



## Social Media and the Historical Trajectory of Political Violence in Aramoko-Ekiti, Ekiti State

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**Abstract.** The intersection of communication networks and political violence has a long history in the Nigerian nation, where practices of information sharing have often informed collective action and conflict. In the Aramoko-Ekiti community, Ekiti State, Nigeria, community narratives, rumour networks, and partisan mobilisation have traditionally influenced political violence. The older channels have now gained new forms and terms with the emergence of social media, which has redefined the nature of political contestation. This paper is a critical assessment of how social media has contributed to the current phenomenon of political violence in Aramoko-Ekiti, especially with emphasis on the youth. Using a qualitative historical method, the study integrates oral interviews of sampled youth and political stakeholders, as well as the examination of secondary data in the form of online resources and digital communications. This approach situates the modern experience within the broader historical context of political agitation and violence in society. Social media platforms have altered the magnitude, pace, and intensity of mobilization, while also reproducing prior trends of competition and factionalism in the political trajectory of Aramoko-Ekiti, as revealed by the findings of this paper. The paper suggests encouraging historical consciousness, digital literacy, and responsible Internet use as measures to mitigate the adverse impact of violence and facilitate peaceful participation in the online space. Furthermore, it highlights the need for further research in this area to fully comprehend the intricate dynamics of social media and political violence.

**Keywords:** Social media, Political violence, Youth, Aramoko-Ekiti, Digital Communication.

### 1. Introduction

The relationship between communication, politics, and violence is a historical question in the study of societies. Over time, the flow of information and the medium through which people communicate have greatly influenced the behaviour of political actors, mass mobilization, and the eruption of conflicts (Amit, 2017). In Nigerian society, people used to organize political communication based on oral traditions, kinship groups, communal meetings, and rumour mills, which were regarded as the lifeblood of political activity. These more traditional forms of exchange often carried within them the seeds of distrust, competition, and even violence, particularly in cases where political rivalry became intense (Adeshina, 2022). With the introduction of digital technology, these dynamics have changed, bringing both new opportunities to mobilise and new dangers to social disintegration. Social media has become a powerful tool in influencing and shaping the global political dialogue, with the ability to disseminate information rapidly, unite diverse communities, and circumvent traditional media regulations. However, in a society like Nigeria, where political contests are characterized by high stakes, weak institutions, and a youth-driven population, social media platforms have become venues for incitement, rumour spread, and mobilisation to commit violence (Alade and Victoria, 2018).

The post-civilian time of 1999 in Nigeria has recorded a history of patterns of electoral violence, factional tussles, and disputes that often escalate into violence. These tensions have not been caused by social media, but have been frequently aggravated by the amplification of divisive narratives, the facilitation of misinformation, and the mobilisation of previously inactive groups of people into confrontation cycles (Apuke and Tunca, 2018). Under this national image, Ekiti State stands out for its rich political culture and frequent cases of

political violence. A town with a rich history of political participation, community-based unity, and a young demographic, Aramoko-Ekiti presents an attractive microcosm in which these processes can be analysed. Electoral contests in Aramoko-Ekiti are generally considered tough, and political parties utilise both traditional methods and new technologies to their advantage. Social media has transformed this competition, and young people have begun to utilise social media tools to express their views, recruit followers, or criticise opponents by engaging with platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. Although this online engagement has enhanced the level of engagement, it has also given rise to new conflicts, particularly when misinformation, propaganda, and incitement spread freely. The fact that political violence persists in Nigeria even after decades of democratic practice is a concern, and Aramoko-Ekiti is not immune. Although the issue of political violence is a national problem, the given research is limited to the case study of Aramoko-Ekiti. The town provides a practical yet insightful background on the analysis of the congruence between social media and political violence within local communities.

Aramoko-Ekiti is one of the prominent ancient towns in Yoruba land and in Ekiti state. It is the Headquarters of Ekiti West Local Government in Ekiti State. It is a nodal town with access roads to all parts of Ekiti and Osun States. It is situated in the middle of the western hemisphere of Ekiti State. It is approximately 26 kilometers to Ado-Ekiti, the capital of Ekiti State, 15 kilometers to Ijero-Ekiti, 15 kilometers to the warm spring at Ikogosi Ekiti, and about 42 kilometers to Ilesa in Osun State. According to history, Aramoko-Ekiti, from time immemorial, has been a sovereign town. The founder and the first ruler was one of the sixteen Obas and foremost Paramount Rulers in Yorubaland with full traditional right and authority to wear without any harm or danger the Original Special beaded crown decorated with sixteen birds. (The Eiye Okin, 'Iyere Okin', symbolized it) was bestowed on him by the ODUDUWA (The progenitor of all Yoruba race) and other emblems of ruling Authority before they were sent out of Ile-Ife (The cradle of Yoruba Race) to search for suitable land on which they could set up their respective kingdoms independent of one another's control. According to Professor Ishola Olomola in his paper titled "The place of Aramoko in the history of the Yoruba race", the don revealed that Aramoko belongs to the royal blood of the Yoruba progenitor, Oduduwa. He said Aramoko, translated to mean people who belong to the patriarch of the house or the husband, is a land of people who are direct descendants of Oduduwa.

According to history, all of them journeyed towards various directions, including the first Alara, who was a maternal brother to Ajero and Orangun of Ila, respectively. As an ancient town, its history dates back many centuries. Aramoko Ekiti has a unique historical beginning, boasting a vibrant traditional and cultural heritage that is truly worth being proud of. In those olden days, the administration of the town was entirely in the hands of a council of sixteen high chiefs, which also constituted the kingmakers. However, in contemporary times, apart from the kingmakers, there now exist other prominent chiefs with lesser status than the kingmakers. Still, they all play significant roles in the community's affairs, especially in their respective quarters, where they are represented. The town is divided into four major traditional quarters: Isasa-Ijowa, Anaye-Ikunato, Oke-Oja, and Isao.

It is, however, essential to note that the kingship arrangement of the community is typically rotated among the three prominent ruling houses. The three Ruling Houses in the Aramoko Kingdom include: The OLOKUN, The OKINBALOYE, and The ARAKEJI ruling houses.

Due to the peaceful coexistence and traditional hospitality of the people of Aramoko, the community is a melting pot of cultures. Many individuals have come to the Aramoko Kingdom to settle and make a living, either as farmers, traders, professionals, or civil servants. It is interesting to note that some communities, such as the Igbos, Urhobos, Itsekiris, Hausas, Oyos, and Igbiras etc., have settled and intermarried with the indigenous people, adding to the diversity and warmth of the community.

Agriculture is not just the primary occupation of the community, but also a way of life. The farmers cultivate a wide range of food crops, viz.: yams, cassava, maize, rice, plantain, and banana. The cash crops are mainly cocoa, kola nuts, and timber. This dedication to farming and the land reflects the resilience and hard work of the people of Aramoko. The community is surrounded by fourteen farm villages or settlement villages, each with its own unique administrative structure. The administrative affairs of these settlements are typically managed by some of the prominent high chiefs from the community. These high chiefs, such as Elejofi and Olona, play a crucial role in maintaining peace and order in their respective villages, as well as in representing the interests of their villagers in the larger community.

Kajola – Administered by Odogun, Ajobamidele – Administered by Atiba, Ile-Egbe – Administered by Alafe, Surulere Odeyemi – Administered by Oisinkin, Orisunmibare – Administered by Okunato,

Temidire, Akola – Administered by Ogboni,  
 Surulere – Administered by Sajowa, Olorunsogo –  
 Administered by Asasa, Araromi Oke-Aro –  
 Administered by Eleyingbo.

Aramoko is enriched with rich traditional institutions, which are very much alive to date. Special festivities for peace, good harvest, prevention of diseases, and the death of young people are staged or held annually and occasionally as they are due for such ancestral gods as OGUN, IJUKU, ALELE, ORISA OWARUNLA, ISEJANA, and all the five OSUNS of Ara. Two of the essential annual events that attract many visitors to the town are the Olokun festival and the Odun Egungun Ara festival, also known as Isagun. During these festivals, the community comes together to celebrate their cultural heritage, with activities such as traditional dances, music performances, and ritual ceremonies.

This paper presents a qualitative historical analysis of the intricacies of the interaction between communication and political violence in Aramoko-Ekiti. The research utilises three primary sources of data: oral interviews, secondary sources, and digital content analysis. Youths, political stakeholders, and community leaders, through oral testimony, offer a distinctive way of understanding the local past and outlooks that may otherwise not be documented in official sources. The young participants, with their unique insights and active engagement in social media and political matters, were the key focus of the research. They are a group of people who participate in most digital communication and forms of political violence. Local politicians and party officials also provide valuable input into how political elites utilise social media as a mobilisation, propaganda, and, in some cases, incitement tool. Elders and community leaders provide historical perspectives on the development of political violence in Aramoko-Ekiti, offering comparative interpretations of previous forms of mobilisation and the current digital environment. The interviews were semi-structured and flexible, although the presence of major themes that needed to be covered, including the use of social media, experience of political violence, and continuity with the past, would be addressed systematically. The secondary information is obtained through published literature, particularly research on political violence and social media in Nigeria, which helps to place the experience of Aramoko-Ekiti in the broader context. The combination of oral interviews, secondary sources, and digital content analysis enables a comprehensive exploration of the influence of various forms of communication on the historical development of political violence in Aramoko-Ekiti. The research employs a purposive sample to identify respondents who are most significant to the research

goals, with a preference given to those with special insights. Analysis of the data is thematic in nature and will reveal patterns, contrasts, and stories across the various sources. It is an interpretive, rather than statistical, analysis that attempts to produce meanings, perceptions, and historical significance. Triangulation, cross-checking, and reflexivity are employed to ensure the credibility of the findings. The study is conducted in accordance with strict ethical principles, as the issue of political violence is a sensitive matter. Participation is undertaken with informed consent, and respondents are assured that their identities will be kept confidential. Moreover, ethical reflection applies to the digital content analysis process, which means that individuals are not revealed in a manner that may threaten them or jeopardise their political positions. These ethical considerations are integral to the research, ensuring the integrity and trustworthiness of the study.

## 2. Conceptualizing Social Media and Political Violence

Social media, in its most basic form, refers to online platforms that enable two-way communication, crowd-sourcing, and connection across long distances (Babaleye et al., 2020). Contrary to traditional media, which include radio, television, and print, and are unidirectional in nature, social media encourages immediacy, interactivity, and participatory involvement. The notable features of social media are speed, connectivity, and accessibility, which precondition strong mobilisation, information flow, and identity shaping (Suntai and Targema, 2017). These platforms have not only been used as campaign and political communication mediums but also the mediums through which rumours, hate speech, and incitement to violence circulate in Nigerian politics (Ekwueme and Folarin, 2017).

Political violence, in its turn, may be taken to mean the application or a threat of force to accomplish a political goal. It includes electoral violence, inter-communal strife of political overtones, political assassinations, violent demonstrations, and violent clashes between opposing groups (Okolo and Atiye, 2022). Political violence has served as a symptom of structural weaknesses, including poor governance, corruption, and weak institutions, as well as a strategy employed by elites seeking access to power or power consolidation in Nigeria (Tsegysu and Kelvin, 2021). The intersectionality of social media and political violence is evident in the fact that digital media can alter long-standing trends in political competition, facilitating quicker mobilisation, magnification, and dissemination of inflammatory content.

## 2.1 Communication and Conflict in Nigeria

The emergence of social media in Nigeria came with the strengthening of democratic contestation. Towards the end of the 2000s, Facebook and Twitter were used as a way of civic expression, campaign organization, and political debate. WhatsApp, with its closed, encrypted algorithms, was quickly becoming the most powerful tool, particularly at the local level, where smartphones and mobile data penetration were significant (Oluwagbohunmi, 2017). This marked the first instance in Nigeria's history where ordinary citizens, especially the youth, had the opportunity to bypass traditional gatekeepers and engage directly in the flow of political discourse.

The development had far-reaching implications for preventing political violence. On the one hand, there were opportunities to raise awareness, promote civic education, and facilitate peaceful mobilization through social media (Ekwueme and Folarin, 2017). Plans of action were implemented during the elections, where polling areas were monitored, irregularities were reported, and votes were mobilized. Conversely, the same platforms were turned into the means of distributing fake news, incitement, and the encouragement of violence. The viral spread of digital content means that fake or controversial messages can be transmitted across communities in just a few hours, and at times result in real-life confrontations. According to Olojede (2024):

"Nigeria's democracy has been under the siege of incessant crises, and these crises are a culmination of the country's successive years of corruption, human rights violations, and in recent times the misuse of social media (through the use of propaganda, cyber bullying, and cyber harassment) that heats the polity and generates bitter politics, hate, and bigotry. The implication of this is that it creates a ripe environment for continuous electoral violence and ethnic strife that consequently undermines democracy." (Olojede, 2024: 35)

On a national level, instances of electoral violence that have occurred since 1999 have become more and more marred by the mark of social media mobilization. The spread of misinformation in elections has frequently increased mistrust in election authorities and targeted anti-opponent campaigns at the grassroots level. The 2020 #EndSARS protests once again highlighted the duality of social media: it enabled millions of Nigerians to protest against police brutality collectively, but it also served as a platform where misinformation and counter-narratives led to violent confrontations in some areas (Akinyetun et al., 2021). The Nigerian state has been struggling with this fact by attempting to control online content,

which is often seen as politically oriented, and this appears to be jeopardizing the practice of freedom of expression (Suntai and Targema, 2017).

## 3. Historical Context of Political Violence in Aramoko-Ekiti Since 1999

Since the return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999, the Ekiti terrain has been marked by intense electoral competition. Clashes between supporters of rival parties, destruction of property, and intimidation of voters have often been standard features of the political violence in the state. Social media has introduced a new and concerning dimension to these struggles. Local politicians and their supporters are increasingly coordinating campaigns, disseminating propaganda, and mobilizing young people with the aid of digital platforms (Agidigbi, 2022). WhatsApp groups, especially, are quite potent in Ekiti, as political debates, rumours, and mobilization activities occur in online town halls. Partisan expression is frequently a rallying point on the Facebook pages of political actors or community influencers. For young people, these social sites not only give them a sense of empowerment but also a feeling of active participation in shaping the future of Nigerian politics; yet, they are being manipulated by political elites who use digital platforms to benefit themselves (Fanu et al., 2022).

The history of the state in question, marked by disputable gubernatorial campaigns involving allegations of election fraud, vote-buying, and physical violence, is a rich field for investigating how social media has increased the stakes of political rivalry. The youthfulness of populations, local rivalries among towns such as Aramoko-Ekiti, and the digitization of local markets have created a setting where digital platforms mediate the historical and technological components of political violence (Agidigbi & Afolabi, 2024). This historical context is crucial to understanding the current state of political violence in Ekiti.

Although conflict in precolonial Aramoko-Ekiti was not common, it was usually associated with inter-town feuds, resource disputes, or succession struggles. Political violence in the contemporary sense was not extensive because there was no partisan organization that could lead to the development of organized violence. The working of chants, songs, and oral narratives as means of agitation, however, pre-empted how communication systems, both traditional and colonial, would be instrumentalized to political effects at a later time (Ajayi & Adesote, 2015).

The political landscape in Nigeria underwent significant changes as a result of the colonial encounter. As the indirect rule was enforced,

traditional rulers were integrated into the administrative systems of colonial rule, often sparking tensions between the customary and colonial governmental systems. This twin power had created rivalries and opposition in places such as Ekiti land, and was at times met with violent clashes. Local politics underwent further changes with the introduction of Western education and missionary activities. The elites began to develop and become educated, which provided new leadership that was difficult to topple, both for the colonial administrators and the traditional rulers. These elites shared their ideas through print media, petitions, and the church by connecting local issues to a nationalist course. The political parties, such as the Action Group (AG), gained influence in Ekiti by the 1940s and 1950s, mobilizing the people through newspapers and rallies (Agidigbi & Afolabi, 2024).

These nationalist and regional parties were very pronounced in Aramoko-Ekiti. The educated elites in the town were also actively involved in spreading party propaganda, usually through the use of print media and oral campaigns. Nevertheless, it was also a time when political violence became increasingly organized in the region. The Action Group and the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) regularly fought in the polls, which reached far into Ekiti towns. The violence was, in most instances, supported by rumour networks and inflammatory rhetoric that was propagated in the community meetings. These trends formed the basis of the ongoing communication, political, and violence intermingling in Aramoko-Ekiti (Agidigbi, 2022).

Political competition in Nigeria intensified following the country's independence in 1960. Political rivalries in Ekiti, as was the case elsewhere in the country, soon turned into violent conflicts. The First Republic was characterized by the bad blood between regional parties and violence usually spilled over to towns such as Aramoko-Ekiti. Electoral races were especially worrisome, as false electioneering, voter coercion, and property incineration became a staple.

The communication systems played a crucial role in all these confrontations. The newspapers, radio, and rumour networks were turned into sources of propaganda, and party stalwarts mobilized youths as a means of enforcing their superiority. The intense competition in politics was experienced in Aramoko-Ekiti as in other Yoruba towns because allegiance to regional parties was strong. The violence had become a regular part of the political process, as evidenced by reports of fights between opposing groups, especially during elections. The 1966 military coup and the civil war (1967-1970) brought about a shake-up in the political scenario but failed to eradicate the causes of violence. Even

though geographically, Aramoko-Ekiti was far removed from the so-called theatres of war, the youth were not isolated by the bigger forces of militarisation and political revolution. Rumour networks were again formidable tools for political communication during this time, spreading news of betrayal, conspiracy, and ethnic separation. The mistrust that the stories created strengthened the relationship between communication and political confrontation, a precursor to the role that social media would play in the democratic era, where it would amplify these dynamics and make them more immediate and widespread (Agidigbi & Afolabi, 2024).

Between 1966 and 1999, Nigeria experienced a prolonged period of military rule, interrupted intermittently by brief periods of civilian rule. This era saw the repression and recasting of political life in towns such as Aramoko-Ekiti. The military regimes curtailed the freedom of political parties, as well as the freedom of the press, and attempted to depoliticize local governance. However, instead of eradicating the political conflict, these actions tend to divert it into the informal sphere. Political agitation in Aramoko-Ekiti during the military era was manifested in student movements, local resistance, and underground activism (Fanu et al., 2024). The communication was based on the rumour networks, face-to-face mobilization, and pamphlets. Although open violence was not as common as in the First Republic, sporadic confrontations occurred, particularly when the military attempted to bring about controlled transitions to civilian governance. For example, the political experiments of the late 1970s and early 1990s were characterized by new mobilisation in Ekiti towns, and violence erupted when transitions were declared invalid or deemed flawed.

The authoritarian influence of the military also influenced the minds of young people in Aramoko-Ekiti. Lacking official avenues of political expression, the youth resorted to informal groups, where rumours and stirrings flourished. Such experiences gave rise to a culture in which political engagement was strongly associated with confrontation, a culture that would subsequently resonate with social media during the democratic era. The military rule not only suppressed political freedom but also shaped the region's political culture, making it more confrontational and less trusting of one another. This culture would find a new platform in social media, where it would be amplified and spread more widely (Agidigbi & Afolabi, 2024).

Democracy was restored in 1999, marking the beginning of a new era of political contestation in Nigeria. In the case of Aramoko-Ekiti, this was a

revival of active engagement in multiparty politics, as well as an increase in political violence. The intensity of electoral competition in Ekiti State was soon to be popularly associated with the elections of governors, which were characterized by violence, vote-buying, and intimidation. The youngsters were at the centre stage of the struggles in Aramoko-Ekiti. Political parties often enlisted young men to serve as enforcers, mobilizers, or street-level campaigners. Rumour networks and community gossip continued to play a central role; yet, the relationship between communication technologies and mobilization was becoming increasingly dominated by the new. Mobile phones became ubiquitous by the mid-2000s, enabling the rapid coordination of large groups of people. In the 2010s, social media channels such as Facebook and WhatsApp were introduced, significantly expanding the scope of political communication and the speed of communication (Agidigbi, 2022).

The 2014 and 2018 Ekiti gubernatorial elections can be mentioned as such a decisive moment. Both of these elections involved extensive mobilization, utilizing social media platforms, propaganda, and counterpropaganda. Facebook pages in Aramoko-Ekiti operated by supporters of local parties turned into partisan arenas, and WhatsApp groups acted as an echo chamber to disseminate information, as well as misinformation. These platforms were immediate, and the rumours turned into confrontations within hours, which increased tensions during already tense elections (Olojede, 2022). Essentially, youths have been a characteristic of political violence in Aramoko-Ekiti both in the past and today. In the past, young men were mobilized through community networks and traditional institutions, as well as material incentives, to serve as foot soldiers for political parties. This trend continued into the digital era, where social media provides additional mobilisation tools. Social media is a platform where individuals can form their identity and engage in political life, something that is utilized not only by older people but also by young people living in Aramoko-Ekiti. WhatsApp groups help them to identify themselves in partisan groups, whereas Facebook provides expression of politics with visibility and recognition. Nevertheless, the same platforms put them in the hands of the political elite who access digital propaganda to provoke confrontations. The merger of historical trends in youth mobilization with digital technologies has, consequently, turned out to be a perilous blend, as contemporary communication systems amplify historical violence in a manner that generates repetitive conflict (Agidigbi & Afolabi, 2024).

#### **4. Aramoko-Ekiti Social Media Usage Patterns**

Among young people and political stakeholders in Aramoko-Ekiti, WhatsApp and Facebook have penetrated the sphere of political communication. WhatsApp groups, which are often divided along partisan lines, have become crucial venues for disseminating campaign messages, mobilizing supporters, and refuting opposing narratives. These organizations not only encompass the inhabitants of Aramoko-Ekiti but also the members of the diaspora in Lagos, Abuja, and abroad, thereby expanding the geographical dimension of the political discussion. In these WhatsApp groups, young people claim that various functions are fulfilled, such as coordinating campaigns, sharing information quickly, and spreading misinformation. Mobilizers are given directives on the places of rallies, how to distribute campaign materials and the techniques of persuading voters. To strengthen allegiance to the party or undermine the opposition, videos, voice messages, and memes are circulated without much verification. There is a rumour of an intended attack, malpractice, or scandals during elections, and these add to the complications of political violence.

By contrast, Facebook is used for public image-building, and candidates and their supporters maintain active pages that post achievements, promises, and symbolic images. The visual aspect of Facebook, such as photos of huge crowds at rallies, videos of speeches, or well-selected suggestions, produces the effect of momentum that can persuade undecided voters and strengthen the sense of group identity. While Twitter has a negligible impact on the political discussions of Aramoko-Ekiti due to its lower penetration, posts from national political discussions regularly penetrate local WhatsApp groups. This illustrates how the regional and national digital spaces are porous, thereby highlighting the interconnectedness of political communication in Nigeria. The results highlight the importance of social media in politically narrating, mobilizing, and potentially influencing political violence in Aramoko-Ekiti.

#### **5. Attitudes of the Young on Political Participation**

The voices of the youth in Aramoko-Ekiti reveal a dualistic approach to participation in politics, encompassing both feelings of disillusionment and a sense of agency. On the one hand, they are angry at mainstream politics due to corruption and its failure to deliver on promises, as well as its lack of engagement in decision-making processes. Social media, on the other hand, provides them with a sense of visibility and empowerment that they often lack in traditional methods of political organization.

Through platforms like WhatsApp, young people believe they can engage with politicians, challenge official discourses, and make themselves relevant in the political arena. Nevertheless, there are two-fold advantages to this participation in partisan online communities that foster polarization. Political mobilization is an aspect that attracts many youths, both online and offline, because it provides a means of accessing financial incentives offered by political elites. Here, social media serves as the channel through which the politics of transaction reach the digital space. The messages spread through the groups are often followed by promises of stipends, food, or other material rewards to people who attend rallies or threaten their opponents.

The situation here is indicative of a wider Nigerian paradox: as much as the youth have taken over digital platforms, their use is more frequently organized and exploited by political elites, which actually reinforces the cycles of clientelism, rather than breaking them. These views of the youths highlight the complexity of the relationship between economic vulnerability and political participation, where social media is not only an instrument used neutrally but also a platform managed and utilized by political elites to manipulate and control the youths. Finally, the convergence of social media, economic gain, and political action in Aramoko-Ekiti serves as a reminder of the intricacies of youth involvement in the political arena, as the need to become an agent and visible is often counterbalanced by the reality of exploitation and manipulation.

### ***Dynamism of Digital Misinformation and Propaganda***

The analysis of digital content provides insight into how misinformation pervades the formation of political perceptions in Aramoko-Ekiti. Gossips that could previously be shared at regular community meetings are now shared quickly via WhatsApp and Facebook, and can have profound effects in most cases. Rivalry is undermined by false statements about a candidate's health or eligibility, and, when compounded, fear and mistrust are heightened through reports of attacks or rigging. It is also typical to misrepresent facts by using fabricated photos and videos, which are designed to manipulate emotions and influence people's opinions. This effect reflects the long history of rumours and propaganda as instruments of political rivalry in Nigeria. Formerly, exaggerated claims were disseminated through pamphlets, leaflets, posters, and town criers to mobilize or demobilize supporters. Nevertheless, the digital communication process has transformed the situation, as information can now spread at unprecedented speed and reach a wider audience. In

contrast, it is more challenging to trace its origin and hold actors responsible.

The cultural and symbolic resources used in social media propaganda are typically those familiar to the community, including images of a local masquerade or references to the warrior tradition of Ekiti. These signs are used to portray political conflicts as existential conflicts, thereby justifying violence. Such a dynamic points out that social media is not an imposed outside force but is instead a space onto which local histories, identities, and rivalries are pinned and enhanced. The convergence of digital communication and local culture narratives has formed a complex and frequently fluctuating political environment in Aramoko-Ekiti, where the role of misinformation and propaganda cannot be underestimated in shaping perception and influencing behaviour.

### ***Rising political violence and Social Media***

Social media can exacerbate existing tensions, rather than being the direct cause of violence. The tendency is exemplified by multiple events in Aramoko-Ekiti, where false information about ballot snatching or an imminent attack was spread on WhatsApp, motivating groups of young people to defend the polling points prematurely, and in some cases, causing confrontations. Facebook became the venue for heated words between fighting supporters, which sometimes escalated into real-life confrontations, with insults and threats becoming increasingly personalized. The rallies' mobilization frequently featured implicit promotion of conflict and postings of heroic defenders against their opponents. These trends indicate that social media erases the distinction between online and offline politics, often transforming symbolic contestation into corporeal mobilization, and strengthens the cycle of political violence in Aramoko-Ekiti. The social media dynamics observed in this situation emphasize the complex relationship between digital media, local dynamics, and political violence, emphasizing the need to consider the nuances of online and offline interactions in shaping political behaviour.

### ***Correlation with Historical Modes of Mobilisation***

There is a strong continuity between the dynamics of social media and previous political mobilization in Aramoko-Ekiti and Nigeria as a whole. Misinformation and rumours, among others, have long been used to create unrest, and now WhatsApp messages are the same thing, but much more effective. The youths also do not change their status in the political arena as political foot soldiers, where young men have always been mobilized as a tool for political parties in elections and rewarded with food,

money, or patronage. It has only recently been introduced to online platforms during the digital age. Another continuity is the prevalence of symbolic politics, a characteristic of Nigerian politics for decades. Since the campaigns of the 1960s, which utilized local masquerades, to present-day campaigns featuring memes of Ekiti identity, political communication remains filled with cultural symbols that justify partisan allegiance and sometimes lead to confrontation. Elites remain the most critical organizers of the mobilization, and the possibility of using a digital platform to engage a broader audience reduces the expenses of propaganda and increases its effectiveness to the maximum. Such continuities suggest that we cannot understand the role of social media in political violence in isolation from Nigeria's long history of political culture.

Nevertheless, some significant differences that characterize the social media age, as compared to previous eras, are also present. Examples include anonymity, where the content can be disseminated without any responsibility, as opposed to posters or oral propaganda that can be linked to particular agents. Social media has enabled the diaspora to be directly engaged in local political conversations, and it can influence the discourse remotely in ways never before possible. Digital technologies have also accelerated and become viral, thereby diminishing the chances of verification or mediation, as false information spreads within minutes. Additionally, the prevalence of videos, memes, and photos marks a departure from text-based or spoken propaganda, as images can be more emotionally charged and impactful.

These contrasts highlight how digital technologies not only increase violence in quantity but also in quality, and how politics are being reimagined and performed in Aramoko-Ekiti. Finally, the research highlights the importance of understanding social media as a continuation of an old drama, which multiplies existing practices rather than revolutionizing them. The intricate relationship between continuity and change would help us understand more clearly the role social media plays in influencing political violence in Nigeria.

The trends in Aramoko-Ekiti mirror broader trends in Nigeria, where WhatsApp and Facebook are the primary platforms for political communication, serving as instruments of mobilization and sources of misinformation. Youths are vulnerable to manipulation by the elite, both online and offline, due to their disenchantment with conventional politics and economic insecurity. Nevertheless, Aramoko-Ekiti also reveals the locality of digital politics, in which digital spaces become highly localized and are rooted in local rivalry, identities, and histories. This highlights the need to analyze

political violence on a more specific level than the national level, focusing instead on a community level where larger trends are represented through local interactions, as observed in the study by Alade and Victorian (2018). This article highlights a paradox that social media in Aramoko-Ekiti has become both an instrument of empowerment and a source of political violence. On the one hand, it enables youths to voice their opinions and mobilise groups, contesting political elites in a manner that was previously difficult to do. Conversely, it magnifies disinformation, polarises, and, in most cases, results in physical confrontations, as a study by Adeshina (2022) also found.

Historically, communication systems have always mediated political violence in Aramoko-Ekiti. Rumours, posters, and verbal propaganda once served as mobilisation vectors, often positioning mobilization rivals as existential threats. Nowadays, these roles are dominated by WhatsApp and Facebook, and the fact that communication continues to be used to polarize and mobilize. Nevertheless, the break is in the pace, distance, and anonymity of digital services, which constrain the time necessary to verify or mediate and offer buffers against escalation. The results of this study also highlight the fact that social media is not a source of violence; rather, it exacerbates existing tensions by recreating traditional patterns of youth mobilization, elite manipulation, and cultural symbolism. However, amplification is a neutral process that can go in either direction, with messages of peace, civic responsibility, and solidarity in the community as easy to spread as any inflammatory message (Adeshina, 2022).

The fact that the digital and political space in Aramoko-Ekiti is centred on youths is a risk and an opportunity. The fact that they are economically vulnerable and opinionatedly partisan makes them susceptible to violent mobilization, while the fact that they are digitally savvy, creative, and numerically strong makes them a potential change agent. In the digital age, if youths are often seen as soldiers of violence, they can also be the carriers of peace. In a bid to do this, the digital literacy initiatives can be used to teach youths how to be critical when detecting misinformation and breaking the manipulation cycle. Peaceful political speech, enhanced by humour, music, and memes, can divert the creative forces away from aggressive propaganda. Digital spaces that promote youth civic education will empower young people to engage in peaceful political discussions.

It is also the responsibility of the elites, who are the main initiators of mobilization, to uphold the standard of digital ethics. This involves signing voluntary codes of conduct, funding fact-checking

projects, and supporting civic engagement campaigns rather than partisan propaganda. It is possible to reposition digital communication as a source of constructive interaction, rather than a source of hostility, to harness social media in preventing violence in Aramoko-Ekiti and facilitating peacebuilding. The problem with Aramoko-Ekiti is how to redefine politics, which is currently dominated by the concept that politics is a zero-sum game, in which victory justifies violence and defeat leads to exclusion. This story is an extension of Nigeria's history of political warfare. Social media, however, also provides the means of redefining politics as a civic space, in which engagement is not just appreciated in the context of securing electoral victory, but also in fostering community discourse. This was affirmed in the study by Akinyetun et al. (2021) and Olojede (2022).

The findings of this study underscore that social media is not inherently violent, but rather its usage that can prompt violence. Through social media applications such as WhatsApp and Facebook, civil societies, churches, and schools can showcase positive experiences of non-violent interaction, youth creativity, and political responsibility. This has the potential to transform digital spaces, shifting them towards peace and a culture of civic responsibility. By highlighting this potential, we can inspire our audience with a sense of possibility and the power of positive online experiences.

## 6. Conclusion

Nigeria has had communication systems that have varied between means of manipulation and means of liberation. Social media is no different. This paper examines the impact of social media on the incidence of political violence in Aramoko-Ekiti, Ekiti State, drawing on local experiences and the broader context of Nigeria's history of political contestation. The results indicate that social media has taken a central stage in mobilization in politics, particularly among youths, where messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook have been at the center of campaigns, the spread of rumors, propaganda, and the organizing of followers. Nevertheless, the paper also shows that the violent dispositions of social media in Aramoko-Ekiti are indicative of long-standing traditions in Nigerian political culture, such as the use of rumors as a political tool, the recruitment of youths as political foot soldiers, and the control of communication channels by elites.

Meanwhile, social media introduces new dynamics, including anonymity, speed, virality, and diaspora participation, which alter the dynamics of political participation. These transformations have heightened the dangers of violence and also

presented fresh spaces of dialogue, accountability, and civil participation. The case of Aramoko-Ekiti highlights that while social media may contribute to violence, it can also be a source of peace within the narrative constructed around it, considering the systems that determine usage and the agencies of those who occupy the space. By and large, this paper concludes that, although social media in Aramoko-Ekiti has been a catalyst for political violence, the same media can also become a source of peace. The course of violence is not predetermined; it can be prevented with the help of conscious actions. These actions include promoting digital literacy, encouraging critical thinking, empowering youth-led initiatives, and holding political elites accountable for their digital behaviour. These actions can use the beneficial potential of digital technologies to prevent violence.

## 7. Recommendations

In response to the issues presented so far, this article offers the following recommendations:

Misinformation and manipulation should be fought through the promotion of digital literacy and critical thinking. This can be achieved through the integration of digital literacy courses in schools, vocational centres, and non-governmental organisations, where youths will be taught how to detect false information, verify sources, and act responsibly when using the internet. Formal education can be supplemented with community workshops that focus on out-of-school youths.

It is also essential to empower young people to take the lead in initiating peace-oriented campaigns, as they are at the centre stage of digital media and politics. This empowerment is not just a strategy, but a powerful tool for inspiring change and promoting peace. This can be achieved through funding youth-led WhatsApp and Facebook groups focused on civic education and peaceful political discourse, providing small grants to youth organisations to develop digital campaigns promoting peace, and training young digital influencers in conflict-sensitive communication. Another essential action is to hold political elites accountable for their digital behaviour. This accountability is not just a suggestion, but a necessary step towards ensuring a peaceful online environment. Electoral bodies and civil society organisations should monitor online spaces in campaigns, and codes of digital ethics should be published and adopted by political parties to ensure that they engage online in a peaceful manner. Candidates or parties that encourage hate speech or misinformation should be reported. The use of digital spaces to promote peace by leveraging traditional and community structures can also be a practical approach. At the local level, community

leaders can moderate local WhatsApp groups, refute false information with official clarifications, and older individuals can record short audio or video messages promoting peace and harmony.

It is also necessary to develop localised fact-checking mechanisms. By having a community-based fact-checking team comprising youths, journalists, and civil society actors, false claims spread in local WhatsApp and Facebook groups can be identified and debunked, corrections can be disseminated swiftly, and awareness of the relevance of fact-checking can be raised through schools, churches, and community gatherings.

Violence can also be mitigated by establishing partnerships with social media companies. Such firms are encouraged to collaborate with Nigerian civil society organisations to identify and filter pernicious content. Pernicious content refers to harmful or destructive information that can incite violence or spread misinformation. By identifying and filtering such content related to elections, offering community-based digital literacy courses, and maintaining transparency in political advertising, social media companies can prevent insidious influence over local populations and contribute to peacebuilding.

Lastly, an early warning and rapid response mechanism can be put in place to avert tensions before they escalate into mayhem. In cooperation with local security authorities and community leaders, civil society organisations can monitor the rise in hostile rhetoric or social media threats and respond promptly with mediation, clarification, and preventive security measures.

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