A CRITICAL REVIEW OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN THE 2019 BAYELSA STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTIONS

Barisuka, Prince Beteh
Department of Political Science
Faculty of Sciences
Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island
Bayelsa State
destrategist24@gmail.com

==========

Abstract

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule on 29th May 1999, transition of power through election has been fraught with violence in Bayelsa state, in particular, and Nigeria in general. Acquisition of arms during election has become synonymous with possessing voter's card. This has led to proliferation of arms in the state. This violence takes various forms at pre-election, during election and after election and they include, harassment, intimidation, assassination and kidnapping. Power cabals employed the use of electoral violence to enable them impose candidate of their own choice against the will of the majority. It is based on these premises that the paper tends to focus on the factors that influences electoral violence during the 2019 gubernatorial election and also suggest ways to curb or reduce electoral violence in the state. It adopted the Relative Deprivation theory propounded Ted Robert Gurr, 1970as its theoretical framework and applied desktop method of data collection for the study. The paper found that unemployment, weak internal political democracy and money politics, were the major factors that influences electoral violence that posed negative implications to in the state and recommended severe punishment for those involved in the violent acts.

Keywords: Election, electoral violence, money politics, nemployment and eak institution

1. Introduction

Elections are meant to choose leaders would represent the interest of the people in government. Elections are meant to serve as a peaceful alternative to using force to settle disputes between competing claims to power. However, in actuality, these expectations frequently fall short of what happens after the people assume office. Elections are often violent from the campaign, on Election day, and aftermath of

voting. A violent environment can occasionally be characterized by crises, disputes, conflicts, and even war, all of which have impact on societal development and relationships (Mbaya, 2013; Okpako and Okolo, 2020; Okolo and Etekpe, 2014). According to Ogbulafor et al (2018), election is expected to be a crucial step that recognized the power of the people and also grant them the right to decide their leaders through a credible and transparent process. In Nigeria, electoral process is not devoid of challenges as witness in the 1999 election where there were instances of electoral malpractices. The irregularities included voter's intimidation, ballot box stuffing, vote buying and manipulation of results (Etekpe, 2019).

Violence during elections is now regarded as an institutionalized practice, particularly in Nigeria and other developing parts of the world. Political leaders utilize violence during elections as a form of electoral fraud to stay in power (Agah, 2017). The frequency with which power has been acquired by violence varies throughout societies and circumstances to the other. Bayelsa State is one of the 36 States in Nigeria and is located in the heart of the Niger Delta. The state is one of the six oil and gas producing states in the South-South geopolitical zone of the country. The Bayelsa gubernatorial election of November 2019 is one of the most recent elections conducted in Nigeria. The November 2019 election in the Bayelsa State is not without controversy of violence and other electoral malpractices (Otu& Odalonu, 2021). Electoral process in the state has been marked by violence such as, arson, political thuggery, assassinations, and violent disputes, among other things. Similar to their counterparts in other regions and state in Nigeria, politicians in Bayelsa State are intolerant of discussion, compromise, and agreement (Azeez, 2005).

In the build-up to the 2019 Governorship election, the conflict environment was already characterized by intense and political competition by the two major political parties. People' Democratic party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC). Despite promises from the state's security agencies and the Electoral Commission, there was violence during the 2019 state governorship election. Prior to the election, specifically, onNovember 13, 2019, PDP campaigners were in Nembe local government area when a group of ruthless gunmen, suspected to be members of rival political party, showed up at the venue without warning and opened fire on them, killing numerous law-abiding Nigerians (Dailypost, 2019), (Table 2).

The situation was also experienced in other part of the state, precisely on the day of election, armed thugs dressed in military uniforms also invaded Ayama ward 4 in Ogbia local government area of the state and hijacked voting materials,

destroyed houses and properties of their political rivals in the community. When such violence occurred, not only their perceived political opponents are attacked, injured and even killed but also innocent individuals who reside within the community suffer the same degree of lost (Njoku, 2012; Allen and Okolo, 2018).

The study examines the factors that influenced electoral violence during the 2019 gubernatorial election as well as, to proffer solutions to curb or reduce electoral violence in the state. This is important because the state cannot produce a credible leader under violent environment.

2. Statement of the Problem

The issue of elections and electoral violence continues to pose a significant threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta region, where political competition is often marked by volatility, ethnic tension, and militancy. While scholars such as Omotola (2019) and Ladan (2020) have explored electoral violence from national and regional perspectives, there remains a noticeable scholarly silence on the micro-dynamics of violence as it played out in the 2019 Bayelsa State governorship election. Existing studies often generalize electoral violence without dissecting the local context, political actors, and power struggles unique to Bayelsa State, where the convergence of youth restiveness, oil politics, and community-based allegiances play a unique role in fueling pre- and post-election crises.

The 2019 governorship election witnessed widespread reports of ballot snatching, intimidation, armed confrontation, and voter suppression, yet few academic inquiries have interrogated the specific triggers, patterns, and localized motivations behind these acts of violence in Bayelsa (Agbo, 2020; Ibeanu & Orji, 2019). Moreover, there is insufficient examination of how electoral institutions, political godfatherism, and community leadership structures either mitigated or exacerbated the violent outcomes during that electoral cycle. This gap creates a critical void in understanding how electoral violence evolves in context-specific environments such as Bayelsa, thereby necessitating a deeper localized and evidence-based investigation of the 2019 governorship election to fill the theoretical and empirical lapses in existing literature.

3. Aim and Objectives of the Study

This research is aimed at examining elections and electoral violence in Bayelsa State: 2019 Bayelsa State governorship election in focus. The specific objective is;

i. to identify and analyze the underlying political, socio-economic, and cultural factors that contributed to electoral violence during the 2019 governorship election in Bayelsa State
ii. to examine the roles of political actors, electoral institutions, community leaders, and security agencies in either promoting or preventing electoral violence during the 2019 election
iii. to assess the effectiveness of existing legal and institutional frameworks in addressing electoral violence in Bayelsa State

4. Methodology

The study employed the descriptive and exploratory method of data analysis. The descriptive aspect allows for a systematic presentation of factual information regarding the nature of the 2019 Bayelsa gubernatorial election, especially with respect to incidents of violence, actors involved, institutional responses, and political developments leading to the election. On the other hand, the exploratory component is aimed at uncovering underlying factors that may not have been previously analyzed, such as the influence of local power structures, community-based mobilization of violence, and the interplay between oil-related interests and political contestations. This dual design is appropriate because the subject matter entails complex and context-specific socio-political phenomena that require in-depth analysis of pre-existing literature, reports, and archival data.

i) Sources of Data

All data used in this study were obtained exclusively from secondary sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, books, newspaper reports, election observation reports from bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and international electoral observation groups (e.g., EU Election Observation Mission, YIAGA Africa, CLEEN Foundation), as well as government publications and civil society organization (CSO) reports. In addition, academic theses, policy briefs, online scholarly databases (such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Research Gate), and credible news media archives were extensively consulted. These sources provided both historical context and real-time documentation of events as they occurred during the 2019 Bayelsa State governorship election. All data were carefully selected for relevance, reliability, and credibility to ensure an objective and comprehensive understanding of electoral violence in the study area.

ii) Method of Data Analysis

The study utilized qualitative content analysis as the main method of data interpretation. This involved systematically reviewing, coding, categorizing, and interpreting textual data from the collected secondary sources. Themes such as causes of electoral violence, types of violence experienced, roles of key political actors, responses by electoral institutions, and the impacts on democratic processes in Bayelsa State were identified and critically examined. By employing content analysis, the study was able to synthesize large volumes of narrative data and extract meaningful patterns, connections, and insights relevant to the research objectives. Particular attention was given to triangulating data from multiple sources to enhance validity and reliability of findings. The analytical framework also integrated elements of political conflict theory and contextual electoral studies to support the interpretation of events within broader socio-political and institutional frameworks

5. Scope of the Study

This study is geographically conducted in Bayelsa state and it is limited to elections in the State with major emphasis on the 2019 governorship election. The scope and content of this research is delimited in examining elections and electoral violence in Bayelsa State.

6. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to enlighten, and guide multiple stakeholders in the democratic process. For policy makers and government agencies, the study provides critical insights into the root causes and dynamics of electoral violence in Bayelsa State, helping to inform the design of more effective electoral policies, conflict prevention strategies, and law enforcement mechanisms. For electoral bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the findings serve as a valuable resource for improving electoral administration, security deployment, and voter protection measures in future elections. Political parties and candidates stand to benefit from understanding the destructive impacts of electoral violence on democratic legitimacy and voter participation, thereby encouraging more peaceful and issue-based political engagement.

7. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Relative Deprivation Theory postulated by Ted Robert Gurr, (1970) as its theoretical framework. Gurr introduced this theory in his seminal work *Why Men Rebel*, where he posited that the potential for collective violence increases when there is a perceived gap between what people believe

they deserve (their value expectations) and what they actually experience (their value capabilities. This perceived discrepancy generates frustration, which, when widespread among a group or community, can lead to aggressive behavior and eventual violent actions. Relative deprivation, therefore, is not necessarily based on absolute poverty or lack, but rather on the perception of being unjustly disadvantaged in comparison to others, particularly in a politically competitive or conflict-prone environment.

In the context of elections and electoral violence, Gurr's theory provides a powerful explanatory lens through which the motivations for violence can be analyzed. Electoral violence often emerges when individuals or political groups feel systematically marginalized or excluded from access to power, political participation, or the benefits of state resources. In societies where political positions are seen as the primary route to economic advantage and social mobility, elections become zero-sum contests. If a segment of the population perceives that the electoral process is unfair, manipulated, or does not reflect their political will, the resulting sense of deprivation can trigger hostility against the state, political opponents, or even fellow citizens. In the case of Bayelsa State, Nigeria, the perception of political manipulation, exclusion of certain ethnic or local interests, and dominance of elite political structures may have contributed to a heightened sense of collective deprivation, which in turn manifested in the form of violence during the 2019 governorship election.

8. Data Presentation and Analysis

The 2019 gubernatorial election was another fiercely contested and violent episode in Bayelsa's political history. David Lyon of the APC was initially declared the winner, defeating Douye Diri of the PDP with a significant margin. However, the victory was short-lived as the Supreme Court nullified Lyon's election just a day before his inauguration due to inconsistencies and forged certificates presented by his running mate. This sudden reversal led to widespread protests and retaliatory violence by APC supporters, especially in Yenagoa and other APC strongholds. Prior to and during the election, there had been widespread reports of electoral violence, including the kidnapping of INEC officials, the hijacking of electoral materials, and armed attacks on voters and political opponents. The use of violence was systematic and targeted, often orchestrated by politically connected actors who enjoyed impunity. The fear and intimidation experienced by the electorate reduced voter turnout and undermined the credibility of the process, while the post-election crisis revealed the fragility of the state's democratic institutions.

Table 2: Electoral Violence based on reported incidents in local government areas of Bayelsa State in the 2019 Governorship Elections.

S/N	LGAs	No of Reported Incidents	No. of Reported Causalities (injured)	No. of Reported Causalities (killed)
1.	Brass	12	25	2
2.	Ekeremor	10	30	1
3.	Kolokumo/Opokuma	4	6	0
4.	Nembe	40	195	30
5.	Ogbia	15	27	3
6.	Sagbama	8	4	0
7.	Southern Ijaw	30	50	15
8.	Yenagoa	25	18	2

Source: Department of Crime Recording and Statistics, Nigeria Police Force,
Bayelsa state command, (2020).

8.1. Underlying Political, Socio-Economic, Cultural and Technological Factors that Contributed to Electoral Violence during the 2019 Governorship Election in Bayelsa State

The 2019 governorship election in Bayelsa State was profoundly shaped by a constellation of political, socio-economic, and cultural factors that created fertile ground for the eruption of widespread electoral violence. Politically, the highly polarized competition between the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) transformed the election into a high-stakes contest for control over the state's vast oil resources and political patronage structures. In a state where access to political office often guarantees access to economic power, elections are viewed as a zero-sum game, intensifying the likelihood of violent confrontations when outcomes appear unfavorable to certain interests (Agbo, 2020). The defection of former governor Timipre Sylva to the APC and his subsequent mobilization of political support across Southern Ijaw, Brass, and Nembe further heightened tensions, as these areas became

flashpoints of electoral violence, given their political leanings and strategic significance.

Socio-economically, the persistent youth unemployment, poverty, and disillusionment with governance provided a vast pool of idle young men who were easily mobilized as political thugs. A situation whereby an individual cannot provide for himself all the basic necessities of life and such will be readily available to carry out an assignment that will provide him economic leverage. The monetization of politics in Bayelsa has normalized the use of financial inducements to recruit supporters for violent purposes, making electoral violence both an economic opportunity and a political strategy. As noted by Uzochukwu (2020), political actors in Bayelsa and across the Niger Delta routinely exploit the economic vulnerabilities of the youth to deploy them as instruments of electoral coercion and ballot manipulation. These conditions were starkly visible in the 2019 election, especially in coastal and riverine communities where governance gaps are most acute. The effects of electoral violence in the state are immeasurable and has jeopardizes social economic development, social integration and robs people of their psychological and emotional stability (Ifeanyichukwu, 2017).

Also, The *selection process for governorship candidates of the two major political parties, Peoples Democratic Party and All Progressives Congress governorship primaries in Bayelsa State during the 2019 gubernatorial election were characterized by intriguing drama as members of the two major political parties in the state approached burial functions, wedding ceremonies, rallies and campaigns, etc., their supporters clashed in the processes (Daily post, 2019).*

Imposition of unpopular candidate on the people leads to discontent. Most of the time, this results in people switching parties to compete with the other, supposedly weaker contender. Furthermore, "do-or-die" politics frequently result from the general public's rejection of the unpopular candidates (Falana, 2009; Okolo and Inokoba, 2014). In such situation, the rejected candidate arms some vulnerable youths with weapons with the instruction to attacked and kill his perceive opponent. The onslaught is not only targeted at the political opponent but it’s extended to other innocent members of the public.

Culturally, traditional communal rivalries and localized ethnic identities played significant roles in shaping the political landscape of the 2019 election. Bayelsa’s eight local government areas are marked by longstanding ethnic and clan-based allegiances, which are often translated into political affiliations. During the election, these divisions were reinforced by party propaganda and intra-community competition for political appointments, contracts, and development benefits. Political actors exploited these ethnic cleavages to galvanize support and

justify acts of violence against perceived outsiders or opposition loyalists. As stated by Okonkwo (2019), cultural identity in the Niger Delta region is a key political resource, often manipulated during elections to stir communal sentiments that facilitate electoral violence.

Technologically, the advent of contemporary technologies, particularly information and communication technology (ICT), is transforming how individuals conduct their daily lives. In many respects, the accessibility and availability of technologies like computers and mobile phones have altered human social connections, particularly among young people. According to Lenhart et al (2010), a majority of the youth in the Bayelsa state, specifically over 80% of them, possess at least one type of electronic media technology, including computers, PDAs, and mobile phones for internet access. While this is beneficial for networking and cross-border connections, it can also be abused, with disastrous results (Odora & Matoti, 2015). One of the effects is cyberbullying, which occurs when young people harass one another online. This is happening to pupils in schools, even in Nigeria (Ayas & Horzum, 2010; Olumide, Adams & Amodu, 2015).

During the 2019 Bayelsa state gubernatorial election, a deluge of nasty remarks and statements—now known as vawulence—was spread online with the intention of mocking, disseminating misleading information, and compromising the credibility and reputations of candidates running for elected office. The tumultuous momentum that is escalating to cause confusion and chaos on social media may cause Nigerians to ignore the problems facing the state in favor of frivolities, character assassination, and intimidation of politicians and their supporters. The golden opportunity we have been given to reverse the course of poor leadership will be destroyed on the altar of absurdities and frivolities, just like a pack of cards.

Additionally, there were provocative and offensive remarks being made by social media organizations like Sayelba, Bayelsa Focus organizations, Inside Bayelsa, Democracy Vanguard, Voice of Naija, and South-South People's Parliament. Furthermore, people are the targets of cyberbullies. Instead of posting words that are generally provocative, they publish derogatory things about a specific individual in an attempt to intimidate or shame them. This might come in the shape of cruel essays and notes, as well as personal images or recordings of the target. They could broadcast the information online or privately send it to the target as a way to tease them. The sole intention of cyberbullies is to harm and degrade their victims. They don't care about attention; thus, their victims will receive negative attention instead of attention for themselves.

In Bayelsa state and in general, cyberbullying is a widespread issue. According to Bauman (2014), the widespread availability of digital technology and the rapid advancement of technical advances are to blame for the prevalence of cyberbullying, which would ultimately lead to various outcomes in terms of electoral violence in Bayelsa state.

8.2. Roles of political actors, electoral institutions, community leaders, and security agencies in either promoting or preventing electoral violence during the 2019 election in Bayelsa state

Political actors played a central role in both instigating and escalating electoral violence during the 2019 Bayelsa State governorship election. Leading politicians and candidates, especially from the APC and PDP, allegedly financed and armed youth groups to disrupt the electoral process in opponent strongholds. Timipre Sylva of the APC was widely reported to have mobilized local militia and former cultists, especially in Nembe and Southern Ijaw, which experienced some of the most violent episodes during the election (YIAGA Africa, 2019). Similarly, allegations were leveled against PDP-affiliated actors for organizing intimidation campaigns in select areas to suppress opposition votes. The strategic use of violence to gain territorial control and electoral advantage reflected the entrenched culture of winner-takes-all politics in Bayelsa.

Electoral institutions, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), were hampered by logistical weaknesses, allegations of bias, and lack of institutional independence. Reports by election observers noted that INEC officials were kidnapped, intimidated, and, in some cases, compromised during the voting process (EU EOM, 2019). The inability of INEC to provide adequate protection for its personnel and electoral materials in volatile areas contributed to the perception of complicity or helplessness, undermining public trust in the integrity of the electoral process. Security agencies, including the Nigerian Police Force, Nigerian Army, and Civil Defence, were deployed to safeguard the election. However, their effectiveness was uneven and, in some instances, compromised. In Southern Ijaw and Brass LGAs, credible reports indicated that security personnel either stood by passively during violent disruptions or were themselves involved in partisanship, assisting in the transportation of compromised electoral materials and shielding political thugs (CLEEN Foundation, 2019). While some security operatives acted professionally, the broader narrative of selective enforcement and collusion contributed to the escalation of violence and the erosion of electoral credibility.

Community leaders, including traditional rulers and religious figures, had a dual role in the 2019 election. In some areas, they acted as peace advocates, urging their followers to refrain from violence and encouraging political neutrality. However, in other cases, local leaders aligned with political interests and lent their legitimacy to violent actors by turning a blind eye to intimidation or by directly endorsing partisan thuggery. The politicization of local authority structures weakened their role as stabilizing forces and instead made them instruments of electoral conflict (Ibeanu & Orji, 2019). The 2019 election reflected a breakdown in institutional safeguards and a failure by key actors to fulfill their mandates. The convergence of political desperation, institutional fragility, and selective law enforcement allowed electoral violence to thrive and become an accepted component of the political process in Bayelsa State.

8.3. Legal and institutional frameworks in addressing electoral violence in Bayelsa state

The Nigerian legal and institutional frameworks governing elections are anchored on the Electoral Act (as amended), the 1999 Constitution, and guidelines issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). These frameworks contain clear provisions for the conduct of elections, the prosecution of electoral offenses, and the roles of security agencies. However, in the case of the 2019 Bayelsa State governorship election, these legal instruments were poorly implemented and selectively enforced, rendering them largely ineffective in curbing electoral violence. The Electoral Act criminalizes actions such as ballot box snatching, voter intimidation, and disruption of polling activities. Despite the prevalence of these offenses during the 2019 election, there were few, if any, successful prosecutions of perpetrators. This failure was partly due to the absence of robust institutional mechanisms for the identification, documentation, and prosecution of offenders. According to Ladan (2020), the culture of impunity that surrounds electoral violence in Nigeria is sustained by the lack of political will to implement legal sanctions against powerful actors who sponsor violence.

Institutionally, INEC is mandated to conduct credible elections, yet its operational autonomy remains constrained by political interference and logistical shortcomings. While INEC introduced innovations such as the use of smart card readers and off-cycle election scheduling, these were undermined by deliberate sabotage, especially in areas where violence was used to prevent accreditation and manipulate turnout. In Bayelsa, the effectiveness of INEC's interventions was compromised by local political pressures and security challenges that made certain areas inaccessible during the election (YIAGA Africa, 2019). Security institutions,

legally responsible for protecting the electoral process, lacked clear coordination mechanisms, and often operated in silos. Their inability to act impartially and efficiently during the 2019 election raised serious concerns about the integrity of the security architecture. The police and army, though present in large numbers, were often reactive rather than proactive, and in some instances, directly facilitated the disruption of the process, as documented by international observers (EU EOM, 2019).

Furthermore, the judiciary, which plays a critical role in resolving electoral disputes, was called into action following the Supreme Court's ruling that disqualified the APC candidate due to issues with his running mate's credentials. While this decision affirmed the court's capacity to act as a legal check, it also triggered violent backlash from APC supporters, raising questions about the judiciary's ability to enforce rulings without provoking further unrest. This underscores the fragile relationship between legal authority and political legitimacy in volatile electoral contexts like Bayelsa.

9. Discussion of Findings

From the analysis, the study found out that;

1. The 2019 Bayelsa State governorship election was characterized by widespread and systemic violence, with clear political motivations underlying most of the attacks and disruptions.
2. Political actors, especially from the two leading parties (APC and PDP), actively sponsored and mobilized violence through armed thugs and youth militias in order to gain territorial and electoral advantage.
3. Electoral and security institutions were either too weak or complicit to prevent the violence, with instances of INEC officials being kidnapped, compromised, or forced to abandon duties, and security agencies selectively enforcing laws.
4. Legal frameworks such as the Electoral Act and the Nigerian Constitution, though theoretically adequate, were largely ineffective in practice due to lack of political will, institutional fragility, and a prevailing culture of impunity.

From the findings, it is evident that the 2019 Bayelsa State governorship election did not only suffer from technical and logistical failures but was deeply undermined by political desperation and institutional breakdowns. The violence that erupted during the election was not random; rather, it was a systematic outcome of long-standing socio-political decay, manifesting in a zero-sum

political culture where winning an election means access to state resources and power, often at the expense of democratic principles. The central involvement of political actors in orchestrating violence, coupled with the complicity or inefficiency of electoral and security institutions, highlights the entrenched nature of electoral malpractices in Bayelsa. Moreover, the failure of legal and institutional frameworks to punish perpetrators or deter future incidents has further normalized violence as a viable electoral strategy. Thus, electoral violence in Bayelsa State remains a deeply rooted issue requiring comprehensive reforms that address not only surface-level irregularities but also the structural and systemic factors perpetuating conflict during elections.

Discussion: The discussion of findings in this study on "Elections and Electoral Violence in Bayelsa State: 2019 Bayelsa State Governorship Election in Focus" aligns significantly with the existing body of scholarship that has examined the patterns, causes, and consequences of electoral violence in Nigeria, particularly in resource-endowed but politically fragile states like those in the Niger Delta. Multiple scholars have established that the endemic nature of electoral violence in Nigeria stems from the convergence of socio-economic vulnerabilities, institutional weaknesses, and the desperation of political elites to acquire or retain power by any means necessary (Omotola, 2010; Ayoade, 2013; Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2015). This study reinforces these findings by highlighting the politically charged atmosphere of the 2019 Bayelsa gubernatorial election, which was marked by fierce competition between the APC and PDP, both of which mobilized violence through the recruitment of local militia and cult groups, especially in areas like Southern Ijaw, Nembe, and Brass.

Omotola (2010) argued that Nigeria's electoral system suffers from a credibility deficit, which creates incentives for political actors to resort to violence as a means of circumventing institutional processes. This view is validated by this study's observation that both political parties in Bayelsa deployed strategic violence, ballot hijacking, and intimidation to secure territorial control and influence the electoral outcome. Moreover, Agbu (2016) emphasized the zero-sum nature of Nigerian politics, where winning an election is equivalent to monopolizing access to state resources. This helps explain the desperation and violent strategies used by Bayelsa's political class in 2019, as the governorship position symbolized control over oil wealth, patronage networks, and federal connections. The socio-economic dimension of electoral violence discussed in this study also resonates with findings by Akinbobola (2014), who contends that youth unemployment and poverty are critical enablers of violence. Young men are often

lured with money, drugs, or the promise of future political rewards, turning elections into violent contests. This finding was reflected clearly in the 2019 election, as widespread poverty and underdevelopment in coastal and riverine areas created an easily exploitable population for political actors. This trend is further elaborated by Nwankwo and Okafor (2018), who found that political thuggery and youth militancy are fueled by a combination of socio-economic exclusion and the politicization of community leadership structures.

This study's finding on the instrumental role of cultural and communal divisions in mobilizing violence is supported by the work of Ukiwo (2011), who posits that ethnic identity politics in the Niger Delta not only shape political alignments but also intensify electoral contestations. In Bayelsa, the manipulation of clan and community loyalties during the 2019 election created localized conflict zones where inter-group rivalries were activated by political interests. This highlights the intersection of identity, geography, and politics, which scholars like Ikelegbe (2014) argue is central to understanding electoral instability in the region. On the role of electoral institutions and security agencies, the study's findings affirm widespread scholarly observations regarding institutional fragility and complicity. According to Ibrahim and Ibeanu (2015), INEC's operational limitations, such as late delivery of materials and inadequate protection for officials, make it vulnerable to manipulation. This was evident in the 2019 Bayelsa election where INEC officials were kidnapped, materials hijacked, and processes disrupted, especially in opposition-dominated areas. Similarly, security agencies were either passive or actively complicit in violence, a trend identified in the findings of Adejumobi (2015), who argues that the militarization of elections in Nigeria often results in collusion between security agents and political actors, undermining electoral integrity.

This study also validates the critique by Ladan (2020), who emphasized the culture of impunity as a major challenge to prosecuting electoral offenders. Despite the clear provisions of the Electoral Act, few perpetrators of violence are ever brought to justice, a situation mirrored in the 2019 Bayelsa case. The judiciary's role, while crucial, remains contentious. Although the Supreme Court annulled the APC victory due to certificate forgery, this sparked further violence, revealing that legal decisions alone cannot stabilize the electoral environment in the absence of political consensus and public trustan observation also noted by Okoosi-Simbine (2013).The discussion also contributes to the growing literature on the erosion of democratic institutions in oil-rich regions. Scholars like Osaghae and Suberu (2005) argue that in such regions, the state becomes a contested terrain where elections are not democratic exercises but opportunities for resource

capture. This aligns with the Bayelsa context, where control of the governorship translates into access to oil revenues, federal allocations, and influence over security appointments. The high stakes associated with political control, coupled with institutional ineffectiveness, create a volatile atmosphere in which violence becomes both a symptom and a tool of political engagement.

10. Conclusion

This study addresses the gap in localized scholarly inquiry concerning elections and electoral violence with a specific focus on the 2019 Bayelsa State governorship election in Nigeria. While previous research has extensively covered electoral violence in broader national and regional contexts, there has been limited investigation into the micro-dynamics and localized factors that shaped the violent electoral environment in Bayelsa. The research identifies how electoral violence in the state is driven not only by structural political instability but also by socio-economic and cultural factors that uniquely define the state's volatile democratic experience.

The objectives of this study were threefold: first, to identify and analyze the political, socio-economic, and cultural factors that contributed to electoral violence in the 2019 Bayelsa governorship election; second, to examine the roles played by political actors, electoral institutions, community leaders, and security agencies in either promoting or preventing the violence; and third, to assess the effectiveness of the legal and institutional frameworks in place for curbing electoral violence in Bayelsa State.

The study employed a descriptive and exploratory research design. The descriptive dimension was used to systematically present factual and narrative accounts of election-related violence, while the exploratory aspect uncovered deeper, less-observed causes and consequences of such violence. Data were collected exclusively through secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, official government publications, election observation reports, academic theses, and reputable online databases such as JSTOR and Google Scholar. The method of analysis was qualitative content analysis, which involved coding and thematically organizing textual data for interpretation. This analytical method allowed the study to extract patterns and meanings from a wide array of narrative materials, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of the election crisis.

11. Recommendations

1. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security agencies must be reformed to operate autonomously and effectively. This includes logistical strengthening, capacity building, and protection mechanisms to safeguard electoral officers and materials from coercion and interference.

2. A dedicated electoral offenses tribunal should be established to fast-track the investigation and prosecution of electoral offenders. Political actors who sponsor violence must be held accountable regardless of party affiliation, and legal reforms should eliminate loopholes that allow impunity.

3. Community leaders, religious figures, and traditional rulers must be actively engaged in peace-building processes. Civic education campaigns should be introduced to promote peaceful participation in elections, and community-based monitoring groups should be empowered to identify and report electoral violence.

References

Adejumobi, S. (2015). Elections, democratic transition and the crisis of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *African Development Review*, 20(1), 63–77.

Agah, B. E (2017). Electoral Violence and Democracy in Nigeria's fourth republic: a study of Delta and Oyo states.

Agbo, F. J. (2020). Political thuggery and electoral violence in Nigeria: A study of the 2019 general elections. *Journal of African Democracy and Development*, 5(1), 89–103.

Agbu, O. (2016). Elections and the democratic challenges in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *Journal of African Elections*, 15(2), 35–51.

Akinbobola, A. (2014). Youths and political violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: A study of the Niger Delta. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 16(3), 108–123.

Ayas, T. and Horzum, B. (2010). Cyber bullying/ victimization scale development study. Journal of Academic Perspective, 19, 1-17.

Azeez, A. (2005). Political violence in Nigeria: Implications and options for democratic consolidation. In: S. A. Ayinla (Ed.): Issues in Political Violence in Nigeria. Hamson Printing Communication, P. 157.

Bauman, S., & Jina, y. (2014). This Issue: Theories of Bullying and Cyberbullying, Theory Into Practice, 53:4, 253-256, DOI: 10.1080/00405841.2014.947215: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2014.947215

CLEEN Foundation. (2019). *Security Threat Assessment for 2019 Governorship Elections in Bayelsa and Kogi States*. CLEEN Publications.

Daily Post Nigeria (2019, November 13), Scores Feared dead, many injure as PDP, APC supporters clash in Bayelsa state. https://dailypost.ng › 2019/11/13 › breaking-scores-fear-dead.

European Union Election Observation Mission [EU EOM]. (2019). Final Report on the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria.

Falana, F., (2009). *"The limits of electoral reforms"* Nigerian Compass, Thursday, June 11, 2009, p31

Gurr, T. R. (1970). *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton University Press.

Ibeanu, O., & Orji, N. (2019). Elections, security and the challenge of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *Journal of Politics and Society in Nigeria*, 7(2), 45–61.

Ibrahim, J., & Ibeanu, O. (2015). *The cost of our democracy: Elections, governance and violence in Nigeria*. Centre for Democracy and Development.

Ifeanyichukwu O. (2017). Political Violence and its Socioeconomic Consequences on the Development of Bayelsa State, equatorial Journal of Social Sciences and Human Behaviour 2017; 2 (2):74- 85 Journal Homepage: www.erjournals.com ISSN Online: 0184-7937

Ikelegbe, A. (2014). Oil, resource conflicts and the post-conflict transition in the Niger Delta. *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review*, 4(1), 1–29.

Ladan, M. T. (2020). Democracy, elections and political violence in Nigeria: The post-2015 experience. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science*, 25(1), 33–50.

Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., & Zickuhr, K. (2010). Social media and young adults: overview. Washington DC: Pew Research Centre Internet Science and Tech. Retrieved from www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Social-Media-and-Young-Adults.aspx

Nigeria Police (2023), Report on Bayelsa state 2023 Gubernatorial Election, CB;3000/SCID/BYS/Vol.1/6

Odora, R.J, Matoti, S. (2015). The Nature and Prevalence of Cybar ullyingBehaviors among African High School Learners: Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/09751122.2015.11890362

Okonkwo, C. A. (2019). Ethno-political conflict and electoral violence in Nigeria's Niger Delta: The Bayelsa State experience. *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, 28(4), 56–72.

Okolo, P. O. (2021). The Role of Security Agents in Gender-Related Violence in Nigeria's Elections. *NOUN International Journal of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution (NIJPCR)*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (A), August, 2021, pp. 61 – 74. Also available at: www.nijpcr.nou.edu.ng.

Okolo, P. O., & Etekpe, A. (2014). "Value Re-Orientation Policy Option for Sustainable Development in the Niger Delta" *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*

Okoosi-Simbine, A. T. (2013). Elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: The challenges and the way forward. *Journal of African Politics and Society*, 3(1), 19–31.

Omotola, J. S. (2010). Elections and democratic transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic. *African Affairs*, 109(437), 535–553.

Osaghae, E. E., & Suberu, R. T. (2005). A history of identities, violence, and stability in Nigeria. Oxford: Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE).

Otu O. E & Odalonu B. H (2021). Assessment of the Factors That Shaped Electoral Violence in 2019 Bayelsa State Gubernatorial Election.

Thisday Newsaper (2019, November 17) thisdaylive.com/violence,intimidation,vote buying mar Bayelsa, Kogi pole

Ukiwo, U. (2011). Violence, identity mobilization and the Nigerian transition. In A. Jega (Ed.), Identity Transformation and Identity Politics Under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria (pp. 74–95). Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

YIAGA Africa. (2019). Preliminary Statement on the Bayelsa and Kogi Governorship Elections. YIAGA Centre for Legislative Engagement.