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On the Edge: Delays in Election Results and Electoral Violence in Sub-Sahara Africa

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Abstract

Does the length of time passing between elections and the announcement of elections results increase the risk of post-election violence? The declaration of official election results is a crucial moment in the electoral cycle. When electoral management bodies (EMBs) take longer than expected to announce official election results, it can signal to the opposition that the election is being stolen. Following this logic, this paper argues that the length of time between elections and the announcement of the official results acts as a signal of possible voter fraud, thereby increasing incentives for post-election violence. Hence, the paper hypothesises that a long length of time between elections and the announcement of official results increases the risk of post-election violence. This hypothesis is examined with an original dataset of election results declarations in African countries from 1997 to 2022. After controlling for important confounders that could influence delays in reporting and violence, the article empirically demonstrates that a longer length of time between elections and the announcement of official election results increases the risk of post-election violence. In doing so, this paper makes a significant contribution to studies of elections, and electoral violence. Its provision of a new dataset on election results declarations in African countries is also a significant contribution.

Keywords: Election violence, delayed elections, post-election violence, elections results declarations, announcement of elections results, Africa

Contents

Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
AED	African Elections Database
CENI	Independent National Electoral Commission (DRC)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECAV	electoral contention and violence
ELF	ethnolinguistic fractionalisation
EMB	electoral management body
EV	electoral violence
GDP	gross domestic product
GLS	generalised least squares
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change (Zimbabwe)
NELDA	National Elections across Democracy
RoW	Regimes of the World
SCAD	Social Conflict Analysis Database
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
ZANU-PF	African National Union Patriotic Front (Zimbabwe)

1 Introduction

Competitive elections are a key element for democratisation, while a good quality of elections strengthens the political legitimacy of elected leaders (Lindberg, 2006; Bishop & Hoeffler, 2016). In line with this dictum, several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), following the "third wave", embarked on democratisation in the 1990s. Although the continent's democratisation process has been characterised by a chequered trajectory, as of the year 2016, nearly all African countries had some form of multiparty elections, with some countries, for instance Ghana, experiencing electoral turnovers where power alternated between a ruling party and an opposition party (see Mechkova, Lührmann, & Lindberg, 2017). This positive trend re-echoes Larry Diamond's assertion that, in no doubt, there is now more political contestation and civil pluralism on the African continent than at any previous moment in its post-independence history (Diamond, 2008). Nonetheless, whereas most of the political leaders accept formal democratic principles in theory, in practice they nevertheless combine electoral competition with varying degrees of undemocratic electoral practices to shape electoral uncertainty in their favour (see Schedler, 2002; Levitsky & Way, 2002). Subsequently, several of the elections conducted are fraught with varied forms of electoral manipulations, including the prevalence of electoral violence, leading to a wide variation in the quality of elections (see van Ham & Lindberg, 2015; Bishop & Hoeffler, 2016; Birch, Daxecker, & Höglund, 2020). Various forms of electoral violence characterised more than half of the elections held by African countries as of 2012 (Straus & Taylor, 2012). Nonetheless, when the magnitude is considered, the deadliest and extreme forms of electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa have been post-election violence. Cases in point are the 2007 post-election mayhem in Kenya where nearly 1,500 people died over the course of two months; the 2008 Zimbabwe post-election violence; the 2010 Côte d'Ivoire post-election violence; and the 2011 post-election violence in Nigeria where at least 800 civilians died and about one million citizens were displaced in the days following the general election (see Dercon & Gutiérrez-Romero, 2012; Norris, 2012; Birch, Daxecker, & Höglund, 2020).

This paper focuses on the length of time passing between elections and the announcement of official election results by electoral management bodies (EMBs)[1] and its effect on the risk of post-election violence. The declaration of official election results by EMBs is a key stage in the electoral process. EMBs may take longer than expected to announce official election results. The paper argues that a longer length of time between elections and the announcement of official results[2] can have serious ramifications. It can signal to the opposition (rightly or wrongly) that an election is being stolen, thus increasing the risk of post-election violence. For example, in the 2018 Zimbabwean general elections, the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) alleged that the Electoral Commission had deliberately delayed the publication of results in order to manipulate them in favour of the ruling African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party. This escalated into a series of deadly clashes between the opposition and the ruling party (Winter, 2008; Torchia & Mutsaka, 2018; Associated Press, 2018). Similarly, election observer reports claimed that flaws in the vote tally, coupled with the 72-hour delay in the announcement of the final results, led to the Kenyan 2007 post-electoral violence outbreak, one of the deadliest instances of electoral violence ever experienced in Africa (Norris, 2012). Delays in announcing electoral results in African elections have become of such great concern to

1 "Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) are the central electoral authorities responsible for administering legal regulations and electoral procedures within the broader constitutional context" (Norris, 2015, p. 22).

2 A longer length of time between elections and the announcement of official results within the context of this paper is when the announcement of results does not take place within the time frame (number of days) within which EMBs are expected to announce results. The expected time frame may be de facto (based on convention) or de jure (as dictated by legislation).

international election observers that they now often urge EMBs to declare results as quickly as possible (Torchia & Mutsaka, 2018).

Yet, notwithstanding its central role in elections and the risk of post-electoral violent uprising, the importance of time passing between elections and announcement of results has gone unnoticed in the literature on electoral violence. There is still a lack of an attempt, both conceptually and empirically, to link the length of time between elections and the announcement of their results to the risk of post-election violence in the greatly increased literature on electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Existing literature has mostly been confined to the effects of competitiveness of elections (Laakso, 2007; Wilkinson, 2004; Höglund, 2009); ethnicity and exclusionary politics (Wilkinson, 2004; Cederman, Skrede Gleditsch, & Hug, 2013); electoral institutions (Fjelde & Höglund, 2016; Daxecker & Rauschenbach, 2023); the role of international observers (Daxecker, 2012); or to the intersection in the power structures of political institutions and informal institutions (Birch, 2020) on electoral violence. (For a comprehensive review of literature on electoral violence, see Birch, Daxecker, & Höglund, 2020).

Examples of literature that are closer to this paper focus on the direct link between the performance of EMBs and the risk of electoral violence (see, for example, Opitz, Fjelde, & Höglund, 2013; Ruiz-Rufino & Birch, 2020). Opitz et al. (2013) for instance, examine the role of electoral governance in defusing post-election violence following contested electoral results by focusing on the inclusive and partisan functioning of electoral management bodies. Ruiz-Rufino and Birch (2020) analyse the relationship between the performance of EMBs, power alternation, and the risk of electoral violence. They show that when EMBs are *de facto* autonomous, electoral integrity is upheld in democratic regimes. This, in turn, paves the way for subsequent elections that enable the alternation of power, and in turn, dampens actors' appetite to employ violence because of the expectation of power alternation (Ruiz-Rufino & Birch, 2020, p. 2). Nonetheless, these works did not analyse the effect of time passing between the elections and the announcement of the election results on the risk of post-election violence. We are, thus, still poorly informed about the link between length of time between elections and declaration of results, and the risk of post-election violence. This paper takes a step to fill this gap.

It is argued here that the length of time passing between elections and the announcement of results is an influencing variable, which induces the risk of post-electoral violent uprising. A longer length of time between elections and announcement of election results serves as a signal (rightly or wrongly) to the opposition that the results are being manipulated, which increases the risk of post-election violence. This relationship between the length of time from elections to the announcement of official results and the risk of post-election violence is tested using a new dataset covering Africa from 1997 to 2022. It will be demonstrated that a longer length of time between elections and the announcement of the official election results increases the likelihood of post-election violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. The results held when important confounders were controlled for, particularly the variables that might influence both delays in reporting the results and violence, such as EMB capacity, EMB autonomy, pre-election violence, and freeness and fairness of elections. The paper makes two contributions to the studies of elections, and electoral violence: First, it unpacks both the conceptual and empirical understanding of the length of time between elections and announcement of official election results, and the occurrence of post-election violence. Second, the paper provides an original dataset on election declarations in African countries. Details of this nature are becoming increasingly important for scholars and policy stakeholders covering African elections.

The next section, Section 2, discusses the concept of the length of time between elections and the announcement of results. Section 3 presents the empirical analysis, which includes a discussion of data collection methods, measurements, and empirical results, followed by remarks and the implications of the findings. The final section offers conclusions.

2 Length of time between elections and the declaration of results

Elections are complex processes that unfold across several stages (Norris, 2015). This paper focuses on the period between election day up to the announcement of results. Announcing results is a key moment in the electoral process, and the length of time elapsing between elections and this announcement is a critical and often tense period. Yet, in the complex process that unfolds across the stages of elections management, different factors are bound to militate against the “timely announcement” of election results.

First, the announcement of election results and whether this is done in a timely fashion can be conditioned by the broader context of EMB performance, that is, the autonomy enjoyed by the EMB and its capacity in conducting elections. The announcement of election results can be delayed when EMBs lack the autonomy to discharge their mandate. This can happen when incumbent politicians seek to influence the announcement in order to manipulate the results. It has been argued that the existence of *de jure* autonomy creates an organisational structure that grants EMBs constitutional and formal independence, which insulates the administrative agencies of EMBs so that they can operate at arms-length from executive meddling (Norris, 2015, p. 135). Under this organisational arrangement, and because EMBs are composed of non-partisan electoral commissioners and professionals whose operations are devoid of executive control, they can conduct and announce elections in a timely and satisfactorily manner (Hartlyn, McCoy, & Mustillo, 2008; Rosas, 2010; Bowler, Brunell, Donovan, & Gronke, 2015; Norris, 2015).

However, regardless of the level of autonomy, the functional effectiveness and capacity of EMBs – which include human, financial and logistic resources – can also have a debilitating effect by constraining EMBs in conducting and announcing credible and legitimate election results in a timely fashion (see Pastor, 1999; Norris, 2015, p. 133). The complexity involved in the logistic operation and bureaucratic nature of administrating election requires the deployment of sufficient resources, technical expertise, trained and experienced staff with the requisite skills, along with substantial financial resources and a budget to organise effective elections (Norris, 2015, p. 135; van Ham & Lindberg, 2015, p. 16). In developing countries, this poses a considerable challenge. EMBs operate on malfunctioning structures which limit their capacity to work effectively and efficiently. They are challenged with routine flaws and unintended maladministration, including human errors, logistic failures, insufficient technological equipment and technical know-how and, in some cases, inadequate and poorly trained staff unfamiliar with procedures (Norris, 2014, 2015). These challenges can lead to delays in the announcement of results. An excellent example of electoral problems that arise from happenstance and accidents or the lack of administrative capacity is the 2013 Kenyan general election. The electrical commission acquired a new highly technological voter registration and vote-count machine to manage the election effectively. Unfortunately, on the day of voting, voter registration and the vote-count device failed when polling day was halfway through. Hence ballot results could not be transmitted to headquarters electronically. Neither could electronic results reporting be executed since the system experienced a software glitch and was also abandoned a day and a half into count (Norris, 2015).

Another logistic-related problem that can lead to delays in election results announcement is state capacity in infrastructure. The operations of EMBs involve the communication with electoral officials in remote areas as well as the printing of elections materials such as ballots, voter information, and the transporting of materials all over the country and on an urgent basis (Pastor, 1999, p. 133). These tasks require a vibrant infrastructure including good roads, modern telecommunications, and transportation systems to deploy elections logistics to scattered and rural populations smoothly (Pastor, 1999, p. 133). Nonetheless, many countries going through the process of democratisation are confronted with weak infrastructural problems. For example,

during the 2011 and 2019 elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), polling station materials and ballots had to be transported to the regional voting centres by airplane due to the limited road infrastructure in the country and were then transported further to rural polling stations by bike, boat or on foot. The results were returned in a similar manner by returning officers when the elections were over, often not escorted by police, and in many cases taking several days to arrive (see van Ham & Lindberg, 2015; Aljazeera, 2019). This led, not surprisingly, to delays and the postponement of the announcement of official election results by the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) (Maclean, 2018; de Freytas-Tamura, 2019; Associated Press, 2019; Aljazeera, 2019).

Moreover, a deficient legal framework on election declaration can be a challenge. For instance, the absence of legal provisions that clearly stipulate how long it should take EMBs to announce official elections results after voting day can create conflicting understandings among political actors and EMBs. In addition, if the majority of citizens are uninformed about existing laws on the duration within which EMBs must announce election results, this can be a harbinger for confusion surrounding the expected time frame for the declaration of results. Several voters in developing countries still lag behind in formal education and are still inexperienced as to how to petition for redress of grievances instead of resorting to violence when electoral problems arise (Pastor, 1999). For example, in 2007, it took the Kenyan electoral Commission 72 hours to announce final election results. Commonwealth observers observed that Kenyans had significant concerns about the validity of the presidential results because of the 72-hour delay in declaring the election results (Commonwealth Observer Group, 2008). However, by law, the Kenyan electoral commission has up to 7 days after voting day to announce election results (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Similarly, in the 2018 Zimbabwe elections, two days following voting day, the opposition alleged that the Electoral Commission had delayed the announcement of the results in order to manipulate the election results. This subsequently escalated into deadly clashes (Winter, 2008; Torchia & Mutsaka, 2018; Associated Press, 2018). Yet, the Zimbabwe Electoral Act stipulates that the Electoral Commission has five days to announce presidential election results (Zimbabwean Electoral Act, 2005).

What is clear from these underlying discussions is that there are several factors – ranging from institutional capacity, resource deficiency, unintended mishaps of electoral maladministration, and a deficient legal framework to electoral fraud – that could cause the announcement of election results to be delayed. However, the announcement of election results can serve as a signal (rightly or wrongly) to political actors and their supporters, particularly the opposition, that the results are being manipulated, thereby increasing the risk of post-election violence. One main reason that can generate this perception is the difficulty of distinguishing between intentional and unintentional acts. The boundary line separating political manipulation and technical capacity are often fuzzy, and elections can fail for one or both reasons. Yet, what makes it more complex is that any of these factors could result from other purposeful acts; and official incompetence may facilitate intentional acts of partisan fraud and manipulation (Norris, 2015). In unconsolidated democracies, distrust in government to run a fair election often coexists with problems of capacity and incompetence: technical issues often converge into political ones. Violent reactions often break out at the intersection between political suspicion and technical incapacity (Pastor, 1999). As a result of this ambiguity and distrust, the opposition is more likely to entertain the fear of the government's potential to manipulate the EMBs (Opitz et al., 2013, p. 714). One party may interpret a technical or human error as politically motivated by its opponents (Pastor, 1999). As in the case of Kenya in 2013, challenges of this natures were not obviously intentional or strategic for electoral fraud. Instead, the problems occurred because of human error and the adoption of technical solutions that could not be supported (Norris, 2015, p. 148).

The argument in this paper is that a longer length of time between elections and the announcement of election results serves as a signal (rightly or wrongly) to the opposition that the results are being manipulated, which increases the risk of post-election violence. Undue

delays in announcing the count can sow suspicion about the fairness and impartiality of the rules of the game causing the credibility of the results to suffer (Norris, 2014, p. 12). When EMBs delay announcing official election results, the opposition may believe that the incumbent is poised to delay announcements of the results in order to influence election outcomes through strategies such as vote padding and results' falsification. This perception of vote fraud, whether right or wrong, can serve as a signal of election fraud inducing violent uprising from the opposition and their affiliates. Following, this, it is to be expected that post-election violence incidents are higher in elections in which official election results take longer to be announced. This expectation is consistent with empirical findings in the literature on vote fraud and elections (Daxecker, 2012; Burchard, 2015). Subsequently, the central hypothesis for this study is stated as follows.

Hypothesis: *The longer length of time between elections and the announcement of election results increases the risk of post-election violence.*

3 Empirical analysis

3.1 Data

To test the hypothesis, a newly created dataset on election results declaration in Africa was used spanning the period 1997 to 2022. It comprised 183 national elections of 40 Sub-Saharan African countries.[3] The focus is on Sub-Saharan Africa because of the region's suitability in the context of the argument. The continent is one of the regions that has experienced the most radical political changes during the third wave of democratisation, leading to the introduction of multiparty elections in the 1990s in most countries in the region, drawing some similarities in their history of electoral politics (Fjelde & Höglund, 2016). Most of the countries display considerable variations in the number of days it takes to announce electoral results. Moreover, even though electoral violence is a global phenomenon and not limited to Sub-Sahara Africa, data suggests that it is one of the regions where a lot of violence occurs during the election period (Birch, 2020).

3.1.1 Dependent variable

The outcome variable of interest is *post-election violence.* It is a count variable and includes all incidents of electoral violence that occur up to three months after the announcement of official election results (see Daxecker, 2012; Fjelde & Höglund, 2016; Birch, 2020).The definition of electoral violence in this study follows the definition by Birch (2020), which includes political violence that takes place during the electoral cycle and is linked causally to electoral processes, actors, and competition (Birch, 2020). To obtain data for this dependent variable, I relied on the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), Version 8 (Raleigh, Linke, Hegre, & Karlsen, 2010). ACLED is an event database that hosts disaggregated data on conflict events across Africa and other countries in the world. Although there are other important datasets, including ECAV (electoral contention and violence) (Daxecker, Amicarelli, & Jung, 2019) and SCAD (the Social Conflict Analysis Database) (Salehyan et al., 2012), ACLED was used for its suitability for this study. ECAV coverage starts from 1990 but currently ends in 2012. SCAD has complete coverage from 1990 to 2017. Unfortunately, underreporting is higher in SCAD comparatively to ACLED (von Borzyskowski & Wahman, 2019, p. 20). Moreover, ACLED has been largely used to code electoral violence as a dependent variable (see Daxecker, 2012;

3 We will return to a detailed description of the dataset when discussing coding for the main independent variable.

Bekoe & Burchard, 2017). ACLED covers 41 Sub-Sahara African countries. However, it was not possible to get data on the announcement of election results for any of the elections in Djibouti, and hence the 40 countries in the sample. Data for coding country-years in which national elections occurred were obtained from National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) and the African Elections Database (AED) (Hyde & Marinov, 2012; AED, 2012a).

3.1.2 Main independent variable

The main independent variable chosen was the *length of time between elections and the announcement of official elections results*. To code this variable for the analysis, an original dataset on election results announcement in Africa from 1990 to 2022 was compiled. The data currently includes, among other indicators, provisional and final dates of results declarations as well as the presence of stipulated *de jure* and *de facto* rules on how long EMBs must take to announce election results after voting.[4] The dataset contains the exact days in which elections are held and the exact days in which election results are announced by EMBs. To my knowledge, this is the most comprehensive dataset on the declaration of election results in Africa.

The dataset was compiled using multiple sources of information. These include NELDA, the African Elections Database, electronic archival information from international and local media reports from news agencies such as the BBC, IRIN News, The New York Times, local newspapers accessed via AllAfrica.com[5] and other available sources from the internet; election monitoring reports such as Human Rights Watch annual human rights reports, National Democratic Institute and the US State Department's Annual Human Rights reports.[6] Triangulating the independent sources has been very helpful in giving accurate and reliable data to help fill informational gaps. Having several independent sources to rely on is recommended for the accuracy of the information (Lindberg, 2006).

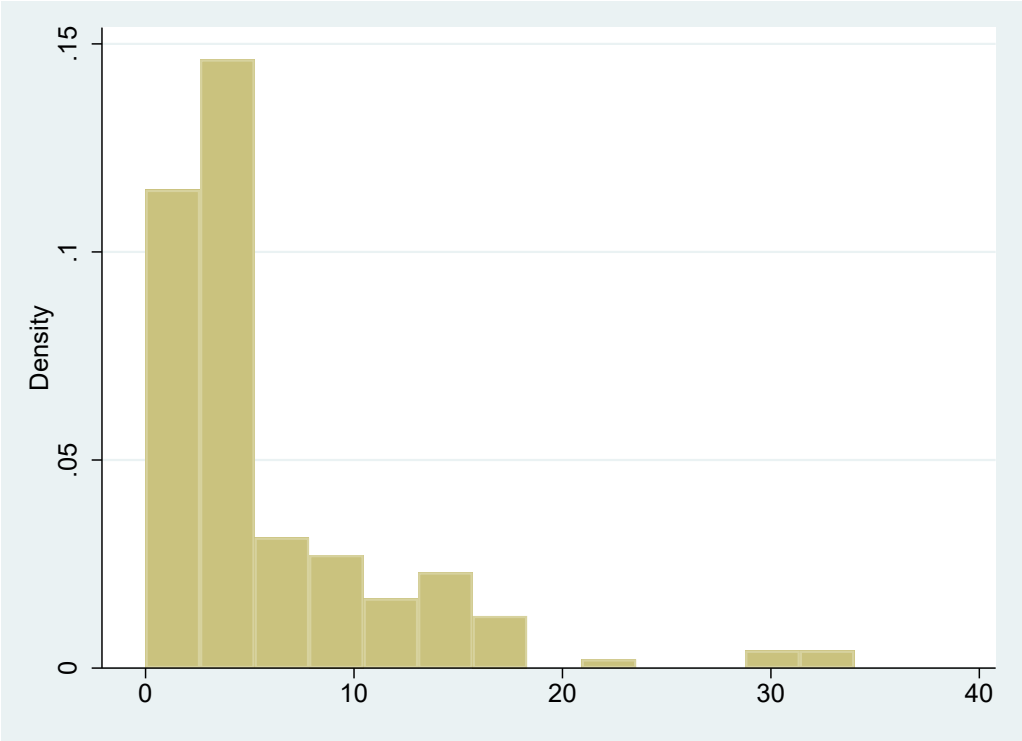
The mean for the number of days it takes until election results are declared is 5.7 days. Figure 1 shows a histogram of the frequency and distribution of the number of days it takes countries to announce election results in Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, we can obtain, from Figure 2, a first sense of the relationship between the length of time for the announcement of election results and the occurrence of post-election violence in a polynomial plot. As expected, the graph shows that the incidence of post-election violence increases along with further delays in the announcement of election results after polling has been completed.

4 We will return to detailed discussion of the dataset when discussing the dependent variable.

5 For further information, see the following websites: https://www.bbc.com/news; http://www.irinnews.org/; https://www.nytimes.com/; https://allafrica.com/; https://en.wikipedia.org.

6 For further information, see the following websites: https://www.hrw.org/; https://www.ndi.org/international-election-mission-chronological; https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/.

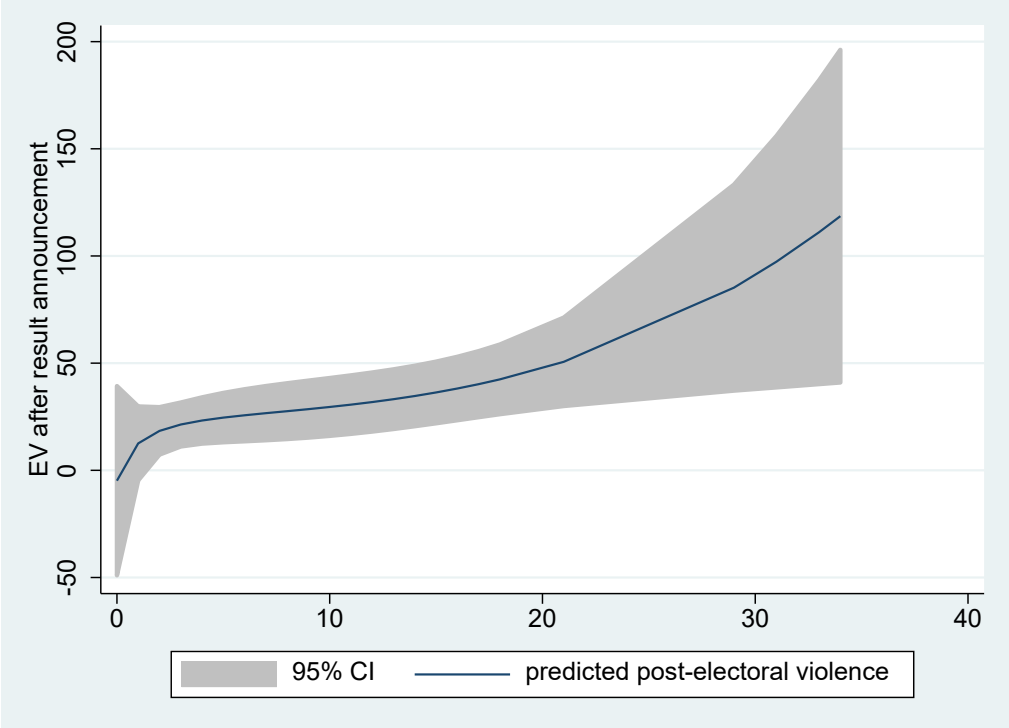
Figure 1: Distribution of number of days it takes to announce election results in SSA



Number of days up to announcement

Source: Author

Figure 2: Polynomial plot of electoral violence (EV) by number of days up to result announcement



Number of days to announcement of results

Source: Author

3.1.3 Baseline control variables

The first step was to include baseline controls in a baseline model. These variables are theoretically likely to affect the relationship between the main independent and the main dependent variables. The procedure began by controlling whether a country had a provision (*de jure* or *de facto*) on the expected number of days by which the EMBs must announce official election results after voting. Controlling for the provision of *de jure* or *de facto* on how long it takes the EMB to announce results is important in many ways. The absence of the law can be an avenue for exploitation by political actors of conflicting expectation about time length in which results must be announced. By combining *de jure* and *de facto* into a single indicator, the presence of stipulated law regarding when EMBs are expected to announce election results can be measured. There is not any existing database that captures this aspect of results announcement. Hence, this variable was also created by using local and international media sources, reports by election observers and available documents from election management websites on the internet. The challenge was that, even when the information is reported regarding the expected number of days by which the EMB should announce results, it was difficult to determine if it was a *de jure* or *de facto* provision – hence the usefulness of the combination of both into one measurement indicator for this purpose.

Second, a control for EMB autonomy and EMB capacity was carried out using data from Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem). To measure EMB autonomy, experts were asked to evaluate: "Does the Election Management Body (EMB) have autonomy from the government to apply election laws and administrative rules impartially in national elections?" Answers could be given on a 5-point scale varying from "No. The EMB is controlled by the incumbent government, the military, or other *de facto* ruling body" to "Yes. The EMB is autonomous and impartially applies elections laws and administrative rules" (Coppedge et al., 2023, p. 64). To measure EMB capacity, experts were asked to evaluate: "Does the Election Management Body (EMB) have sufficient staff and resources to administer a well-run national election?" Answers could be given on a 5-point scale varying from "No. There are glaring deficits in staff, financial, or other resources affecting the organisation across the territory" to "Yes. The EMB has adequate staff and other resources to administer a well-run election" (Coppedge et al., 2023, p. 64). The V-Dem further converted the ordinal scales to intervals by the measurement model. For the purpose of this paper, the interval scale is used. Controlling for these two variables is important because, as we argued earlier, the intuition of delay in announcement and manipulation is often associated with EMB autonomy, competence, and capacity.

One controlled for the perception about the level of freeness and fairness of the elections using the Elections Free and Fair measure from the V-Dem database. To measure the freeness and fairness of the election, experts were asked to evaluate: "Taking all aspects of the pre-election period, election day, and the post-election process into account, would you consider this national election to be free and fair?" Answer categories varied on a 5-point scale from "No, not at all. The elections were fundamentally flawed, and the official results had little if anything to do with the 'will of the people' (i.e., who became president; or who won the legislative majority)" to "Yes. There was some amount of human error and logistical restrictions, but these were largely unintentional and without significant consequences" (Coppedge et al., 2023, p. 70). The V-Dem further converted the ordinal scales to intervals by the measurement model. For the purpose of this paper, we used the interval scale. The "free and fairness" variable is very important considering the focus of this research. Because of the belief that unfair elections can trigger post-election violence, one would expect that violence is likely to be higher when elections are not free and fair.

Competitiveness of elections can increase the incentives for election violence, especially when the race is very close (Höglund, 2009; Straus & Taylor, 2012; Hafner-Burton, Hyde, & Jablonski, 2014; Fjelde & Höglund, 2016). Whilst the closeness of the race may mean that it takes longer to ascertain clear results, parties' expectations of victory raise the stakes of agitation when the

announcement of results is prolonged. The variable used to measure party competition is the margin of victory between the largest political party and the second largest political party. This variable was obtained by computing the margin of victory of the main two political parties – thus the vote share of the largest vote-getter and the second-largest vote-getter of the presidential elections using data from V-Dem (Coppedge et al., 2023, p. 83) and, in a few cases where data was not available, it is supplemented here with data from the African Elections Database (AED, 2012b). The variable is then reversed to ensure a higher score indicates a higher level of competition.

Furthermore, pre-Election violence can extend to the post-election cycle (Straus & Taylor, 2012). The perception of manipulation in the length of time until results are announced can result from pre-election intimidation by the opposition. Severe pre-election violence can lead to anticipation of post-election violence by EMBs, leading to a longer length of time in announcing election results. Pre-election violence was controlled for using data from ACLED. For a violent activity to be considered pre-electoral violence, we defined this as six months before the election took place (Straus & Taylor, 2012). A dummy variable was also created to control for whether elections were held concurrently with legislative elections or separately. Finally, controlling for the electoral system was important because differences in the electoral system may also be linked to the risk of electoral violence. From the literature, unlike majoritarian electoral systems, proportional electoral systems provide opportunities for smaller and weaker parties which reduces the incentives for violence. Fjelde and Höglund (2016) demonstrate both theoretically and empirically that the use of violent electoral manipulation tactics is shaped by the high stakes put in place by majoritarian electoral institutions. According to them, opposition parties often demand that proportional electoral rules be used because they believe them to produce fairer outcomes of representation. Electoral systems were thus controlled for here by including a categorical variable from the V-Dem. To measure the type of electoral system, experts were asked to evaluate: “What was the electoral system used in this election for the lower or unicameral chamber of the legislature?” Answer categories varied on a four-point scale from “0: Majoritarian”, “1: Proportional”, “2: Mixed” to “3: Other (for example, single non-transferable voting, limited voting)” (Coppedge et al., 2023, p. 84). None of the elections in the sample included any of the third category.

3.1.4 General control variables

Apart from the controls included in the baseline, literature suggests other explanatory factors likely to affect the occurrence of electoral violence in general. To test the robustness of the results, we included variables such as ethnic fractionalisation; regime type; gross domestic product (GDP) per capita; and population size. GDP per capita was included to control for the level of economic development. It was measured using data from the World Bank Indicators (World Bank, 2023). Furthermore, studies suggest that rapid population growth, when not balanced with economic growth, may influence the onset of conflict (see Collier, 2009; Acemoglu, Fergusson, & Johnson, 2017). We controlled for population size using data from the UN World Population Prospects.[7] Some studies argue that, in ethnically diverse countries, politicians can strategically instigate inter-ethnic riots for electoral support (Wilkinson, 2004), or that ethnic groups may resort to conflict when they feel excluded from power by competitive elections (Cederman et al., 2013; Fjelde & Höglund, 2016). Therefore, a higher degree of ethnic diversity is expected to be associated with a higher likelihood of electoral violence. The current study measured this using Roeder’s (2001) ethnolinguistic fractionalisation (ELF) indicator. Large numbers in ELF indicate greater ethnic diversity.

7 For further information, see UN Population Prospects at http://data.un.org/Explorer.aspx?d=30&f=docID:265.

Finally, the V-Dem's Regimes of the World (RoW) measure was used to control for regime type. The variable was lagged (t-1), indicating that the variable was measured one year before the elections. The RoW measure asked experts to answer the question: "How can the political regime overall be classified considering the competitiveness of access to power (polyarchy) as well as liberal principles?" Answers could be given on a four-point scale varying from "0: Closed autocracy", "1: Electoral autocracy", "2: Electoral democracy" to "3: Liberal democracy" (Coppedge et al., 2023, p. 286). Regime type was controlled for because it was to be expected that in democracies (for instance, in a liberal democracy) where formal institutions were strong, political actors would not be able to manipulate electoral laws and administration or to intimidate in general. Such behaviour would be denounced and sanctioned. The manipulation of election laws and administration may only be a manipulative strategy available in more hegemonic electoral authoritarian regimes where state bureaucracy is more vulnerable to partisan capture (van Ham & Lindberg, 2015). Accordingly, public disaffection with any perceived electoral malpractices is more likely to be channelled through democratic procedures for redress in advanced democracies. However, in less consolidated democracies (for example, electoral autocracies) perceptions about delays in announcement and electoral fraud can trigger a violent protest among the supporters of losing parties.

3.2 Results

To estimate the effects of the length of days from election day to the announcement of the results on electoral violence, we employed the random effect panel data regression model. The random effects model was used because the available data was unstructured panel data. When the effects were also estimated with a fixed effect model, the results were similar (See Table A1 in Appendix). Table 1 reports the results of the analyses in the two models – baseline and full models. In the baseline model, the hypothesis was tested by restricting control variables to mainly those that were likely to affect the relationship between the main independent and dependent variables. In the full model, we extended the baseline model to include explanatory variables likely to affect electoral violence in general. The results in both models confirmed the theoretical expectation about the relationship between the length of time between elections and the official announcement of results and the risk of post-election violence. In both models, a longer length of time between elections and the announcement of results was consistent and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) with positive coefficients, positing that the probability of post-election violence increases in elections whose results take longer to be announced. In the full model, the results for longer length of time between elections and the announcement of results remained qualitatively the same, indicating the robustness of the results even when all possible alternative controls were added to the model.

The results did not show statistical support for EMB autonomy and EMB capacity and free and fairness of elections, although the direction of the coefficient signs of EMB capacity and free and fairness of elections were negative, implying that those of EMB capacity and free and fairness of elections were likely to reduce the likelihood of post-election violence. The coefficient signs of EMB autonomy pointed in an unexpected direction, which is more likely to resonate with the complexity and ambiguity of the EMB autonomy measure (see Hartlyn et al., 2008; Birch, 2008; Norris, 2015). On the other hand, the support gained by the length of time in announcing results reinforces the importance of the measures as an influencing variable in predicting post-election violence. This finding is in line with the initial theoretical expectation that the perception of elections being manipulated increases the incentive for violence. When elections are deemed free and fair, they are most likely to reduce election violence. Pre-election violence is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and positively associated with the likelihood of post-election violence following the announcement of results. This is in line with existing findings that suggest that pre-election violence is likely to be extended to the post-election period. It is also likely that, when

there is pre-election intimidation, the suspicion of vote fraud increases when the length of time to announce election results is prolonged.

The expectation that a close race (competitiveness) would increase electoral violence during the length of time between elections and the announcement of results did not gain statistical significance but *was* positively associated with incentives for election violence. Both majoritarian and proportional electoral systems did not render any support. In the full model, except GDP per capita, all the other variables included did not provide support. The GDP is significant ($p < 0.01$) with an unexpected positive coefficient. The relationship suggests that at higher income, the probability of violence is higher. One way to interpret the direction of the GDP within the context of this study could be that countries in developing democracies with higher resources are more likely to engage in election manipulation strategies which can include bribing election administration officials, among others. Indeed, Collier and Vicente empirically find that strong incumbents in corrupt, but natural resource-endowed countries would engage in vote fraud instead of violent intimidation (Collier & Vicente, 2012).

In sum, the findings on some of the controls in the models are evidence in favour of their theoretical relevance to the study of electoral violence. They also show the dynamics of electoral violence is multifaceted. Therefore, their inclusion is important to isolate their effects on the models from those related to that of the length of the announcement.

Table 1: Random-effects generalised least squares (GLS) regression: length of announcement and post-EV

EV after results announcement	Baseline model 1		General model 2	
Length of announcement	1.696***	(0.539)	2.188***	(0.593)
EMB capacity	-1.696	(5.145)	-2.193	(5.748)
EMB autonomy	3.624	(5.641)	5.893	(6.169)
Free and fair elections	-2.866	(5.473)	-2.808	(5.613)
Competitiveness	0.137	(0.145)	0.215	(0.149)
Pre-election violence	0.503***	(0.0284)	0.486***	(0.0306)
Concurrent elections	-0.819	(6.636)	-2.102	(6.982)
Announcement days stipulated?	3.650	(7.282)	13.13	(8.176)
Majoritarian electoral system	9.773	(8.290)	12.41	(8.578)
Proportional electoral system	2.392	(9.241)	0.928	(9.382)
Electoral autocracy lagged			4.522	(10.39)
Electoral democracy lagged			2.606	(11.53)
Liberal democracy lagged			-6.478	(18.43)
GDP per capita logged			12.23***	(4.716)
Population size logged			3.375	(3.414)
Ethnic fractionalisation			-12.76	(20.54)
Constant	-26.45**	(12.39)	-161.1***	(51.96)
Observations	183		183	
Adjusted R^2				

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Author

3.2.1 Caveats and robustness

In this article, it has been demonstrated that a longer length of time between elections and the announcement of official results increases the incentives for, and recourse to, post-election violence. However, electoral violence is a complex phenomenon considering the intricate nature of the African electoral process. This impels us to be cautious in our interpretation. In this section, we discuss some of the likely potential concerns and limitations that are likely to arise. We also discuss robustness checks that are included to mitigate those potential concerns.

3.2.1.1 Data structure and limitations

First, an important point of data concern might be dependencies because of the nature of the data used in this study – unstructured and short panel data. This potential concern has been addressed within the panel by estimating random effect models to account for unspecified country-level effects that could potentially bias the estimates (Bekoe & Burchard, 2017). Relatedly, many of the countries in the sample did not have a legal provision that stipulates how long it must take their EMBs to announce election results. A variable on this would have allowed us to measure the number of days stipulated (*de jure*) for the EMBs to announce official election results. This can appropriately account for whether the EMBs exceed their legally specified time frame for the length of time in the announcement of election results to be considered long or not. However, this is currently not possible as there is a lack of data on this. The closest we could reach was to include a dummy variable to test whether a country had such a law (*de jure* or *de facto)* or not.

3.2.1.2 Endogeneity and reverse causality

In a study of this nature, concerns about endogeneity and omitted variables might be raised. For example, it could be that both a prolonged length of results announcement and conflict are due to other factors. In this situation, approaches such as matching, and proper specification of control variables could help mitigate potential endogeneity. However, matching techniques only correct for selection driven solely by observable factors (Flores & Nooruddin, 2012). In this case, properly specifying control variables in the model as has been done should engender results that are broadly similar to matching techniques (Flores & Nooruddin, 2012). There is also a potential concern about reversed causality as to whether the anticipation of a violent reaction to a voting result can prompt the electoral management board to hold back announcing the winner until it is certain the count is correct. While this might likely be one of the limitations of the study, pre-election violence or close electoral competition could be potential indicators for the anticipation of violent reaction. Among other controls, these two indicators are included to control for this effect.

4 Conclusions

The length of time between elections and the announcement of official election results is an important predictor of post-election violence in the electoral process. This paper has made the first attempt to conceptualise and shed empirical light on the length of time between elections and the announcement of elections results and the occurrence of post-election violence following the announcement of election results. It was found that a longer length of time between elections and the announcement of election results is positively related to post-election violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Each additional day in announcing election results is associated with a probability of increase in the incidence of post-election violence. This suggests that a longer length of time between elections and the announcement of election results can serve as a signal (rightly or wrongly) to the opposition that the results are being manipulated, thereby inducing the risk of post-elections violence.

Yet, whilst this study enriches our understanding of how the length of time passing between elections and the announcement of election results is related to the occurrence of post-electoral violence, it is important to be cautious about potential limitations likely to be imposed on some of the findings. Limitations because of the data structure, endogeneity, and reverse causality are important concerns, considering the complexity of electoral violence and the intricate nature of the African electoral process. This paper has made some attempts to mitigate such problems. Nonetheless, the length of time passing between elections and the announcement of official election results still demonstrates its importance as a predictor of post-election violence in the post-vote period.

The two main policy concerns here are that, first, different stakeholders, including development partners, should be wary of potential post-election violence as waiting for the announcement of election results drags on. The second important policy issue for stakeholders to consider is the fact that many countries still do not have legal provisions that stipulate how long it must take their EMBs to announce election results. The data in this paper focused on African countries where many regimes are still considered electoral authoritarian regimes. The argument of this paper is, therefore, more suitable for electoral authoritarian regimes where the rule of law is weak enough to allow the potential manipulation by incumbents.

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Appendix

Table A1: Fixed-effects GLS regression: length of announcement and post-EV

EV after results announcement	Baseline Model1		General Model3	
Length of announcement	3.417***	(0.803)	3.498***	(0.843)
EMB capacity	-5.791	(9.525)	-6.850	(9.882)
EMB autonomy	7.150	(9.225)	4.913	(9.578)
Free and fair elections	-9.781	(7.350)	-8.842	(7.530)
Competitiveness	0.159	(0.205)	0.154	(0.207)
Pre-election violence	0.528***	(0.0357)	0.494***	(0.0403)
Concurrent elections	-3.437	(10.43)	-5.545	(10.82)
Majoritarian electoral system	-22.51	(25.47)	-11.49	(26.28)
Proportional electoral system	-30.28	(32.65)	-25.88	(33.23)
Electoral autocracy lagged			6.842	(12.55)
Electoral democracy lagged			7.762	(14.59)
Liberal democracy lagged			7.141	(26.79)
GDP per capita logged			4.827	(18.31)
Population size logged			25.80	(17.21)
Constant	-14.08	(23.26)	-303.3*	(157.8)
Observations	183		183	
Adjusted R^2	0.518		0.515	

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Author