

Electoral Violence of 2023 and Voters' Turn-Out in Kogi East Senatorial District, Nigeria

Ali Yakubu

Department of Public Administration, Federal Polytechnic Idah, Kogi State, Nigeria

talk2bogger2000@yahoo.com

Abstract

Electoral violence is a serious issue of concern in Nigeria particularly in East Senatorial District of Kogi State, owing to the current political nature of the present Nigeria where the right of the electorates is no longer respected. Election related violence in Kogi-East is threatening the survival of true democracy, thereby affecting turnout of voters. This occurrence is worrisome which brought about the need for a study of the circumstance. This study seeks to examine the both the immediate and remote causes of electoral violence and its consequential effect on voters' turnout in the zone. The study adopted the qualitative research design using the Institutional theory as its underpinning theory. This study relied basically on secondary data and as such, the content analysis was used to analyze data to arrive at findings. The findings of the study revealed that as a result of the fear of being killed, assassinated, injured or maimed by hired political thugs and gun-runners sponsored by desperate politicians, electoral violence has significantly affected the voter turn-out in Kogi-East Senatorial District. Hence, the study recommends that the perpetrators of electoral violence, both the thugs and their paymasters including any electoral umpire found guilty of either taking part or aiding any form of electoral violence should be prosecuted and made to face the full wrath of the law to serve as a deterrent to other would-be offenders. The government should review and update electoral laws and regulations to address loopholes, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and enhance penalties for electoral offenses among others.

Keywords: Election, Violence, Election Violence and Voter turnout.

Introduction

The history of election in Nigeria can be traced back to the Clifford Constitution of 1922 which introduced the elective principle in Nigeria. Indeed, this was the first time; Africans were elected into the legislature of a British Territory in tropical Africa. The fact that politics determines the allocation of resources in the society has been a major factor in the long history of violence in Nigerian politics. Nigeria was recently ranked as the fourth most violent country by Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) judging by the number of violent events that occurred from 1997 to 2003. Nearly all of Nigeria's general elections since independence have been tainted with the brush strokes of violence (Agbu, 2016b).

It is largely accepted that democracy is a system of government of the people for the people and by the people. This comprehensive definition suggests that for the betterment and development of any society, democracy should be participatory. However, this system which seems to be eluded by average African nations compare to what is obtainable in other parts of world. The basic tenets of the principles, rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights are non-existence as violence is a major campaign tactic/strategy and elections are usually rigged in Nigeria. Election violence is gradually becoming a reoccurring decimal in Nigeria's troubled electoral history. The use of violence as a winning tactic is sacrosanct to the conduct of election in Africa's most populous democracy (Nigeria). Overall, electoral violence in Nigeria is more than often perpetrated by political actors (politicians, political parties and thugs), against opposition supporters, electoral officials, electoral observers, and civil society, media and security agencies. Similarly, violence can also be perpetuated

by non-party elements or stakeholders that may have other ends. However, it is a specific form of political violence, differentiated by its timing, targets and ultimately ends for which it is deployed (Hoglund et al, 2009). It is a fraudulent act which involves but not limited to vote buying, intimidation, discrimination and other forms of irregularities deployed with the aim of disrupting and politicizing the electoral process or swaying electoral outcomes (Dexecker, 2019; John, 2019; Onapajo, 2014).

In African regions, particularly Nigeria, intimidation, assassination, kidnapping, vote buying, ballot snatching and violence attacks on voting and collation are the major forms of violence and these are perpetuated with the aim of truncating electoral outcomes (John, 2019; Onapajo, 2014; Omotola 2010; Okoye, 2013). Survey-based evidence revealed that, one in five Nigerians is exposed to electoral irregularities such as vote buying, and almost one in ten is exposed to electoral violence (Bratton, 2008). Additionally, it is noteworthy to clarify that electoral violence goes beyond the eruption of violence during and after the participatory act of voting, it can occur at intra and inter party levels during conventions, campaigns and rallies.

The Electoral Act 2010 in Nigeria as amended empowers political parties to hold conventions; directly or indirectly, to enable them choose candidates to compete for votes (European Union Electoral Observer Mission, 2019; PLAC, 2019). Also, section 229 of the 1999 constitution as amended, holds that, "political parties" as formal organizations preoccupies itself with soliciting for votes during elections into various executive and legislative positions as enshrine in the constitution. As far as the electoral act of voting is concerned in Nigeria, it rests with the political parties and their aspirants to identify and deploy strategies that will increase their chances of success at the polls. The absence of constitutional backing for individual candidacy in Nigeria's electoral laws enforces the central role of political parties in the electoral process. Resultantly, the statutory act of voter mobilization remains a major function of political parties and their supporters, though the mechanisms through which such function is pursued remains particularly relative.

Impunity is endemic as perpetrators of electoral violence are hardly ever prosecuted. Electoral violence initiates voter apathy. Systematic studies of the impact of electoral violence on electoral participation show a negative association between the two. A cross-sectional study revealed that voters who have experienced threats of election violence at the polls were less likely to vote in Nigeria (Bratton, 2013, p. 129). A cross-national study also found the same globally (Norris, 2014, p. 143).

On other hand, voter turnout represents the total number of persons who actively participate in the electoral act of voting. That is, the number of electorates that actually come out to cast their votes on the day of election. It is an official record of the electorates who are involved in the political process of a country or nation. In the opinion of Blais (2007) who proffered the individual and aggregate framework for measuring or assessing voter turnout. The former measures turnout by studying elections over a given period, while the latter is preoccupied with the descriptive question of who votes and why they vote. Hence, voter turnout is assumed to be relative to a number of factors ranging from conviction and trust in institutions to socio-economic determinants, they however can be located in prevailing political behaviour. The long term (1999 – 2015) trends over five electoral cycles show that voter turnout has been in decline. The data reveals that voter turnout dropped from 30.2 million or 52.3% of registered voters in 1999 to 29.4 million or 43.7% of registered voters in 2015. Although there was a sharp increase in voter turnout in 2003, this declined again in 2007. According to Adenyi, Onyia and Nmanchi, (2019), weak institutional capacity and inability to efficiently conduct and regulate elections have contributed to the prevalence of violence in Nigeria.

Election results in Kogi State are hardly acceptable because of doctoring or manipulation of election results, corruption, open rigging, perversion of justice and thuggery. The subject of (democratic instability) is ever more pertinent to Nigeria and indeed Africa as a whole where misrule

and repression accompanied by gross human rights violations have become an intractable problem over the decades (Sofekun, Oyakhiromen, Ige and Obayemi, 2008). Voter turnout in Kogi East has fluctuated significantly, often correlating with the intensity of electoral violence. For instance, the 2015 general elections recorded a turnout of approximately 48%, while the 2019 elections saw a decline to around 42%, attributed largely to widespread violence and intimidation. (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2019).

The example of violence in the election in Ofu Local government area of Kogi-East was the way and manner Mrs Acheju Abuh, the PDP Woman leader of Wada Aro Campaign Council Ochadamu Ward, who was also the Women Leader for the campaign Organization of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), was burnt to ashes in her room on November 18, 2019 barely two days after the governorship election. (Kanu, 2019). Despite the number of security agencies sent to the area, but still, it does not stop people from snatching ballot boxes, buying of votes openly, shooting to scare voters on election day or falsifying election figures, bloodshed among others.

The bitter struggle for power played itself out again in Kogi-East elections as the politicians do not think voters are wise enough to decide for themselves, or that they even have right to vote foolishly as they resort to self-help on election day. They hire and arm thugs to the teeth to rig-election for them while the Security Operatives were helpless or accomplices (Kanu, 2019). It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the effects of electoral violence on voter turnout in Kogi-East Senatorial District so as to ascertain the relationship between electoral violence and citizen engagement in the political process of Kogi-East Senatorial District and to identify the factors that contributed to electoral violence in Kogi-East Senatorial District.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine Election Violence and Voter Turn-out in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State. Specifically, this study sought to:

- i. Ascertain the root causes and triggering factors of electoral violence in Kogi-East Senatorial District of Kogi State.
- ii. Examine the effect of electoral violence on voter turn-out in Kogi East Senatorial District

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Election

Election is a legitimate process through which the citizens of a particular country exercise their franchise by voting the candidate of their choice to the elective offices. It is a peaceful process of transferring power based on the citizens' majority choice. It is anticipated that democracy should be credible, accountable and transparent because of the process in which the leaders emerged by allowing the leaders to compete for power using persuasion and at the same time to give the right and freedom of choice by the electorates (Smith, 2012). Election violence can also be view as political expression events, politically motivated attacks, disruptive state acts, or some other manifestation of discontent - can vary enormously in their intensity (Speed Database 2014).

However, the electoral process in Nigeria has been truncated and undermined. Most of the countries of the world today operate electoral democracy (Buttorff, 2019). Africa is currently in a state of democratic renewal due to the intensified internal and external pressure for most of the countries to give room for an enabling environment suitable for democratization (Adejumobi, 2015). Nigeria as a country has become one of the success stories of Africa's democratization in which the

transition to civilian rule in the Fourth Republic (1999-2020) experienced the longest democratic rule in the history of the country unprecedented. In the Fourth Republic of Nigeria, six (6) consecutive elections were conducted successfully which implies that democracy has come to stay in the country expectedly (Page & Tayo, 2018). The primary areas of concern in Nigerian democracy is the question of integrity, transparency and youth participation (European Union, 2019). Party financing is a phenomenon that is being critically and closely watched by electoral bodies of the world to compel compliance and ensure transparency and credibility of elections globally (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2014 and Transparency International 2015). In Nigeria, there are standard rules and regulations for party financing and campaign expenditure to encourage accountability, transparency, credibility and integrity of electoral process and general elections in the country (Sule, Azizuddin, Mat & Ibrahim, 2019). But the constitutional provisions themselves do not encourage or support the youth participation because even the set limit for campaign spending is seemingly beyond the reach of the youth category (Sule, et al 2019). But this has not been the challenges. The problem is that the whole electoral process in the country from party primaries and nomination to the general election weed out the youth due to influence of money politics, rigging, bribery, corruption, excessive spending, violation of conduct in terms of vote buying and financial recklessness (Sule et al 2019).

Causes of Electoral Violence

1. ***Socio-Economic Factors*** (Poverty and Unemployment): High rates of youth unemployment create a pool of potential recruits for political violence. Economic desperation makes young people susceptible to monetary inducements from politicians. Limited economic opportunities drive competition for political positions seen as paths to wealth. Poverty-induced vulnerability makes voters susceptible to vote-buying and intimidation.
2. ***Social Inequality***: Wide economic disparities, uneven distribution of resources and development projects between political elites and the general population. Limited access to education and skill development opportunities also makes room for election related violence as everyone is desperate for power, wealth and state resources.
3. ***Social marginalization*** of certain communities and groups is also a major factor responsible for electoral violence as any group or community that feels marginalized may take to violence as the last resort.
4. ***Political Factors*** (Political Patronage System): "Godfatherism" politics where political sponsors expect absolute loyalty from thugs and positive results at all times. There is also the winner-takes-all political system that intensifies competition among the various political parties and their actors who want to take control of state resources by all means. Use of political positions for personal enrichment and Exclusionary politics that marginalizes certain groups are factors for electoral violence.
5. ***Weak Political Institutions***: This has to do with ineffective electoral management bodies at local levels, poor enforcement of electoral laws and regulations, inadequate internal democracy within political parties and poor or unacceptable candidate selection processes are recipe for electoral violence.
6. ***Ethnic and Tribal Dynamics***: This has to do with historical rivalries between major ethnic groups (Igala, Ebira, and Okun) and the inherent competition for political dominance among different communities. Manipulation of ethnic sentiments by political actors and traditional power structures influencing political processes in Kogi-East.

7. **Ineffective Security Architecture:** Inadequate security personnel deployment during elections, poor coordination among security agencies, limited capacity to prevent and respond to violence when they arise and compromise by security personnel during electoral processes as a result of being bought over either by the highest bidder or the government in power.

8. **Administrative Challenges:** Logistical problems in election management, inadequate training of electoral officials, poor voter education and civic awareness and challenges with voter registration and verification

9. **Structural and Systemic Factors:** Part of the main causes of electoral violence is the weak Electoral Justice System in Nigeria at large which gives birth to delayed or denied justice in electoral disputes, high costs of seeking (procuring) electoral justice, limited capacity of electoral tribunals and the overwhelming perception of bias in the judicial system.

10. **Political Economy of Violence:** Majorly in Kogi-East part of Kogi State, there is the commercialization of political violence, existence of organized criminal networks, arms proliferation and availability of weapons and economic benefits derived from political instability. These make electoral violence a lucrative venture not minding the deadly risks attached.

11. **Social-Media and Misinformation:** Nothing triggers trouble like the spread of fake news and inflammatory content which has been made cheaper and easier with advent of social media through which fake and inciting information can be widely spread and people will accept them without verification and authentication. Using the social media, public opinion can easily be manipulated.

12. **Drug Abuse:** This is about the high rate of drug abuse among youths who are recruited as political thugs. These illicit drugs embolden political thugs to do the biddings of their paymasters.

13. **Leadership Issues:** Poor leadership and accountability, lack of political will to address violence, poor example set by political leaders.

14. **Resource Control:** Electoral violence in Kogi-East could also be triggered by fierce competition for control of limited state resources, disputes over revenue allocation, political control over natural resources and the father of all...Perpetual economic interests in maintaining political power.

The aforementioned causes demonstrate the complex and interconnected nature of factors contributing to electoral violence in Kogi-State. Understanding these multiple dimensions is crucial for developing effective interventions and prevention strategies.

Election Violence and Voter Turn-out in Kogi-East

According to Ismail & Sule, (2019) “to be a member of the government party means an open avenue to government patronage, contract deals and the like. Leadership becomes a self-recruiting oligarchy which has been known to tolerate no opposition to itself”.

Electoral violence is not a new phenomenon. It has threatened the survival of democracy in Nigeria. One of the perspective states that incumbent parties are the prime perpetrators of violence. Meyler (2007) in his study on electoral violence has argued that electoral violence is usually orchestrated by ruling parties, more so in multi-party states that do not meet minimum threshold for a democracy. While on the opposing end, Collier and Vincente (2008) argued that weaker parties (opposition) facing electoral loss are more likely to resort to violence as no violence shall manifest if the challenger was stronger. The evident decline in voter population between 2011 and 2015 election cycle can be attributed largely to the extant and deadly outcomes of post electoral violence that rocked the North part of Nigeria.

A good example of electoral violence in Kogi-East (Ofu Local Government Area) was the way and manner Mrs Acheju Abuh, the PDP Woman leader of Wada Aro Campaign Council Ochadamu Ward, who was also the Women Leader for the campaign Organisation of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), was burnt to ashes in her room on November 18, 2019 barely two days after the governorship election (Kunle, 2019). Despite the number of security agencies sent to the area, but still, it does not stop people from snatching ballot boxes, buying of votes openly, shooting to scare voters on election day or falsifying election figures, bloodshed among others. The fear of being attacked, maimed, injured, kidnapped or even killed by hired thugs sends fear and back signals to voters not come out on election day to perform their civic responsibility by casting their votes in favour of the candidate of their choice. Given such scenario, only the brave, risk-taking, adventurous and the daring voters can go out to vote.

Kogi East Senatorial District in Nigeria has experienced significant challenges related to electoral violence, impacting political participation and democratic processes. Nigeria, as a whole, has grappled with electoral violence, rooted in historical socio-political complexities. In Kogi State, there have been instances of electoral violence that have impacted political participation. The relationship between electoral violence and political participation in Kogi State can be analyzed from various perspectives, including the effects of violence on voter turnout, the impact on political party activities, and the influence on citizens' trust in the electoral process. Kogi East Senatorial District reflects these challenges, with past elections marred by violence, voter intimidation, and irregularities. Instances of thuggery, ballot box snatching, and political assassinations have been reported, undermining the democratic process and citizen trust. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2019).

Multiple factors contribute to electoral violence in Kogi-East. Socio-economic disparities, high youth unemployment, and poverty create fertile ground for manipulation by political actors. Ethno-religious tensions further exacerbate the situation, often exploited for electoral gain. Weak law enforcement and a lack of swift judicial redress allow perpetrators to act with impunity, perpetuating a cycle of violence. Electoral violence has far-reaching consequences, impacting political participation and governance. Fear of violence deters citizens from active engagement in the political process, leading to voter apathy and disenfranchisement. Moreover, violence disrupts social cohesion, hinders development, and erodes trust in democratic institutions. Levels of political participation in Kogi-East vary, influenced by education, socio-economic status, and perceptions of safety.

Olaniyi (2015) state that electoral violence undermines political stability by creating an atmosphere of insecurity and instability. This, in turn, adversely affects political participation as citizens become apprehensive about engaging in the political process. Olaniyi argues that sustainable development is closely linked to political stability and active citizen participation, and electoral violence disrupts these vital components. Electoral violence is a significant impediment to political participation and democratic processes, often undermining the legitimacy of elections and deterring citizen engagement.

In Kogi State, Human life which is considered valuable and sacred is often hunted, maimed and killed like wild animals as a result of politics. Fear of violence has been imbibed in the hearts of Nigerians, especially during electioneering times. Most Nigerians fear death during elections has become like a norm because of the reoccurring violence, tension, insecurity and social instability among the citizens. Consequently, victims and non-victims of the crisis appear to be in a relative state of panic in Kogi-East. It has contributed significantly to the ethnic, religious, communal conflicts that Nigeria is witnessing today. The election violence in Ofu local government area of Kogi state during the 2019 general elections which led to the destruction of property and loss of lives are perpetrated by the youths. The death of Mrs Acheju Abuh was as a result of electoral violence

in the area. In the view of Aliyu and Bello (2015), the violence that results from the declaration of candidates perceived by the people as unfair or rigged in Nigeria has often led to violent eruptions with attendant destruction of people's property, the burning of human beings alive, and the incursion of military into governance (Aliyu and Bello 2015).

In Dekina LGA, armed thugs disrupted voting, leading to the cancellation of results in several polling units. Similar incidents were reported in other LGAs, contributing to a climate of fear and reduced voter turnout (Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room 2019). The 2019 elections were particularly violent in Kogi-East. In Ankpa LGA, armed men attacked polling units, resulting in several deaths and injuries. Ballot box snatching and arson were also reported, significantly impacting voter turnout. The violence led to the deployment of additional security forces, but many residents remained too fearful to vote. Voter turnout in Kogi-East has fluctuated significantly, often correlating with the intensity of electoral violence. For instance, the 2015 general elections recorded a turnout of approximately 48%, while the 2019 elections saw a decline to around 42%, attributed largely to widespread violence and intimidation. Data from various election observation missions and security agencies indicate a high number of violent incidents. In the 2019 elections alone, over 50 incidents of electoral violence were reported in Kogi-East, including at least 10 fatalities and numerous injuries (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2019).

Factors Responsible for Low Voter Turn-out in Kogi-East

Political Apathy and Disillusionment: Political apathy and disillusionment among Nigerian citizens are significant factors contributing to low voter turn-out. Many Nigerians perceive politics as corrupt, ineffective, and disconnected from their everyday lives. This disillusionment stems from widespread corruption, lack of accountability among political leaders, and broken promises by elected officials. As a result, citizens may feel disengaged and indifferent towards participating in the electoral process, leading to low voter turn-out.

Voter Suppression and Intimidation: Instances of voter suppression and intimidation during elections contribute to low voter turn-out in Nigeria. Reports of violence, intimidation, and harassment by political thugs and security personnel at polling stations deter citizens from exercising their right to vote. Additionally, voter suppression tactics such as voter ID requirements, cumbersome registration processes, and inadequate polling infrastructure disproportionately affect marginalized communities, further suppressing voter turn-out.

Electoral Irregularities and Fraud: Electoral irregularities and fraud undermine the credibility and integrity of elections in Nigeria, leading to low voter turn-out. Incidents of ballot stuffing, vote-buying, manipulation of voter registers, and falsification of election results erode public trust in the electoral process. When citizens perceive elections as rigged or predetermined, they may be less inclined to participate, resulting in lower voter turn-out.

Inadequate Electoral Infrastructure and Logistics: Inadequate electoral infrastructure and logistics pose significant challenges to voter turn-out in Nigeria. Poorly equipped polling stations, long queues, delays in the delivery of election materials, and logistical errors contribute to voter disenfranchisement and frustration. Additionally, inadequate security measures and the inability to ensure a safe and peaceful voting environment deter citizens from participating in the electoral process (Nwankwo, 2015), (Ogundele & Akanbi 2016), (Adejumobi & Akinbobola, 2018) and (Yusuf, et al 2018).

Strategies to Improve Voter Turn-out in Kogi State Elections

Civic Education and Voter Mobilization Campaigns: Civic education and voter mobilization campaigns play a crucial role in increasing voter turn-out by raising awareness about the importance of participation in the electoral process and providing information on voter registration, polling locations, and election dates. These campaigns can target various demographic groups, including youth, women, and marginalized communities, to ensure broad-based participation.

Comprehensive Discussion: Civic education and voter mobilization campaigns have been identified as effective strategies for increasing voter turn-out in elections (Mukwaya et al., 2020). These campaigns provide citizens with information about their rights and responsibilities as voters, the electoral process, and the significance of their participation in shaping the democratic process. Studies have shown that targeted voter mobilization efforts, including door-to-door outreach, community meetings, and public awareness campaigns, can effectively increase voter turn-out, particularly among underrepresented groups (Gerber et al., 2008). By empowering citizens with knowledge and encouraging them to participate in the electoral process, civic education and voter mobilization campaigns can contribute to higher voter turn-out rates in Kogi State elections.

Improving Access to Voter Registration: Improving access to voter registration facilities and processes is essential for increasing voter turn-out in Kogi State elections. This can include extending registration deadlines, establishing mobile registration centers in remote areas, and leveraging technology to streamline the registration process, such as online registration portals and mobile registration apps.

Expansion of Early Voting Opportunities: Expanding early voting opportunities can increase voter turn-out by providing voters with greater flexibility and convenience in casting their ballots. This can include establishing early voting centers in multiple locations, extending early voting periods, and implementing absentee voting options for eligible voters.

Enhanced Voter Education Programs: Enhanced voter education programs can improve voter turn-out by providing voters with information about their rights, the electoral process, and the importance of voting. These programs can include educational workshops, public information campaigns, and outreach efforts targeting specific demographic groups.

Theoretical Framework

Rational Choice Theory: Rational choice theory, has roots in various disciplines including economics, political science, and sociology. Notable proponents include economists Gary Becker and Anthony Downs, as well as political scientists James S. Coleman and William H. Rational choice theory posits that individuals make decisions by weighing the costs and benefits of various options and choosing the one that maximizes their utility or satisfaction. Applied to voter turn-out and transparency of elections, rational choice theory suggests that individuals decide whether to participate in elections based on a calculation of the perceived benefits (such as influencing the outcome of the election or expressing their political preferences) against the perceived costs (such as the time and effort required to vote, the risk of electoral fraud or manipulation, and the effectiveness of their vote in a competitive election). From the perspective of transparency in elections, rational choice theory implies that voters are more likely to participate in elections when they perceive the electoral process as fair, transparent, and credible.

Institutional Theory: Institutional theory has its roots in sociology and organizational studies, with contributions from scholars such as John W. Meyer, Paul J. DiMaggio, and Scott Lash in the field of

sociology, and Douglas W. Rae and Paul J. DiMaggio in political science. Institutional theory emerged in the late 20th century and gained prominence in the fields of sociology, political science, and organizational studies during the 1980s and 1990s. Institutional theory focuses on the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping individual and collective behaviour within society. According to institutional theory, institutions, including laws, regulations, norms, and organizational structures, structure social interactions and shape individuals' perceptions, preferences, and actions.

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research methods using the content analysis. Content analysis is "The systematic reading of a body of texts, literatures, journals, online resources and other evidences". Content analysis is distinguished from other kinds of social science research in that it does not require the collection of data from people. Like documentary research, content analysis is the study of documented information, or information which has been recorded in texts, media, or physical items (Bello & Yakubu 2018). Data used for this research were sourced from secondary data such as journals, books and historical documents both on the internet and libraries. Data was analyzed using content analysis technique.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that election violence has detrimental effect on the voter turn-out in Kogi East Senatorial District. This is evident on the available records particularly the cases of violence particularly in Ofu in 2019 where a woman leader Mrs Salom was burn to death. This and many factors discourage electorate and thereby affecting the voter turnout of the region.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, it is fair to argue that the influence of political parties and their supporters on electoral violence and by extension voter turnout remains a dominant feature in Nigeria. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind the capacity of the average post-colonial state as well as the ability of the state to monopolize the legitimate use of coercion. The larger picture on the state of affairs in Nigeria can be located within the post-colonial theory and the incapacity to control the electoral process. In conclusion, there is a need for social reorientation of the Nigerian society at large, Kogi State in general and Kogi-East in particular should elections be intended to serve as a media for policy articulation. The findings regarding factors influencing voter turn-out underscore the multifaceted nature of voter participation. It is evident that a combination of logistical convenience, informed decision-making through candidate policies awareness, trust in electoral processes, and effective voter education are crucial in promoting higher voter turn-out. Policymakers and electoral stakeholders should focus on addressing these factors to enhance democratic participation and representation. The challenges identified pose significant obstacles to promoting electoral transparency and integrity. Lack of public trust, political interference, and inadequate security measures can undermine the legitimacy of elections and erode public confidence. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts from electoral authorities, civil society, and policymakers to strengthen institutional mechanisms, ensure adequate funding for voter education, enhance transparency in electoral processes, and enforce electoral laws effectively.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the objectives and findings of the study:

- i. Punitive measures be put in place and legally enforced with stiff penalties meted out to all parties involved in any form of electoral violence, ranging from total cancellation of results, imposition of fines, arrests, detention, imprisonment and even the law of ‘an eye for an eye’ for anyone who kills and have been tried and found guilty.
- ii. State institutions such as INEC, should be empowered especially in the area of autonomy and independence from politicians. INEC as an institution has become a common stodge in the hands of politician. Any attempt at reducing electoral violence, vote buying and other electoral irregularities will be insignificant if the socio-economic plight of the average Nigerian is not elevated.
- iii. Government should review and update electoral laws and regulations to address loopholes, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and enhance penalties for electoral offenses. Ensure that these laws are transparent, accessible to the public, and aligned with international standards for electoral integrity.

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