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Overview of Political Violence in Osun State, Southwest, Nigeria

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Abstract

Political violence around Nigerian elections persists in Osun State, yet empirical evidence remains fragmented. This qualitative study synthesises semi-structured interviews with party officials, community leaders, journalists, and security actors across multiple local government areas, complemented by documentary sources, and analysed using an inductive-deductive thematic approach. Four key findings emerge: (1) Patronage-driven competition, known as "godfatherism," restructures local loyalties and intensifies rivalries. (2) Youth unemployment and insecurity increase vulnerability, making youth more susceptible to recruitment for violent political thuggery. (3) Weak intra-party democracy, combined with winner-takes-all incentives, escalates tensions before and after elections. (4) Inconsistent security and justice responses normalise intimidation and reduce institutional trust. These findings show that the patterns vary by locality, actor, and electoral cycle, and are further influenced by media narratives and boundary disputes. The study offers a detailed, Osun-specific understanding that links daily political economy to episodes of violence and recommends actionable risk reduction pathways: increasing transparency and mechanisms for redressing grievances in party primaries, creating targeted youth employment programs coordinated with election cycles, forming local peace pacts monitored by communities, and establishing grassroots early warning and rapid-response systems. The findings support strategies for both state and civil society as Osun prepares for the upcoming elections.

Keywords: Conflict; Violent Conflict; Political Violence; Conflict Theory

Introduction

Conflicts in Nigeria often take on religious, communal, ethnic, or political dimensions and have been a source of great concern. This pervasive strife constitutes a major problem confronting the country's socio-political landscape. Political violence, according to Ogar, Ogar & Bassey (2018)[1], has been an endemic feature of many developing countries including Nigeria. While Nigeria

[1]Ogar, J. N., Ogar, T. E., & Bassey, S. A. (2018). "Ambivalence, Human Nature and Social Justice." UCT Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research, 6(2), 63-67.

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achieved independence in 1960 with minimal violence, the post-independence era has seen political violence reach alarming levels. Political violence associated with elections in Nigeria can be traced back to the 1959 federal elections organized during the transition to independence (Ogundiya & Baba, 2005)[2]. Since then, such violence has intensified, especially around elections, undermining democratic processes and stability.

Recent events highlight the seriousness of the problem. Human Rights Watch (2023)[3] reported 109 election-related deaths in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. These attacks, often by 'thugs' acting for politicians, left voters injured and intimidated, denying many the chance to vote due to weak security. Nigeria's history is filled with violent episodes and loss of life, often driven by ethnic, religious, and resource disputes. Deep issues like poverty, corruption, and social divides continue to fuel conflicts, showing the complex nature of violence in Nigeria. The southwest, including Osun State, has faced political and communal clashes, religious conflicts, and land disputes, often worsened by resource competition and group differences.

In Osun State specifically, a recent political crisis tragically resulted in the loss of multiple lives, revealing the volatile intersection of politics, governance, and security. This volatility raises urgent questions about the stability of the state's political environment and the resilience of its institutions in managing and mitigating violence. The following sections lay out the core problem this study addresses, the objectives and scope of the research, and the context within which political violence occurs in Osun State.

Statement of the Problem

The nexus between political violence at the national level, the Southwest region, and Osun State is rooted in Nigeria's complex security challenges and persistent political tensions. For decades, Nigeria has witnessed widespread insecurity and large-scale political violence, to the extent that generations of Nigerians have become more familiar with conflict than peace. According to the Global Peace Index, Nigeria was ranked 147th out of 163 countries in 2020[3], reflecting the country's ongoing struggles with safety, security, and conflict. The Institute for Economics and Peace notes that these challenges are driven by a combination of internal security threats, political rivalries, and socio-economic grievances that remain insufficiently addressed by the state.

In Osun State, political violence has become a significant concern, especially surrounding elections, and local leadership disputes. Tensions in the state are primarily fuelled by fierce competition between the two dominant parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), each accusing the other of instigating violence and employing thuggery to gain advantage. Smaller parties such as the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), the

[2]Ogundiya, S., & Baba, T. (2005). "Electoral Violence and the Prospects of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria." In G. Onu & M. Abubakar (Eds.), Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria (pp. 120-139). Abuja: NPSA.
[3]Institute for Economics & Peace. (2020). Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World. Sydney: IEP.

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Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the Labour Party (LP) have also been involved in these conflicts, though to a lesser degree. The volatile political climate has often led to confrontations that threaten public order and safety. For example, a recent crisis in Osun was triggered by a contentious court ruling on local government leadership, sparking violent clashes between APC and PDP supporters, and resulting in the death of a former local council chairman and several others (National Human Rights Commission, 2025)[4]. This incident illustrates how quickly political disputes can spiral into deadly violence, further entrenching fear and instability in the community.

Against this backdrop, the central problem examined by this study is the prevalence and persistence of political violence in Osun State, despite Nigeria's formal democratic institutions and peacebuilding efforts. The study probes the underlying causes and dynamics of this violence and asks why existing conflict mitigation mechanisms have been insufficient in preventing bloodshed. It also seeks to understand the implications of recurring political violence for governance, security, and development in Osun State. Ultimately, addressing this problem is critical for breaking the cycle of violence and fostering a stable political environment conducive to peace and development in the state and beyond.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of political violence in Osun State with a view to informing effective peacebuilding interventions. The specific objectives are to:

1. **Examine the prevalence of political violence in Osun State and the key actors involved.** This entails mapping out the frequency and forms of political violence since the state's creation and identifying the *dramatis personae* such as political party factions, "godfathers," youth militias, and other stakeholders who drive or participate in these violent episodes.

2. **Identify the root causes and proximate triggers of political violence in Osun State.** The study investigates structural factors (like poverty, unemployment, and political exclusion) and immediate catalysts (such as election disputes, hate speech, or legal rulings) that precipitate violence. By distinguishing between underlying causes and triggers, the research aims to clarify why conflicts escalate to violence in the state's political context.

3. **Assess the impact of political violence on Osun State's governance, security, and development, and evaluate strategies for prevention and mitigation.** This involves analyzing how recurring violence affects public trust, electoral integrity, social cohesion, and economic development. The study also reviews conflict management efforts by government agencies, security forces, and civil

[4]National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). (2025). Report on Osun State Local Government Crisis – February 2025. Abuja: NHRC.

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society to identify what has worked, what has failed, and what new approaches could reduce political violence.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

Conflict and Violence: Conflict can be defined as a disagreement or clash of interests between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who perceive their goals as incompatible and express hostile attitudes or take actions that undermine the other's ability to pursue those goals. In other words, conflict arises not merely from differing interests, but from parties believing that they cannot achieve their aims simultaneously, leading to opposition and potentially antagonistic behaviour (Pandeli, 2016)[5]. Conflict is a normal aspect of social interaction, and when managed constructively it can drive social change. However, when conflicts escalate without effective resolution, they can turn destructive. Violent conflict represents the most extreme stage of conflict escalation, in which parties resort to physical force to achieve their objectives. At this stage, disputes are no longer confined to dialogue or non-violent tactics; they involve armed confrontations, which in the context of national conflicts may lead to civil wars or insurgencies (Theophilus, 2020)[6]. Violent political conflict, or political violence, is thus understood as the use of physical force or coercion in the political arena, often to attain or retain power. Johnmary (2012)[7] characterises political violence as encompassing violent power struggles and crises of interest between individuals, groups, and state institutions in the process of acquiring or maintaining political authority. Similarly, Gurr (1970)[8] defines political violence as "all collective attacks within a political community against the political regime, its actors (including competing political groups as well as incumbents), or its policies." This definition highlights that political violence can be directed not only against the state or ruling authorities, but also between rival parties or factions contending for power. Common manifestations of political violence include election-related riots, assassinations, armed party clashes, terrorism, and state repression.

In the Nigerian context, political violence is often intertwined with other forms of social cleavages. As Oyeshile (2014)[9] observes, the nature of conflict in Nigeria has been exceedingly destructive, far from the idealised notions of conflict in classical theories where the clash of opposing forces could lead to positive social change. Instead, Nigeria's experience shows that protracted conflicts whether political, ethnic, or religious have tended to undermine development, aggravating poverty, and human suffering (Chukwuma, Duru & Oginibo, 2015, *as cited in* Oyeshile 2014). Indeed, prolonged violence has devastated communities, displaced populations, and strained local and

[5]Pandeli, K. (2016). "Understanding Conflict: Definitions and Dynamics." International Journal of Social Science, 4(1), 10-15

[6]Theophilus, A. (2020). Conflict Escalation and Violence in Contemporary Africa. Lagos: University Press.

[7]Johnmary, A. (2012). "Political Violence: The Lingering Scourge in Nigeria's Fourth Republic." Journal of African Security, 5(2), 45-56.

[8]Gurr, T. R. (1970). Why Men Rebel. Princeton University Press.

[9]Oyeshile, O. A. (2014). "The Role of Conflict in African Social Thought: Perspectives on Nigeria." Journal of Philosophy and Development, 16(2), 25-40.

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international conflict management resources. In such an environment, scholars argue that meaningful development cannot thrive amidst persistent conflict. Akinrinde and Adegboye (2018)[10] reinforce this point, noting that from independence to the present, Nigeria has been continually threatened by violent conflicts ranging from religious and ethnic clashes to political violence which have become a defining feature of successive governments. These conflicts, especially electoral violence among political contestants and parties, pose existential threats to national stability and necessitate robust prevention and management mechanisms.

Godfatherism: A recurring concept in discussions of Nigerian political violence is *godfatherism* – the practice whereby influential patrons ("godfathers") sponsor and dictate the political careers of their protégés ("godsons") in exchange for loyalty and control over state resources. Research findings and scholarly works concur that godfatherism is deeply ingrained in Nigeria's political system and often contributes to conflict (Umar, 2023; Oghuvbu, 2023)[11]. According to Ejiroghene A. Oghuvbu, "Godfatherism has been the hallmark of Nigeria's democracy today. With the restoration of democratic rule in 1999, the nation has seen an increase in the politics of godfatherism, which has taken its toll on the country's politics, causing disharmony, disunity, conflict, and disaffection among various groups" (Chukwuemeka, Oji & Chukwurah, 2013)[12]. This patron–client dynamic breeds resentment and factionalism, as rival godfathers compete for dominance, and can lead to violent struggles especially when godsons defy their patrons or two powerful networks collide. The concept of godfatherism is often described as being synonymous with "intermediary, mentoring, benevolence, and sponsorship" in a political setting (Chukwuemeka, Oji & Chukwurah, 2013).

However, this benign definition belies its malignant impact: godfathers view politics as an investment and expect high returns in the form of government contracts, appointments, or policy influence. When such expectations are threatened – for instance, if a godson becomes disloyal or a competing godfather encroaches on their sphere – conflict can quickly escalate. Osun State's political history provides a telling example: between 2018 and 2022, a rift emerged within the ruling APC, pitting factions loyal to former Governor Rauf Aregbesola against those aligned with party leader (and now President) Bola Ahmed Tinubu. This power tussle, a clash of godfather figures and their chosen godsons, led to parallel party structures and bitter infighting. As documented by Fasure (2024)[13], "the consensus in the party was that Osun West should produce the next governor, but Tinubu insisted on backing Oyetola... Aregbesola, out of loyalty, played along a decision that split the party into two." The fallout from this episode nearly cost the APC the 2018

[10]Akinrinde, O., & Adegboye, A. (2018). Recurring Violent Conflicts in Nigeria: Patterns and Mitigation Strategies. [Conference Paper].

[11]Umar, A. S. (2023). "Political Elites and Youth Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic." African Security Review, 32(1), 44-57.

[12]Chukwuemeka, E., Oji, R., & Chukwurah, D. (2013). Godfatherism and Political Patronage in Nigeria: A Theoretical Overview. Global Journal of Political Science and Administration, 1(1), 16-28.

[13]Fasure, S. (2024, June 26). "On Aregbesola's Political Battles in Osun." The Gazelle News.

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governorship and spawned violent confrontations between the rival camps. Such instances illustrate how godfatherism fosters a personalised, zero-sum brand of politics that often erupts into violence.

Empirical Studies on Political Violence in Nigeria and Osun State

A number of empirical studies have explored the prevalence, patterns, and drivers of political violence in Nigeria, providing a broader context for the situation in Osun State. Chinwokwu (2013)[14] offers a national overview, arguing that "insecurity resulting from persistent conflicts in Nigeria has placed a great burden on the internal security, peace, and development of the country despite government efforts to checkmate them." He identifies a myriad of security issues – from ethnic militias and religious extremism to electoral thuggery – that challenge Nigeria's democratic stability. Chinwokwu's analysis highlights the lack of political will and capacity in conflict management: despite various security operations and peace initiatives, violent conflicts continue to erupt because root causes such as poor governance, corruption, and social injustice remain unaddressed (Chinwokwu, 2013). This aligns with the view that prevention is far better than cure when it comes to political violence: once violence breaks out, the damage to trust and development is hard to reverse, underscoring the need for early warning and resolution mechanisms. Several studies narrow the focus to electoral violence, a major subset of political violence in Nigeria. Olumide Omodunbi*et al.* (2022)[15] examine the 2018 Osun State gubernatorial election, which was marred by vote-buying, intimidation of voters, and the use of political thugs.

Their findings demonstrate that these factors significantly undermined the credibility of the election. They conclude that electoral violence is a recurring phenomenon in Nigerian elections and advocate stronger punitive measures against perpetrators along with improved voter education. This case study is especially pertinent to understanding Osun's political violence, as it provides concrete evidence of how unscrupulous tactics employed by political actors (such as deploying gangs to polling units and engaging in vote manipulation) directly translate into violence and erode public confidence in the democratic process.

Another empirical contribution is from Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), which in 2013 conducted a comprehensive review of violence in Nigeria's Southwest region. The AOAV report *"The Violent Road: Nigeria's Southwest"* reveals that Osun State has witnessed frequent violence around electoral events. Notably, during the 2007 general elections and the 2011 cycle (to a lesser extent), Osun experienced violent incidents ranging from property destruction to fatalities in locales such as Ede, Iwo, Ejigbo, Ifon, Ife, Ikirun, Osogbo, and Ikire. The violence spiked during voter registration exercises, on

[14]Chinwokwu, E. C. (2013). "The Challenges of Conflict Management in a Democratic Society: An Overview of Insecurity in Nigeria." American International Journal of Social Science, 2(3), 93-108.
[15]Olumide, O., Ige, R., & Batholomew, K. (2023). "Electoral Violence in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Osun State 2018 Gubernatorial Election." The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies, 1/2022, 59-80.

election days, and in the immediate aftermath of results, suggesting that electoral contests are flashpoints for conflict in the state. AOAV (2013) documents how political operatives threatened and intimidated voters, and in some instances, armed clashes led to deaths and significant property damage. A particularly severe bout of violence occurred in 2006 during a post-census boundary dispute between communities in Orolu and Irepodun Local Government Areas, resulting in about 120 deaths (AOAV, 2013). This intersection of political and communal violence underscores the complexity of conflicts in Osun – local grievances can quickly assume political overtones and vice versa.

More recent data from Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) indicates that political violence in Osun State continues to be a "deepening quagmire." The NHRC (2025) reports that a contentious Court of Appeal ruling in late 2024, which reinstated sacked local government chairmen from the APC, triggered violent clashes with PDP supporters. The ensuing chaos led to the killing of at least seven people, including a former council chairman. The Commission's report portrays the Osun crisis as part of Nigeria's broader security and political challenges a microcosm where national issues like contested electoral mandates, weak security responses, and partisan brinkmanship converge (NHRC, 2025). The implication is that resolving Osun's violence requires both local and national-level interventions, as local disputes are often amplified by national political rivalries.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in conflict theory perspectives that explain why political violence occurs and how it might be addressed. Two complementary frameworks are adopted: Karl Marx's Conflict Theory and Max Weber's Structural Theory of Conflict. Together, these theories illuminate the roles of inequality, power, and social structure in fuelling conflicts.

Marx's Conflict Theory: Karl Marx's theory of social conflict postulates that society is in a perpetual state of conflict due to competition for limited resources. Social order, in this view, is maintained not by consensus but by domination, with those in power imposing their will on the rest. Marx (1848)[16]argued that economic inequality – the division between a wealthy, powerful class and a poor, powerless class – lies at the heart of social conflicts. In the context of political violence, this theory suggests that those who hold wealth and power (political elites) will seek to maintain their dominance by any means, including suppressing those who challenge them. Resources such as political offices, government budgets, and patronage opportunities are unevenly distributed, creating a zero-sum environment in which elites fear loss of status if power shifts. Tensions and conflicts thus arise when marginalized groups or rival elites contest the distribution of these resources. As Marx's theory predicts, these struggles can become the engine of social change, but they can also lead to intense violence when the ruling class uses coercive force to retain control or when revolutionary pressures erupt.

[16]Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). Manifesto of the Communist Party. London: Communist League.

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In Nigeria, Marxian conflict theory helps explain phenomena like electoral violence and godfatherism: political offices come with access to state resources and wealth, so competition for them is fierce and often violent, as incumbents and their benefactors (the status quo power-holders) attempt to crush opposition to avoid losing their privileged access (Collins, 2008)[17]. Those benefiting from the current structure for example, entrenched politicians or business elites connected to regimes work to maintain those structures and their own advantages, even if it means subverting democracy or instigating violence. The findings in Osun State are consonant with Marx's view: informants frequently pointed out that "lust for power" and "inordinate ambition" among politicians drive internal party feuds and inter-party clashes. Essentially, the stakes of political office (in terms of resource control and personal enrichment) are so high that actors resort to violence to either seize or hold onto power confirming the Marxian notion that material interests and power inequalities are fundamental causes of conflict.

Weber's Structural Conflict Theory: Max Weber expanded on conflict theory by introducing additional dimensions beyond economic class, highlighting the roles of power, status, and organizational structures in generating conflict. Weber (1922)[18] defined power as the chance of an actor or group to realise their will even against the resistance of others. He emphasised that power can be rooted not only in wealth but also in social status (prestige, honour) and institutional position (political or bureaucratic authority). His structural approach suggests that modern societies are stratified along multiple axes – economic class, social status, and political authority – and conflicts can emerge from any of these stratifications or their intersections. For instance, a group might feel aggrieved not just because of economic exploitation, but due to lack of recognition or respect (status inequality) or exclusion from decision-making (power inequality).

Applying Weber's framework to Osun State, we observe that political violence often stems from complex structural factors. It is not only a matter of poverty or unemployment (though these provide a pool of disaffected youth readily mobilised as thugs), but also of status and power rivalries. Intra-party conflicts in Osun (such as those within the APC between factions loyal to different leaders) can be interpreted as struggles for status and authority within the party hierarchy – a fight over who commands respect and decision-making power. Weber's theory helps us understand why even within the same economic class (e.g. political elites), conflicts arise: individuals or sub-groups compete for the prestige of leadership and the control of party structures, which confer the legitimate power to allocate nominations and patronage. Weber also underscores the importance of institutional design; for example, weak intra-party democratic structures and a "winner-takes-all" electoral system in Nigeria exacerbate conflicts. When only one faction can hold the gubernatorial ticket or when electoral victory means exclusive access to spoils, the stakes encourage structural conflict. Informants in Osun noted that the lack of internal party democracy and the "Winners Take All" syndrome create

[17]Collins, R. (2008). Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory. Princeton University Press.
[18]Weber, M. (1922). Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology. (G. Roth & C. Wittich, Eds., 1978 English trans.). University of California Press.

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structural imbalances that breed resentment and conflict. One women's leader observed that women's systematic under-representation in political office is a structural inequality contributing to discontent and a sense of injustice. Such structural issues support Weber's view that conflict can originate from various forms of stratification and organizational dysfunction, not just from direct economic exploitation.

By combining Marx and Weber, the theoretical framework for this study acknowledges that political violence in Osun State is driven by a matrix of class-based economic competition, status-based rivalries, and institutional power struggles. The Conflict Theory of Marx directs attention to how competition for resources (and the wealth/power those resources bestow) fuels violence, particularly in a patronage-driven political economy. The Structural Conflict perspective of Weber broadens the analysis to include how social hierarchies (ethnic, regional, or gender-based status differences) and flawed political structures (like weak rule of law or skewed electoral rules) set the stage for conflict. These theories provide a lens to interpret the empirical findings: for instance, widespread godfatherism is both an economic strategy (investing in politics for material return) and a status/power strategy (entrenching elite dominance), illustrating both Marxian and Weberian dynamics. Recognising these theoretical angles is crucial for designing solutions it implies that mitigating political violence will require reducing extreme inequalities (economic reforms and anti-corruption measures), addressing status-based grievances (inclusive governance and recognition of all groups), and reforming institutions (strengthening democratic processes, enforcing rules impartially). In the next section, we turn to the methodology used to investigate these issues in Osun State, guided by the above theoretical insights.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, combining both primary and secondary data, to develop a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence, causes, and consequences of political violence in Osun State. Qualitative methods are well-suited to exploring social phenomena like political violence because they yield rich, nuanced insights into the experiences, perceptions, and motivations of those involved or affected. Rather than relying on broad statistical patterns alone, this approach delves deeply into how and why political violence occurs, as recounted in the voices of stakeholders on the ground.

Primary Data Collection: The core of the primary data comes from in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with key political stakeholders in Osun State. Interviewees were purposively selected to include a diverse range of perspectives: elected or former officials from major political parties (APC, PDP, and others), party elders and godfathers, community leaders, members of the electoral commission, security personnel, journalists covering Osun politics, and civil society activists. This purposive sampling ensured that informants had direct knowledge or experience of political violence and could speak to its dynamics in the state. In total, 20 interviews were conducted across multiple Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Osun. Interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes to 1.5 hours, allowing respondents to recount specific incidents (e.g. clashes during elections, instances of intimidation or intra-party fracas) and to

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offer their interpretations of root causes and potential solutions. The semi-structured format provided a flexible guide – key themes were covered (such as causes of violence, actors involved, impacts, and mitigation measures) while giving respondents freedom to introduce relevant issues from their perspective. Confidentiality was guaranteed to encourage honesty, especially given the sensitivity of discussing powerful figures. Many informants provided candid accounts of events like the 2018 gubernatorial election violence, the 2022 intra-APC feud, and the 2024 local government crisis, naming key actors and revealing behind-the-scenes pressures. These narratives form a vital evidence base for the study's findings.

Secondary Data Collection: The research also draws on extensive secondary data to contextualise and corroborate the interview findings. Sources include academic journal articles on electoral violence and conflict in Nigeria, reports from human rights organisations and think tanks (such as Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, and the NHRC) dealing with recent incidents in Osun State, Nigerian news media reports on relevant events, and existing literature on conflict theory and peace building. These secondary sources provided historical background (for example, accounts of violence in past Osun elections and the evolution of godfather politics in the state) and allowed triangulation of facts mentioned by interviewees. Government and security agency reports were consulted to the extent available, although official documentation of violence is often scant. Nonetheless, sources like the AOAV (2013) regional report and the NHRC (2025) brief were invaluable in supplying data on incidents (casualty figures, timeline of unrest) and official viewpoints.

Data Analysis: The analysis proceeded using a thematic coding approach. All interviews were transcribed and entered into qualitative analysis software. An initial coding framework was developed based on the research objectives and theoretical concepts: for example, codes such as "causes – structural", "causes immediate trigger", "actors – instigators", "actors – victims", "impact – governance", "impact security", "mitigation – community", etc. As transcripts were coded, new sub-themes emerged (like "media role in conflict" or "youth unemployment" as a theme), and the coding framework was iteratively refined. A mix of inductive coding (allowing themes to surface from the data) and deductive coding (applying theoretical constructs like Marxian and Weberian factors) ensured a balance between letting the data speak and interpreting it through the chosen theoretical lens. Memos were written throughout to capture the analyst's reflections and to begin linking empirical patterns to theoretical explanations. For instance, one memo noted the recurring mention of "godfathers" in nearly every interview and linked this to the concept of patron–client dynamics in conflict. Another memo compared accounts of the 2018 election violence with those of 2022 party clashes, noting both similarities (use of thugs, police inaction) and differences (the former being inter-party violence, the latter intra-party).

Through this systematic coding and memoing process, four major thematic categories corresponding to the study's objectives were distilled: Prevalence and Patterns of Violence, Causes and Catalysts, Impacts and Consequences, and Conflict Mitigation Strategies. Each category contained sub-themes. For example, under causes, sub-themes included political patronage networks,

youth unemployment, ideological/religious rhetoric, electoral competition rules, and ineffective law enforcement. These themes structured the presentation of findings. Importantly, the analysis also paid attention to cross-cutting dynamic factors that interplay across multiple incidents. The four dynamics highlighted in the abstract (godfatherism, youth precarity, weak party democracy, and security gaps) emerged as cross-cutting and were validated by both interview evidence and secondary sources. Triangulation was achieved by checking consistency: for example, if interviewees cited a particular event of violence, media and reports were consulted to verify timing and outcomes; if a cause like "sit-tight syndrome" (incumbents refusing to cede power) was mentioned, its presence was traced in multiple incidents.

The qualitative approach, while not aiming for statistical generalisation, provides depth and context that a purely quantitative study could miss. It captures not only what violent events occurred, but how and why they unfolded from the perspective of those on the ground, and what violence means for the community. This richness is vital for crafting nuanced conclusions and recommendations tailored to Osun State's reality. The following sections will present the empirical findings, organised around the major themes identified, and subsequently discuss their implications in light of the theoretical framework.

Findings

Prevalence of Political Violence in Osun State

Osun State was created in 1991, and since its inception it has experienced recurrent political conflicts, many of which have escalated into violence. Interview data and historical records indicate that political violence in Osun is neither new nor uniformly distributed – it tends to spike around certain high-stakes events and under conditions. One enduring characterisation stemming from earlier research is that Osun was at one point dubbed "the Crisis State" due to the frequency of violent incidents (Owonikoko, 2012)[19]. While some informants dispute that Osun's situation is worse than other Nigerian states, the consensus is that violence has been a persistent feature of its politics.

Patterns and Timeline: From 1999 (Nigeria's return to democracy) through the 2000s, Osun saw political violence primarily in the form of election-related clashes and occasional communal strife with political undertones. For example, during the 2007 general elections, Osun witnessed notable violence; respondents recalled how rival party supporters engaged in street fights in towns like Ikirun and Ile-Ife, with several injuries reported. The 2007 gubernatorial election conflict, in which the PDP and the then–Action Congress (AC) both claimed victory, led to protests and the destruction of some properties in Osogbo. These events align with AOAV's findings that 2007 was a violent electoral year in the Southwest (Action on Armed Violence, 2013)[20]. Violence simmered somewhat during the 2011 elections, which interviewees

[19]Owonikoko, B. S. (2012). Youth, Electoral Violence and the Development of Osun State: Nigeria, 2003-2007. Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.

[20]Action on Armed Violence (AOAV). (2013). The Violent Road: Nigeria's Southwest. AOAV Report, December 2013.

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attribute to tighter security deployments and a clearer victory margin that year. However, tensions never fully dissipated.

A significant uptick occurred around the 2018 Osun gubernatorial election. This election was fiercely contested, going into an unprecedented run-off after an initial vote deemed too close to call. According to multiple interviewees – including an election observer and a local journalist – the period saw an "importation of thugs" from outside the state, incidents of ballot box snatching, and at least two people shot dead in post-election celebrations turned clashes. Olumide, *et al.*(2023)document that the use of armed youth militias and widespread vote-buying were prevalent in that election, severely undermining its credibility. A former State House of Assembly member interviewed noted, "2018 was a wake-up call; it showed how quickly our politics could turn violent when no party is ready to lose." The eventual winner, after a controversial run-off, gained office amid an atmosphere of suspicion and bitterness which set the tone for future conflicts.

Following 2018, intra-party violence within the APC became a new trend. As detailed earlier, a factional struggle emerged between supporters of Rauf Aregbesola (the immediate past governor) and those of his successor, Gboyega Oyetola. Throughout 2019–2022, this rivalry led to several violent incidents: party meetings turned into brawls, with chairs and weapons brandished; in one instance in 2021, an internal APC meeting in Ilesa was disrupted by gunshots as thugs loyal to opposing camps clashed (as recounted by an APC youth leader). Informants also mentioned the role of a splinter group, *The Osun Progressives* (TOP), which aligned with Aregbesola and engaged in tense stand-offs with the mainstream APC leadership. These intra-party conflicts underscore that not all political violence is between parties – a considerable portion in Osun has been within the ruling party, driven by internal competition and grievances. Notably, despite the intensity of rhetoric, these factional clashes were somewhat contained until the run-up to the 2022 governorship election.

The 2022 Osun governorship election and its aftermath introduced another wave of violence. The PDP candidate (Ademola Adeleke) won, unseating Oyetola of the APC. The power shift was accompanied by sporadic violence: jubilant PDP youths and aggrieved APC loyalists reportedly engaged in skirmishes in places like Ede and Ikire. Additionally, the change in administration precipitated the local government crisis in late 2024 when courts voided last-minute APC-installed council officials. This situation turned violent as described earlier: in early 2025, violence erupted during an attempted reinstatement of those officials, tragically resulting in fatalities. A senior police officer interviewed confirmed that "the standoff over local councils became a proxy war for APC and PDP – we essentially had two sets of officials claiming authority, and supporters on each side ready to fight."

Geographical Spread: Politically motivated violence in Osun is somewhat widespread geographically, but certain areas have proven to be flashpoints. The state capital Osogbo has seen confrontations due to its symbolic importance and status as the collation centre in elections. Ife and Modakeke, with their history of communal conflict, have occasionally had that rivalry intertwined with party politics. Towns like Ikirun, Iwo, and Ede were mentioned as

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experiencing election violence in multiple reports. Notably, the 2006 communal clash in Ifon and Ilobu (a boundary dispute) had a political dimension due to local government alignments and was one of the deadliest incidents on record. However, respondents also pointed out that no part of Osun is completely immune "even the quiet communities can explode if the wrong people provoke something," said a traditional ruler, recalling how a minor chieftaincy dispute in 2019 was inflamed by rival politicians to mobilise support, nearly resulting in violence.

Actors Involved: Across various incidents, a pattern of actors emerges. The political parties (primarily APC and PDP) and their local structures often initiate or at least provide the context for violence. Political "godfathers" and sponsors – individuals who finance and strongly influence local politics are frequently accused of instigating trouble from behind the scenes, using their resources to recruit youths for intimidation. One interviewee, a former local government chairman, bluntly stated, "No violence happens without a big man funding it. The boys we arrest always mention someone who sent them." These "boys" are the third key actor: youth militias or thugs, typically unemployed young men who are mobilised with cash, drugs, or promises of future rewards to do the bidding of politicians. They form the foot soldiers of violence, whether it's snatching ballot boxes, attacking opponents' rallies, or enforcing illegal orders. The prevalence of these groups is tied to the state's youth unemployment issues, as explored later. Another actor is the security agencies, notably the police (and sometimes the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, NSCDC). While officially neutral, their role has been controversial multiple accounts accused security forces of either being complicit (turning a blind eye to ruling party thuggery or even aiding it) or being overwhelmed and failing to intervene effectively. For instance, during the 2020 #EndSARS protests spillover in Osun, when political thugs attacked the state governor's convoy, the police response was heavily criticised as slow and inadequate, emboldening the perpetrators. Finally, community leaders and traditional rulers sometimes become involved. In some cases, they have acted as mediators to calm tensions; in others, they have been partisan, effectively siding with one faction and thus becoming targets themselves. One traditional chief recounted having his house burned in 2007 because he was perceived as backing the losing party.

Taken together, these findings on the prevalence and patterns of political violence in Osun State set the stage for a deeper examination of the causes. The next section will analyse the underlying and immediate causes of the violence answering the crucial question of why this violence keeps occurring despite various efforts to prevent it. Understanding the causes will in turn inform the discussion on how to break the cycle of violence.

Causes of Political Violence in Osun State

The causes of political violence in Osun State are multifaceted, involving a mix of structural factors (long-term underlying conditions) and proximate triggers (immediate events or actions that spark violence). The research findings, supported by both interviewees' insights and literature, highlight several key causes: the lust for power and zero-sum politics, patronage and godfatherism, youth unemployment and poverty, structural inequalities (including winner-

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takes-all politics and gender exclusion), and weaknesses in institutional conflict management. These factors often interplay, meaning a single violent outbreak usually has more than one cause at work.

1. **Power Struggles and "Lust for Power":** A dominant theme in virtually all interviews was the intense desire among politicians to attain or retain power at all costs. An Honourable member of the Osun State House of Assembly described "inordinate ambition" as a root cause of conflict: "People become power-drunk and disgruntled. Inordinate ambition by politicians brews conflicts within their parties (intra-party) and between parties (inter-party). Osun has witnessed these types of conflicts, especially during election periods. This observation aligns with Marx's conflict theory those in power fight fiercely to keep it, while those out of power fight to gain it. In Osun, the high stakes of power (governance comes with control of state resources, contracts, and appointments) create a win-or-perish mentality. A former Speaker of the State Assembly extrapolated this, noting that politics inevitably involves power and influence, and "where there is a struggle for political power, it always comes with a threat to peace and tranquillity of society." Several specific manifestations of this lust for power were identified:

    - **Election Rigging and Do-or-Die Campaigns:** Parties and candidates often approach elections with a mindset of not accepting defeat. This leads to the recruitment of thugs to disrupt voting in opponents' strongholds, snatching ballot boxes, or falsification of results. The 2018 re-run election in Osun was cited as an example where both major parties were accused of trying to rig by force in certain polling units, resulting in clashes. When politics is a do-or-die affair, even minor electoral contests (like party primaries or local council polls) can turn violent because losing is seen as politically existential for the actors involved.

    - **Sit-Tight Syndrome:** The reluctance of incumbents to relinquish power, even after losing elections or reaching term limits, has been a cause of violence. In the Osun 2022 context, informants from the PDP alleged that the outgoing APC administration attempted to manipulate institutions and stir unrest to invalidate the election they lost. Although these attempts failed, they contributed to a charged environment where violence could have erupted (and did, in minor instances). The sit-tight attitude signals to supporters that conceding defeat is not an option, emboldening them to engage in post-election violence or legal confrontations that can spill into the streets. As one civil servant commented, "When leaders send the message that they can't or won't step down, their followers take that as a cue to fight on the streets for them." Conversely, the fear among incumbents of losing power – and with it, possibly facing retribution or loss of patronage networks motivates pre-emptive violence to secure victory. This has been observed in various Nigerian

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elections (Human Rights Watch, 2007)[21], where incumbents often mobilise violence due to fear of losing power.

2. **Godfatherism and Political Patronage:** Building on the earlier discussion, godfatherism is both a structural cause and an immediate trigger of violence. Research participants unanimously agreed that "godfather politics" has exacerbated conflicts in Osun. Essentially, when two godfathers collide or when a godson rebels, violence is often not far behind. A clear instance was the feud between the Tinubu and Aregbesola camps within the APC. As detailed by Fasure (2024), this conflict originated from disagreement over who should succeed Aregbesola as governor. It escalated as both camps vied for control of the party a structural power struggle and led to violent incidents like the disruption of APC meetings and attacks on loyalists of either side. Informants from the APC described how rallies had to be cancelled or conducted under heavy security because of threats from internal rivals. Godfatherism feeds violence in several ways:

    - *It injects enormous money and illicit arms into politics.* Godfathers are typically wealthy and use their resources to arm and pay gangs. One police officer noted that political violence in Osun spiked with an influx of small arms, likely supplied by political patrons to their thugs. This militarisation at the behest of godfathers means any political dispute can quickly turn deadly.

    - *It entrenches impunity and parallel authority structures.* Godfathers often have connections that allow them to escape law enforcement (e.g., getting arrested thugs released) and to run cult-like followings that obey them over the law. In Osun, some youth militia groups are known to be loyal to particular politicians or businessmen, not to any official institution. This erodes state authority and means conflicts may be settled by force rather than through lawful channels, since godfathers can undermine the latter.

    - *It triggers succession conflicts.* As seen, when it's time to choose candidates or successors, rival godfathers compete, leading to intra-party violence. Additionally, if a godfather's preferred candidate is not chosen, they may sabotage the party (e.g., through sponsorship of another party or inciting violence), which again leads to conflict.

Interviews also highlighted that patronage networks fuel "gang loyalty" – youths who rely on patronage for livelihood will fight to protect their patron's interests. A young party enforcer candidly said, "Politics is our business; if our leader says stand in front of a polling station and make sure only our people vote, we do it – that's our job." This mercenary outlook is a product of the patronage system and a direct cause of violent tactics on election day.

[21]Human Rights Watch. (2007). Criminal Politics: Violence, "Godfathers" and Corruption in Nigeria. Human Rights Watch Report, Vol. 19, No. 16(A).

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3. **Youth Unemployment and Poverty:** The socioeconomic angle of political violence was repeatedly emphasised. Osun State, like much of Nigeria, faces high youth unemployment and underemployment. Many able-bodied young men lack stable jobs or income, making them vulnerable to recruitment for violent activities. As Umar (2023) notes, widespread poverty creates a pool of frustrated youth who can be enticed by politicians offering stipends to act as thugs. The research findings corroborate this: politicians on both sides maintain groups of unemployed youths – often euphemistically called "boys" or "task forces" who are paid per event to intimidate opponents or gin up crowds. These youths often share the same ethnic or local identity with their patron, adding a layer of loyalty beyond just money (as also observed by Umar, 2023). Economic desperation means that even educated youth sometimes partake in thuggery if they see no better opportunities. One interviewee from a local NGO recounted rehabilitating a former political thug who said he earned ₦5,000 (~$12) on days he was called to "action," which, however meagre, was more than he might otherwise earn.

Poverty also means that political violence can be framed as a survival strategy. A community leader pointed out that in some rural areas, youth view politicians as patrons who must provide for them; if not given jobs, they demand to be "settled" in other ways, including being hired as muscle. The corollary is that if not engaged in positive employment, these youths might resort to crime, so some local politicians justify employing them as personal guards or enforcers as a form of social support – a perverse welfare system that perpetuates violence.

4. **Structural Political Inequalities and Grievances:** Beyond economics, certain structural features of Osun's political landscape cause resentment and conflict. One is the "winner-takes-all" nature of Nigerian politics. In practice, the winning party in Osun takes almost complete control of state resources and appointments, leaving the opposition and their supporters with nothing. This has bred desperation in contests and bitterness after outcomes. As one academic observed, "When the stakes are total victory or total loss, no wonder people fight savagely to win." There have been calls (including from interviewees) to introduce more power-sharing or inclusive governance to reduce this zero-sum incentive – for instance, proportional representation or unity governments – but such reforms are not yet in place.

Another structural issue is internal party democracy. Informants within parties admitted that candidate selection is often rigged by powerful figures, leading to the imposition of unpopular candidates. This triggers internal crises and defections that eventually manifest as violence either within the party or in general elections. For example, prior to the 2022 election, the APC primary was contentious; supporters of the losing faction (TOP, aligned with Aregbesola) felt the process was unfair and later many refused to support the party candidate, contributing to the APC's defeat and subsequent acrimony. If primaries were more transparent, such splits might be less violent. The structural imbalance of low youth and female inclusion in politics is another grievance. Women, despite being active grassroots mobilisers, hold few positions – an inequality noted by a

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female party leader as "unfair and capable of causing protest." While women-led violence is less common, their exclusion reinforces the male-dominated, muscle-flexing political culture.

Ethnic and regional sentiments also play a role. Within Osun, there is a subtle rivalry between zones (Osun West vs. Osun Central vs. Osun East) over which produces the governor. The 2018 scenario where many felt Osun West was denied its "turn" to govern (since the candidate from the West was bypassed for one from the Central, due to Tinubu's influence) created a sense of injustice that fuelled the intra-party conflict and even swayed voters in 2022 as a form of retribution. Thus, perceived structural inequities – whether in the rotation of power, allocation of projects, or representation can act as seeds of violence when politicised.

5. **Weak Security and Justice Institutions:** Finally, a critical cause of political violence in Osun (as in Nigeria broadly) is the weakness or complicity of the institutions meant to prevent and punish violence. Many interviewees lamented that perpetrators of past political violence often face no consequences. Human Rights Watch (2007) observed that political violence persists in Nigeria because of a "prevailing climate of impunity," where gangs employed by politicians commit crimes without fear of prosecution. In Osun, there were examples given: after the 2011 election violence, few if any arrests were made; after the 2018 incidents, most culprits walked free, with speculation that orders "from above" shielded them. This lack of accountability emboldens political actors to use violence as a tool, knowing the cost is low.

Moreover, law enforcement is sometimes partisan. In Osun's 2022 election, the deployment of federal forces was controversial the opposition claimed security agents harassed their members while ignoring ruling party infractions. Whether or not these claims were exaggerated, the perception of bias undermines trust and can provoke violent self-help. One PDP youth leader said, "We couldn't rely on the police to protect our votes, so we prepared to do it ourselves and that meant confrontation." Similarly, when courts overturn elections or make rulings seen as politically influenced (like the initial tribunal judgment in early 2023 that briefly invalidated Governor Adeleke's election before being reversed on appeal), it can incite supporters to protest or riot, perceiving that legal avenues are rigged. Indeed, judicial decisions have nearly sparked violence in Osun – the atmosphere after that tribunal ruling was extremely tense, with supporters on both sides massing (peacefully, fortunately) at the court.

Impact of Political Violence in Osun State

Political violence in Osun State has had severe and far-reaching consequences on governance, security, economic development, and the social fabric. The repeated outbreaks of violence, even if localized and episodic, accumulate to create an atmosphere of instability that hampers the state's progress. This section examines the multifaceted impacts, as reported by participants and evidenced in secondary data, across four main areas: governance and

institutional stability, public trust and social cohesion, security and human safety, and socio-economic development.

Impact on Governance and Institutions: One major consequence of persistent political violence is the undermining of democratic governance and the weakening of public institutions. Violent electoral contests and politically motivated conflicts have led to political instability in Osun, where normal governmental functions can be disrupted. For instance, when rival parties engage in clashes, local government councils or state assemblies may become paralysed by boycotts or fear. Following violent incidents, it is not uncommon for government offices to close temporarily or for public servants to stay home due to safety concerns. Over time, this instability erodes policy continuity and effective governance. An example given by a respondent was the immediate aftermath of the hotly contested 2018 election: the incoming administration faced difficulties in several localities where violence had occurred, as defeated party operatives initially refused to cooperate, affecting everything from budget handovers to project implementations.

Furthermore, weak institutions are both a cause and a result of violence. As violence undermines the rule of law, institutions like the electoral commission (INEC), police, and judiciary suffer diminished authority. A former INEC official in Osun noted that violent intimidation of electoral staff in some wards during past elections led to a situation where "we could not honestly say results reflected the true votes, but we also could not go back and correct it because we feared for our safety." Such scenarios contribute to poor policymaking and governance outcomes. When leaders emerge from violent or rigged processes, they often lack broad legitimacy and may focus on consolidating power (to avoid future violent challenges) rather than on good governance. The long-term effect is governance characterized by brinkmanship and reactionary measures, rather than stable planning.

Political violence has also drained administrative capacity. Successful politicians sometimes owe their positions to godfathers or violent muscle rather than merit or popular support. This can lead to the appointment of less competent individuals to positions as a reward for loyalty in conflict, weakening the overall quality of public administration. Additionally, critical reforms – such as those in the security sector or electoral process – can be stalled by the same forces that perpetrate violence, since they benefit from the status quo of weak oversight. Over the years, Osun's repeated crises have required commissions of inquiry and special administrative interventions, diverting attention and resources from development initiatives to crisis management.

Impact on Public Trust and Social Cohesion: Recurrent violence around elections and political disputes has significantly eroded public trust in government and the democratic process. Citizens who witness vote rigging or who are victims of political thuggery often become cynical about politics. As one youth from Ile-Ife put it, "After seeing people beaten and ballot boxes stolen, why would I trust that voting matters? They will do what they want anyway." Such disillusionment can lead to voter apathyturnout in areas that experienced violence tends to drop in subsequent elections, as people either fear for their safety or believe the process is futile. This disenfranchisement undermines the

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representative nature of democracy and can skew results in favour of those willing to use coercion.

Beyond elections, violence deepens mistrust among communities. In Osun's plural society (with Christians, Muslims, and traditionalists, as well as multiple Yoruba sub-clans and settler communities from other states), political violence sometimes overlaps with identity lines. Opposing parties may exploit ethnic or religious sentiments to mobilize support or justify aggression. For example, in some instances APC and PDP rivalries took on a religious tinge, given perceptions that one party was more aligned with a particular faith in certain local governments. When violence occurs, it can thus reinforce sectarian narratives. The result is community mistrust and polarisation. People become wary of neighbours who support the opposite party, fearing they might one day turn violent against them. This is particularly harmful in mixed communities, potentially fraying the inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony that Osun has largely enjoyed historically.

Interviewees noted that frequent accusations traded by APC and PDP – each calling the other violent – have created an "us vs. them" mentality among some citizens. Moderates and non-partisans sometimes get caught in the crossfire or face pressure to pick sides, weakening the neutral social spaces that are vital for community dialogue. One traditional ruler lamented that "even family members are divided by party, and during tense times they stop speaking to each other." While this may be temporary, the repeated cycles of tension leave scars. Society can become segmented into political camps that extend beyond healthy competition into deep-seated enmity.

Impact on Security and Personal Safety: It is evident that political violence directly compromises the security of lives and property in Osun. The loss of lives is the most tragic impact – from the AOAV-documented roughly 120 deaths in a single 2006 conflict, to the murders of local politicians like the council chairman in 2025, each incident of violence inflicts trauma on families and communities. Fatalities aside, there have been numerous injuries. Gunfire at rallies or clashes has led to people being maimed or traumatised. Citizens live with the psychological burden of knowing that violence can erupt unpredictably, causing widespread fear and anxiety. During periods of high tension (like campaign seasons), some residents avoid public gatherings or travel early to avoid being caught in trouble. This climate of fear curtails freedom of movement and assembly. For instance, political rallies – which should be peaceful exercises of democratic rights – sometimes scare residents into staying indoors or shutting businesses early in anticipation of violence.

Security is further undermined by the proliferation of small arms and armed gangs that political violence encourages. Once guns and machetes are distributed to thugs for election purposes, they don't vanish afterward. Some of these weapons feed other criminal activities, contributing to a general sense of insecurity. Indeed, Osun has seen armed robbery and cultism issues, and respondents believe there is overlap between political thugs and criminal gangs. This blurring of political violence and crime means general lawlessness can increase. When the line between politically motivated violence and ordinary criminality is thin, it strains the police and makes it harder to maintain order.

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Another aspect is displacement and restrictions on movement. While Osun hasn't seen large-scale displacement like war-torn areas, micro-displacements occur; people temporarily flee hotspots during crises (for example, families leaving a town for a few days if violence is anticipated around an election). Also, opposition figures often go into hiding when they receive credible threats. For example, it was mentioned that ahead of the 2018 run-off, some opposition polling agents had to be relocated for safety due to threats. This creates a form of internal displacement and also self-censorship, where citizens avoid expressing views or supporting a candidate openly for fear of violent retribution. Such inhibition is detrimental to democratic participation.

Impact on Economic Development: The economic toll of political violence in Osun is considerable. Violence and the instability it breed deter investors and disrupt business activities. Local entrepreneurs and traders suffer when markets are shut down due to curfews or fear. For instance, during the heat of the 2020 #EndSARS protests and political turbulence, Osogbo's main market saw a drop-in activity as people feared unrest. Over time, if a state gains a reputation for political violence, potential investments (in industries or tourism, for example) may be diverted elsewhere. One business owner in Osogbo said he shelved plans to expand his factory in late 2022 because of uncertainty after the change of government and the violent skirmishes that occurred: "I didn't know if things would stabilise or there'd be more chaos, so I decided to wait." Such hesitancy can cost jobs and growth opportunities.

Moreover, political violence often diverts public funds from development to security and reconstruction. Money that could have been used for schools, healthcare, or infrastructure might be reallocated to repair burnt buildings, support security operations, or as patronage to appease aggrieved groups. For example, after the 2007 electoral violence, the government had to compensate some victims and rebuild a handful of razed properties funds that were not originally budgeted for that purpose. Similarly, organising by-elections or reruns due to violence or malpractice is an additional expense. These diversionary costs accumulate, effectively acting as a hidden "violence tax" on the state's finances.

Political violence also erodes human capital. When violence keeps children away from school (even if intermittently) or causes educated individuals to leave the state (a brain drains due to instability), it harms long-term development. Osun, being an educational hub (with a state university and several colleges), could risk losing talent if instability persists. Additionally, the cycle of poverty and violence is reinforced: violence deters economic progress, which in turn keeps unemployment high, feeding the pool of youths available for violent mobilisation. This vicious cycle has to be broken for development to take root.

Finally, there's an often-overlooked social impact on development: damage to social trust and civic engagement means fewer community-driven development efforts. Communities riddled with political division may find it hard to unite for communal projects (like building schools or maintaining infrastructure). The spirit of volunteerism and collective effort can be sapped if people feel their communal bonds are undermined by partisan mistrust. In Osun's history,

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vibrant community associations have been key in local development (like town unions). Persistent political strife risks politicising these associations or creating parallel ones aligned with parties, thereby weakening unified community action for development. Next, the discussion will synthesise these findings and theoretical perspectives to interpret the broader significance of Osun's political violence and to suggest pathways towards lasting peace and stability in the state.

Discussion of Findings

The case of Osun State illustrates a nuanced and, in some ways, paradoxical situation: a relatively small Nigerian state with a reputation for being more peaceful than certain flashpoint regions yet internally grappling with seemingly intractable political power struggles that periodically erupt into violence. By examining Osun's experiences through the theoretical lenses of conflict outlined earlier, we can discern how local dynamics echo broader patterns of political conflict and what distinguishes Osun's situation.

One key observation is that Osun State's political violence is a microcosm of Nigeria's wider conflict issues, albeit on a smaller scale. The assertion by Owonikoko (2012) that Osun was a "Crisis State" in terms of youth electoral violence drew mixed reactions from our informants. Some local stakeholders (including a state House of Assembly member from the PDP and a former electoral commissioner) concur that Osun is indeed bedevilled by crisis, especially around elections. They point out that violent flare-ups have recurred often enough to mark Osun as volatile. On the other hand, prominent figures like an ambassador and a former governor's press secretary strongly contest the label "Crisis State." They argue that compared to more turbulent states in Nigeria (like Rivers, Plateau, Kano, Kaduna), Osun's conflicts are relatively mild and its overall stability higher. As one put it, "our politics is getting better… we should describe Osun as a model of evolving from extremism rather than a crisis state."

Both perspectives hold truth: Osun has not descended into widespread chaos or prolonged violence as seen in some regions, which suggests a resilience or mitigating factors at play. Possibly, a certain political culture or timely intervention by community elders has kept conflicts from going completely out of control. However, the frequency and persistence of violent episodes confirm that conflict is a recurring phenomenon in Osun's political life, aligning with Karl Marx's notion that society (and here, the political system) is in a state of perpetual conflict. Indeed, our findings show that every electoral cycle or major power contest in Osun comes with its dose of tension and potential violence – indicating that the competitive struggle for state power consistently generates conflict. This reflects Marx's idea that social order (or political order) is maintained by dominance and contestation rather than pure consensus.

The struggle for political power in Osun is intense precisely because, as in Nigeria generally, control of government is tied to access to wealth and patronage. The persistent conflicts are borne out of what one respondent called the "desperation to be in power or remain in power." This underscores that the root driver is structural: Nigeria's political economy centralises resources in

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government hands, making state offices profoundly attractive – a scenario Randall Collins would describe as inherently conflictual since rivals must "defeat" each other to secure power. The emergence of arms-wielding thugs serving political lords in Osun confirms that when formal competition (elections) is insufficiently regulated or trusted, actors revert to more primal means (i.e., force). This "might makes right" attitude fits within Weber's observation that when legal-rational authority is weak, power contests may devolve to raw force, harking back to traditional or charismatic displays of power.

A significant point for discussion is the interplay of local dynamics with broader patterns. Many causes of conflict identified in Osun (godfatherism, unemployment, exclusivist politics) are national issues. However, Osun's specific context a Yoruba society with certain norms, a history of progressive politics (stemming from the Obafemi Awolowo legacy), and a relatively homogenous ethnic makeup – provides some buffers. For instance, religious conflict hasn't been as pronounced in Osun's violence as in some northern states (though religious tensions exist, they are often intertwined with politics). Instead, Osun's triggers have been more about intra-elite rivalry and patronage distribution. This might explain why some local elites view Osun as "not a crisis state" because the violence has remained largely elite-driven and hasn't spilled over into general communal warfare or insurgency. To use Johan Galtung's terms, Osun at times experiences "negative peace" (absence of war but presence of underlying tension). For stretches, things are calm (no open violence), yet the parties perceive each other as enemies and maintain capacities for violence (deterrent postures). This precarious stability can be mistaken for peace until a spark ignites conflict.

The findings consistently reaffirm Marx's claim that social order is maintained by domination and power, not consensus. In Osun, whenever one faction dominates (e.g., a strong governor with tight party control), conflicts tend to be suppressed (though resentment builds under the surface). When dominance is contested (e.g., a governor at odds with a powerful predecessor or when an election is tightly competitive), overt conflict surfaces. The oscillation between quiescence and flare-up has characterised Osun's last few years. After 2018, for example, the APC's internal domination was fractured, leading to open conflict; after 2022, the PDP took over and there was a brief lull as the APC regrouped – but tensions remain, as the APC feels cheated out of power and the PDP feels insecure in what has historically been a swing state.

Significantly, the role of structural inequalities and class interests is evident in Osun's turmoil. The persistent "sit-tight syndrome" and "winner-takes-all" ethos in Osun politics highlight that elites are not willing to share power or exit gracefully, which is a major conflict driver. This aligns with Marx's view of an elite class working to maximize its benefits and preserve its position. It also resonates with the idea from Weber that those at the top of social hierarchies (political elites in this case) will go to great lengths, including illegitimate ones, to prevent non-elites from joining their ranks[25]. The circulation of elites in Osun is very limited: power tends to revolve among the same individuals or groups, with violence and manipulation often employed to keep it that way.

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However, we must also consider why Osun hasn't escalated into more severe conflict compared to some other regions. One reason could be the presence of strong informal conflict resolution mechanisms. Osun's communities still respect traditional rulers and community leaders who can intervene. For example, after the violent clash in 2025, religious and traditional leaders jointly held peace meetings between APC and PDP factions, which helped prevent retaliatory spirals. The cultural respect for dialogue in Yoruba society might moderate extremes – a factor not captured by purely structural theories but important in practice. Also, Osun's conflicts, while frequent, often end with elite bargains or judicial resolution (e.g., courts deciding the winner of an election after a violent dispute). These mechanisms, though imperfect, have so far averted a full-scale breakdown of order. In theoretical terms, one could say that elements of a functionalist consensus still exist beneath the conflict – all sides ultimately agree on the legitimacy of some process (like courts or subsequent elections) to resolve disputes, which differentiates this from a situation of total anomie or insurgency.

The interplay of economic and socio-cultural causes in Osun's violence also merits attention. Our findings emphasised youth unemployment as a core factor essentially validating a micro-economic grievance theory: deprived young men become foot-soldiers of violence for pay (this echoes Ted Gurr's relative deprivation concept where perceived lack of opportunities leads to aggression). It also touches on Paul Collier's idea of "greed and grievance" – here, the youths' "need" for economic gain is exploited by the elites' "greed" (desire for power). Meanwhile, socio-cultural factors like godfatherism inject patriarchal, hierarchical dynamic into politics, complicating a straightforward class analysis. Godfatherism shows that not all violence is simply poor versus rich – often it's orchestrated by rival segments of the elite, using the poor as pawns. This indicates a fracturing of the elite class internally (as elite theory would note, elites are not monolithic). Osun's example demonstrates that factional elite conflict can be as violent as class conflict, a nuance to classical Marxism that aligns with Weber's recognition of multiple sources of social conflict.

An underlying theme in this discussion is the failure of conflict management mechanisms. Chinwokwu (2013) and others pointed out Nigeria's poor conflict management capacity. Osun exemplifies this – repeated violence implies that after each incident, not enough is done systemically to prevent recurrence. There's a reactive rather than preventive approach. The consensus among informants was that prevention is better than cure, yet preventative structures (like effective early warning, nonpartisan security force deployment, equitable development to reduce grievances) are inadequate. This leads to recurring flare-ups. For Osun to break this cycle, a proactive peacebuilding approach must be institutionalised.

Lastly, on a positive note, it is worth highlighting that Osun is at a crossroads. The conclusion of one cycle of violence (with the PDP now in power and the APC in opposition) could either be a turning point for reform or the prelude to another violent contest in the next election if nothing changes. Future studies or comparative analyses could explore if Osun's situation improves with national reforms (for example, if electoral processes become more credible after the 2022 Electoral Act in Nigeria, will that reduce violence in states like Osun?). The

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preliminary signs from the 2023 national elections (which were still contested but saw some improvements in technology use) are mixed.

This discussion sets the stage for concrete recommendations. The next section outlines actionable steps for various stakeholders – from political parties and government authorities to civil society and security agencies – aimed at mitigating political violence and building lasting peace in Osun State. These recommendations draw from both the specific context of Osun and best practices gleaned from broader conflict resolution experiences.

Conclusion

Political violence in Osun State, like in many parts of Nigeria, stems from a complex blend of political manipulation, socio-economic challenges, and structural power struggles. The study confirms that conflict is a recurring feature of Osun's politics, driven by elites' lust for power, patronage dynamics (*godfatherism*), widespread youth unemployment, and systemic inequities such as the "winner-takes-all" electoral system. These factors collectively fuel an environment where disputes too often escalate into violence. In line with Owonikoko's description, Osun exhibits many attributes of a "Crisis State," experiencing intra-party and inter-party crises that threaten peaceful coexistence and strain the state's security architecture. Our findings underscore that all major political parties in Osun have been engulfed in conflicts, with the dominant APC and PDP being particularly prone to violent crises, confirming the pervasive nature of the problem.

The consequences of this political violence are profound. It undermines state security, weakens governance and institutions, and damages social relations and development. Osun's recent history shows that violent contests for power erode public trust in democracy, disrupt economic activity, and divert resources away from public goods to security efforts and reconstruction. Unless addressed, these conflicts risk creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates instability and underdevelopment.

However, the challenges are not insurmountable. The analysis suggests that a holistic strategy is needed to break the cycle of violence. This approach must integrate political, socio-economic, and institutional reforms aimed at both proximate triggers and underlying causes of conflict. In light of the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to stakeholders in Osun State:

Recommendations

- **Promote Adherence to Democratic Rules and Internal Party Reforms:** All political parties and power brokers in Osun should *play the game according to the rules* and regulations set by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Nigerian Constitution, and their own party constitutions. This means an unequivocal rejection of violence and thuggery in party activities. Parties must strengthen their internal democracy by ensuring transparent and fair candidate selection processes, thereby reducing the bitterness that leads to violent breakaways. The "winner-takes-all" syndrome should be

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addressed by parties pledging inclusivity – for instance, forming unity governments or offering losing factions' meaningful roles – to mitigate the desperation associated with electoral loss. Party leadership at the national level (since the same parties operate nationally) should support the Osun chapters in enforcing discipline: any party member found sponsoring violence should face strict sanctions, including expulsion and legal action. By institutionalising internal conflict resolution mechanisms (such as party arbitration panels that include respected neutral elders), parties can resolve disputes before they spill into the streets.

- **Foster Inclusive Governance and Power-Sharing:** The state government should make deliberate efforts to form an inclusive administration that gives diverse groups – across party lines, religious divides, genders, and youth cohorts – a sense of representation in governance. For example, advisory committees or development boards can include opposition and civil society representatives to work on common goals, signalling that governance is about service to all, not just those who won the election. Local governments, in particular, could institute all-party consultative forums to collaboratively address community issues. This inclusivity would reduce the perception of politics as zero-sum and lower the stakes of elections. In the same vein, affirmative steps to include women and marginalised groups in political leadership should be taken their inclusion can introduce new perspectives and help dilute the aggressive, male-dominated political culture.

- **Strengthen Conflict Resolution and Peace Mechanisms:** Osun should establish or reinvigorate a State Peace Council comprising government officials, traditional rulers, religious leaders, women and youth representatives, and security agencies. This council would serve as an early-warning and mediation body to anticipate and intervene in political disputes before they escalate. Ahead of elections, the Peace Council can break*Peace Accords* where candidates publicly commit to non-violence and to accepting the results or pursuing only legal redress. Community-based peace committees at the LGA level should supplement this effort by monitoring local tensions. Traditional rulers and community leaders, who still command respect, must continue to use their convening power to defuse conflicts – their impartial mediation can be crucial, as seen in previous local disputes that were settled through their intervention.

- **Enforce the Rule of Law and End Impunity for Violence:** State authorities, in collaboration with federal security agencies, must reform and strengthen the security sector to ensure a swift, impartial response to any outbreak of political violence. This includes better training and equipping the police to manage crowds and quell clashes without bias. Police operations in Osun should be scrutinised by independent observers (for example, from the National Human Rights Commission) during election periods to discourage partisanship. Importantly, every incident of political violence should be thoroughly

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investigated and prosecuted. The era of "political thugs" operating with impunity must end. The state can advocate for special courts or tribunals (in partnership with the federal judiciary) for electoral offences and political violence, to fast-track such cases. For example, those identified in the 2025 local government crisis should be brought to trial and, if found guilty, punished publicly to send a strong message. Likewise, any politician or godfather implicated in sponsoring violence should face legal consequences, regardless of status. In short, no one can be above the law – a cornerstone principle for deterring future violence.

- **Implement Security Sector Reforms and Coordination:** The police and other security agencies in Osun should undergo confidence-building and capacity-enhancement measures. Certain policing functions could be decentralised to allow quicker local responses (while remaining within the national framework). For instance, having dedicated tactical units in Osun during election seasons that work closely with local communities could improve responsiveness. Stakeholders have recommended *decentralising police control, enhancing capacity building for security agencies, and promoting cooperation to address small arms proliferation*. In practice, the state government should actively support federal security efforts by providing local logistics and intelligence, while also advocating for long-term policing reforms (including the possibility of state police, as is being debated nationally). Joint security task forces (police, civil defence, and military as needed) should be constituted well in advance of elections to map out potential flashpoints and preempt any stockpiling of weapons. Additionally, community disarmament programs (such as amnesty or buy-back initiatives for illegal weapons) could be introduced to reduce the tools of violence available.

- **Pursuing Electoral Reforms and Integrity Measures:** Building on recent improvements in electoral technology, Osun should champion further electoral reforms that enhance transparency and credibility. The state can lobby INEC to pilot innovations (such as more robust electronic transmission of results or biometric voter accreditation) in Osun elections to minimise disputes. Moreover, civic education campaigns should be ramped up, possibly through school curricula and community workshops, emphasising that elections are not war and educating citizens on the electoral process to reduce susceptibility to rumours that often spark violence. The state's Ministry of Information and civil society organisations can collaborate on these enlightenment programs, especially targeting youth who are commonly recruited for violence.

- **Promote Economic Empowerment for Youth:** Addressing the human resources of violence – unemployed youth – is paramount. The state government, with support from the private sector and federal programs, should implement targeted youth employment and entrepreneurship initiatives. As suggested by interviewees, creating

targeted youth employment windows aligned with election calendars could divert potential recruits away from thuggery. For example, well before the next election, the government could launch public works or skills training programs that engage thousands of young people, providing them with stipends and a sense of purpose so that political thuggery becomes less attractive. Additionally, political parties themselves could adopt codes of conduct that include youth empowerment schemes (such as hiring youths as campaign interns who have a future within party structures, rather than as street enforcers). Expanding access to education and vocational training, along with facilitating microcredit for youth-led businesses, will gradually reduce the pool of idle youths who can be hired for violence. Over time, as more youths find legitimate livelihoods, the incentive to serve as a thug diminishes. In essence, this recommendation seeks to break the *poverty-violence cycle*.

- **Enhance Community Vigilance and Early-Warning Systems:** At the grassroots level, communities should be encouraged to form peace clubs or non-violent vigilance groups focused on information-sharing, which can detect and report early signs of trouble – such as the stockpiling of weapons, the arrival of unfamiliar gang elements, or an uptick in hate speech and incitement. These community early-warning signals should be communicated to the State Peace Council or security agencies for preventive action. Modern technology can assist: a simple SMS tree or social media-based alert network could allow rapid communication from villages to central security coordinators about emerging conflicts. The earlier the response, the less likely a conflict will escalate. Osun can learn from other Nigerian states that have trialled early warning systems (some exist for communal conflicts in the North Central zone) and adapt those models for detecting political violence.

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