefore, put in place institutions that will meet simultaneously the political, social and civil requirements of citizenship to ensure peace. Stoker (2006) while contributing to the debate said that democracy can be in trouble and have a dark side when the definition and status of the political community are hinged on the advancement of one group at the expense of another. He listed examples like Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Fiji, and for the argument, the researchers are stressing in this essay, the researchers include South Africa. Reynal-Querol (2004) also submitted that partly democratic countries are more prone to civil war than full democracies, and full autocracies. Cervellati and Sunde (2014) contend that the democratization process may trigger political violence because the scenario under which democratization takes place especially during democratic transitions provides convenient platforms for violent conflicts, especially among groups within the polity. Keane (2010) calls this the democratization of violence. Hoglund (2006) and Horowitz (1985) also argue that competitive elections result in ethnicization of the electorate in a multi-ethnic society, thus creating conflict.

The literature on violence and conflict also varies in argument concerning conditions that make conflict more likely. Hirshleifer (1991) and Skaperdas (1992) emphasized the 'paradox of power', where asymmetric situations create conflict. Esteban and Ray (1999) theorized that ethnic fragmentation could cause conflict. In their model, they showed that conflict was maximized when society was polarized along racial groupings. Bates (2000) further gave an insight into the argument when he claimed that racial conflict was more pronounced in such a situation. Gurr (1970) model pointed to the fact that a relative deprivation may result in violence in whatever guise. Stewart (2010) opines that horizontal inequality across religious, cultural and other ethnic characteristics may lead to violence and create conflicts. State weakness, the absence of state monopoly on force, the inability to uphold a legal order and the inability or willingness to provide essential needs to the citizens while interacting with them in the form of political or social exclusion has served in many cases as the fundamental structural underpinning of conflict (Aranson 2012). Chabal and Daloz (1991) point to the political economy of disorder, the opera-

tion of political action in the realm of the informal, uncodified and unpoliced as contributing factors to conflict. In the discussions that follow below, the researchers draw from actual historical events in South Africa and build on these theoretical perspectives for some analysis. The point as the researchers will try to show below, is that, when a democratic state and its institutions undermine justice and is limited in the capacity to develop social programs to address deep poverty, inequality, and racial discrimination, and further compromise and undermine citizen participation, and hinders the development of political parties as articulators of citizens interest using them rather in an individualistic way to prevail during elections, it opens the space for internal aggression or violent conflict.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the secondary source of data collection using the historical data collection approach. The study examined records and narratives of the electoral history in South Africa and questions the seemingly intractable violence that have characterized the electoral process, which have in a way given credence to the many deaths and violence that have being unleashed on the citizenry. The rift within and between political parties in South Africa has questioned and informed the sustenance of South Africa democracy. The experiences of violence have led the government to set up numerous convention and conferences targeted at further educating South Africans. Data collection also involved the re-interpretation of texts to sieve out how the violence has led to the emergence of the new thought process that surrounds the declaration of social cohesion. Materials from the secondary sources helped support and develop ideas on the particular area of interest.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Drivers of Electoral Violence in South Africa Politics

Though violent conflict in South Africa had existed before the return of the multiparty democracy in 1994, the frequency of these conflicts and bloodletting in the country especially in the days and weeks that heralds elections in the present democratic dispensation calls for

concern (Beresford 2015; Cilliers and Aucoin 2016; Everatt 2016; Khadiagala and Nganje 2015; Odendaal 2016; Zuern 2015). Violent conflict is multidimensional and multi-causal (Bishop and Electoral Violence in South Africa; Hoeffler 2016; Daxecker 2014; Hafner-Burton et al. 2014). In South Africa, a combination of trust and political factors, presumed breakdown in social contract with the electorates, ethnic rivalry, and identity politics have in one way or the other contributed to electoral violence (Breen et al. 2016; Lodge and Mottiar 2015; Southall 2016). Also, socioeconomic factors that include assumed marginalization, lack of or weak social cohesion, unfair exploitation of state resources and inequality have also contributed to violent electoral conflicts (Adelman 2015; Matthews 2015; Super 2016). Stewart and O'Sullivan (1999) submitted that weakness in the apparatus of governance could be a major factor that can create the conditions for violent electoral conflict. They submitted further and were supported by De Kadt and Larreguy (2015) and Paret (2015) that inability to accomplish an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence between different racial groups and the failure to accommodate growing demands for more involvement and participation in politics by the political fractured people's trust in government and governance. Undoubtedly too, factors relating to uncertainty in the polity and collective fears for the future, arising from the weakness of the state to deal with these concerns and perceived repression by the people may result in the emergence of violence responses by the marginalized groups, racial groups, and nationalist citizens (Andreasson 2015; Gaimo 2016; Mkhize 2015). Salehyan and Linebarger (2015) however argued that in South Africa, the struggle for power is divisive, militarized and intense. The 'them versus us' ideology is the kind of politics that broadens the fault lines. Ojo (2007), Chiroro (2005) and Lindberg (2003) have also argued that in all societies where democratic principle has been solidly entrenched, conducting elections constitutes an essential ingredient for the transition from one administration to another. Summarily, to them, a selection of a representative's by-elections remains an integral part of representative democracy that prevails globally.

The ubiquitous presence of electoral violence in South Africa politics cannot be overemphasized (Marks 2014; Straus 2012; Von Holdt

2013). It would be impossible to pretend that one individual can find answers or that there is any single issue that accounts for electoral violence in South Africa politics. First of all, what is it about electoral politics in South Africa that drives violence? Is it the environment, the candidates, the slogans, the campaigns, or the contest itself that produces violence? Or are the seeds of violence already on the ground even before election commences, in which case, do elections merely provide a spark? Is electoral violence to be taken as part of the conversation or the architecture of democracy in South Africa? This article thus provokes further interrogation of these issues so as to appreciate what can be done to minimize, if not totally eliminate the incidence of election-induced violence in the country.

The process underlying election in South Africa and Africa in general, especially since the commencement of the 21st century, has been characterized by violence (Cilliers 2013; Collier and Vicente 2014; Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero 2012; Hafner-Burton et al. 2014; Spears 2013). It is important therefore, to put on record here that though violence has been a longstanding feature of the democratization process in the apartheid regime in South Africa, its recent manifestations, especially since the birth of the new democratic government in 1994, has reached an unprecedented magnitude thus constituting a significant threat to the survival of democratic ideals (LeBas 2014; Mattes 2012; Paret 2015). Essentially, there is no doubt about the fact that electoral violence remains a major source of political instability in a democratic society with overt threats to the consolidation of democratic successes that have been recorded. Numerous scholars (Cole 2013; Collier and Vicente 2012; Fjelde and Höglund 2016) have argued that violence has become infused in political processes in most new democracies in Africa. For example, the 2008 Amnesty International Report, the violent struggle for power, even in states, which do not descend into armed conflict, continues to remain an important component of political life in Africa. South Africa, having survived decades of the apartheid regime that was characterized by the violation of fundamental human rights among others, eventually returned to democratic rule in 1994 and thus marked the watershed in the history of South Africa.

As indicated above, whatever name one might give it and no matter how it manifests itself, it would seem safe to say that the tendency to violence is inherent in the human genes irrespective of location. Against the background of the history of apartheid, violence in South Africa can be said to be a means of expression of grievance. The issues might be for one to ask then that what circumstances, values or culture might help tame the instincts that trigger violence. It seems safe to argue that in some instances, the quest for peace is probably far more compelling than the pursuit of war and that indeed, the resort to violence is often an attempt at bringing about peace (Kimbrough et al. 2014; Low and Davenport 2014). This article argues therefore that a quantifiable improvement of the social conditions of human existence is the best antidotes to prevent electoral violence and all other forms of violence. Therefore, an aggressive pursuit of the good things of life by the government is the best way to stem violence in any segment of a community. Violence persists because politics is the means for the allocation of resources for the improvement of the human condition (Hristova et al. 2014). When citizens perceive that those who govern them have not met their wishes and that these insensitive elites still insist on representing them, the temptation to resort to violence is often presented as a just recourse to seeking justice and fairness. Here, the perpetrators of violence do not see themselves as threatening the system. Rather they believe that they are correcting the system even by resorting to violence. Controversial as it may sound, their resort to violence is seen by them as possessing liberating and redemptive value. It is, therefore, important to underscore a historical fact about violence in South Africa since a violent environment has the tendency to produce further circles of violence.

Politicians are often inclined to take advantage of existing cleavages and fault lines among communities. A good number of the communities already possess historical prejudices that have laid them open to hostilities. Sometimes these have been based on old myths, which have now become embedded in the culture as a result of constant recycling. Myths of origin and ownership of land often set slaves apart from the imaginary and real princes, the royals from the non-royals, and the owners of the property against the settler. With constant repetition,

these myths have come to draw the invisible line of power among many communities. Perhaps all this would have been correct if the societies remained buried in the womb of time or if one lived in caves. But the emergence of the modern nation-state has introduced new instruments of modernization and negotiation for upward mobility (Ezrow and Hellwig 2014; Fernández Albertos et al. 2013).

Thus, the acquisition of education and the economic empowerment that follows pose new challenges. Often, the settler, slave, non-royals of yesterday, armed with education and economic power, decide to seek to take their place at the table of power. They present themselves for elections and then resistance against them comes to the surface based on these prejudices. Thus, ahead of elections, even if the community belongs to one political party, violence would almost be inevitable. Imaginary royals stake their claims, draw the battle lines and declare that there is no way a slave or an outsider can rule over the community. Alternatively, the fault lines could widen when these identities become the basis for political affiliations. In this environment, the conditions on the ground would already have provided the conditions for the likely eruption of violence in the course of elections.

As a consequence, corruption will become the natural fall out of the government that came to power through illegitimate means. Whether these means are violence or through rigged elections, the seeds of corruption have already been sown. It is only to be expected that the government will merely continue to use the most corrupt means to appoint its ministers (or draw its officials from the corrupt pool). Governance will then tend to deteriorate to the sharing of the booty of power by the victors. Thus, access to the honey pot of power will be based on the performance of those who worked for the Party. Usually, since the political environment would already have become a jungle, participants at the table must show evidence of the scars that they incurred in the course of working for the Party. Governance is gradually reduced to the recycling of resources among a tiny clique whose obligations include putting aside something for the Party. In the end, this scenario will generate violence because, like the inhabitants of the fortified city, those inside do not wish to surrender their privileges while those outside are determined by all means to gain entry.

Politics has become so associated with money that money has become a factor in deciding who gets what in politics. You need money to get in and when you have entered the temple of politics, the issue is more complicated. No one can imagine that politics or any aspect of life can be undertaken without money. The issue here is the corrosive influence of money in the system, a situation where its possession is a guarantee for access and lacking it forecloses the possibility of participation in politics. Beyond merely regulating its uses, the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) must find ways to ensure that it reduces the corrosive effect of money especially in an environment of such economic deprivation. The issue is ensuring that the rules punish undue influence of money and that thugs suffer the punishment they deserve for the verbal or physical violence they visit on other citizens.

Politics of Exclusion, Deprivation and Violence

Elections are regular rituals that sustain democracy and socialize citizens to imbibe the tenets of democratic practice, not a war of words that cast the rival as a demon (Bennett 1980). Truly, electoral competition presupposes that there will be a conflict between or among candidates from different political parties asking for the same thing, that is, the mandate to govern (Ginsberg and Weissberg 1978). But if one is not to be petty about this important matter, all persons functioning as party leaders need to imbibe and display a commitment to the principle of choice by the electorate. Ability of the citizens to choose correctly can be frustrated or destroyed by the demonization of candidates in a campaign that focuses more on personalities than programs or on images than issues. South Africa's democracy is too young (only twenty-two years after apartheid) for the political elite to organize electoral struggles only in the plot and imagery of conflict for conflict sake.

Inter-party conflicts during elections in particular and at other times in a democratic ethos are for the purpose of clarifying nationally important issues for the electorate, too (or "intending to") leading them to make informed choices about the future preferred by voters for themselves and their children (Pedersen 2010). The nation's multiparty system has not disappeared, and the struggle by various political parties for

the mandate to govern the country has not become redundant. In fact, the only thing that adds legitimacy to any political party's bid for power is the existence of more than one political party (Ben-David et al. 2008).

As mentioned above, marginalization and injustice make communities vulnerable to manipulation (Vertegaal 1999). It is easy to use deprivation as a tool for mobilization. An environment of deprivation has the tendency to make the scoundrel look like a hero of his or her community when they deploy their conditions of perceived exclusion as a rallying cry. They tap on these feelings and create the necessary conditions for the eruption of violence. These were the grievances that Hitler and his colleagues exploited under Nazism. They are the ones that the Hutu elites exploited. When people feel excluded, they may fall victim to the temptations to violence. When people are excluded, they lack a voice, and they quickly resort to violence as a means of expressing their frustrations and drawing attention to their conditions. As is known, somehow, violence induce a sense of bizarre glamour, creating its heroes and heroines. These merchants of violence are often enticed by politicians who wish to use them as agents of terror. Over time, they become very powerful and seemingly indispensable. As a reward for their hard work, they often end up with a seat at the table of power. The quality of their weapons changes with time and sooner than later, these thugs become the politician's special squad or private army. They wield more power than the regular security agencies, and they remain a threat to any hope for peaceful elections. Gradually, they make a bid for the top job itself and their success officially elevates violence to the table of power.

In addition, very often, the members of the police force suffer from two problems. First, they become so compromised through their allegiance to the government in power that they believe their job is mainly to secure the government of the day or protect the President. Everyone in the opposition, therefore, becomes more or less an enemy of the state. Secondly, the police often suffer from a lack of capacity to enforce the law. Again, often, there is a conflict of roles between the various security agencies as to who is expected to do what. Allegations of corruption against the police and other security agencies are often common. Often there are com-

plaints of lack of clear rules and regulations guiding the performances of these institutions and how they relate to the IEC. Apparently, weak security agencies with no clear roles cannot deter violence in the course of elections. The persistence of violence in almost every area of the national life is a symptom of the weakness of the apparatus of the state. Electoral violence is merely an extension of a series of expressions of violence arising from the widespread frustration stemming from joblessness, lack of infrastructure, weakness and corruption of state institutions, poverty and so on. A country that is unable to meet its obligation to its citizens loses any right to make citizens comply with basic tenets of human conduct and decency. Consequently, electoral violence is in many instances another expression of the violence that is already extant in the domestic, social and other facets of one's lives. One must, therefore, take the issues together and appreciate the fact that every effort must be made by the state to ensure that citizens imbibe the values of fairness, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. But these will not happen if the state does not fulfil its obligations to its citizens as a source of security and welfare.

CONCLUSION

The researchers have tried to argue in this article that there is a need to understand the forces that drive violence before it can be situated in the arena of politics or elections. In themselves, elections ought to be merely a mechanism for making it possible for persons to compete and win the right to hold certain public offices. Sadly, elections have become the greatest threat to the democratic ethos in South Africa. The reasons for the violence in South Africa political system are easy to understand. Seeking public office is simply the easiest and cheapest way for self-enrichment. The same people who are in politics today are the same ones who serve any cause that advances their quest for personal wealth.

The researchers have not concluded in this paper that electoral violence conflict in South Africa can exhaustively and exclusively be attributed to the disappointment of the masses in democracy and democratic institutions. This article concluded that the incompetence of democratic process, democratic ideals, and democrat-

ic institutions had provided the platform for people to ventilate grievances, frustrations, struggles, confrontations, competition and interactions that promote violent electoral protests. To prevent violent electoral protests and safeguard a permanent national peace, strong institutions that will deal with the perpetrators of electoral violence must accompany strong institutions to establish and implement the rules and regulations of the game of politics and guarantee an inclusive governance to reduce the rate of poverty and unemployment in South Africa. The democratic ethos serves humanity as a conveyor belt for almost all the basic needs for order, peace, and tranquility must also be guaranteed. Politicians must also be reminded that politics was never meant to be a war nor was its tree intended to be watered with the blood the citizens. The pathetic greed of the South African politician may strip the nation of its very envious glory.

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