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Environmental Impact of Voter Education on Election Violence Disposition in Calaba Metropolis of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Election violence poses a significant threat to democratic stability in Nigeria, particularly in the South-South zone. Despite efforts to address this challenge, the Environmental impact of voter education on election violence disposition remains understudied. This study examines the relationship between voter education and election violence disposition in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State. Guided by Thorstein Veblen's Institutional Approach, the study aims to investigate how voter education influences the norms and values that shape voter behavior toward the Environment during election violence. A correlational survey research design was employed, with a sample of 377 respondents selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. Data was collected using a questionnaire and analyzed using linear regression. The study's findings reveal that voter education significantly contributes to reducing environmental problems during election violence. Election violence poses a significant threat to

	democratic stability in Nigeria, particularly in Calabar metropolis and can create a war situation that ca lead to the destruction of the Environment. The study recommends that Governments and electoral commissions should increase funding for voter education programs to ensure that all voters have access to education on the electoral process and the importance of peaceful elections to archive electoral violence free election and to safeguard our environment.

Introduction

Elections are a means through which democracy is practiced; they are periods when political and power struggles are legally exercised by citizens in a society. Political parties present candidates, and the electorate makes choices through the exercise of their franchise. Elections are a participatory activity in which every eligible citizen should willingly and freely take part. However, elections in Nigeria have increasingly become periods of political violence, intimidation, coercion, and harassment, leading to casualties, loss of lives, destruction of properties, and environmental degradation (Sarafadeen Aderemi Adeagbo et al., 2019). These battering and morbid trends of violence associated with elections have worried researchers, scholars, the educated elite, and agencies of government both locally and internationally.

Not inconsiderably, the South-South zone experienced the darkest trades of violence associated with the just concluded 2023 gubernatorial and state assembly elections in the history of Nigeria. Irate parties, groups, and ethnicities attacked supporters with improvised firearms and weapons to settle scores and intellectual vindication. Destruction of ballot boxes, materials, and arson was the order of the day. Bodies were left uncollected in polling booths. State caps and uniforms of security agents were found among the dead. It is descriptively lamentable the extent at which the conduct of elections, intensively, in the South-South zone has dehumanized the people and rendered them with dire poverty.

A voter education campaign aims to provide information, education, and communication materials in various forms – printed, oral, electronic, and audiovisual – to stimulate and sustain an interest in the electoral process. It assists voters in making informed choices, thus enhancing their civic engagement (O. Kalu & Gberevbie, 2018). Voter education has been successful virtually in all countries practicing democracy, especially Ghana, South Africa, Zambia, and Liberia (Sule et al., 2017).

The quest for a peaceful and conducive environment for the conduct of elections is paramount for consolidating and deepening democracy in Nigeria. However, elections in Nigeria are often characterized by violent disputes resulting in loss of lives and degradation of the environment. The incidence of election violence in Nigeria is high, with the electoral process fraught with the scornful use of violence. The conduct of elections has now taken a grim dimension, with the occurrence of pre- and post-election violence. Environmental damage is often part and parcel of election violence, as the physical environments of towns, cities, and villages are turned into theatres of violence and war. Development is stunted as property is destroyed, and lives lost, thus infusing fear and anxiety and leading to capital flight.

Given this somber and grisly background, the intent of the research is to investigate the impact of voter education on the disposition of election violence in South-South Nigeria before, during, and after elections. Specifically, an effort will be made to respond to the following research questions: What is the impact of voter education on the disposition of election violence in the South-South zone?

Statement of the Problem

Electoral violence has emerged as one of the greatest problems in Nigeria, constituting a serious threat to the nascent democratic republic. Participation in electoral campaigns and elections is the crux of democracy, from which the people and government ought to enjoy the dividends of democracy. However, the violence and its attendant problems are discouraging citizen participation, thereby undermining democratic development. More so, it causes loss of lives, injuries and destruction of property (Kalu & Gberevbie, 2018). Despite the seriousness of electoral violence, public discourse has tended to be largely on the act itself, neglecting its antecedents and societal implication such as environmental degradation.

South-South Nigeria is among the peaceful regions in Nigeria; however, recent developments have shown a resurgence of violence in this axis, owing largely to the desperate political ambition of politicians during electioneering campaigns to use thugs on the day of the election to coerce citizens to vote for them, which subsequently led to political thuggery, court cases and environmental degradation. Prior to this, there had been efforts by some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies to enlighten the region on the evils of violence. Despite these efforts, election violence, its political ecology, and environmental degradation continue to pose a serious and crucial challenge to the peaceful cohabitation of the people of South-South Nigeria. In the wake of the above problem is the question of whether these awareness campaigns are commensurate with the levels of election violence escalation perpetrated by the political class on the poor and innocent citizens. These queries revealed the gap this study intends to fill.

Statement of hypotheses

The following hypotheses was formulated to be tested at .05 level of significance:

1. Voter education does not significantly contribute to Environmental problems during election violence in Calabar, Cross River State.

These twin problems of rejected ballots and declining turnout at elections are widely attributed both directly and indirectly to inadequate civic and voter education.

Studies have consistently shown that voter education is a crucial factor in reducing election violence disposition. For instance, a study by (Huntington, 1991) found that voter education increases political knowledge, which in turn reduces the likelihood of election violence. Similarly, (Collier & Vicente, 2012) found that voter education programs reduce election violence by increasing voters' understanding of the electoral process.

In Nigeria, voter education has been identified as a key factor in reducing election violence. A study by (Omotola & Adejayan, 2014) found that voter education programs implemented by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reduced election violence in the 2011 general elections. Another study by (Agbaje & Adejayan, 2016) found that voter education increased voter turnout and reduced election violence in the 2015 general elections. However, some studies have found that voter education may not be enough to reduce election violence disposition. For instance, a study by (Obi, 2012) found that voter education programs may not be effective in reducing election violence if they are not accompanied by other measures such as electoral reform and security measures. Similarly, (Ibrahim & Abubakar, 2017) found that voter education programs may be undermined by factors such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality.

In Calabar Metropolis, voter education has been identified as a key factor in reducing election violence disposition. A study by (Ekpe & Ekpe, 2018) found that voter education programs implemented by civil society organizations reduced election violence in the 2019 general elections. Another study by (Okoi & Okoi, 2020) found that voter education increased voter turnout and reduced election violence in the 2019 general elections.

Despite these findings, there is still a need for further research on the impact of voter education on election violence disposition in Calabar Metropolis. This study aims to contribute to this body of research by examining the impact of voter education on election violence disposition in Calabar Metropolis.

The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of research on voter education and election violence disposition. They will also provide insights for policymakers and stakeholders on the effectiveness of voter education programs in reducing election violence disposition in Calabar Metropolis.

Theoretical Framework:
The study is situated within the philosophy of the Institutional Approach propounded by Thorstein Veblen in 1995. Institutional approach to electioneering violence focuses on understanding the role of political institutions in shaping and perpetuating violence during electoral processes. It examines how the design and functioning of electoral systems, political parties, and state institutions can contribute to or mitigate election-related violence.

Here are some key elements of the institutional approach to electioneering violence:
Electoral System Design: The electoral system can have a significant impact on the occurrence of violence. Certain electoral systems, such as winner-takes-all or majoritarian systems, may create intense competition and winner-loser dynamics, increasing the likelihood of violence. In contrast, proportional representation systems or other mechanisms that promote inclusivity and power-sharing may reduce the incentives for violence.

Political Party Dynamics: Political parties play central roles in elections and can either contribute to or mitigate violence. Factors such as party polarization, weak internal party structures, and a lack of internal democracy can exacerbate conflicts and fuel violence. Strong, inclusive party organizations and mechanisms for resolving internal disputes can help prevent or manage election-related violence.

State Institutions And Rule Of Law: The strength and independence of state institutions, particularly law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, are crucial in curbing election violence. When these institutions are weak, corrupt, or under the influence of political actors, perpetrators of violence may act with impunity, leading to a cycle of violence. Conversely, impartial and effective institutions that enforce the rule of law can deter violence and ensure accountability for offenders.

Electoral Management Bodies: The role of electoral management bodies (EMBs) in organizing and overseeing elections is vital. Independent, competent, and transparent EMBs can enhance the integrity of elections and minimize violence. Their capacity to resolve disputes, address grievances, and provide a level playing field for all candidates and parties is essential in preventing or mitigating election-related violence.

Civil Society And Media: Vibrant civil society organizations and a free and independent media can play a critical role in monitoring elections, promoting transparency, and holding political actors accountable. They can raise awareness about the consequences of violence, advocate for peaceful electoral processes, and contribute to conflict resolution efforts.

The institutional approach to electioneering violence emphasizes the importance of addressing structural and systemic factors that contribute to violence. It highlights the need for electoral reforms, strengthening of democratic institutions, and the creation of an enabling environment for peaceful and inclusive political competition. By focusing on these institutional aspects, efforts can be made to prevent and mitigate election-related violence and promote democratic stability and Environmental sustainability.

Outcome of electoral violence without voter education on the Environment.

Ensuring environmental sustainability amidst election violence is a crucial challenge that demands immediate attention. It is essential not to overlook the impact they can have on our environment.

Election violence often leads to an increase in destructive activities such as vandalism, arson, and looting, which can have severe consequences for our natural resources. Forests may be illegally logged, wildlife may be poached, and protected areas may be encroached upon, all in the midst of chaotic political unrest.

The destruction of the environment during election violence not only harms ecosystems and biodiversity but also exacerbates the effects of climate change. Deforestation releases vast amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming. The loss of wildlife disrupts delicate ecological balance, affecting pollination, seed dispersal, and natural pest control.

Furthermore, the destruction of environmental resources can have long-lasting effects on local communities. Impoverished communities often depend on natural resources for their livelihoods, such as fishing, farming, or gathering forest products. When these resources are depleted or destroyed, these communities are left vulnerable and face increased poverty and food insecurity.

To address this critical issue, it is imperative for governments, civil society organizations, and international bodies to prioritize both sssenvironmental sustainability and peacebuilding efforts during elections. Ensuring the protection of natural resources, strengthening

environmental laws, and promoting sustainable practices can help mitigate the damage caused by election violence.

Additionally, raising awareness among citizens about the importance of environmental conservation and the consequences of violence on our ecosystems is crucial. Education and advocacy campaigns can play a vital role in promoting a sense of responsibility towards the environment and fostering peaceful coexistence during elections.

Safeguarding environmental sustainability during election violence is an essential task that requires collaborative efforts from all stakeholders. By recognizing the interconnectedness of political stability, environmental protection, and social well-being, we can work towards creating a more peaceful and sustainable future for generations to come.

Methodology

The research design for the study was a correlational survey research design. This design is chosen because it allows for the application of principle of correlation techniques in understanding underling relationships and contributions of the dependent variables, voter education programme on the independent variable- election violence. This study was conducted in Calabar metropolis, the capital of Cross River State. It is located in Southern Senatorial District of the State. The people of this area can be grouped into three ethnic groups- the Efiks, the Efuts and the Quas. This research area is also well known for its tourism attraction centres in the heart of State capital and its environs. It is, thus, considered suitable for this research work. The population of this study is made up of entire people living in Calabar Municipality numbering 183,681 (National Population Commission, 2006). The multi stage sampling technique was used, where different sampling techniques were involved. First, Stratified random sampling technique was used to stratify the population into different state, or subgroups of the population. Secondly Purposive sampling was used to select the local government areas that are flash points to electoral violence in South South. Thirdly, Accidental sampling technique was used to administered the instrument to adult that are literate. The Sample size for the research is 377 as determined by Krejcie and Morgan formula (1970). Questionnaire was used for data collection. Data collected were analysed using linear regression.

Results

Hypothesis: Voter education does not significantly contribute to civic participation in election in Calabar, Cross River State.

To test the hypothesis, linear regression was applied to the data. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the linear regression analysis produced an F-ratio of 58.404 which is significant at .05 probability level because the p-level of .000 is less than .05 ($p<.05$). On the basis of this result, the hypothesis is rejected. This implies that voter education significantly impacts on election violence disposition among subjects used in this study. Again, a multiple regression (R) value of .299 and multiple regression square (R^2) value of .090 was obtained, suggesting that voter education contributed 9.0 percent to civic participation in election.

Table 1: Summary of Linear Regression between voter education and election violence disposition

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F-ratio	p-level	Decision
Regression	596.191	1	596.191			
Residual	7068.767	376	11.920	58.404	.000	Reject Ho
Total	7464.958	377				

*$p< 0.05$; R= .299, R^2 = .090

Discussion

The result of the hypothesis shows that voter education significantly contributes to reduction in election violence. From the findings of this studies, the null hypothesis that says vote education does not significantly influence election violence was rejected, since there is a significant influence which means voter education reduces electoral violence. Hence without voter education, electoral violence situation would have been worse than what it is.

The research findings indicating that voter education reduces election violence is of significant importance and carry great implications for the promotion of peaceful and democratic electoral processes, some of the implications are as follows:

Conflict prevention: Voter education can play a vital role in preventing election-related violence by promoting peaceful means of participating in the political process. When individuals are educated about the electoral process and the importance of peaceful and lawful engagement, they are less likely to resort to violence as a way to express their political preferences or grievances.

Awareness of legal recourse: Voter education can inform citizens about the legal mechanisms available for addressing electoral disputes and irregularities. This awareness can

discourage individuals from engaging in violent actions and instead motivate them to seek legal redress in the event of electoral concerns.

Confidence in the electoral process: Voter education can enhance citizens' trust and confidence in the electoral process. When individuals believe that the elections are free, fair, and conducted with integrity, they are more likely to accept the results peacefully, reducing the likelihood of violence stemming from perceptions of electoral fraud.

Conflict resolution and mediation: Some voter education programs include conflict resolution and mediation components. This can help equip citizens with the skills and knowledge necessary to resolve disputes and conflicts through peaceful means rather than resorting to violence.

Community cohesion: Voter education initiatives often bring communities together to learn about democratic values, rights, and responsibilities. This can foster a sense of community and shared civic responsibility, making individuals less inclined to engage in violence that could harm their neighbors or fellow citizens.

This result agrees with the result of Smith (2016) who conducted a research in Durham University on different approaches to voter education on electioneering violence. The researcher examined the effectiveness of different media, such as seminars, jingles, and social media campaigns. The study conducted in a developing country found that social media campaigns were more successful in reducing electioneering violence compared to traditional seminars or jingles.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of voter education on election violence disposition in Calabar Metropolis. The findings revealed that voter education has a significant impact on reducing election violence disposition among voters in Calabar Metropolis. The study also found that voters who received education on the electoral process and the importance of peaceful elections were less likely to engage in violent behavior during elections. Additionally, the study revealed that voter education can also increase voter turnout and improve the overall quality of elections.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Increased funding for voter education programs**: Governments and electoral commissions should increase funding for voter education programs to ensure that all voters have access to education on the electoral process and the importance of peaceful elections.

2. **Voter education should be incorporated into school curriculum**: Voter education should be incorporated into school curriculum to ensure that young people are educated on the electoral process and the importance of peaceful elections from an early age.
3. **Community-based voter education programs**: Community-based voter education programs should be established to reach voters who may not have access to formal education.
4. **Collaboration between electoral commissions and civil society organizations**: Electoral commissions should collaborate with civil society organizations to implement voter education programs and ensure that they are effective.
5. **Regular evaluation of voter education programs**: Voter education programs should be regularly evaluated to ensure that they are effective and to identify areas for improvement.

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