

**EFFECT OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN AFIJIO
LOCAL GOVERNMENT, OYO STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of electoral violence on political participation in Afijio Local Government Area, Oyo State, Nigeria. Despite Nigeria's progress toward democratic consolidation since 1999, electoral violence remains a significant obstacle to genuine political engagement, particularly at the grassroots level where institutional oversight is weakest. The study was guided by four objectives: to ascertain the extent of electoral violence in Afijio, determine its impact on voter turnout, assess its effect on other forms of political participation, and examine the relationship between residents' perceptions of electoral violence and their level of political engagement. The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, collecting data from 365 respondents across the ten electoral wards of Afijio Local Government Area. A structured questionnaire served as the primary quantitative instrument, complemented by key informant interviews with 15 community leaders, party officials, and security personnel. The study was anchored on three complementary theoretical frameworks: the Civic Voluntarism Model. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that electoral violence is prevalent in Afijio Local Government Area, with 65.7% of respondents perceiving violence as high. The study concludes that democratic consolidation at the grassroots level cannot be achieved without effectively addressing electoral violence. The study recommends that enhanced security arrangements with adequate deployment of personnel to violence-prone wards, professional and impartial conduct by security agencies, commitment to violence-free campaigns by political parties and candidates, intensified civic education programmes focusing on citizens' rights to participate without fear, and active involvement of traditional and religious leaders in promoting peace during elections.

Keywords: Electoral violence, political participation, voter turnout, political engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have brought about many changes to the way violence is understood in relation to democracy, elections, and the political processes of 'developing democracies.' Most notably, the scholarship on violence and elections has developed in innovative and important ways vis-à-vis democracy and the violence of the political processes of 'developing democracies.' For the most part, this scholarship has explored the important ways violence has disrupted, influenced, and transformed elections in many parts of the developing world. The political use of violence can mean a lot of things. For example, the political use of violence, and other such actions, may intimidate, coerce, or force an individual or group to do something, or fail to do something, such as taking part in an election. Therefore, it may include the use or threat of the use of violence, harassment, or other forms of unfair political processes to alter who is elected, what processes are permitted during an election, or who can take part in the processes of an election. It can happen the day of the election, the day before the election, or even after the results have been announced. It can involve many actors, such as political party members, candidates, the police or military, members of civil society or other violent non-state actors such as youth gangs and organised crime. Many evolving democracies, such as Africa, have further complicated the political use of violence. The use of violence intertwines and complicates the core of democracy, making the processes and structures of democracy and the democracy associated with those structures much more difficult to attain.

The most serious consequence of electoral violence is the detrimental effect it has on the (theoretical) participation of citizens in a (political) process. In essence, political participation is a measure of the extent to which citizens are willing to take part in activities designed to influence decision making and the (political) process, including such activities as attending rallies, political debates and discussions, voting, and joining political parties (and/or) civic associations or community mobilisation (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). It is an established principle of democracy that political participation encourages accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness in governance and therefore, is critical for strengthening the democratic process. According to (theoretical) participation levels, citizens' trust in the political system is measured. An increase in participation is a reflection of citizens' trust in the system, while a decrease measures fear, or disillusionment, or political alienation. Research has shown that the violence of the election process is a factor that only encourages citizens to rationally withdraw (and avoid) participation due to the violence and in doing so, democracy is further stifled (Collier & Vicente, 2014).

Across the world, the data points to the same conclusion: electoral violence discourages voter participation, as well as wider citizenship. In conflict-sensitive polities, electoral violence decreases affected people's willingness to vote and participate in campaign events (Birch & Muchlinski, 2017). Citizens avoid going to polling stations or providing visible political statements because they fear losing their lives, their possessions, or suffering from violence after the election. There are instances when electoral violence results in the displacement of entire communities, which in turn restricts their

civic and political participation. Therefore, electoral violence not only falsifies the results of elections, but also alters the political landscape in a way that is detrimental to the enduring consolidation of democracy.

Most African countries have experienced violent electoral disputes during their democratic transitions. The absence of strong political frameworks and widespread unemployment and poverty have contributed to the violent political contests. Strain and Taylor (2012) attribute the violence to the multiparty political systems and the various politicised ethnic and community identities. Because of the perceived self-reinforcing nature of competing for political power, there are greater opportunities for violence to be used to secure the elections. As a result, the violence surrounding elections that are believed to bolster democracy creates widespread apathy, fear, and political disengagement among the citizens.

Nigeria is an interesting study of electoral violence and participation. Since civilian rule resumed in 1999, Nigeria has held many general and local elections. However, there has been violence throughout all of these electoral cycles. Politically motivated violence in Nigeria has included killing political rivals, clashes between political party supporters, voting intimidation, box-snatching, destruction of election supplies, and violence against election personnel (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Nigeria's attempts at redesigning election structures and the constitution to eliminate violence at the polls have been unsuccessful, highlighting the heavy, enduring challenges of political violence in Nigeria.

Scholars link violence in Nigerian elections to the monetisation of politics, weak enforcement of election laws, unemployment, patron-client networking, and seemingly high rewards from holding office in politics (Omotola, 2010; Albert, 2019). Political office is usually seen as the ultimate achievement for accruing wealth, social status, and other societal values; therefore, competition for it is most intense. It is in this context that, for most of these actors, the unemployed, especially the youth, are organised as thugs to assault and carry out violence against rival contestants in order to control the outcome of the elections. Such scenarios are common and play out in the lower levels of local governments and are generally ignored in most scholarly works and media.

Nigerian local government elections are more likely to suffer from violence because they are at the bottom-most level of operation, in which the government's regulating authority is at its weakest. Moreover, these elections are particularly sensitive because there is also very high local hostility in the elections. Local councils also have control over local resources, employment, and other development resources, making them very competitive politically. There is a wide consensus that local level electoral violence not only goes unrecorded, as noted by Adejumbi 2011, but most importantly, the levels of violence have very dire consequences on democratic participation in politics.

Violence in elections, in the eyes of the people, makes politics appear dangerous; therefore, people become apathetic about participating in politics. Instead of actively involving themselves in the political processes, they steer clear of politics. Instead,

they remove themselves from the whole political environment. Witnessing or experiencing violence makes people politically apathetic. Their previous political participation is usually lost, and they end up seeing politics as a world of violence, which in turn makes them more removed from politically active participation.

The research questions is to what extent is electoral violence recorded during elections in Afijio Local?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Electoral Violence

In the field of democratic governance, especially within emerging democracies, there is a phenomenon known as electoral violence. It is particularly relevant for emerging democracies that face fierce electoral competition and have weak institutional buffers. In simple terms, electoral violence is the use, or threat, of violence, intimidation, coercion, or destruction of property directed towards a particular electoral process, or any of its constituents, including election participation or election outcomes. It is a stark violation of the democratic principle of competition and, thus, a critical erosion of the democratic legitimacy of elections as a means of ascertaining the will of the people. Most scholars agree that electoral violence is more than just a crime, or the breakdown of law and order. It is a rational, politically motivated, and strategic action by a particular actor or group of actors to assert, contest or defend their position of power (Höglund, 2009; Straus & Taylor, 2012).

Electoral violence can be understood as a subset of a broader category known as political violence, with the understanding that its timing, targets, and goals are different from generalized political violence. In contrast to generalized political violence, which is not time-bound, electoral violence is violence tied to a specific electoral cycle and is designed to achieve politically strategic objectives, be it in the form of voter suppression, intimidation of the opposition, or electoral manipulation. In reference to Fischer (2002), electoral violence is categorised as pre-election violence, election-day violence, and post-election violence. Each of the categories is aimed at serving a specific goal of the political actors involved in the violence. It is the violence involved in each of these categories that influences electoral behaviour and political participation.

Violence linked to an election event can include threatening voters, candidates, and party supporters, as well as disrupting campaign rallies, destroying campaign materials, and attacking rival politicians. The main goal is to influence the political climate before an election, with the intention of dampening opposition rallies and showing the risks of getting involved in politics (Birch and Muchlinski 2017). In contrast, violence on election day includes startling and attacking polling places, intimidating election workers, and hitting voters. This type of violence intends to control the election by restricting voters from exercising their right to vote. Violence after elections typically develops in reaction to contested outcomes, such as protests, riots, community fighting, and counterattacks on presumed adversaries. Although violence after elections may not change the outcomes of the election, it has an enduring impact on social cohesion and trust in the public sphere.

Conceptual distinctions related to forms of electoral violence are also important to note. Though violence can be physical, it can also be psychological or structural. Psychological violence can involve threats, harassment, hate speech, and speeches by individuals in powerful positions meant to intimidate and politically coerce someone. Structural violence, in contrast, is often more discreet and involves systematic exclusion, uneven application of electoral laws, and under-provision or over-provision of security to politically underrepresented and disadvantaged groups and communities. In many contexts, non-physical forms of violence are as effective as physical violence (Galtung, 1969; Norris, 2014). In many contexts, violence that is physical is often less effective when compared to non-physical violence in discouraging or limiting participation in the democratic process; if non-physical violence is present, physical violence will be less effective.

Electoral violence also exemplifies the complex nature of other concepts. State and non-state actors can take part in this form of violence. State actors, such as biased security officers, and non-state actors, such as political party militias, youth gangs, and paid thugs, can cause violence. In some instances, political actors use violence and mobilise poor youth by promising to pay them or offer them political support (Omotola, 2010). The presence of both state and non-state actors creates ambiguity concerning the roles and designations of actors, as it pertains to legitimate and illegal acts, and creates additional obstacles to the prosecution of and the prevention of violence in elections.

Violence in Nigeria's elections has been understood as a characteristic of the country's political system. There is a political culture in

Nigeria where weak political institutions, coupled with a significant amount of money to be won in political office, create high motivations for candidates to be violent during the election process (Adejumobi, 2011; Albert, 2019). 'Nigerian political office' is associated with gaining access to control government funds, legal impunity, and social esteem therefore making elections a very contested process. Hence, electoral violence is a rational process that candidates justify although socially deviant for gaining a political advantage.

There are several empirical analyses indicating that elections in Nigeria have been violent and that violence has not changed from 1999 to the present. A report by Human Rights Watch (2011) states that elections in Nigeria are examples of even deadly violence, intimidation, and division among group parties, as well as the lack of control or accountability for violence among supporters. This issue is not prominent in local government elections, where less attention and forum control is focused on government elections. This emphasises that the violence of elections is not a national but a local perspective.

At the level of local government, electoral violence is often seen as individualised and communal. In contrast to national voting, where political competition may be facilitated by party frameworks and national entities, local elections occur within very tight social structures where political rivalries are also kinship, ethnic, or community-based. In such situations, electoral violence can intensify social divides, shifting political rivalry into communal violence (Boone, 2014). This is especially pertinent for rural local government regions, where electoral violence is compounded by an absence of pre-emptive

measures, and poor conflict resolution mechanisms adversely impact elections.

The interaction between electoral violence and electoral integrity is the other major conceptual concern. The idea of electoral integrity can be defined as the extent to which elections are conducted within the parameters of democracy in an inclusive, transparent, fair, and accountable manner (Norris, 2014). This principle is, in fact, undermined by electoral violence, as it limits the electorate's choice and alters the equilibrium of competition. The assumption that elections are meant to reflect the will of the populace is undermined when the electorate is subjected to violence. Therefore, such violence must be regarded not only as an issue of security but also as an area of deep concern for democracy.

Scholars also draw attention to the rationality behind the use of violence during election processes. Instead of being viewed as random or spontaneous, election-related violence can be strategically used in particular places, targeting specific people at certain pivotal moments in the election period (Straus & Taylor, 2012). For instance, violence can be directed in areas dominated by the opposition to reduce electoral participation, or in areas with close electoral competition. This indicates the necessity of assessing electoral violence as a calculated political mechanism, as opposed to being an unintentional incident of the election competition.

Most importantly, the study of electoral violence is connected to how people understand and experience it. Often, violence that is anticipated can have just as much, or even more, impact on how people behave politically. Research indicates that even if

there is no direct victimisation, there is a high likelihood of fear and political apathy as a result of violent incidents in the community, or through reported violent acts in the media (Collier & Vicente, 2014). This dimension, which is based on perception, is more dominant at the local level and is characterised by the rapid transmission of information through social networks and the collective memory of violence, which affects how violent acts are anticipated in subsequent elections.

In the case of Afijio Local Government Area of Oyo State, the definition of electoral violence includes instances of violence, psychological abuse, and intimidation, and will be defined with respect to particular electoral periods. Violation of voters, blockage of campaign programmes, and post-electoral violence are manifestations of the national situation; however, they also indicate the circumstances of the locality arising from the community, the political rivalry, and the availability of state structures. This locality-based definition of violence will be the starting point to help us understand the locality's violence and the impact of violence on the levels of political activity and citizenship in Afijio.

Finally, there are several activities, actors, and reasons tied to the electoral process which constitute violence in its various forms and dimensions in relation to the violence of the various phases of the elections. They can be physical or non-physical and are influenced by the environment and social institutions in which they operate. One of the prominent characteristics of Nigeria's democracy is electoral violence, especially in the local government system, where there is minimal institutional protection. A comprehensive definition of electoral violence is necessary

and the impact on democracy, participation of the electorate, decrease in the activity of the electorate, and the study of consolidation of democracy, which is the study of Afijio Local Government Area, will be to examine the impact of democracy in Afijio.

Political Participation

In all democracies, political participation is a key aspect of political power. Any political activity that has a direct or indirect impact on political decision-making is referred to as political participation (Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995). Political participation holds government officials accountable to the citizens, the government policies reflect the citizens' preferences, and leave space for the citizens to exercise their political rights and responsibilities. Political participation, in contemporary political science, is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon with both conventional and non-conventional forms of participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Putnam, 2000).

There are different dimensions of political participation. The most dominant and clear-cut form of participation is voting, which is the primary and formal act of taking a position in an election. Voting is a crucial aspect of a representative democracy because it empowers citizens/people to choose their representatives and decide on the policies that will affect them. Beyond voting, participation encompasses engaging in electoral campaigns by taking part in campaigning for candidates, attending campaign rallies, and distributing campaign paraphernalia or even organising rallies to mobilise supporters. Campaign participation is also a means of promoting democracy, and enhancing political

socialisation and political awareness (Verba et al, 1995).

Another aspect is going to political meetings, town halls, and party forums, where constituents can meet with their representatives, state their issues, and hold them accountable. Engaging in political discourse and consideration in other, more informal, contexts, such as community meetings, places of worship, and social networks, is yet another form of participation. These informal settings impact the formation of political attitudes, give knowledge of the candidates and policies, and improve civic knowledge. More broadly speaking, civic engagement, which includes political participation but is not limited to it, consists of volunteering, community organising, advocacy, and social movement activities, which demonstrate the desire of citizens to influence public policies beyond the ballot (Norris, 2002; Putnam, 2000).

Political Participation in Nigeria

Political participation in Nigeria can be organised as a function of the specific interplay of colonialism, ethnic pluralism, and authoritarianism. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, there has been an increase in formal political participation, especially voting; however, this has occurred unevenly across different regions, different social and economic strata, and different genders (Omotola, 2010). Elections at the local government level, which represent the bottom tier of the political structure, are vital to the promotion of political citizenship. Unfortunately, they are quite likely to be manipulated, and to experience violence and low turnout due to inadequate institutional oversight (Adejumobi, 2011).

Research shows that participation of Nigerian citizens is not just a function of the prevailing economic and social conditions; in addition to these, the existence of political violence is a disincentive to participation. Collier and Vicente (2014) discovered that, whether as a direct actor or as a bystander, the experience of violence during an election diminishes the likelihood of participation in the election, and in voting in particular. Similarly, Albert (2019) shows that threats, intimidation, and harassment, are some of the reasons that disproportionately affect participation of youths and women, thereby making the outcome of voting less representative of the population.

Political Participation and Democratic Consolidation

The goal of democratic consolidation cannot be achieved without political participation. Increased political participation enhances accountability, responsiveness, and legitimacy of a governing system (Norris, 2014). Conversely, participation declines when there is a fear of violence or political intimidation. Democracy begins to erode when participation diminishes. In local government areas such as Afijio, the importance of political participation is magnified since the local level is the closest point of contact between the citizenry and the government. At this level, political disengagement can adversely affect policy formulation and execution, service provision, and the confidence of the citizenry in the political system.

Theoretical Review

The Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM)

Civic Voluntarism Model posits that political participation is a function of three available resources: time, money, and civic skills (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). Time encapsulates one's willingness and ability to get involved in political activities. Examples of such activities include but are not limited to attending political rallies, volunteering for candidates, and community organising. Money refers to one's ability to financially facilitate political participation. This may include transport to polling places, donations to candidates, and the purchase of political information. Civic skills cover knowledge about politics, organisation and communication along with the ability to articulate and to influence political processes.

CVM states that political participation is mediated by structural conditions and inequalities that lack voluntary explanatory factors. Low income, little schooling, and multiple socio-economic responsibilities related to time involve barriers that prevent people from engaging politically. Thus, people from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially rural and less prosperous areas, women, and young people, are often left out of both political participation and under participation, as well as out of political unaffiliation and political contact. In Afijio Local Government, CVM proposes that citizens' participation is likely to be limited by other forms of socio-economic violence, such as lack of means, political ignorance, and weak civic association.

CVM has been explained and analysed through empirical literature with respect to participation in elections in Nigeria. Omotola, for example, observes that

economically disadvantaged youths are more likely to not participate in local government elections, especially in places where there is political violence. In the same manner, Collier and Vicente argue that even minimal exposure to violence greatly diminishes the likelihood of people with fewer resources voting. This evidence states that in order to achieve political participation, there must be an improvement in structural inequalities and the violence must be reduced.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A convergent parallel mixed-methods approach (cross-sectional) will be utilised for this research. This method involves collecting both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time and analysing them separately with the objective of merging the results at the final interpretation stage. The qualitative data will provide insights into the how and why of the phenomena being studied while the qualitative data will provide statistically significant data which can be generalised and used to explain the extent of the how and to what degree the phenomena are occurring. A cross-sectional approach is best suited for collecting data for one time only at a single time to understand the prevailing circumstances.

Primary data will be collected using two main tools:

1. Structured Questionnaire: This will be administered to the 400 sampled respondents, and it will consist of the following:

Section A: Socio-demographic information (age, gender, education, and occupation).

Section B: Scales and questions (pre-determined) about the independent variable (what respondents think and how they feel about electoral violence).

Section C: Questions (pre-determined) about the dependent variables (voter turnout history, campaign participation, and the incidence of political discussions).

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

Descriptive Analysis of Electoral Violence in Afijio Local Government

This section presents respondents' perceptions and experiences regarding electoral violence in Afijio Local Government Area. The analysis covers the prevalence, forms, timing, and perpetrators of electoral violence based on the 2015-2023 electoral cycles.

Prevalence of Electoral Violence

Respondents were asked to indicate their perception of the prevalence of electoral violence in Afijio Local Government Area during the period under study. Table 4.3 presents the findings.

Perceived Prevalence of Electoral Violence in Afijio LGA (2015-2023)

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
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Very High	98	26.8%
High	142	38.9%
Moderate	78	21.4%
Low	32	8.8%
Very Low	15	4.1%
Total	365	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The data in Table 4.3 reveals that a combined 65.7% of respondents perceived electoral violence to be either "high" (38.9%) or "very high" (26.8%) in Afijio Local Government Area. Only 12.9% considered violence to be "low" or "very low," while 21.4% rated it as "moderate." This finding empirically confirms that electoral violence is a significant phenomenon in the study area, validating the problem statement that motivated this research. The high prevalence perception aligns with national patterns documented by Omotola (2010) and Human Rights Watch (2011), while providing localised evidence specific to Afijio.

The qualitative interviews provided deeper insight into this perception. A community leader from Akinmoorin ward explained:

"Election time in Afijio is always tense. You can feel it in the air. People are afraid to speak openly about politics because they don't know who might be

listening. In the last three local government elections, there have been fights, people have been injured, and some have even fled their homes temporarily. It has become something we expect, not something that surprises us anymore." (Male Community Leader, 58 years, January 2026)

This qualitative account corroborates the quantitative finding and illustrates how electoral violence has become institutionalised in the local political culture, creating a pervasive atmosphere of fear that extends beyond isolated incidents.

Forms of Electoral Violence Experienced

To understand the specific manifestations of electoral violence, respondents were asked to indicate the forms of violence they had personally witnessed or experienced during elections in Afijio. Multiple responses were permitted, and the results are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Forms of Electoral Violence Witnessed or Experienced

Form of Violence	Frequen cy	Percen Respor
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Physical assault/fighting between supporters	267	elections. This finding supports Krook and Restrepo Sanín's (2019) argument that women face distinct forms of electoral violence that are often underreported in mainstream analyses. A female respondent from Iware ward shared her experience:	
Verbal threats and intimidation	298		
Destruction of campaign materials	245		
Snatching of ballot boxes	187	51.2%	<i>"During the 2019 local government election, I went to vote early in the morning. Some young men gathered around the polling unit started making obscene comments and touching women inappropriately as we tried to join the queue. I was so ashamed and frightened that I left without voting. I have not gone back to vote in any local election since then."</i> (Female Respondent, 34 years, Market Trader)
Harassment of voters at polling stations	276	75.6%	
Thuggery and hired violence	234	64.1%	
Destruction of property	156	42.7%	
Attacks on candidates or their supporters	143	39.2%	
Sexual harassment (reported by female respondents)	67	40.1% of females	

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The findings reveal that verbal threats and intimidation were the most commonly reported form of electoral violence (81.6%), followed by harassment of voters at polling stations (75.6%) and physical assault between supporters (73.2%). The high prevalence of non-physical forms of violence (threats and intimidation) is significant because, as Galtung (1969) and Norris (2014) argue, psychological violence can be as effective as physical violence in discouraging political participation. The finding that 51.2% of respondents witnessed ballot box snatching indicates that violence is used not only to intimidate voters but also to directly manipulate electoral outcomes by destroying or stealing voting materials. Particularly noteworthy is that 40.1% of female respondents reported experiencing or witnessing sexual harassment during

This testimony illustrates how gender-specific violence directly suppresses women's electoral participation, creating lasting psychological barriers that extend beyond the immediate electoral cycle.

Descriptive Analysis of Political Participation in Afijio Local Government

This section examines the patterns of political participation among residents of Afijio Local Government Area, covering voter turnout, campaign participation, attendance at political meetings, and political discussions.

Voter Turnout Patterns

Respondents were asked about their voting behaviour in the local government elections held between 2015 and 2023. Table 4.8 presents the self-reported voter turnout.

Self-Reported Voter Turnout in Local Government Elections

Voting Pattern	Frequency	Percentage
Voted in all elections	87	23.8%
Voted in most elections	112	30.7%
Voted in few elections	98	26.8%
Never voted	68	18.6%
Total	365	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The findings reveal that only 23.8% of respondents reported voting in all local government elections during the study period, while 30.7% voted in most elections. Significantly, 26.8% voted in only a few elections, and 18.6% never voted at all. This means that nearly half of the respondents (45.4%) exhibited low or no electoral participation. This level of voter disengagement is concerning for democratic consolidation at the grassroots level,

supporting Norris's (2014) argument that low turnout undermines the representativeness and legitimacy of elected governments.

A non-voting respondent explained their rationale:

"Why should I risk my life to vote? The politicians only remember us during elections. After they win, we don't see them again until the next election. And with all the fighting and thuggery, it's just not worth it. I stay home and pray that whoever wins will do something good for us, but I don't hold my breath." (Male Respondent, 52 years, Artisan)

This illustrates the interplay of rational choice (weighing risks against benefits) and political efficacy (belief that voting matters) in shaping participation decisions, consistent with the theoretical framework adopted in this study.

Discussion of findings

This chapter presented the analysis and interpretation of data collected from 365 respondents in Afijio Local Government Area. The findings revealed that electoral violence is prevalent in the study area, with 65.7% of respondents perceiving it as high or very high. Various forms of violence were reported, including verbal threats (81.6%), voter harassment (75.6%), physical assault (73.2%), and ballot box snatching (51.2%). Political party thugs (85.5%) and supporters (78.6%) were identified as the main perpetrators, with 54.2% implicating political candidates themselves.

CONCLUSION

Political participation levels were found to be low, with only 23.8% voting in all elections and 18.6% never voting. Participation in campaign activities and political meetings was even lower, with only 34.0% attending rallies and 12.3% regularly attending political meetings. Engagement in political discussions was cautious, with substantial proportions never discussing politics even with family (30.4%) or in community meetings (47.9%).

Inferential statistical analysis using Chi-square tests, t-tests, and correlation analysis led to the rejection of all four null hypotheses, establishing that electoral violence significantly affects voter turnout and other forms of political engagement, and that both direct experience and perception of violence independently contribute to reduced participation. The findings provide strong empirical support for the theoretical framework and align with existing literature while offering localised evidence specific to Afijio Local Government Area.

The study concludes that electoral violence is a significant and pervasive phenomenon in Afijio Local Government Area, characterized by the widespread occurrence of both physical and psychological forms of violence, the involvement of political actors at multiple levels, and its concentration during election periods, all of which indicate the systematic and strategic use of violence as a tool of electoral competition. Notably, the prevalence of non-physical violence such as threats and intimidation creates a pervasive climate of fear that often goes unnoticed by security agencies and election observers, while the gendered dimension—evidenced by 40.1% of female respondents reporting sexual harassment—highlights the differentiated impact of violence across demographic groups and the need for targeted interventions. The study further establishes that electoral violence significantly suppresses voter turnout, as individuals who experience or perceive violence are less likely to participate, driven by a rational calculation that weighs the risks of harm against uncertain electoral benefits, thereby undermining the legitimacy and representativeness of local governance. Beyond voting, the effects extend to all forms of political engagement, including campaign activities, attendance at meetings, and informal political discourse, resulting in a contraction of democratic space and the erosion of civic culture and political socialization. Additionally, even the perception of electoral violence independently discourages participation, creating a self-

reinforcing cycle in which fear reduces engagement, weakens accountability, and potentially fuels further violence. Ultimately, the study concludes that democratic consolidation at the grassroots level cannot be achieved without effectively addressing electoral violence, as it fosters political disengagement, weakens democratic values, and compromises governance; thus, ensuring safe political participation requires not only improved electoral security but also broader institutional reforms targeting the root causes of violence, including weak law enforcement, the political economy of competition, and the monetization of politics.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. **Enhanced Security Arrangements:** INEC and SIEC should collaborate with security agencies to develop and implement comprehensive security plans for elections in Afijio Local Government Area. These plans should include: adequate deployment of security personnel to all polling units, particularly in violence-prone wards; clear protocols for responding to violent incidents; and mechanisms for rapid reinforcement when violence erupts. Security personnel should be deployed at least 24 hours before voting begins and remain

until results are collated and transmitted.

2. **Professional and Impartial**

Conduct: The Nigeria Police Force and other security agencies must ensure that their personnel conduct themselves professionally and impartially during elections. The finding that 33.7% of respondents perceived security personnel as biased is deeply concerning and undermines public trust. Security personnel should receive refresher training on their role as impartial protectors of the electoral process, and commanders should be held accountable for the conduct of their subordinates.

3. **Commit to Violence-Free**

Campaigns: Political parties and candidates in Afijio should publicly commit to non-violence and should include such commitments in their campaign platforms. Party leaders should be held accountable for violence perpetrated by their supporters, and parties should establish internal disciplinary mechanisms to sanction members who engage in violence.

4. **Civic Education:** Civil society organisations (CSOs) operating in Oyo State should intensify civic education programmes in Afijio Local Government Area, focusing on: citizens' rights to participate in elections without fear; the importance of political participation for community development; and strategies for non-violent political engagement. Civic education should

be delivered through community-based organisations, religious institutions, and schools to reach diverse audiences.

5. **Promote Peace During**

Elections: Traditional rulers, religious leaders, and community elders in Afijio should use their influence to promote peace during elections. This includes: publicly condemning violence; mediating disputes between political groups; and using traditional communication channels (town criers, community meetings) to disseminate peace messages.

6. Citizens of Afijio should exercise their democratic right to participate in elections and political activities despite the challenges documented in this study. While the risks are real, non-participation cedes political space to violent actors and undermines the potential for democratic accountability. Citizens should demand protection from security agencies and report threats or violent incidents promptly.

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