

**ESCALATING POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACTS ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN OYO STATE RESIDENTS**

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**Abstract**

*This study examined the impact of political violence on political participation in Oyo State, Nigeria. Political violence has remained a major challenge to democratic governance, often discouraging citizens from participating actively in electoral processes. The study sought to establish the relationship between political violence and political participation, identify the causes of political violence, examine its effects on political participation, and suggest possible solutions to the problem. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through the administration of structured questionnaires to respondents in Atiba Local Government Area of Oyo State. Findings revealed a significant relationship between political violence and political participation. The study found that political violence discourages voter turnout, creates fear among candidates and electorates, suppresses democratic engagement, and contributes to political apathy among citizens. It concluded that political violence remains a major obstacle to political participation and democratic development in Oyo State. It recommended enhanced voter education, credible and transparent elections, strengthening community policing, economic empowerment of youths, strict prosecution of electoral offenders, and improved electoral security measures such as the effective use of BVAS and electronic result transmission systems.*

**Keywords:** Political Violence, Political Participation, Electoral Violence, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Oyo State, Nigeria.

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the critical aspects of democracy is election, which must be conducted in line with the acceptable norms set by the national laws of a given state to enable a peaceful transfer of power from one legitimate government to another, (Oni & Agbude, 2021, Segun, 2025, Anifowose, 2024) Election according to Ogundiya & Baba (2023) refers to the process by which electorates choose by voting officers either to act on their behalf or to represent them in an assembly with a view to governing or making administration. The efficacy of election is indispensable in democracy since it gives the citizens more opportunity to participate in governance by choosing those who steer the affairs of leadership in the state, (Luqman, 2019).

However, in Nigeria, the quest to conduct an election that can be widely adjudged as peaceful in order to promote greater political participation among the citizens and to further consolidate her nascent democracy appears to be impossible. Over the years, elections in Nigeria have been associated with violence even at a slightest provocation (Ogundiya & Baba, 2023). Worst still, it has gone beyond exercising legitimate political rights. Currently it has metamorphosed into a period of acrimony where families and friends are turned apart on the ground of party sentiments (Fischer, 2023)

The purpose of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing power to organize society, harness and distribute resources to influence decision making in line with organized or individual interests (Eze & Akena, 2020). Violent electoral occurrences in Nigeria are occasioned by both strategic and incidental

factors. This trend poses a threat to peace and security on the country, but also risks the long-term sustainability of the democratization processes (Okofo, 2020). Political violence is revealed in many ways, for instance, intimidation of candidates and voters, physical harassment, assault on journalists, imprisonment and assassinations, confrontations with security forces and attacks on local party headquarters (Ali, Dalarama & Dauda, 2022).

The history of electoral political in Nigeria has been covered in the works of scholars like Akintola, Albert, Post & Vickers, Lewis, Sklar, Diamond, Osaghae, Mitee, and Kolawole. These studies by both Nigerians and foreign authors working at different times and spanning more than 40 years reinforce Albert's assertion that 'political violence resulting from representational, campaign, balloting, and results conflicts, has been a terminal problem of Nigerian politics since the 1950s (Obakhedo, 2021).

Political violence negates peaceful coexistence, law and order. In addition to security concerns, it militates against the consolidation of democracy and social coexistence. This in turn impact on the social and economic well being of the nation and creates imbalances in social relations (Nkwede, Ibeogu and Nwankwo, 2021). Political violence brings complex set of events such as poverty, ethnic or religious grievances which affect the social relationship of the people in the society. Anifowose (2021) posits that violence, particularly political violence, represents a disturbance movement to the political equilibrium and peaceful co-existence of the system.

Ever since Nigeria's independence in 1960 and her return to democratic rule which led to the conduct of her general elections in 1999,

2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and recently 2019, none of her elections was free from violence. This to a great extent seems to hamper the citizens' spirit of participation in the politics of the country. Nweke (2023), noted that political violence has become a reinforcing phenomenon in Nigeria's postindependence history. According to him, successive elections depicted chaos, violence, and confusion. As such, its attendant consequences have significantly constituted a fraction of the several remote and immediate factors that had threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria especially in her quest to achieve democratic consolidation (Adebanwi, 2021). This study thus investigates the impacts of political violence on political participation among Oyo state's residence.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Conceptual Framework

##### *Concept of Election*

Election like every other concept in the field of social sciences has no single acceptable definition as such; several efforts have been made by scholars to give meaning to it through their individual definitional views. According to Dahiru, Ibrahim & Mustapha, (2021), Election is defined as the systematic way of allowing the citizens to choose leaders into public office, through the use of electoral process which is guided, organized, conducted and monitored by the authorized electoral body. To Kwagha, (2020), Election is defined as a process by which citizens of a given democratic entity elect representative to handle their machinery of government through vote casting.

In a similar way, Scruton, (1983), in Kwagha, (2020), see election as the process whereby electorates choose by voting officers either to act on their behalf or represent it in an

assembly with a view to governing or administering them. According to Ali, Dalarama & Dauda, (2018), the process in which people follow to elect or choose their representative in federal, state and local government is called election. Gwinn, Norton & Oddih, (1992), in Zainawa, (2018), describe election as the formal process of selecting persons for public office or a political proposition through voting. Omodia, (2019), equally defined election as a systematic process of choosing representatives in any political setting to hold positions of authority.

Realizing the indispensable role of election in democracy, Luqman, (2019), opined that, election is very important in democratization. According to him, it is only through election that people can participate more in contributing their quota by choosing those to represent them at all level. Ekundayo, (2021), on his own maintains that election process is very significant in democratic government because it is the procedure for choosing representatives, and the means of expressing people's views in democratic settings. He further noted that election is one of the devices for changing the government, as it helps people to decide who should rule them at all level. Arising from these views, it is believable that election is one of the important aspect of democracy since it gives the citizens the necessary opportunity to participate in the government of their country. However, achieving greater participation can only be feasible when elections are conducted in a peaceful manner.

##### *Concept of Political Violence*

Violence has been defined as the illegitimate or unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will or desires of others (Kolawole 2022, Høglund 2019, Keane 2018). The World Health Organization

(WHO) defines violence as the deliberate use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either leads to or has a high probability of leading to injury, death psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation (WHO 2002).

Violence can be categorized into three-fold: physical, structural and psychological violence. Physical violence has to do with somatic injury inflicted on human beings such as the Killing of an individual. Structural violence is related to social injustice while psychological violence is concerned with injury or harm done to the human psyche which includes brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds and threats (JInadu 2021)

Fischer (2022) and Sisk (2019) describe electoral violence as acts of threat, coercion, intimidation, blackmail, physical harm including assassinations and killing directed against electoral actors, events and materials. Höglund (2019) distinguishes election-related violence from other forms of political violence because it is carried out during the election period with the objective to influence the process and its outcomes. Electoral violence represents all forms of organized acts or threats physical, psychological, and structural, aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process (Nwolise 2025).

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES (2015) also describes electoral violence as: any act or threat of physical or psychological harm to a person or damage to property, intended for anyone directly involved in an electoral process (voter,

candidate, party officer, election worker, election monitor, journalist, etc.), which may disrupt or attempt to disrupt any aspect of the electoral process (campaign, registration, voting, counting, etc.). From the foregoing, election violence can therefore be seen as any act, directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly directed at persons' involved in the electoral process, with the aim of undermining the process. The objective of the perpetrators of electoral violence is to unduly influence the electoral process and its outcome to gain advantage over other rivals or opponents.

### **Historical Account of Electoral Violence in Nigeria**

The origin of electoral violence in Nigeria could be traced to the colonial period. Scholars have argued that some colonial settings laid the foundation for future electoral violence in Nigerian government, (Ebenyi, 2019). This argument was hinged on a number of British political experiments in West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular which include among other things, the introduction of the elective principle of Clifford constitution in 1922. The elective principle though, a welcome development in the political system but the idea of limiting the criteria to contest in an election to income and residential qualifications in Lagos and Calabar made a potential basis for violence in the electoral system, (Omotola, 2021). This argument could be corroborated with the events that took place when elections were held in the regional Houses of Assembly in 1951 across the country.

The elections, which were held based on the then electoral system introduced by the 1922 constitution led to widespread dissatisfaction among majority of Nigerians which triggered some violent protests across the streets in

1952. Thus, in 1953, there was increase in the intensity of political agitation, (Falola, 1991, in Ebenyi, 2019). Sequel to that, the 1946 constitution that paved way for the division of the country into three regions also contributed to the electoral violence in Nigeria. This was because each of the regions were dominated by a major ethnic group. For instance, the Hausa-Fulani dominated the Northern region, while the Yoruba and the Igbo dominated the Western and Eastern regions respectively. Thus, within each region, there were numerous other minorities groups which were at a considerable disadvantage as far as political power was concerned, (Olatunji, 2026).

The emergence of these political developments obviously marked the genesis of electoral violence in Nigeria as it brought about tribal support for political candidates. Furthermore, Isichei, (1984), in Okafor & Okafor, (2018), is of the view that the political tussle between Akintola and Awolowo during the first republic, which witnessed an unprecedented violence, was one of the earliest crises recorded in postcolonial era. According to him, the unpopular minority government of Akintola as at then used violence and coercion to survive the venoms of the opposition political parties and the electorates in the western region of Nigeria. The worst still is the fact that Nigeria is yet to recover from the violence and chaos that greeted the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, which was widely accepted by Nigerians as the best elections, adjudged to be free, fair, peaceful, and orderly in spite of all machinations and against all odds, (Eze & Akena, 2019). Hence, the annulment was understandably visited with nationwide outrage and violent protests.

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 and engaged with other democratic processes, about six (6) general elections have been conducted. These ranged from the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and recently 2019. However, it can be safely argued that none of these elections was free from violence as the contestants wanted to win at all cost either by hook or crook means (Ogoyi & Obukeni, 2019). This to a great extent has hampered the citizens' interest to participate in the politics of the country. According to Obakhedo, (2021), the 1999 general election that brought President Olusegun Obasanjo was marred by such widespread violence and fraud as it was massively rigged in favour of People's Democratic Party. This must have accounted for the reason why the US-based foreign observers from Jimmy Carter Centre for Democracy which monitored the 1999 election concluded in their report that "it is not possible for them to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election", (Human Right Watch, 2019).

In 2003 general elections, violence was part of political competition in different parts of Nigeria. According to Human Rights Watch, (2020), the April and May 2003, witnessed the killing of about one hundred people and many more injured during federal and state elections in Nigeria. According to the report, members or supporters of the ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), perpetrated majority of serious violence. In a number of locations, elections simply did not take place as groups of armed thugs linked to political parties and candidates intimidated and threatened voters in order to falsify results. The violence and climate of intimidation facilitated widespread fraud, invalidating the results of the elections in many areas, (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

The 2007 was equally not something to write home about, off as it was greeted with several violence. According to International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) reports, (2019), there were about 967 incidents of electoral violence in the 2007 elections. Cases of abduction and kidnapping, murder and killing protest, disruption, intimidation and physical attack as well as poster defacing all featured in the incidents. In all the foundation noted that about of 300 people were killed on issues relating to 2007 elections.

The 2011 general election was equally among the worst of violence driven election since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. The violence began some days before the election but the most obvious was the series of killings of innocent Nigerians including corps members with bomb blast on the day of the presidential election,(Bamgbose, 2011). As though such was not enough, the violence continued with widespread protests by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim from the Congress for Progressive (CPC) Change, following the re-election of incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta in the south, who was the candidate for the ruling People's Democratic Party(PDP). The protests degenerated into violent riots and killings in the northern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara. Relief officials estimate that more than 65,000 people were displaced, (Human Right Watch, 2011)

The 2015 general election which was widely acknowledged by both foreign and local observers as the most free and fair election since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 was not free from violence. The election on

the other hand, could have been the mostly deadly but the orderliness, statesmanship and maturity demonstrated by the then incumbent president – Goodluck Jonathan and the presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party helped to save blood of many innocent souls. According to Najib, (2015), traces of violent cases started prior to the Election Day. The violence kick-started when some disgruntled political thugs allegedly to be APC members began to stone sachets of water on the campaign train of President Jonathan of the PDP in Bauchi State. This was in addition to the burning of campaign buses, and cases of bomb blast near a campaign ground in Potiskum, Gombe State. Sporadic gunshots at APC members in Rivers State were also allegedly reported to have been carried out by PDP thugs, (Human Right watch, 2015).

Preliminary reports of electoral observers also revealed that the elections were peaceful and orderly in many parts of the country but some states, nevertheless, recorded significant number of violent incidents, the most affected being Rivers, AkwaIbom, Cross River, Ebonyi and Ondo States. INEC's records show that there were about 66 reports of violent incidents targeted at polling units, the Commission's officials, voters and election materials. These were in Rivers State (16 incidents), Ondo (8), Cross River and Ebonyi (6 each), AkwaIbom (5) Bayelsa (4), Lagos and Kaduna (3 each), Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti and Osun (2 each), Katsina, Plateau, Kogi, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun one each (INEC, 2015). From this historical account, it can be seen that electoral violence is part and parcel of Nigerian election.

### **Causes of political violence on political participation among Oyo state's residents**

An in-depth investigation on the occurrence of electoral violence in Nigeria showed that a

lot of factors are responsible. Some of which include;

- i. **Poverty and Unemployment:** According to Jonathan (2021), majority of Youths in Nigeria are jobless with no means of livelihood, they are highly impoverished. As such, they have no other option than to do anything possible to earn their daily bread. The politicians capitalize on this to offer paltry sum of money to the youths who not only constitute the pillar of society but also the most vulnerable to the self-inflicted poverty and get them recruited as their thugs and touts to perpetrate violence especially during elections.
- ii. **Hate Speech (Inflammatory Messages):** Hate speech is another factor the triggers electoral violence. Bako, (2025), explained hate speeches as “communication that denigrates a particular person or a group on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation nationality, religion, or other characteristics. It can be in the form of speech, gesture, conduct, writing, or display and usually marks incitement, violence, or prejudice against an individual or a group”, (Abah & Nwokuwu, 2025). The after effects of these hate speeches sometimes, result in violence. Adding to this point, Jega, (2018), in Abah & Nwokuwu, (2025), while considering the Nigerian situation, said that, “there is a strong relationship between campaign of calumny (hate speech) and electoral violence and that is as far as history is concerned. Hate speeches in Nigeria have brought about

incitements that resulted in the killings of innocent citizens, assassination of top politicians and destruction of many properties.

- iii. **Tribal, ethnic and religious inclinations:** According to Okafor & Okafor, (2018), about 75% of electoral crisis in the history of Nigeria are associated with tribal, ethnic and religious inclination. Expounding on this, Olatunji, (2026), the 1946 constitution paved the way for the division of the country into three regions in which a major ethnic group dominated each region. For instance, the Hausa-Fulani dominated the Northern region, while the Yoruba and the Igbo dominated the Western and Eastern regions respectively. Thus, within each region, there were numerous other so-called minorities, which were at a considerable disadvantage as far as political power was concerned. It was the emergence of these political developments marked the genesis of electoral violence in Nigeria as it brought about tribal support for political candidates, (Olatunji, 2026).
- iv. **Ineffective security structure:** Adeleke, (2026), noted that ineffective security structure is another factor that has enabled electoral violence to creep into the Nigerian political system. Instances of this can be either seen from the fact that most of the political violence perpetrated especially during elections are carried out by or flagrantly allowed to manifest by some security officers. One can recall that before every general

election, the top security institutions in Nigeria often assure Nigerians of peaceful atmosphere during and after elections at the end of the day, the revise becomes the case.

- v. **Lack of Internal Democracy within Political Parties:** When there are no level playing ground or internal democracy within and among political parties, especially when the party leaders are not carrying out their responsibilities and duties during elections, aggrieved political contestants uses this platform as a way of orchestrating violence by sponsoring thugs and hooligans who end up disrupting the peaceful conduct of a particular election. This was observed between the two major parties of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) as a result of level playing ground with political parties. According to Ogheneakoke, (2021), lack of internal democracy, irregularities in registration and technical challenges during elections are responsible for election violence.

- vi. **Inefficiency of the Electoral Commissions:** Adeniyi, (2018), stated that the inefficiency of the electoral commissions in conducting its duties and responsibilities also contribute to incidence of violence during the 2011 and 2015 general elections in Lagos State. As a way of curbing this problem in subsequent elections, the Lagos State Independent Electoral Commission (LASIEC) through the Inter Party Advisory Council (IPAC) engages all political parties in Lagos State via their stakeholders in discussions on

rules guiding the conduct of free and fair elections as a means to achieve a peaceful and credible election outcome. However, in situations where the commission fails to call all political parties together in a meeting, there is likely to be violence because political parties will not be able to inform them.

- vii. **Inordinate Political Ambition:** Abah & Nwokwu, (2025), noted that Politics in Nigeria has been perceived as a gold mine where any aspiring billionaire should venture to satisfy his quest for wealth. According to them, such is unarguably responsible for the huge number of persons who go into politics in the country. That is why majority of them, go extra miles to achieve their ambitions without considering whose ox is gourd. To that effect, they truncate the rules of the game so as to succeed at all cost. This explains why politicians keep and maintain armed thugs who are deployed as ready instruments to wreck havoc on perceived political opponents before, during and after elections.

### **The impact of political violence on political participation among Oyo state's residents**

Electoral violence over the years is known to be detrimental to national development in which the results show that thuggery created fear among the candidates, hindrance of the electorates, killing innocent people, violation of human rights, destruction of properties and insecurity during and after the election.

- i. **Killing of Innocent People:** One of the serious effects of electoral violence on political participation is the killing of innocent people in the

society. According to Abubakar, (2019), political thugs often attack innocent people, whenever they are unable to lay hands on their target victims. They attempted to attack everybody they come across. This trend is affecting democratic and social activities negatively, especially in the Third World Countries, where democracy not allowed to be played in accordance with its guiding principles. In Oyo state many innocents citizens have lost their lives due to electoral violence.

- ii. **Creating Fear among Political Candidates and Electorates:** According to Razak & Garuba, (2017), violent activities especially during elections creates fear among party candidates which often prevent electorates from going out to cast out their voted during elections. An instance of this can be seen from the violent activities which took place in Oyo state where all the electoral materials meant to be used for the election were burnt were completely by unknown political thugs. Thugs burnt valuable materials including vehicles, houses, and offices of officials of PDP in different states. Similarly, innocent individuals lost their lives and valuable properties during and after the 2011 General Elections. The resultant effect of these violent cases was that many citizens were unable to turn in their polling units as they were afraid of being injured. Therefore, thuggery affects political participation specifically in the conduct of free and fair elections in Ebonyi State politics by creating fear among

candidates and hindrance of the electorate during and after elections.

- iii. **Violation of Fundamental Human Rights:** This is also another effect of electoral violence on political participation in Nigerian. According to chapter the 1999 constitution as amended 2011, one of the fundamental rights of a Nigeria citizens is the right to vote and be voted for during elections. Unfortunately, the incidences of electoral violence have obviously denied many citizens the right to voluntarily vote for their candidates of choice in Oyo State. This is because during the days of election, many electorates are either coerced by political thugs to vote for their sponsored candidate or denied the right to vote due to destruction of the election materials. In some areas, ballot boxes are snatched or were not provided for the electorates to vote the prepared candidates.

- iv. **Insecurity in the State:** According to Okafor & Okafor, (2018), electoral violence is one of the factors that have worsened the insecurity state of the country. It is a clear fact that most of ethno-religious crises and communal conflicts which have degenerated into a large form of violence in many parts of the country have their genesis from political violence that usually occur during and after elections. This situation has led to the poor political participation and more often than not affects democratic sustainability in Nigerian politics.

### Theoretical Framework

### **The Structural-Functionalist**

As a framework for building theories, Structural functionalism envisions society as a multifaceted system whose parts work collectively to promote cohesion and stability. The approach considers both social structure and social functions. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the functions of its constituent elements; that is, norms, customs, tradition and institutions. A common analogy popularized by Herbert Spencer presents these parts of society as organs that work towards the proper functioning of the body as a whole (Urry 2019) To this end societies are envision as coherent, bounded and basically relational constructs that function like organisms, with the various social institutions working collectively in an overall social balance.

The theory of institutional functionalism seems a plausible explanation for electoral violence in Nigeria. Biegon (2009) averred that institutional-functionalism explains fragility or instability by focusing on the interface between institutionalization and political participation. In which case, societies (like Nigeria) with a low or weak process of political institutions and high level of political participation are more likely to experience or witness a high level of political disorders. Biegon (2019) further states that, institutionalism-functionalism draws a direct relationship between fragile or weak states and the phenomenon of violence, violence is therefore likely to occur where the state fails to meet popular demands, leaving the mass of the people in grinding poverty. This theory emphasizes structuralism as linking social stratification and the configuration of power relations among social forces within and without the ambit of the state in explaining violence. The structural explanation of electoral violence suggest that the society and politics are organised in a manner that

generates violence, in other words, the state is organised in such a way that significant elements of the population are excluded from meaningful participation in and benefiting from the state's economic and political life; such segments are bound at some point, to reverse the effects of the exclusion using violent means (Nathan 2020).

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research employed a comprehensive approach that combines both primary and secondary data sources to effectively address the study objectives. A structured questionnaire will be administered to a randomly selected sample of respondents. The data for this study was generated from primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data was generated using a questionnaire. The secondary sources of data basically consisted of information collected from studies of relevant books, journal articles, media reports, newspapers, and relevant websites. The data collected in the course of this study was presented using descriptive statistic. The descriptive method deals with the presentation of the variables of the study (in relation to the subject) such as the profiles of respondents. The descriptive method is employed to explain responses obtained from the questionnaires presented to respondents.

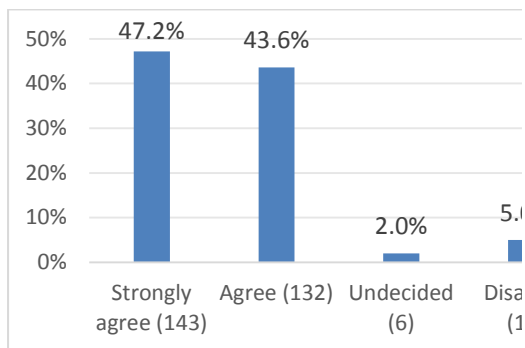
The data gathered for this research utilized SPSS version 25 as the primary tool for analysing the gathered data due to its versatility and powerful analytical capabilities. The analysis covered descriptive statistics and percentages were employed to present a clear and insightful portrayal of the data.

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

## Data Analysis

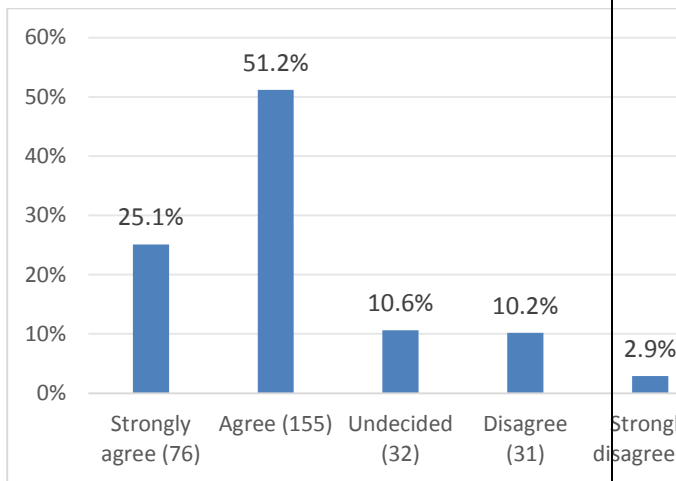
### Relationship between political violence and political participation in Oyo state

Exposure to political violence decreases likelihood of voting in elections



Question 1 showed that 47.2 percent of the total respondent strongly agrees that Exposure to political violence decreases likelihood of voting in elections. 43.6 percent agree, 2 percent are undecided, 5 percent disagree, while the remaining 2.2 percent strongly disagree.

Individuals experiencing political violence are more likely to engage in protests or activism



This showed that 25.1 percent of the respondents strongly agree that Individuals experiencing political violence are more likely to engage in protests or activism, 51.2 percent agree, 10.6 percent are undecided, 10.2 percent disagree, while the remaining 2.9 percent strongly disagree.

## Data analysis and Discussion of findings

### The relationship between political violence and political participation in Oyo state

The first research question of the studies which states that What is the relationship between political violence and political participation in Oyo state? The respondents accepted that exposure to political violence decreases likelihood of voting in elections, Individuals experiencing political violence are more likely to engage in protests or activism, fear of violence suppresses political participation among marginalized groups and perceived government response to violence influences citizens' political engagement.

Voting at elections is one of the easiest ways for citizens to participate in the democratic

process. A political system is democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote (Adeleke, 2026). Unfortunately, the spate of bombings, kidnapping, massive fraud and harassment associated with the electoral process in Nigeria not only tarnish the image of our democracy, they also grossly affect voters' interest in politics. Voting, which is an important ingredient of democracy, is thus seen as the business of party supporters and political thugs who are paid peanuts to turn the whole process of election into a violence-packed political jamboree suitable for only fiendish individuals with violent minds (Johnmary, 2026)

Höglund (2025) distinguishes election-related violence from other forms of political violence because it is carried out during the election period with the objective to influence the process and its outcomes. Electoral violence represents all forms of organized acts or threats physical, psychological, and structural, aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process (Nwolise 2025). Electoral violence as: any act or threat of physical or psychological harm to a person or damage to property, intended for anyone directly involved in an electoral process (voter, candidate, party officer, election worker, election monitor, journalist, etc.), which may disrupt or attempt to disrupt any aspect of the electoral process (campaign, registration, voting, counting, etc.). From the foregoing, election violence can therefore be

seen as any act, directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly directed at persons' involved in the electoral process, with the aim of undermining the process. The objective of the perpetrators of electoral violence is to unduly influence the electoral process and its outcome to gain advantage over other rivals or opponents.

In Oyo State, political violence and political participation share a complex, reciprocal relationship. Violence, typically driven by elite desperation, godfatherism, and the weaponization of unemployed youth, acts as a massive deterrent for voters, often causing low electoral turnouts. The threat to life and property intimidates voters, causing a decline in voter turnout, particularly among women and the elderly (Nkwede & Nwobashi, 2026). According to Ogundiya & Baba (2026), violence or threat to violence has a negative effect on political participation since citizens exposed to violent incidence display lack of confidence in the electoral system places less premium on the functioning of democracy in Nigeria.

### CONCLUSION

The study concludes that has established that election is indispensable in any democracy since it gives the citizens the opportunity to take part in governance by choosing those who steer the affairs of leadership in the state. However, such election becomes relevant when it is conducted in line with the acceptable norms set by the national laws of a given state that operates such system to enable a peaceful transfer of power. In Nigeria and Oyo state in Particular, several attempts to conduct peaceful election appears to be challenging, hence this study. Going by the findings of the study, it can be concluded that electoral violence has significantly

hindered political participation among the citizens and has constituted a serious challenge towards achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

The complex relationship between political violence and political participation remains one of the defining challenges of the democratic process in Oyo State. This study has comprehensively examined how the deliberate use of electoral thuggery, intimidation, and systemic chaos functions as a powerful tool for voter suppression. By transforming the civic arena into a hazardous environment, political violence drives widespread voter apathy, drastically lowers voter turnout, and systematically excludes vulnerable demographics—particularly women and youth from participating in governance. When citizens choose self-preservation over civic duty, the fundamental principles of representative democracy are compromised, leaving elected leaders with diminished public legitimacy.

Furthermore, the research underscores that political violence in Oyo State is not a series of spontaneous, isolated incidents. Instead, it is a structural crisis fueled by deep-rooted socioeconomic vulnerabilities and institutional failures. High youth unemployment rates and the commercialization of local transport unions provide political elites with a steady supply of affordable, organized mercenaries. This volatile dynamic is made worse by a culture of political impunity, where sponsors and perpetrators of electoral crimes rarely face legal consequences, and security agencies are often perceived as biased actors. Consequently, public trust in democratic institutions has eroded, leaving residents feeling alienated from the very systems meant to serve them.

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