



# **Voters' Perspectives on Elections (2011-2021): A Hermeneutic Study in Chadiza Constituency, Eastern Province, Zambia**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author CI designed the study, collected data, analysed and wrote the first draft. Author CT managed the analyses of the study and literature review. Both Authors read the final paper. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study explored voters' experience during elections from 2011 to 2021 in Chadiza District of Eastern Province, Zambia. The objectives of the study were: to establish causes of electoral violence, to describe effects of electoral violence and to establish mitigation measures to ameliorating electoral violence in Chadiza Constituency. This was a thematic analysis and used qualitative research method with 35 participants. In using the Hermeneutic phenomenology, the authors desired not to depart from personal opinions, experiences and value as aid to analyse and interpret collected data.

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Data was collected through interviews and Focus Group Discussion using purposive sampling. The results of the study were discussed in referential to thematic areas that emerged during data analysis and they established that voting experiences in Chadiza were characterised by electoral violence. The factors that caused electoral violence and effects of electoral violence were revealed by the study. The collected data helped in formulation of sustainable electoral violence prevention measures. The study recommended that the Electoral Commission of Zambia ought to bridge the gap between Ideal and real elections by applying appropriate measures that would lead to cost effective elections that over rides or reduce elections nullifications.

*Keywords: Conflicts; violence; electoral violence; political violence; mitigation; peace.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Electoral violence in Zambia can be traced back to re-introduction of multiparty participatory democracy prior to 1991 elections (Chali, 2018). Paolo (2017) says, the culture of conflicts started emerging prior to 1991 democratic election. The elections were marred with conflicts which led to violence. During elections, more cases of violence and destruction of property were recorded. Kawila, Mulubale and Muleya (2023) defines electoral violence as the use of force by a group with a political purpose or motivation or influenced by political matters.' It encompasses civilians or political rivals as well as violent demonstrations. In Zambia, even if we cannot be so conclusive with the causes of violence around election period but the suggestions are that, most of violence perpetrators are political players. Wahman, (2023) adds that, Electoral violence in Zambia had become a central part of political competition across the country due to its perceived rewards arguably the political and economic control. However, it was wise to explore voters' experience in Chadiza constituency from 2011 to 2021 elections conducted by Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ).

It could be noted that the study was worthy to be undertaken in order to elicit detailed information from voters in Chadiza constituency of their experiences during elections conducted by ECZ from 2011 to 2021. The study would help to promote active citizen participation by preventing electoral violence in any future elections to be conducted. Active citizen participation in this sense is the ability of the people to exercise and defend their democratic rights.

The main focus of the study was to explore voters' experience in Chadiza constituency during elections in order to enhance a deep understanding. However, a number of authors have tried to carry out their studies on causes of

electoral violence around urban areas. As Akpan (2015) argued that the causes of electoral violence are unfavourable socioeconomic conditions of young people including unemployment, poverty, lack of good education and access to modern facilities. As such many organisations have embarked on mitigation of electoral violence to ensure peaceful elections and close the disproportionate negative impact of electoral violence in society but to no avail. It is against this background that this study explored voters' experience during elections in Chadiza constituency, Eastern Province of Zambia.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Elections ought to be conducted in a liberal manner following democratic principles set out, where each political party unveil its manifesto to the electorates as stipulated by the 2006 Electoral Code of Conduct. Elections must take place in a suitable political environment where all candidates can compete fairly and electorates participate meaningfully (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2006). The Zambian Electoral Code of Conduct has further empowered the stakeholders such as political parties, media institutions, election monitors, election agents, Zambia police and other interested parties to ensure free and fair elections. These stakeholders have actively participated in the electoral process, since Zambia got political independence in 1964, but electoral violence ruin ideal elections enshrined in the electoral code of conduct. For instance, the case of Mumbi Phiri and Chilekwa Shabby Vs the people published in public domain. The facts of the matter were that the two were accused of having murdered a United Party for National Development supporter by the name of Lawrence Banda, during Council Chairperson By-election in Kaoma District in 2019. Even Bekoe (2010) confirms that, electoral violence was accelerated by political actors to purposefully influence the process and outcome of elections. The problem is that, electoral

violence may undermine civil and political rights leading to diminished trust in democratic process and institutions. This may lead to voter apathy and further threaten democratic practices.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this literature review, the authors interacted with other studies with similar focus on voters' experience during elections. Consequently, knowledge gaps were identified and could be filled-up by this study. In utilisation of Hermeneutics Phenomenological approach, it was important to note that phenomenological purists Transcendental Phenomenologist's argue against in-depth literature reviews because of the risk of increased researcher bias perpetuated by the influence from the literature. However, scholars with a more practical perspective argue that it is beneficial to "build upon earlier literature. This helps to set the platform for deeper explanation, conceptual development, and theoretical refinement (Creswell and John, 2022). To this effect, the study subscribes to the latter school of thought, in line with Hermeneutics Phenomenology, as this study sought to build upon previous work to expand the discourse highlighted above (Heindel, 2014; Creswell and John, 2022). Therefore, this was a study in retrospective. Learning from the past, inform the present in order to change the future. However, elections are Global concern, International organisations advocate for peaceful elections.

### **2.1 Global Electoral Perspective**

The United Nations (UN) charter stipulates how elections ought to be held in the environment that maintains human dignity. These guidelines should be so structured as to be unambiguous, understandable and transparent, and should address all components of an electoral process necessary to ensure democratic elections. Heywood (2013) tells us that, Scope of the legal framework of elections, generally refer to all legislation and pertinent laws and quasi-legal material or documents related to the elections. Specifically, the "legal framework for elections" includes the applicable constitutional provisions, the electoral law passed by the legislature and all other laws that impact on the elections. It also includes any and all regulations attached to the electoral legislations and to other relevant laws promulgated by various governments. It encompasses relevant directives or instructions related to the electoral laws and regulations

issued by the responsible Electoral Management Body, as well as related codes of conduct, voluntary or otherwise, which may have a direct or indirect impact on the electoral process.

A country has discretion in its choice of an appropriate electoral system. However, such discretion in choosing an electoral system is not unlimited and should be consistent with international community standards. Given the past tendency of many countries to adopt electoral systems which applied during their colonial periods or for other historical reasons, the review of a country's legal framework could usefully reflect on current cultural, political, social or other factors and realities. A meaningful review of a country's legal framework requires more than an examination of the relevant instruments' texts. An assessment is of little value, if the thorough review, the comments, the recommendations and the advice given are not appropriate and unconstructive. For example, Koko (2013) says, even if a piece of legislation delivers direct and serious criticisms assessment should be phrased to address the challenges of the task at hand. When reviewing a country's legal framework, all related legislation needs to be consulted and analysed to ensure that they do not conflict with one another and that they do meet international community standards.

### **2.2 African Electoral Perspective**

Generally, elections in Africa are characterised by electoral violence. For instance, koko (2013) a researcher from South African University explains that, from Algeria to South Africa, passing through Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe, election-related violence has imposed itself as a full continent of Africa's political landscape in the past two decades. The prevalence of such violence in Africa has led to the production of abundant literature dedicated to the matter. The central argument is that, although the patterns, causes and consequences of electoral violence do not necessarily follow the same trends in different African countries, there are commonalities in the types, causes and consequences of such violence on the continent (Fischer, 2002). While a thorough understanding of the patterns and causes of electoral violence in Africa constitutes an important point of departure in addressing the problem, an effective prevention strategy should embrace a multi-level approach targeting all significant stakeholders in

any electoral process, including the political leadership, the electoral management body, civil society organisations, public and external partners (Adolfo et al. 2012; Barber, 2013; Burchard, 2015). However, it should be noted that Africa consists of different sovereign countries. Therefore, it would be unfair to generalise or bundle all countries as one in terms of electoral violence prevalence levels.

### **2.3 Zambian Electoral Perspective**

Despite minimal electoral violence reports against Zambia, it is unfair to describe elections in Zambia as violent. The situation may not be as horrific as it is in other countries. However, before it becomes a full framed issue, serious interventions have to be implemented. For example, Deth (2013) carried out a comparative study of Zambia and other sub-Saharan African countries. In their comparative, it was revealed that, if measured in terms of violent incidents or fatalities related to electoral violence, Zambia does not stand out compared to other African countries. Fjelde and Höglund (2015) disclosed that, there are 22 countries in sub-Saharan Africa with high or comparable levels of fatal electoral violence. Compared to other countries on the continent such as Kenya, Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire or Zimbabwe, elections in Zambia have certainly been significantly more peaceful than the former. However, political party cadres are known to propel electoral violence in most of African countries. Zambia's case is not an exceptional.

Party cadres join political parties as a gateway to political connections and rent-seeking career. Cadres in the government party have been known to develop significant economic interests in preserving political power benefits. The economic incentives of cadres do not solely derive from one-time payments but cadres have also benefitted greatly from patronage politics in relation to government contracts and the ability to extract rents from urban populations without prosecution. For example, Skage (2016) and Wahman, (2023) had similar findings. Paolo (2017) urged that electoral violence is caused by seemingly political and economic gains by political players. Skage also mentioned that, Political parties had been known to organise violence through their political campaigns and to have built repressive capacity within their organisations by the recruitment of party cadres.

The hostile environment created by political party cadres may be the cause of withdrawal for many

people, who would have been in political arena, from political participation. In the Zambian Electoral Panel Survey (ZEPS), fielded early in the 2021 electoral campaign, respondents were asked to state whether they feared violence while participating in different forms of political activities (Lust et al., 2021). This data suggests that voters were particularly fearful of participating in highly visible forms of electoral violence.

### **2.4 The Elections**

Most countries have adopted democratic governance that calls for periodic, competitive inclusive and decisive characteristics of elections in good governance. However, besides elections benefits are dysfunctional of elections. For instance, Straus and Taylor (2012) explained that, elections have become an integral element of many United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions over the past decade and are today a major focus of UN operations in post violence regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq. In many post violence societies, elections represent a key step in a broader process of building political institutions and legitimate government. A common mistake is to hold elections soon after violence and before national political stability has been attained. In such a situation, elections may become a focus for violence, as the groups previously engaged in violence may turn to indulgence in electoral violence.

Although some generalizations are possible based on experience, what and how long it takes to organize credible, free and fair elections would depend greatly on what is there to contemplate on and resolve issues in the immediate post violence environment. A recent estimate of election violence across sub-Saharan Africa shows that majority of electoral campaigns featured some degree of violence (Straus and Taylor, 2012).

### **2.5 Electoral Violence**

Electoral violence is the off shoot of political violence, which usually occurs during election period. There are many definitions of electoral violence, Deth (2013) defines electoral violence as use of physical force intending to damage property, hurt or kill someone in order to influence electoral results. This violent act of some people could be against basic principles of any political party to form a legitimate government. Elections in good governance ought

to be periodic, regularly, inclusive and decisive to respect universal and equal suffrage. As a global document in promoting human rights, Universal Declaration on Human Right advocates for good governance and democratic rights by providing technical assistance to election officials; empowering the underrepresented to participate in the political process; and applying field-based research to the electoral cycle. The ability for people to participate in elections free from fear of harm is essential to inclusive, credible elections, and protection at the rights to human security and universal suffrage. As all people in society gain a voice in who governs them and how they are governed, we increase the chances that governments serve the interests of all people and protect them from discrimination, intimidation, and violence.

Elections in non-violent states are the source of ideas, policies and approaches which serve society better. They are such states alternatives to violence as they determine who governs the people. Contrary, the states that are at the centre of power and influence seek power at any cost for self-interest and gains and often use any means available to win elections. Therefore, mobilizing groups of people against each other in societies has sadly become a common tactic in electoral politics. Hate speech and incitement to communal violence are used in election campaigns in both developing and developed democracies around the world. What political leaders often fail to realize is that once set loose, these powerful negative forces are difficult to rein back in and they may lead to a spiral of violence and even mass atrocities (Walsh, 2013). Hate speech and incitement to communal violence in election campaigns violate the right to equality and dignity, the right to personal safety, the right to assemble and associate in the right to participate in elections.

## **2.6 Politics and Electoral Violence Relationship**

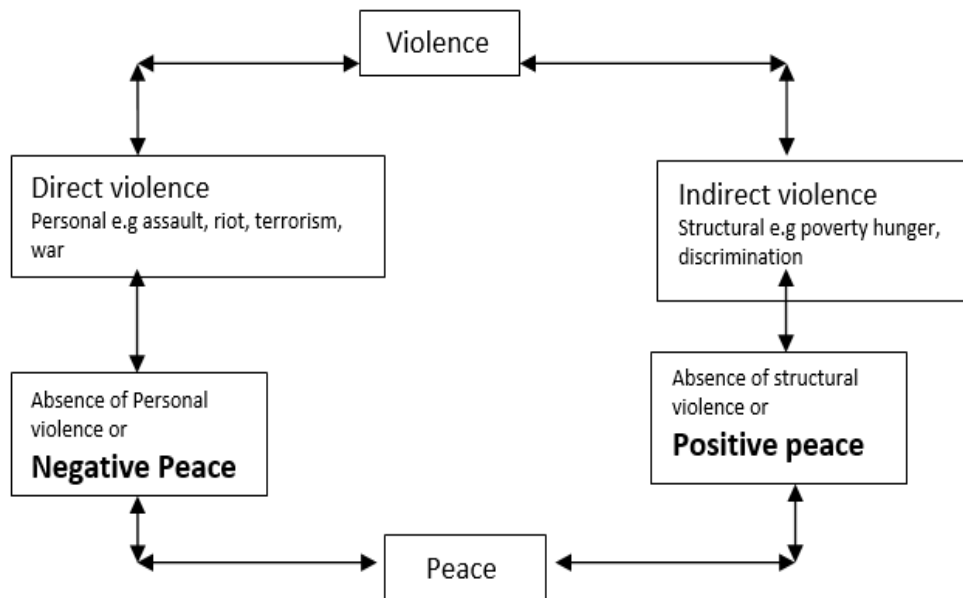
There is no simple definition to the term politics. Throughout the history of the discipline, political theorists and practitioners have offered contradictory and overlapping definitions of the term politics. It is therefore difficult to provide a single definition of politics that everyone can agree with. The best we can do is to explore salient working definition of politics. In this study, we would like to run with the most acceptable definition.

Political scientist Andrew Heywood offers a broader definition of politics. He defines politics as the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live (Heywood, 2013). He goes on to characterise politics as a process of violence resolution as other earlier consulted authors put it, whereby an attempt is made to reconcile rival interests. Although, in the end, the violence may not be resolved, politics is characterised by a search for such resolution. With its focus on violence resolution, this definition shares some commonalities with Clarke's, yet there are also some differences. Clarke (2005) defines politics as a particular way of resolving violence, the proportional sharing of power by different interests and narrows its scope by noting that it takes place 'within a given state.

Even if politics by definition is the solution to conflicts, it has contributed to electoral violence, a pernicious vice that continues to afflict most countries. It is a truism that the two are mother and the baby. Political violence may be characterised as an umbrella under which electoral violence shields itself. The motivation behind categories of violence is eminently political. It is an unfair way of acquiring political advantage by an individual or a group over others (Baya, 2017). The International community has set up a legal framework to guide and control electoral processes.

## **2.7 Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by peace model by Johan Galtung. In peace model, common terms for responses to conflict are conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation. Conflict management is the art of appropriate intervention to achieve political settlements. Powerful actors have the power and resources to bring pressure on the conflicting parties in order to induce them to settle disputes. Conflict management more commonly refers to interventions to control conflict, keep violence at bay or keep violence from escalating (Galtung and Webel, 2007;). Under this definition, conflict management is successful if violence is contained and symptoms of conflicts are suppressed. The term conflict resolution refers to efforts to resolve conflicts by addressing the underlying contradictions or incompatibilities of interest of the parties as guided in positive and negative peace theory.



**Fig. 1. Positive and negative peace**  
(Source: Galtung, 1985)

The idea of Positive and Negative Peace is foundational to modern peace theory and practice. Negative Peace is a state in which there is an absence of violence and war, which can be achieved by violent means and still have unrest. Positive Peace is the absence of violence and war and the presence of “positive components” that enable and sustain peaceful growth and peaceful change. Johan Galtung coined the terms. He identified “positive components” as the presence of equity and harmony, including the presence of restorative relationships, social systems that serve the needs of society, and the elimination of structural violence. Galtung called Positive Peace the “integration of human society,” because it embraces harmonious social existence. Positive peace is peace by peaceful means; it also serves to prevent future violence. As more scholars have engaged with this concept, Positive Peace has grown to include ecological justice perspectives. Negative Peace might be a ceasefire agreement during a war, or the presence of an armed force to dissuade violence in a situation. Positive Peace might be education to change the mind-set. This peace model helped the authors to establish mitigation measures to ameliorate elections in Zambia particularly Chadiza constituency.

Overtime Galtung developed the relationship between peace and violence. In making this relationship the basic aim is to resolve conflict.

He further stated that peace should be achieved by peaceful means (Galtung, 1985). This draws us closer to the study. Relating to Galtung there are two type of electoral violence which are; visible and invisible violence. Negative peace would only address visible peace while positive peace would address both.

The Fig. 1 shows the theoretical model guiding this study. The two trail methods of promoting peace in society are positive and negative peace. This mind-set changing information would be helpful to Electoral commission of Zambia and stakeholders who may later advocate for positive peace building during any form of elections. Through this knowledge, people may be aware of the Voter responsibilities and appreciate diversity in democratic dispensation. The teaching of peace and violence studies in Voter Education provides skills and awareness needed for critical thinking, analyse issues and formulate opinions.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study was aimed at getting in-depth insight into voters’ experience in Chadiza district, Eastern province of Zambia. This was a thematic analysis riding on subjective reality. The authors used qualitative method and positioning as an emic. This is consistent with Mumba and Alici (2021) who argues that the key philosophical assumption of a qualitative

research is that individuals interacting with their social world construct reality. This provided a profound understanding of a research problem where research questions were formulated to answer the "how" or "why" questions. The authors selected participants that were knowledgeable about the project. The target population was 44 779 voters presented by Chadiza district elections register at the local civic centre. The study had a sample of 35 participants 17 males and 18 females. It was guided by the saturation point and the desire to obtain in-depth insights. Twenty participants were engaged in semi structured interviews while fourteen participated in Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Both secondary and primary data collections were utilised. For primary data, the study used purposive and snowball sampling to select participants. The authors identified four lead participants who then recommended others who were contacted and requested to participate in the study. The authors triangulated data to allow improvement in the construct validity of the study and develop overlapping evidence. The authors used thematic data analysis to analyse qualitative data collected from interviews and Focus Group Discussion to come up with themes.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Location of the Study

The study was carried out in Chadiza district within Zambia. During period of study the district records indicated a population estimation of about 44,779 registered voters (census, 2022). Chadiza district is a rural district in Eastern province, located 72km south-west of Chipata and it stretches along the border with Mozambique, (Chulu, et al. 2021). Chadiza is one of the fifteen districts in the Eastern Province of Zambia. It is situated to the extreme south – eastern corner of Zambia. It lies between latitudes 13.75° and 14.30° South and longitudes 32° and 33° east. Hence, this research site was purposively selected to explore the voters' perspectives in rural area.

### 4.2 Demography Information of participants

The Table 1 gives the demographic characteristics of the sample, from which variables are presented and some bi-variety relationships examined. This information was

collected through information and consent forms that every participant completed prior to their interview. The categories that were collected were as follows: gender, age, ward of residence in Chadiza constituency, level of qualifications attained, and years spent in Chadiza constituency; the career was extracted from questions asked during the course of the interviews.

From Table 1, there are several cross-cutting issues that can be noted around age, period of living in Chadiza, political affiliation, educational back ground, gender, and number of times participated in elections conducted by Electoral Commission of Zambia. For example, the gender distribution was proportionally equal. Although male civil servants were reluctant and delayed showing an interest in participating in the study, they actively participated. The majority of the female recruited for this study were not political party members but keen followers of political scenario, whereas fifteen men recruited were from political arena and were active seasoned politicians. The age of participant was not much a reason of recruitment. However, 77% concentrations of participants were between 35 to 60 years old. Members of various political parties were more knowledgeable than non-partisan participants.

The data shows more political party members than non-political party members. The data shows twelve non-political party members and twenty-three political party members, Participants with political affiliation may be more likely to gather data during party primary elections, nominations of candidates, campaigning and voting unlike non-political party members that may only actively participate during elections. Table 1 shows number of participations in elections as a gendered aspect of the demographics. That shows voter apathy among women. Electoral violence may be one of the causes.

The collected data revealed causes and effects of electoral violence. When analysing collected data the authors objectively followed research questions to achieve research objective by starting a dialogue based on broad representations of electoral violence causes in Chadiza constituency. In the section below, participants' opinions point to a number of causes.



**Fig. 2. Map of eastern province**  
(Source: Lusaka Times)

**Table 1. Demography information of participants**

Gender	Age			Member of Political party		Education			Years in Chadiza			No. of participation in elections		
	>25	>35	<60	not	Yes	Crtfc	Dip	Deg	>5	>10	>15	1	2	3
Male n= 17	3	8	6	5	12	5	7	5	2	9	6	2	11	4
Female n= 18	5	9	4	7	11	1	14	2	6	10	2	12	4	2

**Table 2. Causes of electoral violence**

Participants of electoral violence causes	Male n= 17	Female n= 18	Total n= 35
distribution of campaign material	1	1	2
high unemployment levels	1	2	3
low literacy levels	2	0	2
pursuant of political and economical gains	12	6	18
votes counting process	3	1	4
votes rigging suspicions	4	2	6

### 4.3 Underlying Causes of Electoral Violence in Chadiza Constituency

Multiple realities appear to inform participants' representations of causes of electoral violence. Interviewees' common disclosures of causes of electoral violence in Chadiza were broad, yet they could be consolidated into the six main categories outlined in the Table 2.

Approximately 18 participants representing 51% associated causes of electoral violent to pursuant

of political and economic control, whereas 4 participants' representing 11% eluded causes of electoral violence to low literacy levels and distribution of campaign materials. Thus, public sentiments on causes of electoral violence in Chadiza was dominated by a wish to have economic and political control, other causes included: vote-rigging suspicions at the constituency totalling centre that attracted 6participants indicating 11% that emotional sentiments, use of vulgar language and physical attacks that were observed at the district totalling



centre at Chadiza Boarding Secondary School in 2021 General Elections. The majority suggested that televising of votes counting in district totalling centres should be introduced to promote transparency. For instance, the response below, narrates what happened at the district totalling centre in Chadiza constituency:

*There was confusion, Patriotic Front (PF) had a named candidate and United Party for National Development (UPND) had also a named candidate. During votes counting confusion arose because all the political parties knew that UPND candidate won elections. Somebody who was operating computers at the secondary school used a certain system to drop down UPND candidate. PF candidate who was coming from Copperbelt province knew that he lost. He went upto Nyimba district after knowing that he lost. But then there was a programme that PF candidate had won elections. Computers at the secondary school were shifted and taken to a point where they twisted figures.... (MP1).*

Participants suggested that more strategies had to be put in place to reduce suspiciousness at the district level. It was also reported that security officers did a great job by rescuing people that were badly attracted by a mob of people who were not satisfied with the announced election results. For example, it was reported that the community is largely disintegrated on political affiliation lines. Responses in relation to divisions on political grounds were common. The majority of participants suggested that politicians ought to be encouraged to re-unite after elections.

In the second part, the study dives into details of major causes of electoral violence according to the hermeneutics phenomenological data under the umbrella of subjective reality which holds that, electoral violence in Chadiza constituency was largely caused by desire to gain political and economic control. Concerns from participants were that, high unemployment level, socio-economic constraints were the causes of many evils. As spiritual and cultural tries to sharp the attitude, behaviour and character of people in society, lack of employment pulls these efforts backwards. From the data, there were

descriptions of kinds of electoral violence observed by participants by gender. Therefore, what stands out in Table 3 is a high concentration of responses describing kinds of electoral violence experienced by participants in Chadiza constituency from 2011 to 2021.

In Table 3 we can see that 19 people representing 54% of participants echoed the view that physical attacks were recorded in Chadiza constituency in the years under review. Only 17% indicated that conflicts end by exchanging vulgar language. Close inspection of the table shows that some participants indicated that conflicts were observed represented 28% that linked their claims to a number of narrated events in Mwangazi, kaluma and Chadiza wards. For instance, MP2 who first participated in elections conducted by Electoral Commission of Zambia in 1988 as a poll staff and a serving head teacher for a certain secondary school in Chadiza narrated an event that happened at the totalling centre when he went to witnessing consolidation of votes at the district level in Chadiza constituency in 2021 General Elections as Electoral Commission of Zambia Presiding Officer.

*It happened I think the last elections at the counting or totalling centre. When all of the sudden the totalling changed, candidate who was ragging behind took over some other candidate. It brought some misunderstandings. .... Mostly using of vulgar language and almost punch up it was only that the man who was behind the data processing was rescued by the police, (MP2).*

More profound for this discussion of electoral violence was the way in which MP2 in the quote above described an event as something disorderly in a place where people were expected to work peacefully. When conveying election results, electorates trust in Electoral Management body is vital. Participants mention that to have such kind of results was unusual and may lead to doubting of election's outcome. It is interesting to note in the extract above that society sets out what is 'normal', and it has to be attributed to peace of mind.

**Table 3. kinds of electoral conflicts and violence**

Participants' view	Male n= 17	Female n= 18	Total n= 35
Conflicts	4	6	10
Death	0	0	0
Physical attack	11	8	19
Vulgar Language	2	4	6

**Table 4. Effects of electoral violence**

Participant's view	Male n = 17	Female n = 18	Total n = 35
Creation of recycled politicians	1	0	1
Disintegration of communities	6	5	11
Lack of development	4	3	7
Lack of public participation in decision making	0	2	2
Perception of Regionalism	0	1	1
Use of small fire arms and machetes	2	1	3
Voter apathy	4	6	10

Participants indicated that, electoral violence was observed and some matters were reported to the police station and medical reports were obtained. Participants indicated by responding yes or no, twenty-five participants representing 71% of the interviewees agreed that the violence truly happened several times, whereas (6) representing 17% disagreed that, they had never witnessed such incidences, while 12% of the participants were in doubt. What came out interesting were the reasons that some participants, such as FP1, gave in her affirmation that there was a presence of electoral violence in Chadiza constituency. She narrated a scenario where they organised traditional 'Nyau' dance to spice up campaign. Suddenly a number of men came and whipped the traditional dancers who scuppered in all directions. There left spectators behind and that was the end of the meeting. In contrast, those who said there was no evidence of electoral violence in Chadiza constituency were confident. In this regard, MP3 identified as a Ward Development Committee members (WDC) in one of the focus group discussion argued:

*When there are political parties campaigning for example PF and UPND competing, their campaign is sometimes fair but certain individual from somewhere else they are the ones who come to fight. But because we work with village head men when we identify this we report the people involved to the security committee. ... Each section has neighbourhood security so if such kind of an event happens they arrest the culprit or call police officers from the Boma to come and arrest them, (MP3).*

The majority of the participants indicated there was a presence of physical molestation by the politically strong and the heavy masculine. Even though participants continuously acknowledged that there was electoral violence, very little is done to control the situation. The most striking aspect across interviews was that, inspite of various interventions to prevent electoral violence the problem seemed to be long

lasting leaving salient marks on society, FP1 observed.

#### **4.4 Effects of Electoral Violence on Chadiza Constituency**

A close review of participants disclosed that the major effect of electoral violence is the deconsolidation of the community at the expense of much needed development. Table 4 illustrates effects of electoral violence based on gender. The data further reveals that victims of electoral violence were reluctant to participate in public affairs.

What we see in Table 4 is that participants who suggested that the major effect was deconsolidation of society on 'political lines' were eleven representing 31%; whereas ten indicated 'voter apathy' representing 28% as one of the effects of electoral violence. It is apparent from this table that fewer participants pointed at creation of recycled politicians and use of small fire arms and machetes. The study also revealed that cadres militarised themselves by imitate army personnel. They would put on military like uniforms, boots and ballets. The use of military language as well as titles such as commander, platoon and many others were quite common. The study now turns to what motivates people seeking cooperation in Chadiza constituency to have a common voice to fight for development over other Challenges faced by people in Chadiza constituency. MP2 confirmed how electoral violence has negatively affected development of Chadiza district.

*.... yeah on the social perspective it has to some extent brought differences between people who may be friends or supposed to be friends. These differences are at the expense of development, (MP2).*

Furthermore, some responses indicated that during adoption of candidate in various political parties to represent any political party provided a suitable environment for electoral violence. The

artificial groupings formed by candidates inspiring to represent their political parties mostly take it personal and get physical. Similarly, some participants echoed the sentiment that women and children are the most affected in the revelation of electoral violence that range from short to long term. MP4 gives his views on electoral violence effects on Chadiza.

*The electoral violence had the impact on our community by instilling fear in our electorates. So, this is what caused people not to go and vote most of the times, more especially on the side of our women they do not like violence. So, wherever there is violence you will not find women. When women hear that, people were fighting or insulting each other that may cause voter apathy or low voter turnout. So electoral violence may be one of the causes of people avoid participating in elections..... (MP4).*

#### 4.5 Electoral Violence Prevention

Having presented effects of electoral violence in Chadiza constituency from the collected data, participants observed that electoral violence were detrimental to the constituency development. They proceeded to suggest provision of electoral violence prevention measures. The Table 5 indicates the prevention measures suggested by participants. The 35 participants were asked to mention atleast one electoral violence prevention strategy. The Table 5 shows their responses.

It was encouraging to note in transcripts that 11 participants representing 31% suggested political parties taking a leading role in electoral violence prevention as well as improving literacy levels was mentioned by 7 participants representing 20%. Besides the mentioned measures a male individual mentioned which were not common among participants, the defined deterrence from the application of both positive and negative incentives to alter the choices of relevant actors.

In the context of electoral violence, deterrence is a practice of disincentives application or restraining political parties from undertaking unwanted actions or transgressions such as ballot fraud, voter intimidation, or displaying violence evidence. This represented 3% (1) of the participants' choices of electoral violence prevention measures.

It was surprising from the data to observe that seven participants indicated that very few farmers around the area are able to read and write despite the increase in the number of schools in the district. However, some older interviewees expressed interest to enrol in a literacy class given an opportunity. For example, MP1 confirms that, improving literacy levels may be one of the tools that could be used to prevent electoral violence. So that people can read and understand the electoral code of conduct.

The remarks above demonstrate the lack of right and adequate information about civic issues and governance. Also, it shows the absence of individual analytical and informed based decisions. FP2 is a secondary school teacher, served as a presiding officer twice and narrated to the researchers how intergroup and social contacts would help to prevent electoral violence.

*Fostering interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice among groups may keep evil intentions toward one another. These intergroup animosities include partisan political divisions. By being in contact and communicating with one another, the groups enjoy the opportunity to appreciate their differences. This enhanced understanding of each other to curb stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice between groups. Evidence in general, moderated dialogues may build cooperation among peer political party leaders that could open lines of communication and contribute to electoral violence mitigation, (FP2).*

**Table 5. Suggested electoral violence prevention measures**

Suggested Prevention Measure	Male n=17	Female n=18	Total n=35
Deterrence	1	0	1
Forming Networks and Coalition	1	3	4
Improving literacy levels	4	3	7
Information Intervention	2	1	3
Intergroup and social contact	1	2	3
Norms and behaviour transformation	1	1	2
Political party mitigation	5	6	11
Presence of International observers	2	2	4

**Table 6. Access to information**

Participants responses	Male n= 17	Female n=18	Total n= 35
Easy	5	7	12
Difficulty	12	11	23

Most people in Chadiza lack access to information. Despite reports of improvements in information dissemination facilities, several accounts were given concerning limitations to information access. Participants were asked whether it was easy or difficult to communicate to people in Chadiza constituency. The Table 6 shows the responses collected from the 35 participants:

The data shows that 23 participants representing 65% denied having easy access to information and 12 participants representing 35% mentioned that it was easy. Both male and female mentioned that, majority of people had no access to direct information and that some politicians expressed difficulties they were facing to reach out to people.

The majority of the participants suggested that, there is need for informational interventions such as provision of information relevant to voters about electoral process and the benefits of electoral code of conduct adherence.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study explored voters' experience in Chadiza constituency guided by hermeneutic phenomenology, riding on subjective reality as socially constructed obtained by social interactions. The study found several causes, effects and prevention measures of electoral violence. One of common causes of electoral violence in Chadiza is the desire to gain political and socio-economic control. This desire has left the community in a deconsolidated state on political affiliations grounds. Many lessons were drawn from the analysis of data. The participants were free to express their election experience, where different participants shared similar events experienced in 2021 general elections. The study suggested elements and strategies that could be employed to mitigate electoral violence.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Further research works are recommended to illuminate the discourse on the Voters' Experience in Chadiza Constituency from 2011 to 2021 using the phenomenology approaches.

In view of the limited numbers studies done on Voters' experience in rural areas, it can be argued here that a lot more remain 'hidden' to a critical eye. To this effect, if Voters' Perceptions of election in rural Zambia are to be emancipated from societal bondage, more research should be conducted to uncover their hidden experiences. Further research works could be conducted in the following areas: Politicians Perception on solution to electoral violence, more women must be encouraged to contest for various political positions in elections, Create more jobs for youths by both public and private firms and Introduction of live transmission of votes counting from District and provincial totallingcentres in Zambia to enhance transparency. In conclusion we would say, there are a number of gaps in knowledge about voter experience in Chadiza constituency that follow from our findings, and would benefit from further research. The In-depth exploration of voters experience committed to electoral violence prevention would be helpful. Further research might explore effectiveness of voter education conducted prior to general elections facilitated by Electoral commission of Zambia.

## DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Authors hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

## CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

Consent was obtained from participants before engaging them. They were again assured that all the data shared would remain confidential and be used solely for this study and that anonymity would be observed. Ethical Approval was sought from The University of Zambia, Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies Ref No. HSSREC-2024-APR-006 and HSSREC IRB No. 00006464.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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