

Media Reportage of Election Violence and Voter Turnout in the Nigerian 2023 General Elections in Ogwashi-Uku

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Abstract: *This study aims to examine the impact of media reportage of election violence on voter turnout during the Nigeria 2023 general elections in Ogwashi-Uku. The Nigerian political landscape has frequently been marred by election violence, which has been attributed to various factors, including ethnic tension, political rivalry, and economic disparities. The media plays a crucial role in informing the public about these incidents, often shaping public perception and influencing voter behavior. The study adopted the survey research method as used the online questionnaire as instrument to collect data from 397 randomly sampled voters in Ogwashi-Uku. The data collected were presented in pie charts and analyzed using simple percentages. The data analysis revealed that voters turnout in Ogwashi-Uku was not negatively impacted by media report of electoral violence as these reports were not framed to create fear but to create awareness. The study therefore concluded that media reportage of election violence when framed rightly will help curb the menace of election violence in Nigeria while encouraging voters to turn out to vote during elections. The study thus recommended amongst others that policymakers, journalists and stakeholders must shun sensationalist reportage as it threatens democracy in any given society.*

Keywords: Media, reports, election violence, and voter turnout

Introduction

In every democratic society, elections have become necessary avenues for the fair and credible selection of individuals or group of individuals to be entrusted with the political power to lead and govern the people. Teehankee (2002) observes that elections are integral to democratic governance. Any society which practices the tenets of democratic government must therefore, from time to time, organize elections through which democratic leaders are chosen by the people for the purpose of bringing to bear their political aspirations and collective developmental needs.

The above concurs with Heywood (2013) who defined elections as “mechanisms through which individuals and groups of great political desire can be put in public office to account and to be forced in introducing policies that reflect public opinion”. The electoral process involves the struggle by politicians to woo the electorates by interacting with them and persuading them to cast their votes in their (politician’s) favour. Thus, elections bring about socio-political interaction and socialization in order to peacefully and legitimately transfer political powers from one person or group of persons to another. In fact, elections signal the transition from one government to the other.

Wojtasik (2013) states that elections are means by which political individuals and parties can communicate to the public to gain support and legitimacy to rule. Elections are sometimes used by political elites to exert influence over a population. The crux of elections therefore is the transfer of political powers and exercise of same.

“Elective democracy had been introduced in Nigeria in May 1919, when the Townships Ordinance gave the right to vote for three members of Lagos Town Council to some men. The first elections to the council were held on 29 March 1920” (Tamuno, 1966). The Clifford Constitution, named after Governor Hugh Clifford, was adopted in 1922 and gave the Legislative Council four elected seats: three for Lagos and one for Calabar.

The electoral history of Nigeria, like most of other African countries, has often been marred with the brush strokes of violence ranging from kidnapping of political opponents, killing of opposition members, snatching of ballot boxes, injuring and killing of electoral officers and destruction of electoral materials among others. For example, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports that the outrage that trailed the election conducted in 1964/5 claimed more than 200 lives especially in the Southwest. Also, the 1983 election also led to an unprecedented post-election violence leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties.

Although the 1993 presidential election which have over the years been adjudged by political pundits as the freest and fairest election in Nigeria’s history, it also had some strands of violence and chaos. The annulment of the election by the Ibrahim Babangida Military junta triggered one of Nigeria’s most fearsome outcry and protests all over the country. The Campaign for Democracy (CD), led by Beko Ramsom-Kuti, claimed that security personnel killed over 100 non-violent protesters and bystanders while purportedly attempting to quell the violent outgrowth of the July rallies.

Following accusations of fraud in the 1999 election that brought Olusegun Obasanjo to power, there was widespread rioting. About 80 fatalities are thought to have occurred. Similar to how pre-election violence alone claimed more than 70 lives, at least 100 people were killed during acts of violence brought on by federal and state elections in 2003, and over 300 people perished as a result of electoral violence four years later.

The deadliest case in the nation's political history occurred in 2011, when post-election violence claimed at least 800 lives over the course of three days of rioting in 12 states around Northern Nigeria. Following the re-election of incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Southern Niger Delta who was the candidate for the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), there were large-scale protests by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a Northern Muslim from the Congress for Progressive Change, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW).

According to the International Crisis Group, more than 100 people died during and after the 2015 general elections. Finally, the European Union Election Observation Mission reported that about 150 persons were killed as a result of violence related to the 2019 national elections.

Various causes have been pointed to in order to understand why what is meant to be the hallmark of democracy encounters such frequent obstacles. These include poor governance, inadequate security forces, poverty and unemployment, abuse of authority, political alienation, a climate of impunity, a “winner-takes-all” political system, and the proliferation of small guns.

Many observers have condemned the use of force, violence, threats and foul languages in the just concluded 2023 general elections. Political analysts have observed that during the campaigns and the election, political parties and their supporters carried out violent threats and actions against perceived enemies or oppositions and even on the ordinary electorates. There were reports of threats of political parties in some areas of the Nigerian society that voters who would not vote for a particular political party should not bother to come to the polling units.

Given the enormous stakes of Nigerian elections, politicians will use any methods, fair or foul, to gain public office as long as they win at the polls. The predisposition to appropriate and depend on violence as a strategy of electoral competition is partly attributed to the do-or-die nature of multi-party politics in

Nigerian (Agbu, 2016, p.92). As opposed to avenues for voter conscription and policy articulation, elections in Nigeria are usually keenly contested where the winner takes all as stipulated by the electoral laws (Animashaun, 2010, p.14; Chidi, 2015).

In Nigeria, political actors are all too willing to exploit ethnic, religious, and ideological identities to perpetuate violence if it increases their chances of victory at the polls (Paul, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2018). In sum, multi-party democracy in Nigeria has been predominantly characterized by manipulations, maneuvering and re-alignment (Nwachukwu, 2015, p.53).

The media has a critical role in distributing information to the public, including news of electoral violence. Media stories have the capacity to form the perspective of voters and influence their decision to participate in the voting process. In the context of Nigeria's general elections in 2023, the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout is a major worry, hence this study.

Statement of the Problem

Low voter turnout has long been a problem in Nigerian elections. Despite attempts by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and civil society organizations to enhance voter turnout in prior elections, voter turnout has remained relatively low. The influence of media reports of election violence in contributing to the low turnout has to be investigated further.

While the media is critical in alerting the public about election-related issues, including violence, there is worry that sensationalized or biased media reports may dissuade potential voters from voting. It is critical to investigate if media reports of election violence have a direct impact on voter turnout in Nigeria's general elections in 2023, as well as to comprehend the underlying elements that contribute to this link.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout in the 2023 Nigerian general elections, specifically in Ogwashi-Uku. To achieve this, the specific objectives are:

1. To know the content and tone of media reports of election violence leading up to the 2023 general elections.
2. To assess the influence of media coverage on public perception and attitudes towards elections, focusing on the role of election violence reports.
3. To identify the factors that contributes to the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout.
4. To examine whether there are any differences in the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout across different demographic groups.

Research Questions

To investigate the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout in the 2023 Nigerian general elections, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the content and tone of media reports of election violence leading up to the 2023 general elections?
2. What influence does media coverage of election violence have on public perception and attitudes towards elections?
3. What factors contribute to the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout?
4. Are there any differences in the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout across different demographic groups?

Concept of Mass Media

Mass media encompasses various channels of information dissemination, including television, radio, newspapers, and most recently, the internet, which are used to reach a large and heterogeneous audience simultaneously.

The term "mass media" refers to a technology that aims to communicate with or reach a large audience. In reality, the general populace uses mass media as their main form of communication to interact with one another and their community. It is a method of communication that conveys information from the intended audience to the target public and any media aimed at a wider audience. One person (such the author of a book, the producers of a television programme, or a film director) speaks to many individuals (the audience) at the same time in a method that is mainly impersonal.

Mass media refers to technology that is designed to reach a large number of people. It is the principal mode of communication for the great majority of the general populace. The general public often looks to the media for information on political concerns, health issues, economic issues, social issues, entertainment, and news.

The obligations of the mass media as a social institution cannot be overstated; therefore, it is not an overstatement to argue that the coexistence of society and the functionality of government and its agencies are the reasons the mass media exists. This means that the media has responsibilities to maintain society peaceful, united, and progressing.

The mainstream media, on the other hand, is tasked with obtaining and disseminating information to a diverse audience. Other responsibilities of the mass media to the public include information, education, and entertainment. The media owes it to society to always maintain the beliefs, opinions, ideas, and actions that promote social stability, unity, and peaceful coexistence.

According to Wright (1956), the mass media have two important sociological characteristics: first, very few people can communicate to a great number; and, second, the audience has no effective way of answering back. By definition, mass communication is a one-way street. Media organizations are bureaucratic and corporate in nature (unless in societies where all media are controlled by the state). Governments everywhere regulate media output, although the restrictions range from very modest advisory oversight to the most extensive types of censorship in totalitarian nations.

McQuail (2006) opines that the mass media are dependent on economic and power structure of the society and can be controlled or limited by those who own them. More so, because of their substance, media are thought to have enormous impact and that the specific ideas and values expressed by the media can effect major social change independent of ownership. According to the second media viewpoints, there is a strong emphasis on the influence of media production and reception on social elements, implying that media messages operate to influence their immediate physical surroundings.

According to Rodney (2009), the media in performance of their traditional function of editorializing, information, correlation and socialization, participates in the social life of the society. McQuail (2000) describes "Mass Media" as "means of communication that operates on a large scale, reaching and involving virtually everyone in a society to a greater or lesser degree". It is a media on a vast scale. The plural form of medium is media, which refers to a channel or instrument via which something (such as information, messages, and signals) is conveyed or carried.

Each mass medium has its own set of content categories, artists, technicians, and economic structures. The Internet, for example, comprises blogs, podcasts, web pages, and a variety of other technologies built on top of the broad distribution network. The sixth and seventh media, the Internet and mobile phones, are frequently referred to as digital media, while the fourth and fifth, radio and television, and are referred to as broadcast media. Some say that video games have evolved into a distinct mass media form.

Defined as "information and entertainment disseminated through channels of communication that reach large numbers of people," (Baran & Davis, 2015, p. 6), mass media provides a vital means for citizens to access political information and engage in democratic processes.

Elections, Violence and Voter Turnout in Nigeria

One of the hallmarks of a democratic society is a periodic election. Therefore, election is a relevant and indispensable tool in a democratic setting. A formal process of collective decision-making, an election is how a population chooses one or more individuals to hold public office. It can also be described as a process whereby people elect representatives on a regular basis.

Bernard (1997) notes that elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century. Elections may be held to fill legislative, executive, judicial, and regional and municipal seats. This technique is also used by a number of other private and commercial institutions, including clubs, nonprofit organizations, and businesses. The global use of elections as a tool for selecting representatives in modern representative democracies is in contrast with the practice in the democratic archetype, ancient Athens, where the elections were considered an oligarchic institution and most political offices were filled using sortition, also known as allotment, by which officeholders were chosen by lot (Bernard, 1997).

Given the unavoidable fact that democratic government must be conducted through representatives, elections provide a significant contribution to democratic governance. A periodic election helps to overcome the problem of leadership succession and hence contributes to the survival of democracy. Elections allow voters to choose leaders and hold them accountable for their performance in office. Participation in an election promotes the voter's sense of self-esteem, respect, and belonging. When it comes to voting rights in an election, purposeful refusal to vote can be an indication of unhappiness with the political or electoral process.

According to Mackenzie (1967) cited in Igiebor (2013), there are four conditions for the conduct of a free and fair election- an independent judiciary to interpret the electoral laws; an honest, competent nonpartisan electoral body to manage the elections; a developed system of political parties; and a general acceptance by the political community of the rules of the game.

The electoral system is the institutionalized provision in which an election is conducted and the purpose of the election fulfilled the legal and practical realities of voter registration and election administration (Roberts 1971). The electoral system of any country plays an essential role in shaping and sustaining the political behavior of its citizens (Okolo 2002).

The electoral process is divided into three major stages: Pre-election activities include delimitation, voter registration, political party registration, nomination process, campaign process, media, civic and voter education. Election Day activities such as polling stations, ballot secrecy, ballot papers, ballot boxes, election materials, counting, election monitoring and observation; and Post-election phase activities such as announcement of results, post-election review, and post-election disputes.

The conduct of an election greatly influences the country's political culture, political involvement, and good administration. This, however, is dependent on the effectiveness and efficiency of the election system in use. While the regularity and frequency of elections has generated a sense of demo-optimism, (Lindberg, 2008 in Igiebor, 2013), a disturbing trend of election-related violent conflict has recently evolved, endangering democracy, peace, stability, and long-term human development. Scholars all over the world have recently launched studies to examine the relationship between violence and democratic engagement by assessing the impact of violence on individual opinions.

Nigeria, a populous African nation with over 200 million people, has a relatively short history of democratic elections. Following the military rule, Nigeria transitioned to democracy with its first elections

taking place in 1999. Since then, subsequent elections have been marred by violence. In Nigeria's tumultuous electoral history, election violence is quickly becoming a recurring pattern. The use of violence as a strategy is inextricably linked to the conduct of elections in Africa's most populous democracy.

In Nigeria, political players (politicians, political parties, and voters) frequently perpetrate election violence against opposition supporters, electoral officials, electoral observers, and civil society, media, and security organizations. Similarly, violence can be promoted by non-party elements or stakeholders with ulterior motives.

Election violence refers to any form of violence that occurs during the electoral process or as a result of it. In Nigeria, election violence can manifest through various means, including voter suppression, political thuggery, ballot box snatching, intimidation, and violent protests. The motives behind such violence may include political rivalries, ethnic or religious tensions, divisive political rhetoric, or social and economic factors (Duruji & Wilson, 2018).

Bergman (2006) averred that, the rise of violent activities represents a formidable threat to the stability of democratic institutions around the world. Citizens exposed to violent activities tend to show signs of dissatisfaction with their country's democratic framework thereby displaying low level support for political institutions (Fernandez and Kuenzi 2010).

Dominant forms of electoral violence include intimidation, assassination, kidnapping, arson, ballot snatching and attacks on voting and collation with the aim of truncating electoral outcomes (John, 2019; Onapajo, 2014; Okoye, 2013). Survey-based evidence shows 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). Furthermore, it is critical to emphasise that electoral violence can appear at intra and inter-party levels during conventions, campaigns, and rallies, in addition to the eruption of violence during and after the participatory act of voting.

The high prevalence of violence heightens the sense of insecurity during the political process. Recurring incidents of violence frighten voters, who may decide not to participate in the election process, particularly voting on Election Day. There is bound to be a decline in voter turnout in areas known to be prone to election violence as voters tries to secure them before thinking of casting their votes for any candidate.

Media Coverage and Reportage of Election Violence in Nigeria

A variety of organizations, including the media, play critical roles in the electoral process. The media plays a crucial role in reporting incidents of election violence, thereby influencing public perceptions and subsequent actions. However, the media's role in Nigeria's elections has been subject to criticism for its bias, misinformation, and sensationalism. Media organizations have occasionally been accused of fueling violence through their reportage, exacerbating tensions rather than promoting peaceful resolution (Onyekpe, 2015).

Since the return of democracy in Nigeria, the media has provided the majority of information to the public about politics and political processes, and people form impressions and assessments of political actors and events based on information provided by intermediaries such as the media, political parties, and people with whom they analyze politics. Many people in society believe that the media has an impact on voters' perceptions of political parties and candidates, and hence can influence their decision to vote for one candidate over another.

The way that the media galvanizes and focuses on societal problems, cultural issues and provide insights about candidates vying public offices bring into fore the motivation to assess media works and the effects of agenda-setting, framing, and priming effects of issues in the news (Nwofe, 2016). More so, the way the media presents, analyses and report electoral activities and speeches of politicians and their associates greatly affects outcomes of peace or conflict before, during and after elections (Tella, 2019).

Scholars such as Demarest and Langer (2019) have extensively studied the relationship between media framing of politicians' speech and electoral violence. These studies on African electoral violence have focused on how the media uses inflammatory rhetoric to incite violence before, during, and after elections. According to Umechukwu (2001) cited in Osah and Jinmi-Ahisu (2021), the growth of Nigerian politics is entwined and has a strong correlation with that of the media. In many African nations, elections are very frequently used as a battlefield for the control of resources, upping the stakes and risk. Conflicts between states are therefore conceivable during election seasons. In all 36 states of Nigeria, the voting procedures lead to unnecessary political instability.

In the process of electioneering activities, inflammatory political rhetoric, opposition parties' allegations of intimidation and partisanship by security forces, particularly of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and planned illegal voting and results rigging raises the potential for violence (Kwarkye, 2019). Isola (2018) noted that while hate speech manifests itself regularly, it crystallizes during election periods when the struggle for votes and political power provides conducive environment for hate speech and elections-related violence. During and after elections, certain politicians, public officials, religious leaders, and ethnic jingoists used traditional and social media to disseminate hate speech through campaign ads, slogans, and verbal expressions. In public places, these expressions can occasionally result in physical altercations and violence.

Research indicates that media reportage often accentuates violent incidents, emphasizing on graphic images and sensational headlines, which can provoke further unrest (Yisa, 2014). Furthermore, media houses are known to be politically aligned, leading to biased reportage that supports their preferred political parties, thereby polarizing public opinion (Duruji & Wilson, 2018).

Moreover, the power of social media and citizen journalism has grown significantly in recent years, allowing for the rapid dissemination of information during elections. However, the lack of regulation and verification of information can lead to the spread of rumors, misinformation, and hate speech, further contributing to election violence (Akeju, Adegbola, & Okunade, 2019).

The media uses specific frames to organize the material presented, and these frames influence how the general public views these topics. The media either uses broad occurrences or violent events to frame electoral violence. The framing of electoral violence in terms of general events include: Protests (demonstrations and sit-ins), riots (violent protests and mob-justice), Kidnapping (for non-criminal purposes), armed attacks (assassination attempts, violence against civilian population) and terrorists attacks (suicide bombers and car bombings) (Demarest and Langer, 2019). Iyengar (2019) and Druckman (2001) have been able to identify two key effects of media framing and these framing effects would be used to understand how framing of electoral violence works in the political landscape of Nigeria. Equivalency framing and focus framing are the two framing effects that have been identified. The focus framing is centered on making a particular aspect of a problem relevant in order to make it more salient, while the equivalence framing emphasizes the usage of logical words or phrases.

Theoretical Framework

Theories help us to understand the relationship between two phenomena. Theories help us to understand why something happens or how it happens and when it happens. In social sciences and specifically the mass communication field, there is an avalanche of theories that could help us understand social phenomena. It is against this backdrop that most media researches are anchored on a particular theory or more in order to provide a theoretical foundation for the study.

Therefore, this study is anchored on the media framing theory. Erving Goffman applied the theory for the first time in his 1974 book *Frame Analysis*. According to Goffman, audiences perceive the world around them using their default framework. In a similar way, framing takes place when social realities are created.

The basic tenet of the framing theory is that people's decisions regarding how to interpret information are influenced by the way that information is presented to an audience. Typically, frames collaborate in abstract ways to provide context for a given structure or message. Frames and the way the media emphasize the information they present are becoming more and more connected. The media's use of frames is believed to affect how readers interpret information, which indirectly directs readers' thoughts on the subject.

In relation to this study, the framing theory explains that mass media audience interpret media reports based on how they are framed and could make informed or rash decisions depending on how they view or interpret these frames. One of such occasions where media reports or frames used in reporting stories by the media could influence public or audience perception of the societal reality is during the electioneering process. This study therefore seeks to validate or invalidate the postulations of this study with its findings.

Empirical Review

Studies from Bolivia (Smith 2009), Costa Rica (Seligson 2002) and Germany (Finkel 1987) have established that citizens with higher levels of support for the political system are more likely to vote and to participate in campaign activities. Also, Grönlund and Setälä (2007) explain that regime legitimacy is positively correlated with electoral participation in twenty two (22) European countries examined in the European Social Survey (from 2002 to 2003) and conclude that there is an apparent and linear association between trust in parliament and turnout as well as satisfaction with democracy and turnout. Cox (2003) arrives at an analogous conclusion in her study of the determinants of voter turnout in European Parliamentary elections.

The argument regarding the aforementioned subject is that violence or the prospect of violence has a detrimental impact on political involvement because people who are exposed to violent incidents lack faith in the electoral process, which lowers the importance of Nigeria's democracy working. The amount of perceived insecurity during the election cycle rises with a high rate of violence. The voters may decide not to participate in the political process, especially on Election Day, as a result of repeated acts of violence. Voters in dangerous neighbourhoods are more inclined to leave polling places if there is a high likelihood of a violent attack.

The study conducted by García (2009) on political violence and electoral behavior in Colombia, reveal that the modification of campaign strategies by political parties in violent prone areas have two main consequences. The first is that it reduces political contest, thus giving advantage to the most formidable party in the area while the second is that it brings about a decrease in political mobilization as politicians and party militants choose to keep a low profile so as to preserve their wellbeing.

Mou (2018) in his report on election violence in Nigeria stated that violent conflict has been a key feature of elections in Nigeria since independence. Furthermore, the reason for the violent conflicts during elections is because of the zeal of political actors to exploit ethno-religious conflicts for political advantage.

Methodology

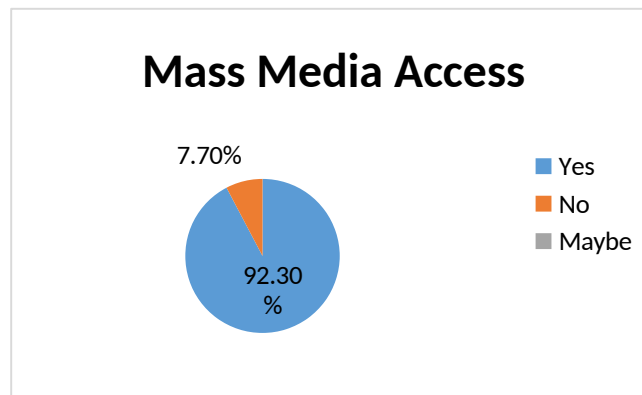
The research design for this study was the survey research method. The population of this study comprised all residents of Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State, which, according to the results of the 2006 National Population Census, totals 50, 234 persons (NPC, 2006). A sample size of 397 was chosen from the study population using the Taro Yamane's sampling determination formula.

The questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection and was randomly distributed to the 397 sampled respondents. The collected data from the respondents were presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentages.

Data Presentation and Analysis

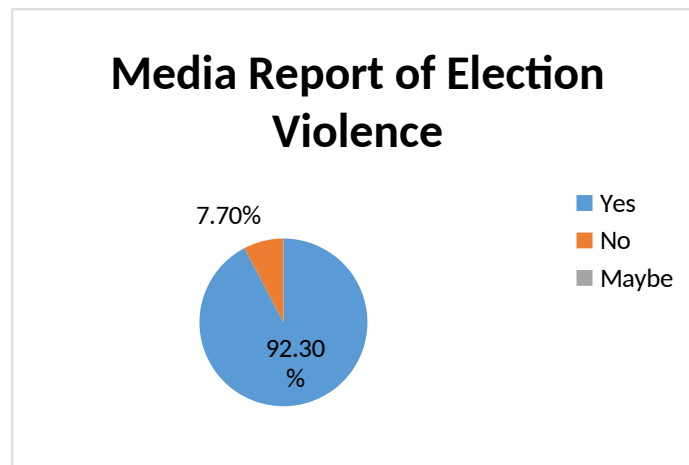
A total of 397 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. The researchers made use of the online survey to ensure that the respondents fill the questionnaire and submit immediately in order to avoid loss of the questionnaire copies. Thus, the researchers recorded a 100% response rate. The data collected from the respondents are hereby presented and analyzed as follows:

Figure 1: Access to the Mass Media



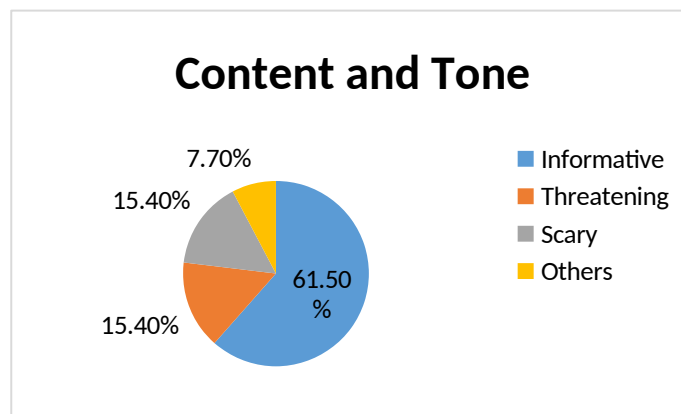
Data in figure 1 shows that majority of the respondents representing 92.3% have access to the mass media while 7.7% do not have access to the mass media.

Figure 2: Nigerian media report on election violence during the 2023 general elections



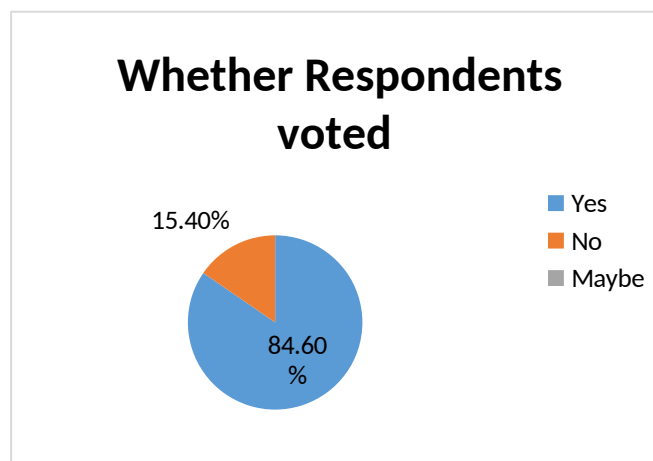
From the Data in figure 2, it can be deduced that majority of the respondents representing 92.3% agreed that the Nigerian media reported election violence during the 2023 general elections while 7.7% disagreed.

Figure 3: Content and tone of media reports on election violence during the 2023 general elections



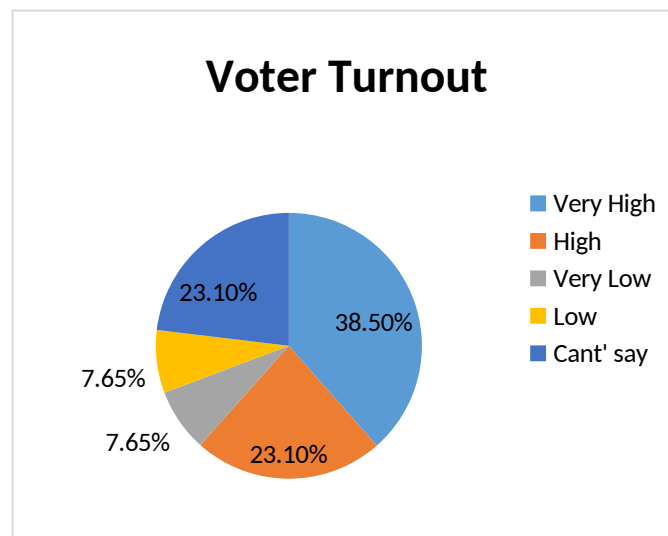
Data in figure 3 shows that majority of the respondents representing 61.5% opined that the content and tone of the Nigerian media reports on election violence during the 2023 general elections was informative while 15.4% said it was threatening and scary respectively.

Figure 4: Whether respondents came out to cast their votes during the 2023 general elections



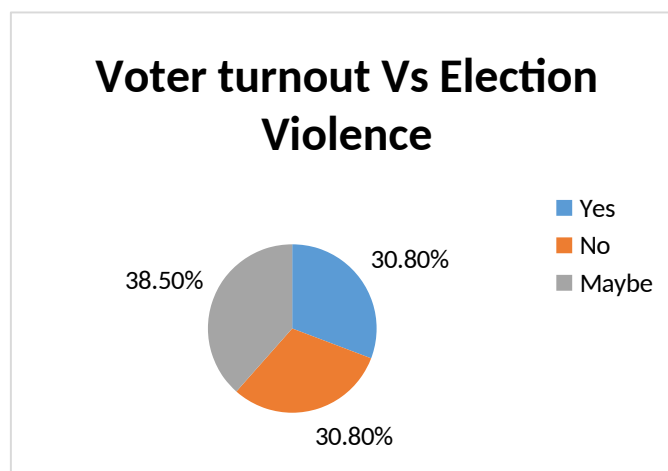
Data in figure 4 shows that majority of the respondents representing 84.6% of the respondents agree that they came out to cast their votes during the 2023 general elections while 15.4% did not cast their votes.

Figure 5: Rate of voter turnout in voting units in Ogwashi-Uku during the 2023 general election



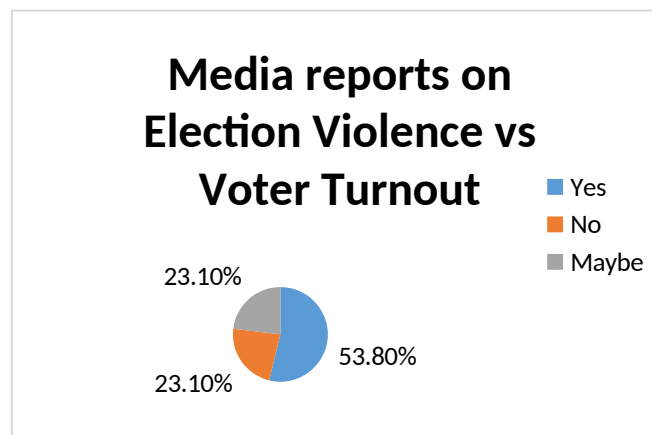
From the data in figure 5, it can be deduced that despite media reports on election violence, the overall voter turnout rate in Ogwashi-Uku, according to majority of the respondent representing 38.5% was very high followed by 23.1% who said it was high.

Figure 6: Do you think that people who didn't come out to vote during the 2023 general elections were scared of election violence



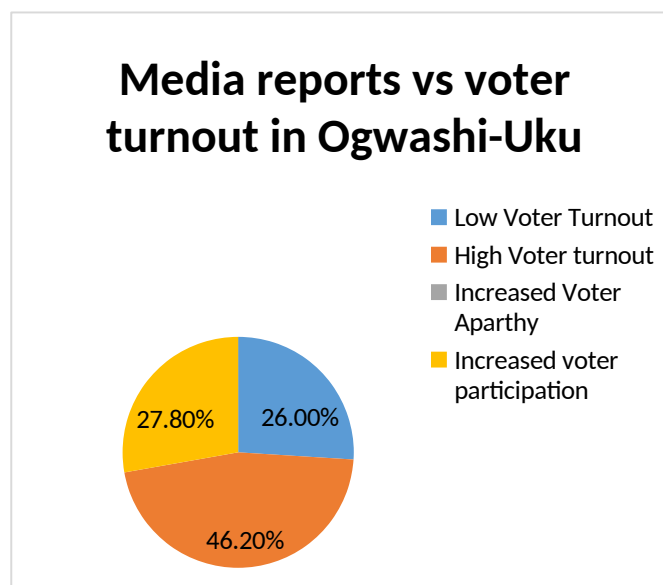
From the data in figure 6 above, it can be deduced that majority of the respondents representing 38.5% were not sure whether people did not come out to vote because they were scared of election violence. However, an equal number of respondents representing 30.8% agreed and disagreed respectively.

Figure 7: Do you think media reports on election violence contributed to voter turnout during the 2023 general election?



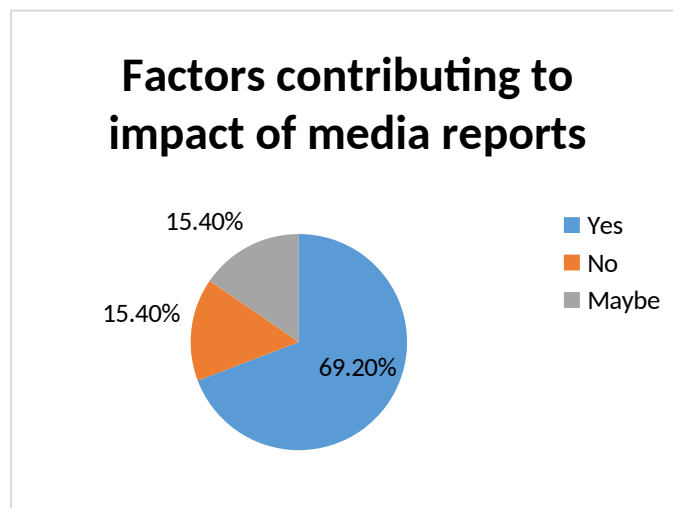
The data in figure 7 shows that majority of the respondents representing 53.8% agreed that media reports on election violence contributed to voter turnout during the 2023 general elections in Ogwashi-Uku while 23.1% said no and maybe respectively.

Figure 8: How did media reports on election violence influence voter turnout during the 2023 general elections in Ogwashi-Uku?



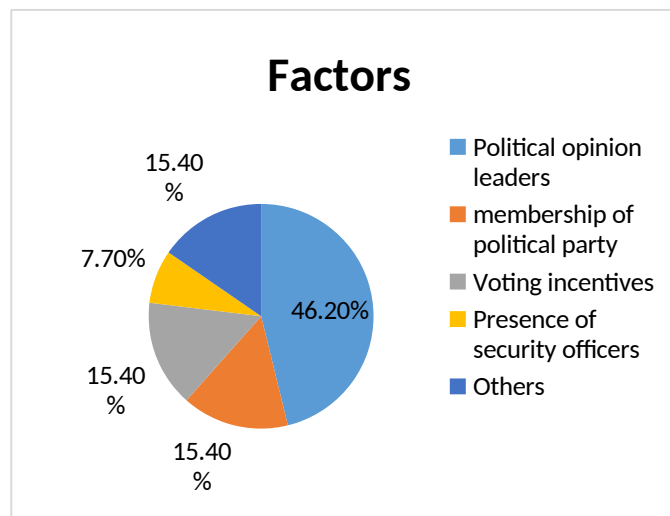
The data in figure 8 shows that majority of the respondents reemphasized that media reports on election violence influenced the high voter turnout during the 2023 general elections in Ogwashi-Uku, 28.8% noted that it increased voter participation in the electioneering processes such as campaigning rigorously for the candidates of their choice, making sure their votes are counted among others. Only 26% of the respondents thought that media reports on election violence led to low voter turnout.

Figure 9: Are there factors that contribute to the impact of media reports on election violence on voter turnout?



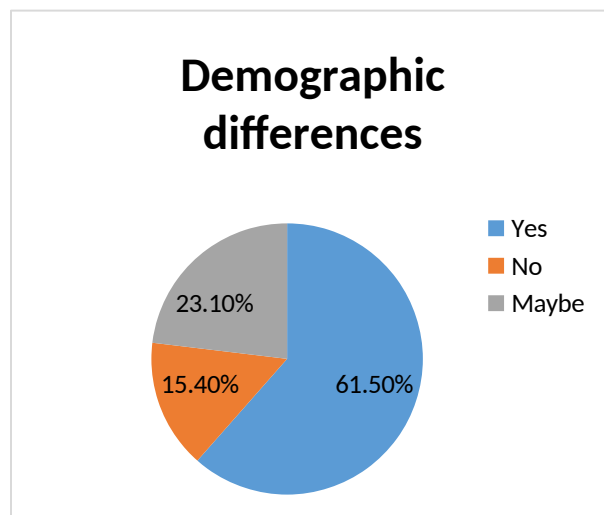
The data in figure 9 shows that majority of the respondents representing 69.2% are of the view that there are factors that contributed to the impact of media reports on election violence and voter turnout.

Figure 10: What are the factors that contributed to the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout?



Data in figure 10 shows that majority of the respondents representing 46.2% are of the opinion that political opinion leaders contributed to the influence of media reports on election violence on voter turnout in Ogwashi-Uku.

Figure 11: Is there any difference in the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout across different demographic groups?



Data in figure 11 shows that there is a significant difference in the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout across different demographic groups.

Discussion of Findings

This study aimed to assess the impact of media reports on election violence on voter turnout in the 2023 general elections in Ogwashi-Uku. Based on the data analysis, the study found that majority of electorates in Ogwashi-Uku representing 92.3% have access to the mass media. The study also found that the Nigerian media reported election violence during the 2023 general elections as agreed by 92.3% of the respondents. What is interesting here is that the number of people who agreed that the Nigerian media reported election violence during the 2023 general elections equals the number of people who have access to the mass media. This shows that the Nigerian media is effective in reporting election violence in Nigeria.

The study also found that the content and tone of the Nigerian media reports on election violence during the 2023 general elections was informative as opined by majority of the respondents representing 61.5%. The study also found that 84.6% of the respondents agreed that they came out during the 2023 general elections to cast their votes. This shows a high level of voter turnout but the researchers tried to validate this claim by enquiring further how respondents rate the voter turnout in their individual polling units. This enquiry found that despite media reports on election violence, the overall voter turnout rate in Ogwashi-Uku, according to majority of the respondent representing 38.5% was very high. This corroborates the claim of 84.6% of the respondents who claimed they came out to cast their votes during the 2023 general elections in Ogwashi-Uku.

Furthermore, the study found that majority of the respondents representing 38.5% were not sure whether people did not come out to vote because they were scared of election violence. It was also found that majority of the respondents representing 53.8% agreed that media reports on election violence contributed to voter turnout during the 2023 general elections in Ogwashi-Uku. Since it was earlier found that there was high voter turnout and majority of the media reports were informative in content and tone, it therefore implies that informative media reports on election violence helped curb the fears of the electorates rather than scare them away from voting. Majority of the respondents reemphasized that media reports on election violence influenced the high voter turnout during the 2023 general elections in Ogwashi-Uku.

The study also found that majority of the respondents representing 69.2% are of the view that there are factors that contributed to the impact of media reports on election violence and voter turnout. This implies that media reports do not necessarily impact voter behaviour but works with some underlying factors or voter's predisposition.

The study found that majority of the respondents representing 46.2% are of the opinion that political opinion leaders contributed to the influence of media reports on election violence on voter turnout in Ogwashi-Uku. This implies that majority of the electorates in Ogwashi-Uku depend on media interpretations from political opinion leaders which in turn impacts their political decisions. Other factors included membership of political parties, voting incentives (vote buying), presence of security officers and other factors.

It was found that there is a significant difference in the impact of media reports of election violence on voter turnout across different demographic groups. For example, the data show that female respondents were more scared of election violence than the male respondents. In the same vein, younger respondents were more eager to vote than the older respondents. This shows that media influence is limited and constrained by socio-demographic dispositions of electorates in Ogwashi-Uku.

Conclusions

Overall, the mass media plays a critical role in shaping public opinion and influencing electoral processes. Although this study found that media reportage of election violence during the 2023 general election was rather informative than scary, threatening and others; other scholars have criticized the Nigerian media for its bias, sensationalism, and contributions to the exacerbation of conflict.

To ensure fair and peaceful elections, media organizations need to adopt ethical reporting practices, verify information, and promote unbiased coverage. It is imperative that media practitioners adhere to professional standards and provide objective, accurate, and balanced reporting. By doing so, they can contribute to the peaceful conduct of elections and foster an informed citizenry that actively engages in democratic processes, thereby promoting a more stable and democratic Nigeria.

Notwithstanding, the researchers conclude that media reports on election violence positively impacted voter turnout in the 2023 general elections in Ogwashi-Uku. It is also concluded that media reports alone do not impact directly the election decisions and behaviours of electorates but works in collaboration with other factors such as political opinion leaders and membership of political parties by the electorates. More so, most people out of poverty are willing to come out to vote despite reports of election violence because they hope to get incentives (money) from vote buying.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are hereby recommended:

1. Policymakers, journalists and stakeholders must shun sensationalist reportage as it threatens democracy in any given society.
2. Media practitioners should be more proactive in their reportage of political issues and election violence by not only being informative but also providing advisory measures to curtail election violence in Nigeria
3. The media should also carry out sensitization campaigns against vote buying as it has been seen that despite election violence, many people still come out to collect money in order to cast their votes
4. Political opinion leaders have a strong impact on the electorates. Therefore, they must ensure to deliver accurate information free from bias, prejudice and falsehood; to the electorates who rely on them during electioneering processes.
5. Media practitioners should adhere to professional standards and provide objective, accurate, and balanced reporting

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