



THE CHALLENGES OF MANAGING ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN OKENE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KOGI STATE, NIGERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF INEC'S PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Anya Adebayo Anya¹ and Akinwale Victor Ishola²

¹Department of Political Science, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

Email: adeanya@summalogix.com

²Department of Peace, Security and Humanitarian Studies, University of Ibadan.

Email: victorakinwale2@gmail.com

Cite this article:

Anya, A. A., Ishola, A. V. (2024), The Challenges of Managing Electoral Violence in Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria: An Analysis of INEC'S Preparedness and Response. Journal of Advanced Research and Multidisciplinary Studies 4(4), 15-28. DOI: 10.52589/JARMS-EEFNVDH

Manuscript History

Received: 11 Jun 2024

Accepted: 6 Sep 2024

Published: 3 Oct 2024

Copyright © 2024 The Author(s).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits anyone to share, use, reproduce and redistribute in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

ABSTRACT: *Electoral violence remains a poignant issue in many societies, with Okene Local Government Area being no exception. This study examines the complexities of managing electoral violence within this region. It specifically investigates the underlying causes of electoral violence, the efforts and challenges faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in addressing this menace, and the broader implications for national security. The Marxian Political Economy approach provided the theoretical foundation for this research. A qualitative, descriptive research design was employed to gain in-depth insights into the subject matter. Data were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Through purposive sampling, interviews were conducted with ten key informants and four IDI respondents. These interviews were guided by a structured qualitative interview, and the collected data were analysed using content analysis. The findings revealed that electoral violence in Okene is primarily driven by factors such as corruption, greed, exclusion from the political system, and economic deprivation, including unemployment and poverty. Additionally, the efforts of INEC in managing electoral violence are often hampered by limited resources, political interference, and challenges in coordination with security agencies. The study also highlighted significant security implications, including loss of lives and property, displacement, and erosion of public trust in governmental institutions. The study therefore recommends comprehensive strategies to address the root causes of electoral violence and enhance the capacity of electoral institutions like INEC. Recommendations include improved resource allocation, strengthened legal frameworks, and enhanced coordination between INEC and security agencies to mitigate the risks of electoral violence and safeguard national security.*

KEYWORDS: Election, Electoral violence, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).



INTRODUCTION

Elections are fundamental to the functioning of democratic systems around the world. It serves as the primary means through which citizens exercise their sovereignty, choosing their representatives and shaping the policies that govern their lives. The significance of free, fair, and credible elections cannot be overstated, as they are essential for legitimising governments, ensuring accountability, and fostering public trust in the political process. Despite the importance of elections, electoral violence has remained a significant threat to the integrity of democracies globally, as it has continued to undermine the fundamental principles of democratic elections by including acts of violence against candidates, media personnel, voters, and election officials. In many countries, elections are often accompanied by substantial violence, with political actors using such tactics to influence the outcomes of electoral contests. This pervasive issue has become a distinct feature of electoral processes, especially in countries like Nigeria, where regular and multi-party elections are held. Since the inception of its current democratic era in 1999, Nigeria has experienced a continuous cycle of electoral violence, further complicating its democratic landscape (Obakhedo, 2011). These violent acts create an atmosphere of fear, suppress voter participation, and skew election results, ultimately threatening democratic stability and public confidence.

Electoral violence has become a pervasive phenomenon in Nigeria, with Okene, Kogi State, being one of the hardest-hit areas. The recurring incidents of violence during elections have left an indelible mark on the community, resulting in devastating consequences. The lives lost, properties destroyed, and families displaced serve as a grim reminder of the high cost of electoral violence. Moreover, the erosion of trust in the electoral process, the perpetuation of political polarisation, and the stifling of democratic growth have far-reaching implications for the state's development and stability. Electoral institutions worldwide have, however, long played a vital role in ensuring peaceful and credible elections, serving as the cornerstone for democratic governance and the upholding of electoral integrity. However, the credibility and effectiveness of these institutions, particularly in developing democracies, have faced persistent scepticism. In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) exemplifies this challenge. Despite its mandate to conduct free and fair elections, INEC's capacity to manage and mitigate electoral violence has been increasingly questioned. This is particularly evident in the Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State, where recurrent electoral violence has highlighted potential gaps in INEC's preparedness and response mechanisms. These challenges not only undermine the Commission's legitimacy but also threaten the broader democratic process in Nigeria.

The persistent occurrence of electoral violence in Okene, Kogi State, and Nigeria as a whole, has raised concerns about the institutional capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure peaceful and credible elections. Despite its critical role in maintaining electoral integrity, INEC's preparedness and response to electoral violence have been questioned, leading to a crisis of confidence in the electoral process. This study seeks to investigate the challenges of managing electoral violence in Okene, Kogi State, and identify strategies to strengthen the capacity of electoral institutions to deliver peaceful and credible elections.



Research questions

1. Why has electoral violence continued to be prevalent in Okene Local government area of Kogi state?
2. What are the efforts of electoral institutions in managing electoral violence in the study area?
3. What are the challenges facing electoral institutions in managing electoral violence in the study area?
4. What are the implications of electoral violence on national security?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the causes of electoral violence in Okene Local government area of Kogi state.
2. To investigate the efforts of electoral institutions in managing electoral violence in the study area.
3. To examine the challenges facing electoral institutions in managing electoral violence in the study area.
4. To examine the implications of electoral violence on national security.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Election

Elections are a fundamental component of democratic governance, serving as the primary mechanism through which citizens exercise their right to choose representatives and influence public policy. This process ensures that political authority is derived from the will of the people, thereby legitimising the governance structures within a democracy. Elections are not merely a procedural formality; they are a critical expression of popular sovereignty and a means of holding elected officials accountable to the electorate.

The concept of elections encompasses more than just the act of voting. It involves a series of processes and activities, including voter registration, campaign activities, polling, vote counting, and the declaration of results. Each of these stages is integral to the overall integrity and credibility of the electoral process. As Ardiansyah et al. (2017) note, elections are a process by which individuals are chosen to occupy political positions, representing a tangible manifestation of citizens' participation in democratic governance. This perspective underscores the importance of elections as both a procedural and substantive element of democracy, where citizens actively engage in shaping their political destiny.

Moreover, elections provide a structured framework for political competition, enabling diverse political actors to present their visions and policies to the electorate. This competitive nature of elections fosters a pluralistic political environment, encouraging debate, innovation, and responsiveness among political candidates. The outcome of elections reflects the collective



preferences of the society at a given time, thus serving as a barometer of public opinion and societal values.

Elections are processes through which suitable candidates are selected from a group of contenders, encompassing various types such as local, legislative, parliamentary, presidential, senate, and small group or union elections (Singh, Singh, & Bhatia, 2012).

Elections are a mechanism for selecting individuals to assume positions of authority within organisations, institutions, or government entities, reflecting the sovereign will of the people (Abutudu, 2014). The significance of elections lies in their ability to facilitate a representative democracy, where elected officials are accountable to the people they serve. By allowing citizens to vote for candidates who best represent their interests and values, elections uphold the principle of popular sovereignty. This process ensures that authority is derived from the consent of the governed, reinforcing the legitimacy and accountability of those in power.

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence is a distinct form of political violence, characterised by its unique dynamics compared to other organised violent acts and nonviolent strategies used to manipulate elections. According to the research by Birch, Daxecker & Hoeglund (2020), electoral violence involves targeted acts intended to disrupt or influence the electoral process itself. This type of violence includes intimidation, physical assaults, vandalism, and even assassination of candidates or election officials, all aimed at altering electoral outcomes and suppressing voter participation. The implications of electoral violence are severe, as it undermines the fairness and credibility of elections and instils fear among voters. This creates an environment that not only deters participation but also diminishes public trust in democratic institutions. Such violence often indicates deeper issues within the political system, including weak institutional frameworks, corruption, and inadequate security provisions.

Electoral violence encompasses acts of both physical and psychological aggression that disrupt the electoral process and influence its results. According to Mochtak (2019), such violence is defined by its timing, the specific issues it targets, the methods employed, and the resulting consequences. These acts can range from intimidation and threats to physical assaults and property damage, all aimed at interfering with the electoral competition. The strategic nature of electoral violence is often intended to influence voter behaviour, suppress participation, and sway election outcomes. By creating an environment of fear and instability, electoral violence undermines the fairness of the electoral process and challenges the legitimacy of democratic institutions. The specific timing and nature of these violent acts are designed to maximise their impact on the electoral process, making it a critical issue for democratic governance.

Electoral violence refers to acts of violence that specifically occur in conjunction with elections and are directly linked to the electoral process. According to Muchlinski *et al.* (2020), this type of violence is distinctive in that it arises specifically due to the presence of an election, suggesting that it would not have occurred otherwise. This temporal relationship underscores the connection between electoral events and the surge in violent activities aimed at disrupting or influencing the electoral process.



Theoretical Framework

Marxian Political Economy Approach

In exploring the challenges of managing electoral violence in Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria, the study employs the Marxian Political Economy approach as its theoretical framework. This approach is rooted in Karl Marx's social theory, which unveils the economic and social dynamics that underpin electoral violence.

The Marxian Political Economy approach provides a radical interpretation of social and economic processes by focusing on the relationship between social classes and their conflicting interests. Central to this framework is the idea that the economic base of society, the "substructure" determines the political, legal, cultural, and ideological "superstructure" (Marx, 1867). This perspective highlights that the structure and nature of economic relations shape all other aspects of societal organisation. This approach emphasises the analysis of historical economic relations, focusing on the actions and interests of social classes. It asserts that economic development is fundamental, with human needs and production playing central roles in shaping societal relations. In this framework, society is divided into two main classes: the exploiting class, which controls the means of production, and the exploited class, which does not. This dichotomy leads to inherent contradictions and conflicts, which must be managed to prevent societal breakdown.

Relating this theory to electoral violence, the approach reveals how competition for state resources and power can lead to violent struggles among political actors. In Nigeria, the fight for political positions often becomes a high-stakes, zero-sum game, where contenders resort to violence to secure control over economic and state resources. The Marxian Political Economy approach underscores how such conflicts reflect broader economic struggles and the exploitation of societal divisions, including ethnic and religious sentiments, to maintain power. Understanding a society's economic structure and its impact on social relations is crucial for analysing its political and cultural dynamics. This approach helps explain the prevalence of violence in Nigerian elections as a manifestation of the ruling class's efforts to dominate and exploit resources, often at the expense of collective societal interests. The Marxian Political Economy approach provides a comprehensive framework for analysing electoral violence by linking it to broader economic and class struggles. It reveals how economic interests and class conflicts drive political violence and shape the dynamics of electoral competition in Nigeria.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design to explore the nature, causes, and implications of electoral violence in Okene. The descriptive design is appropriate as it allows for a detailed examination of the phenomenon within its real-life context, providing insights into the challenges of managing electoral violence in the study area.

Population of the Study

The target population for this study comprises residents of Okene Local Government Area, focusing on key community stakeholders. This includes traditional rulers, religious leaders, community leaders, and market leaders, as well as officials from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), who are responsible for conducting elections. Additionally, the study also involved security agencies tasked with maintaining law and order and ensuring the protection of lives and property.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

This study employs a stratified random sampling technique to obtain data from the diverse groups within the population. A convenient sample was used to ensure the representation of various stakeholders. In total, fourteen respondents were interviewed during the data collection phase, comprising: **2 traditional rulers, 2 religious leaders, 2 community leaders, 2 security personnel, 2 legal personnel, and 4 INEC officials.**

Sources of Data Collection

Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilised in this research. Primary data were derived from information obtained through Key Informant Interviews (KII) and In-Depth Interviews (IDI) with selected respondents. Secondary data were sourced from journals, textbooks, and other published and unpublished materials relevant to the study.

Method of Data Analysis

This study made use of content analysis as the method of data analysis. The data collected through Key Informant Interviews (KII), In-Depth Interviews (IDI), and other secondary sources were analysed using content analysis. The analysed data were used to corroborate key issues raised in the research questions.

Study Area

The study area for this research is Okene, located in Kogi State, Nigeria. Okene is one of the 21 local government areas of the state, established in 1976 from the Ebira Division. It comprises Okene and Okengwe districts, with 11 electoral wards and several villages. Covering an area of 328 km², Okene lies within the tropical savannah climate zone, experiencing both dry and rainy seasons, with an average temperature of 30°C. The population is estimated at 163,441, predominantly from the Ebira ethnic group, with Christianity and Islam as the major religions.



DATA PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Objective One: To examine the causes of electoral violence in Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State.

The study revealed that the primary drivers of electoral violence in the Okene Local Government Area include corruption, greed, political exclusion, the quest for power, high unemployment, and poverty. These factors were identified as the major triggers of electoral violence in the area.

An INEC official in the study area noted that;

The epitome of it all is corruption because when politicians tend to win by all means, they tend to use their money to siphon our youths into carrying arms and other weapons to disturb people. When you see people using thugs and hoodlums during elections, the reason is not difficult to comprehend; it's all because our politicians are corrupt.

(IDI/Male/Okene/July 2024)

In a similar view, another official stated that;

Corruption is at the heart of it all. Politicians who are desperate to win at any cost use their wealth to lure youths into carrying arms and disrupting the peace. The involvement of thugs and hoodlums in elections is simply a result of this corruption among our politicians.

(IDI/Male/Okene/July 2024)

Corroborating the above, a traditional ruler in Okene remarked; *Electoral violence is widespread across Nigeria, but in Okene, it is often driven by the greed of political office holders. Greed and corruption are the primary reasons why politicians hire miscreants to create chaos during elections.*

(KII/Male/Okene/June 2024)

A legal practitioner in the study area stated that;

Exclusion from the political system in Okene has emerged as a significant cause of electoral violence. In Okene, many individuals and groups feel marginalized and excluded from meaningful political participation. This sense of exclusion fuels frustration and resentment, particularly among the youth and other disenfranchised populations. As they see themselves shut out of the decision-making process and deprived of opportunities for political and economic advancement, these groups often become susceptible to manipulation by political actors who exploit their grievances to incite violence during elections. This pattern of exclusion not only destabilizes the local political environment but also perpetuates a cycle of violence and instability in the area.

(KII/Male/Okene/July 2024)

Another respondent stated that;

Unemployment and poverty have significantly contributed to electoral violence in this area. Many of the thugs involved in election-related violence are either unemployed or impoverished.



This situation reflects the societal issues we face. Many of these hoodlums would likely not participate in electoral violence if they were gainfully employed.

(KII/Female/Okene/June 2024)

Objective Two: To investigate the efforts of electoral institutions in managing electoral violence in the study area.

The efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission in managing electoral violence in Okene were discovered to range from voter education programs, collaboration with security agencies, conflict management training, public awareness and education.

An Electoral official in the study area stated that;

First and foremost, I would say that electoral violence has been a major concern in our area here. And in response to this, we have over the years come up with diverse initiatives, which include; voter education programs, focusing on the dangers of electoral violence and the importance of peaceful elections; and robust collaboration with security agencies, ensuring that our polling units are adequately secured during elections. Additionally, we have trained our staff on conflict management and resolution, enabling them to effectively manage any situation that may arise during elections.

(IDI/Male/Okene/July 2024)

Another respondent affirmed that;

We have implemented various initiatives aimed at reducing electoral violence in Okene Local Government Area. One of our key strategies has been the deployment of community-based voter education programs, which engage local leaders and stakeholders in promoting peaceful elections. We have also developed targeted messaging campaigns to address specific forms of electoral violence, such as vote-buying and ballot box snatching. Furthermore, we have collaborated with local NGOs and CSOs to amplify our efforts and ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing electoral violence.

(IDI/Male/Okene/July 2024)

A respondent in the study area noted that;

Electoral institutions have implemented measures to prevent electoral violence in Okene, including promoting the principle of one person, one vote. These efforts include advocacy for voter registration and the collection of Permanent Voter's Cards (PVCs), emphasising that registration is a prerequisite for voting. Additionally, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has undertaken public education and awareness campaigns to enlighten citizens on the electoral process, thereby reducing the likelihood of electoral malpractices that could lead to violence during elections.

(KII/Male/Okene/June 2024)



Objective Three: To examine the challenges facing electoral institutions in managing electoral violence in the study area.

A respondent noted that;

Looking at the challenges facing INEC, I'd say that a major issue is their limited resources and capacity constraints. They often struggle with insufficient funding, inadequate training, and not enough personnel. This clearly impacts their ability to manage and reduce electoral violence effectively.

(KII/Male/Okene/June 2024)

A respondent also noted that;

In my view, political interference and corruption are significant hurdles for INEC. Politicians sometimes try to influence or obstruct the commission's efforts, which undermines its neutrality and effectiveness in managing electoral violence.

(KII/Male/Okene/June 2024)

Another respondent stated that;

From my perspective, INEC faces real problems with enforcing its guidelines. They have regulations in place, but implementing and monitoring these rules is a challenge. This makes it hard for them to address and prevent electoral violence properly.

(KII/Male/Okene/July 2024)

A respondent in the study area stated that;

Another issue INEC struggles with is coordinating with security agencies. Sometimes, there are delays or inefficiencies in how quickly security forces respond, which can make the situation worse during elections. Better coordination is definitely needed.

(KII/Male/Okene/July 2024)

A respondent also stated that;

INEC also has trouble with gaps in data and intelligence about potential threats of electoral violence. Without accurate information, it's hard for them to predict and deal with violence before it happens.

(KII/Male/Okene/July 2024)

According to another respondent in the study area;

Finally, INEC's challenges are compounded by legal and institutional constraints. The current legal framework and bureaucratic processes often slow down or block their efforts to implement effective measures against electoral violence.

(KII/Male/Okene/July 2024)



Objective Four: To examine the implications of electoral violence on national security.

A respondent in the study area stated that;

Electoral violence frequently results in the tragic loss of lives and properties. The destruction of homes, businesses, and infrastructure not only harms individuals but also has long-term effects on community stability and national security.

(IDI/Male/Okene/July 2024)

Another respondent stated that;

One significant implication of electoral violence is the displacement of communities. Violence often forces people to flee their homes, which creates humanitarian crises and places additional strain on national security resources. If you follow the trend, you will understand me better.

(KII/Male/Okene/July 2024)

A respondent noted that;

I would say that one major implication of electoral violence, not only in Okene but also across the federation, is the erosion of public trust in governmental institutions. When people see violence influencing elections, they lose faith in the ability of the state to ensure peace and security, which undermines national security efforts. You know, past experiences have always given the impression that state institutions are not capable.

(IDI/Male/Okene/July 2024)

A respondent stated that;

From my perspective, electoral violence disrupts social cohesion. It creates divisions within communities, fosters mistrust, and can lead to a breakdown in social harmony, which ultimately affects national security.

(KII/Male/Okene/July 2024)



DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question 1: What are the causes of electoral violence in Okene Local government area of Kogi state?

The findings from the first research question highlighted the causes of electoral violence in Okene Local Government Area, identifying factors such as corruption, greed, exclusion from the political system, the quest for power, unemployment, and poverty. Corruption, greed, and the relentless pursuit of power were identified as major triggers of electoral violence, explaining why many political actors aggressively resort to violence during elections. These findings align with the perspectives of scholars like Tamuno (2003) and Tijani (2003). Tamuno (2003) asserted that the political arena in Nigeria is one of the few industries that offers wealth, power, and fame—three coveted rewards of holding public office. Similarly, Tijani (2003) argued that political and election-related violence is deeply rooted in Nigeria's entrenched culture of corruption. Furthermore, the study emphasised exclusion from the political system as a significant cause of electoral violence. Bekoe (2010) supports this by noting that structural grievances, such as disputes over land rights, jobs, and ethnic marginalisation, are often exploited by politicians to further their personal ambitions, contributing to the regularity of electoral violence.

Research Question 2: What are the efforts of electoral institutions in managing electoral violence in the study area?

The efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in managing electoral violence in Okene were discovered to encompass a broad range of initiatives aimed at ensuring peaceful elections. These efforts included voter education programs designed to inform the electorate about their rights and responsibilities as well as the importance of non-violent participation in the electoral process. INEC also work with security agencies to ensure a coordinated approach to preventing and responding to incidents of violence. This collaboration was crucial in maintaining order and protecting voters, election officials, and materials. Additionally, INEC organised conflict management training for its officials and other stakeholders, equipping them with the skills needed to de-escalate tensions and resolve disputes that could otherwise lead to violence. Public awareness campaigns were also a key component of INEC's strategy, aimed at sensitising the community to the dangers of electoral violence and encouraging a culture of peaceful political engagement.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges facing electoral institutions in managing electoral violence in the study area?

The findings from the research on the challenges facing electoral institutions, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in managing electoral violence in Okene Local Government Area, reveal several significant obstacles. One respondent highlighted that limited resources and capacity constraints are major issues for INEC, noting that the commission often struggles with insufficient funding, inadequate training, and a shortage of personnel. These limitations severely hamper INEC's ability to effectively manage and mitigate electoral violence. This observation is consistent with Herron's (2016) argument that resource constraints can undermine the effectiveness of electoral commissions.

Another respondent pointed to political interference and corruption as substantial hurdles for INEC, explaining that politicians sometimes attempt to influence or obstruct the commission's



efforts, thereby compromising its neutrality and effectiveness. This aligns with Lehoucq's (2003) assertion that political interference can significantly undermine the impartiality of electoral bodies, leading to increased risks of electoral violence.

Enforcement of guidelines was also identified as a challenge by another respondent. Although INEC has established regulations for elections, the practical implementation and monitoring of these rules remain problematic. This difficulty in enforcement makes it challenging for the commission to adequately address and prevent electoral violence, a concern echoed by Norris (2015), who emphasises the importance of robust enforcement mechanisms in maintaining electoral integrity.

Furthermore, coordination with security agencies was noted as another significant challenge. According to a respondent, inefficiencies and delays in the response of security forces can exacerbate situations during elections, highlighting the need for improved coordination. This issue underscores the broader coordination challenges faced by electoral commissions, as noted by several scholars.

Additionally, gaps in data and intelligence were cited as a critical issue. One respondent pointed out that without accurate information on potential threats, INEC struggles to predict and manage electoral violence effectively. This finding is in line with the work of Norris (2015) which emphasises the importance of reliable data in the prevention of electoral violence

Findings also highlighted the legal and institutional constraints that further complicate INEC's efforts. The existing legal framework and bureaucratic processes often slow down or obstruct the commission's ability to implement effective measures against electoral violence. Elklit and Reynolds (2005) similarly argue that such constraints can significantly impede the functioning of electoral institutions.

Research Question 4: What are the implications of electoral violence on national security?

The findings from the field on the implications of electoral violence on national security reveal a disturbing pattern of consequences. Electoral violence results in the loss of lives and properties, leading to long-term effects on community stability and national security. This finding resonates with the submission of Hills (2016). Furthermore, it leads to the displacement of communities, creating humanitarian crises and placing additional strain on national security resources (Lischer, 2005). The erosion of public trust in governmental institutions is another significant implication, as people lose faith in the ability of the state to ensure peace and security (Bratton, 2008). Additionally, electoral violence disrupts social cohesion, creating divisions within communities, fostering mistrust, and potentially leading to a breakdown in social harmony, which ultimately affects national security (Varshney, 2002). These findings suggest that electoral violence has far-reaching and devastating consequences for national security, extending beyond the immediate aftermath of elections to affect the very fabric of society.



CONCLUSION

Electoral violence poses a significant threat to democratic stability, not only in the study area but also across developing democracies. Nigeria's democratic experience since 1999 has been marred by recurring electoral violence, fuelled by corruption, greed, and the pursuit of power. The electoral institution responsible for managing elections faces numerous challenges, hindering its ability to prevent violence. As a result, electoral violence in Okene and Nigeria as a whole has undermined democratic progress, causing devastating human and national security consequences. However, the findings from the study suggest that electoral violence can be significantly mitigated with effective interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations are offered;

1. Institutional Strengthening

Electoral institutions such as the INEC must be strengthened to ensure their independence, impartiality, and effectiveness. This involves building capacity, improving resources, and enhancing the professionalism of electoral officials. Institutions should be empowered to enforce electoral laws, regulate political parties, and ensure compliance with electoral regulations. This would go a very long way in mitigating the recurring incidences of electoral violence in the study area.

2. Democracy Education

Integrating democracy education into school curricula is crucial to fostering a culture of democratic governance. This includes teaching democratic values, human rights, and civic responsibilities. Education should focus on promoting critical thinking, tolerance, and peaceful conflict resolution.

3. Community Engagement

Encouraging community engagement and participation in electoral processes is vital to preventing electoral violence. This includes establishing community-based initiatives, promoting voter registration, and supporting citizen observer groups. Communities should be empowered to take ownership of electoral processes.

4. Early Warning System

The establishment and rigorous implementation of an early warning system mechanism is key to preventing potential electoral crises. By adopting this proactive approach, major stakeholders can identify and address emerging issues before they escalate, thereby ensuring a more peaceful and stable electoral process not only in the study area but also across the country. This forward-thinking strategy enables timely interventions, mitigates risks, and promotes a more secure and democratic electoral environment.



REFERENCES

- Abutudu, M. (2014). Political Parties, Elections and Governance in Nigeria: The Fourth Republic in Perspective. *Journal of Political Studies*, 21, 1-26.
- Ardiansyah et al. "General Election In Indonesia." (2017). <https://doi.org/10.2991/icodag-17.2017.14>.
- Birch, S., Daxecker, U., & Hoeglund, K. (2020). Electoral violence: An introduction. *Journal of Peace Research*, 57, 14 - 3. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319889657>.
- Bratton, M. (2008). Vote buying and violence in Nigerian election campaigns. *Electoral Studies*, 27(4), 621-632.
- Elklit, J., & Reynolds, A. (2005). Electoral system design and electoral violence. *Journal of Democracy*, 16(2), 81-95.
- Herron, E. S. (2016). Measuring electoral fraud. *Electoral Studies*, 41, 283-293.
- Hills, A. (2016). Why electoral violence models can be misleading. *African Affairs*, 115(460), 471-491.
- Lehoucq, F. E. (2003). Electoral fraud: Causes, types, and consequences. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6, 233-256.
- Lischer, S. K. (2005). *Dangerous sanctuaries: Refugee camps, civil war, and the dilemma of humanitarian aid*. Cornell University Press.
- Marx, K. (1867). *Das Kapital*. Verlag von Otto Meissner.
- Mochtak, M. (2019). Electoral violence under different contexts. Evidence from the Western Balkans. *Nations and Nationalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/NANA.12484>.
- Muchlinski, D., Yang, X., Birch, S., Macdonald, C., & Ounis, I. (2020). We need to go deeper: measuring electoral violence using convolutional neural networks and social media. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 9, 122 - 139. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2020.32>.
- Norris, P. (2015). *Why electoral integrity matters*. Cambridge University Press.
- Obakhedo N.O (2011). Curbing electoral violence in Nigeria: The imperative of political education. *African Research Review International Multidisciplinary Journal Ethiopia*, 5(5), Pp. 99-110.
- Obi, C. (2011). Understanding electoral violence in Africa. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 29(1), 1-15.
- Singh, H., Singh, G., & Bhatia, N. (2012). Election Results Prediction System based on Fuzzy Logic. *International Journal of Computer Applications*, 53, 30-37. <https://doi.org/10.5120/8450-2245>.
- Varshney, A. (2002). *Ethnic conflict and civic life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. Yale University Press.