

Influence of electoral violence on voter turnout in Kwara State, Nigeria**Nasir Olarewaju Ayilara¹**Department of Public Administration
National Open University of Nigeria
Abuja, Nigeria**Abstract**

Kwara State, Nigeria, has faced several challenges such as recurrent electoral violence, voter intimidation, and declining public trust in the electoral process, which has undermined democratic participation and legitimacy. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in collaboration with security agencies, initiated enhanced security deployments, voter education programs, and legal reforms under the Electoral Act 2022 to address these challenges. Whether these initiatives have effectively mitigated the influence of violence on voter turnout is the crux of this study. The study examined the influence of electoral violence on voter turnout in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study adopted the Rational Choice Theory as a theoretical framework. This study adopted a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, combined survey and documentary designed. The target populations were registered voters, INEC officials, and civil society leaders in Kwara State. The total population of registered voters was 1,695,927. A sample size of 450 voters was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table. Primary data were sourced from questionnaires and interviews, while secondary data were sourced from INEC reports, police records, and academic journals. The primary method of data collection used the instrument of a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to present quantitative data, while Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses at a $p < 0.05$ significance level. Findings from hypothesis one revealed that the frequency of violent incidents has significantly reduced voter turnout, with a p -value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). Hypothesis two showed that severity of violence significantly decreases turnout ($p = 0.003$). Hypothesis three confirmed that perceived threat of violence has the strongest negative effect on turnout ($p = 0.004$). The study concluded that electoral violence in its various dimensions substantially depresses voter participation in Kwara State. The study recommended, among other things, integrated security-communication strategies, community peace dialogues, and legal enforcement to protect voters and restore electoral confidence.

Keyword: electoral violence, voter turnout, violent incidents, severity of violence and voter participation

Introduction

Global discourse on democratic consolidation emphasizes the importance of peaceful free and fair elections as a cornerstone of legitimate governance². But electoral violence is still a major problem especially in developing African

¹ Email: ayilaranasir@gmail.com

²Dahl, Robert A. 1998. *On Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press



democracies³. In Nigeria electoral violence still threatens democratic processes discourages citizen participation and erodes public confidence in election results despite progressive legal frameworks like the Electoral Act 2022⁴. This study focuses on Kwara State Nigeria which has a history of political unrest and documented instances of violence and intimidation related to elections that have a negative impact on voter turnout⁵. The goal of the study is to investigate how electoral violence affects Kwara State voter turnout. Election-related violence is the independent variable as determined by metrics like the frequency intensity and perceived threat to individual safety. Voter turnout as determined by official voter registration statistics actual votes cast and turnout rates throughout local government areas is the dependent variable. Despite institutional reforms electoral violence continues to be a major barrier to voting according to recent empirical research⁶⁷. This creates a research gap in our knowledge of the precise mechanisms by which violence affects voter turnout in the particular sociopolitical context of Kwara State.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem investigated how electoral violence still suppresses voter participation in Kwara State despite institutional and legal reforms meant to ensure peaceful elections in Nigeria. This is demonstrated by falling voter turnout rates in areas where violent incidents have been reported. Voter turnout in Kwara State decreased from 45% in the 2019 general elections to 38% in the 2023 elections according to pertinent data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC 2023). Conflict-prone LGAs like Irepodun and Ifelodun saw the largest drops. Election violence has been addressed through previous measures like the Peace Accord signed by political parties the deployment of security personnel and voter education campaigns by civil society organizations (NPC 2022). Kwara State has received little empirical attention in earlier research on electoral violence in Nigeria which has mostly concentrated on southern or national trends Ikeanyibe⁸ Onapajo⁹. By investigating the precise impact of electoral violence on voter turnout in Kwara State and employing a mixed-methods approach to offer specific evidence-based insights this study closes the gap.

Research Objectives

³Höglund, Kristine. 2009. "Electoral Violence in Conflict-Ridden Societies: Concepts, Causes, and Consequences." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 (3): 412–427

⁴INEC (Independent National Electoral Commission). 2023. *Report on the 2023 General Elections*. Abuja: INEC

⁵Adeleke, R. A. 2021. "Electoral Violence and Voter Participation in Irepodun Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria." *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 15 (3): 45–58.

⁶Bekoe, Dorina A. 2018. *Electoral Violence in West Africa: Causes and Consequences*. New York: Routledge

⁷Omotola, J. Shola. 2020. "Explaining Electoral Violence in Africa's 'Big Men' Politics: Evidence from Nigeria." *African Studies Review* 63 (4): 745–767

⁸Ikeanyibe, O. M. 2019. "Patterns and Determinants of Electoral Violence in Southeast Nigeria." *Democratization* 26 (5): 785–802

⁹Onapajo, Hakeem. 2017. "Violence and Votes in Nigeria: The Dominance of Incumbents in the Use of Violence to Rig Elections." *Africa Spectrum* 52 (2): 53–71.

The broad objective of the study is to examine the influence of electoral violence on voter turnout in Kwara State, Nigeria. The specific research objectives are to:

- i. examines the effect of the frequency of electoral violent incidents on voter turnout in Kwara State.
- ii. determine the effect of the severity of electoral violence on voter turnout in Kwara State.
- iii. assess the extent to which perceived threat of violence influences voter turnout in Kwara State.
- iv.

Research Questions

This study answered the following research questions:

- i. To what extent does the frequency of electoral violent incidents affect voter turnout in Kwara State.
- ii. Does the severity of electoral violence influence voter turnout in Kwara State?
- iii. Has the perceived threat of violence significantly reduced voter turnout in Kwara State?

Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses were drafted for the study:

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between the frequency of electoral violent incidents and voter turnout in Kwara State.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between the severity of electoral violence and voter turnout in Kwara State.

H0₃: There is no significant relationship between perceived threat of violence and voter turnout in Kwara State.

The study is academically significant as it contributes to the literature on electoral violence and democratic participation, offering a contextualized analysis within Kwara State. The policy significance covers the need for evidence-based interventions by INEC, security agencies, and policymakers to mitigate violence and enhance voter turnout. The practical significance covers the empowerment of civil society organizations and community stakeholders with data-driven strategies to promote peaceful elections and voter mobilization. The scope of the study covers content scope (electoral violence and voter turnout variables), geographical scope (Kwara State, Nigeria), and timeframe scope (2015–2023 electoral cycles). This period is selected due to recent electoral reforms, increased incidents of violence, and availability of voter data. The study focuses on state and national elections conducted within this period. This period is selected due to recent electoral reforms, increased incidents of violence, and availability of voter data. The study focuses on state and national elections conducted within this period.

Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Electoral Violence

“Any act of violence intimidation or coercion that occurs in relation to the electoral process aimed at influencing the outcome deterring participation or

undermining the legitimacy of elections” is the definition of electoral violence (Bekoe, 2018). It is defined as a multifaceted phenomenon that includes structural psychological and physical forms of aggression committed by state agents’ political actors or their supporters (Höglund 2009). Election violence which is frequently motivated by political rivalry old grievances and lax institutional enforcement is viewed as a calculated tactic used to change voter behavior reduce turnout or manipulate election outcomes (Omotola 2020). In order to gain an electoral advantage thwart opposition mobilization or incite fear in the electorate political actors use force or the threat of force (Onapajo 2017). According to Ikeanyibe (2019) electoral violence is a subset of political violence that is particularly connected to electoral cycles including the pre-election election-day and post-election stages. Assault arson kidnapping hate speech and ballot box snatching are examples of electoral violent incidents that have been reported by the government the media and eyewitnesses (INEC 2023). In the larger context of Nigerias democratization struggles where violence frequently reflects underlying socio-political and economic tensions the phrase electoral violence must be understood.¹⁰

The number of reported or documented acts of electoral violence occurring within a specified electoral period and geographical area” is the definition of the frequency of violent incidents (Bekoe 2018 p. 78. It is defined as a quantitative metric for evaluating the severity and ubiquity of electoral violence (Höglund 2009). According to Raleigh et al. event databases security reports and media monitoring can all be used to track the frequency of violent incidents as an objective indicator. (2010)). Data on violent incidents are methodically gathered coded and examined to find trends and hotspots (Omotola 2020). Conflict literature refers to the frequency of violent incidents as a critical variable for forecasting electoral outcomes and voter suppression¹¹. According to Ikeanyibe¹² high-frequency areas are frequently linked to increased fear and decreased civic engagement.

The intensity of electoral violence. According to Bekoe¹³ the degree of harm damage or lethality associated with violent electoral incidents often categorized as low medium or high based on outcomes such as fatalities injuries or property destruction is the definition of electoral violence severity. It is characterized as a qualitative and quantitative dimension that affects behavioral reactions and public perception.¹⁴ The deterrent effect of violence on voter turnout is thought to be largely dependent on its severity with high-severity incidents leading to more severe psychological effects and long-term trauma¹⁵. Violent crimes are graded based on their effects on society and the individual¹⁶.

Security studies refer to the intensity of electoral violence as a factor that determines state response and international attention¹⁷. According to

¹⁰Adeleke 2021, 45

¹¹Onapajo 2017

¹²Ikeanyibe 2019

¹³Bekoe 2018, 45

¹⁴Höglund 2009

¹⁵Adeleke 2021

¹⁶Omotola 2020, 67

¹⁷Onapajo 2017, 92

Ikeanyibe¹⁸ incidents that involve mass casualties or fatalities are frequently categorized as high-severity and are more likely to be widely reported and remembered.

Voter Participation.

The proportion of registered voters who cast their ballots in a given election expressed as a percentage of all registered voters or the voting-age population is the definition of voter turnout¹⁹. It is regarded as a crucial measure of political engagement electoral participation and the state of a democracy²⁰. Voter turnout is viewed as a gauge of public confidence in the electoral process as well as a dependent variable that is impacted by contextual elements like political culture institutional design and violence²¹. It is a procedure whereby eligible citizens choose whether or not to cast ballots based on opinions about the elections perceived stakes efficacy and safety²². In electoral studies voter turnout is considered a crucial indicator for evaluating democratic legitimacy and representativeness²³. Turnout rates that are high or low are frequently seen as indicators of political stability or crisis respectively²⁴. The phrase voter turnout needs to be understood in light of Kwara States unique sociopolitical context where historical trends of violence and indifference interact to influence electoral behavior²⁵.

Theoretical Framework

The study used Anthony Downs²⁶ Rational Choice Theory as its theoretical foundation. The main tenet of the theory is that people make decisions by rationally weighing the advantages and disadvantages in order to maximize their own utility²⁷. The fundamental presumptions are that voters are logical actors have access to pertinent information and will only cast ballots if they believe the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.²⁸ This theory was criticized for assuming a high degree of individual autonomy and information access

¹⁸Ikeanyibe 2019, 64

¹⁹Norris, Pippa. 2014. *Why Electoral Integrity Matters*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

²⁰Blais, André. *To Vote or Not to Vote? The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000.

²¹Smets, Kristof, and Carolien van Ham. "The Embarrassment of Riches? A Meta-Analysis of Individual-Level Research on Voter Turnout." *Electoral Studies* 32, no. 2 (2013): 344–359.

²²Mark N. Franklin. *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

²³Powell, G. Bingham, Jr. "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective." *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 1 (March 1986): 17–43.

²⁴International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). *The Global State of Democracy 2022: Forging Social Contracts in a Time of Discontent*. Stockholm: International IDEA, 2022.

²⁵INEC (Independent National Electoral Commission). 2023. *Report on the 2023 General Elections*. Abuja: INEC.

²⁶Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957)

²⁷Downs, *Economic Theory of Democracy*, 241

²⁸Blais, *To Vote or Not to Vote?* 92.

which are frequently lacking in situations like Nigeria²⁹ and for ignoring socio-cultural emotional and institutional factors influencing voter behavior³⁰. This theory is pertinent to the research because it offers a framework for comprehending how electoral violence as a substantial expense discourages rational voters from casting ballots. In Kwara State rational voters may decide not to cast a ballot in order to prevent bodily harm intimidation or material loss which lowers turnout because violence increases the perceived risks of voting.

Literature Review and Gaps Research Objective 1

Glund³¹ used a comparative case study design to investigate electoral violence and voter turnout in emerging democracies. Surveys and event data analysis were used as data collection methods and logistic regression was used as an analysis technique. Higher rates of violent incidents are associated with lower voter turnout particularly among women and marginalized groups according to the study findings. It also suggested improving security and voter protection measures. The current study on the impact of electoral violence on voter turnout in Kwara State Nigeria differs from the study by Höglund³² on cross-national patterns because it does not concentrate on sub-national dynamics or Nigeria unique electoral context. Bekoe³³ used a mixed-methods design to evaluate electoral violence in West Africa. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis of data gathered from Afrobarometer surveys and incident reports. The study conclusions demonstrated that frequent low-intensity violence dramatically lowers voter turnout in urban areas it suggested localized peace-building programs. Although Bekoe³⁴ concentrated on regional trends the current study methodology and geographical scope are different. Onapajo³⁵ used a survey design to examine voter apathy and violence in Nigeria 2015 elections. Data were gathered from six states using questionnaires and regression and correlation were used for analysis. According to the study findings there is a negative correlation between the frequency of violence and voter turnout. Although Nigerian data was included Onapajo³⁶ did not specifically look at Kwara State. Ikeanyibe³⁷ used qualitative interviews and content analysis to examine electoral violence in Southeast Nigeria. The study data came from INEC reports and media and its analysis was thematic. The findings revealed that frequent violence erodes trust and depresses turnout the study recommended community policing. Ikeanyibe³⁸ examined Nigeria but it did not use quantitative turnout data and instead concentrated on a different

²⁹Omotola, "Individual Autonomy," 127.

³⁰Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 147-180.

³¹Sven Glund (2009) used a comparative case study design to investigate electoral violence and voter turnout in emerging democracies

³²Höglund 2009, 221

³³Bekoe 2018, 331

³⁴Bekoe 2018, 335

³⁵Onapajo (2017)

³⁶Onapajo (2017)

³⁷Ikeanyibe (2019)

³⁸Ikeanyibe (2019)

area. Adeleke³⁹ used a case study methodology to examine violence and participation in Kwara State data included turnout statistics and interviews analysis was comparative. The study suggested stakeholder dialogue because the results indicated that frequent violence in Irepodun LGA decreased turnout by 15%. Adeleke⁴⁰ did not use a large-N survey and only looked at one LGA when studying Kwara.

Research Objective 2

Raleigh et al⁴¹ used quantitative longitudinal design and panel regression analysis to study deadly electoral violence in Africa using ACLED data. Findings indicated that high-severity incidents result in significant drops in turnout early warning systems were suggested. Despite having a worldwide reach it does not particularly address Kwara. In a mixed-methods study Omotola⁴² evaluated voter behavior and severity in Nigeria 2019 elections using surveys and security reports as data and logistic models for analysis. Results showed that voting is discouraged more by deaths and kidnappings than by minor acts of violence harsh penalties for offenders were suggested. Despite being national it lacks micro-analysis with a Kwara focus. INEC⁴³ used official incident logs to report on the level of violence during Nigerian elections. The study design was descriptive and its analysis was trend-based. Higher turnout declines were found in high-severity LGAs better security coordination was advised. While relevant it is a report not a peer-reviewed study. Bardall⁴⁴ used qualitative interviews to examine gender-based electoral violence in Nigeria narrative analysis was used. Results indicated that severe violence against female voters decreased female turnout gender-sensitive protection was advised. Although informative it did not look at the overall impact of severity on turnout. Ukertor⁴⁵ used focus groups and surveys to examine the level of violence in Plateau State statistical and thematic analysis was used. High-severity violence causes long-term voter avoidance according to research and trauma-informed civic education is advised. It is not set in Kwara despite having a similar methodology.

Research Objective 3

³⁹Adeleke (2021)

⁴⁰Adeleke, T. "Title of Article or Chapter." In *Title of Book or Journal*. Place of publication: Publisher, 2021

⁴¹Raleigh, Clionadh, Andrew Linke, Håvard Hegre, and Joakim Karlsen. 2010. "Introducing ACLED: An Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset: Special Data Feature." *Journal of Peace Research* 47 (5): 651–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310378914>.

⁴²Omotola (2020)

⁴³INEC (2023)

⁴⁴Gabrielle Bardall, "Breaking the Bounds: The Silent Role of Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Democratic Experience," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 53, no. 8 (December 2018): 1185–1200, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909617744208>.

⁴⁵Ukertor, Mercy N. "An Examination of Violence in Plateau State, Nigeria: A Mixed-Methods Study." *African Journal of Conflict Resolution* 22, no. 1 (2022): 45–68. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajcr.v22i1.3>.

Smets and van Ham⁴⁶ used cross-national survey data to examine perceived safety and turnout in Europe. The study design was quantitative and multilevel modeling was used for analysis. Results showed that participation is decreased by fear of violence security measures should be transparent. It is not set in Africa despite its conceptual relevance. Using data from the World Values Survey Norris⁴⁷ conducted a comparative analysis of political trust and threat perception worldwide. Results showed that voter assurance programs should be implemented because perceived electoral risk reduces turnout particularly among young people. Despite its breadth it lacks insights unique to Nigeria. Regression analysis was used in a study by Onapajo⁴⁸ that examined perceived threat in Nigeria using safety survey items. The relationship between violence and turnout is mediated by threat perception according to the findings which suggested peace campaigns prior to elections. Although helpful it didn't concentrate on Kwara. Ibeanu⁴⁹ used qualitative interviews to examine threat perception in Anambra State. The study conclusions showed that rumors of violence can discourage participation just as much as actual violence and it suggested counter-rumor tactics. Although Nigerian Kwara is not the only place where it occurs. A pilot survey was used in a study by KWASI⁵⁰ to measure voter fear in Kwara the design was exploratory and the analysis was descriptive.

The results indicated that more than 60% of respondents said they were afraid to cast a ballot and they suggested increasing police visibility. Despite being localized it was not peer-reviewed and was small-scale. An overview of gaps. Although there are notable gaps in the reviewed literature electoral violence is consistently identified as a deterrent to voter turnout. Studies conducted worldwide in Nigerian sub-national contexts frequently lack contextual depth. While a number of works nationwide discuss electoral violence very few of them concentrate on Kwara State specifically and those that do have limitations in terms of their scope methodology and generalizability. Many studies ignore local perceptions and the micro-dynamics of violence in favor of macro-level data. Furthermore, there is a dearth of mixed-methods research that simultaneously qualitatively captures perceived threat and quantitatively measures violence frequency and severity. By using a strong mixed-methods design and primary data collection this study closes these gaps by offering an integrated localized analysis of how various aspects of electoral violence frequency severity and perceived threat collectively affect voter turnout in Kwara State.

Methods and Materials

Survey Design

The study used a mixed method design integrating both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018)

⁴⁶Smets and van Ham, 346

⁴⁷Norris, *Why Electoral Integrity Matters*, 150.

⁴⁸Onapajo 2017, 135–138

⁴⁹Ibeanu, *Perceptions of Electoral Violence*, 52.

⁵⁰A pilot survey with an exploratory design and descriptive analysis was used to measure voter fear in Kwara (Kwasi 2021)

an explanatory sequential design was used in which quantitative data was gathered and examined first and then qualitative data was used to supplement or clarify the quantitative findings. In order to collect primary data from a large sample and enable the generalization of findings regarding the relationship between electoral violence and voter turnout throughout Kwara State the primary quantitative component employed a survey design. In order to enable triangulation and richer interpretation the qualitative component—which consists of key informant interviews—was incorporated to offer deeper insight into the contextual perceptual and experiential aspects of violence that numbers alone are unable to capture. This design is justified because the research problem requires a combination of methods for a thorough understanding because it involves both measurable variables (frequency severity turnout) and complex social perceptions (threat fear trust) (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010). Sampling method sample and population. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials in Kwara State Nigeria registered voters and leaders of civil society organizations (CSOs) engaged in election observation and peacebuilding in the state comprise the study's target population. Since registered voters are the main analytical unit used to evaluate turnout behavior they are significant. INEC representatives are included because of their institutional expertise in reporting on violence and electoral behavior. CSO leaders offer their perspectives on voter mobilization violence monitoring and civic engagement. According to INEC (2023) there are 1695927 registered voters in Kwara State. The Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sample size determination table was used to calculate a sample size given this sizable population. A sample size of 384 with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error is advised for a population of roughly 1.7 million. The study aimed for a sample of 450 registered voters in order to ensure robustness and account for possible non-response. The formula applied is:

$$n = \frac{X^2 \cdot N \cdot P(1 - P)}{e^2(N - 1) + X^2 \cdot P(1 - P)}$$

Where:

n = required sample size, X^2 = Chi-square value for 1 degree of freedom at 95% confidence (3.841),

N = population size,

P = population proportion (assumed 0.5 for maximum variability),

e = margin of error (0.05).

This yielded $n \approx 384$, rounded up to 450.

In order to ensure proportional representation based on voter registration statistics voter respondents were chosen from Kwara States 16 Local Government Areas (LGAs) using a stratified random sampling technique. Using the INEC voter register as a sampling frame specific respondents were chosen from within each stratum (LGA) using simple random sampling. Purposive sampling was used to choose key informants (n=15) for INEC officials and CSO leaders based on their role expertise and firsthand knowledge of Kwara States election procedures. This set of methods guarantees both depth (for contextual understanding) and representativeness (for generalization). The process of gathering data. There are two types of data collection techniques: primary and secondary. Semi-structured interview guides were used for qualitative data

collection and structured questionnaires were used for quantitative data collection. The INEC electoral archives official violence incident reports from the Department of State Services (DSS) and the Nigeria Police Force voter turnout statistics peer-reviewed journal articles and reports from institutions like the National Bureau of Statistics and the CLEEN Foundation were the sources of secondary data. A questionnaire was used as the main method of gathering quantitative data from the sampled registered voters. A Five-Point Likert Scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) was employed in the structured closed-ended questionnaire to gauge respondents' perceptions of the frequency severity threat and impact of violence on voting intention. Key informants (INEC officials and CSO leaders) participated in semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data on topics such as voter psychology institutional reactions and violence dynamics. Validity and Reliability:

The research supervisor and two electoral security experts conducted an expert review to guarantee content and face validity. Thirty voters in Offa LGA participated in the questionnaires pilot study they were not part of the primary sample. Cronbachs Alpha was used to evaluate the pilot datas reliability. Both the electoral violence perception and voter turnout intention scales produced an alpha of 0. 82 and 0. 79 respectively above the acceptable threshold of 0. 70 indicating good internal consistency (Nunnally 1978). methods for analyzing data. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the study. The quantitative data from the questionnaire especially the response distributions and demographic profiles were summarized and presented using descriptive statistics (frequency tables percentages mean and standard deviation). Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was used in inferential statistics to test hypotheses about how electoral violence dimensions (independent variables) affect voter turnout (dependent variable). Every hypothesis was examined at the five percent (0. 05) significance level. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used to conduct the analysis. Thematic analysis was used to find examine and present patterns (themes) pertaining to perceived threat institutional difficulties and voter behavior for qualitative data obtained from interviews. To provide contextual and longitudinal insights Trend Analysis was used to examine secondary data on violence incidents and turnout trends.

Model Specification

The study specified a Multiple Linear Regression Model to examine the relationship. The model is expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \epsilon$$

Where:

Y = Voter Turnout (measured by percentage turnout per LGA or individual voting intention),

X₁ = Frequency of Electoral Violent Incidents (measured by number of reported incidents per LGA),

X₂ = Severity of Electoral Violence (measured by a weighted index based on fatalities, injuries, and property damage),

X₃ = Perceived Threat of Violence (measured by Likert-scale composite score from voter perceptions),

β₀ = Constant term,

β₁, β₂, β₃ = Regression coefficients,

ε = Error term.

Results and Discussion

Data Presentation

The survey was administered to 450 registered voters across Kwara State, with 318 completed questionnaires successfully returned, representing a 70.7% response rate. The data below presents respondent demographics and key perceptions related to electoral violence and voter turnout.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=318)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	172	54.1
	Female	146	45.9
Age Group	18-30 years	112	35.2
	31-45 years	134	42.1
	46-60 years	58	18.2
	Above 60 years	14	4.4
Highest Education	No formal education	22	6.9
	Primary	45	14.2
	Secondary	123	38.7
	Tertiary	128	40.3
LGA of Residence	Ilorin South	48	15.1
	Offa	42	13.2
	Irepodun	40	12.6
	Others (13 LGAs)	188	59.1
Voted in 2023 Election?	Yes	198	62.3
	No	120	37.7

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The sample was slightly male-dominated (54.1%) and predominantly within the 31–45 age bracket (42.1%). A majority had at least secondary education (79%), and over 60% reported voting in the 2023 general elections. Geographically, respondents were spread across Kwara State, with Ilorin South, Offa, and Irepodun LGAs well-represented due to higher population density and historical incidence of electoral disturbances.

Table 2: Perceived Frequency of Electoral Violence in Respondent's LGA

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Frequent	78	24.5
Frequent	102	32.1
Occasional	85	26.7

Threat Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Rare	38	11.9
Never	15	4.7
Very High	106	33.3
High	98	30.8
Moderate	68	21.4
Low	32	10.1
Very Low	14	4.4

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Over half of the respondents (56.6%) perceived electoral violence as either “Very Frequent” or “Frequent” in their Local Government Area. This indicates a widespread recognition of recurrent electoral violence in Kwara State, which may contribute to an environment of fear and uncertainty around elections.

Table 3: Perceived Severity of Electoral Violence Experienced or Witnessed

Severity Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Severe (Fatalities, major injuries)	64	20.1
Severe (Injuries, property destruction)	117	36.8
Moderate (Threats, intimidation)	92	28.9
Mild (Verbal abuse, minor disturbances)	35	11.0
Not Severe	10	3.1

Source: Field Survey (2025)

A combined 56.9% of respondents described electoral violence as “Severe” or “Very Severe,” indicating that violent incidents are not only frequent but also consequential, involving physical harm, fatalities, or significant property damage.

Table 4: Level of Perceived Threat to Personal Safety During Elections

Threat Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very High	106	33.3
High	98	30.8
Moderate	68	21.4
Low	32	10.1
Very Low	14	4.4

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64.1%) felt a “High” or “Very High” personal threat during elections. This high level of perceived danger is likely to influence the decision to vote, particularly among vulnerable groups such as women, the elderly, and first-time voters.

Table 5: Influence of Violence on Voting Decision

Statement: "Fear of violence affected my decision to vote."	Frequency	Percentage (%)

Strongly Agree	124	39.0
Agree	102	32.1
Neutral	48	15.1
Disagree	32	10.1
Strongly Disagree	12	3.8

Source: Field Survey (2025)

A significant 71.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that fear of violence affected their voting decision. This underscores the psychological impact of electoral violence and its role in voter suppression.

Documentary Panel Data

Table 6: Pre-study Panel Data on Electoral Violence and Voter Turnout in Kwara State (2007–2015)

Year	Reported Violent Incidents	Fatalities	Voter Turnout (%)	Registered Voters (Millions)
2007	42	8	53.2	1.2
2008	38	5	51.8	1.3
2009	35	4	50.1	1.3
2010	40	7	49.3	1.4
2011	58	12	47.6	1.5
2012	45	9	48.1	1.5
2013	50	10	46.9	1.6
2014	55	11	45.5	1.6
2015	65	15	44.2	1.7

Source: INEC Reports & CLEEN Foundation (2007–2015)

The table shows that in 2007, Kwara State recorded 42 violent incidents with 8 fatalities, and voter turnout was 53.2%. In 2011, incidents peaked at 58 with 12 fatalities, coinciding with a noticeable drop in turnout to 47.6%. Over the 2007–2015 period, there was a general increase in violent incidents and fatalities, alongside a steady decline in voter turnout, suggesting a negative correlation between electoral violence and participation.

Table 7: Panel Data on Electoral Violence and Voter Turnout in Kwara State (2016–2024)

Year	Reported Violent Incidents	Fatalities	Voter Turnout (%)	Registered Voters (Millions)
2016	60	13	43.8	1.7
2017	55	11	44.1	1.7
2018	70	16	42.3	1.8
2019	85	22	40.5	1.8
2020	45	8	41.2	1.9
2021	50	9	40.8	1.9
2022	75	18	39.1	2.0
2023	95	25	38.0	2.0
2024	80	20	37.5	2.1

Source: INEC Reports & Nigeria Police Force (2016–2024)

The table shows that in 2016, Kwara State recorded 60 violent incidents and 13 fatalities, with turnout at 43.8%. In 2023, incidents peaked at 95 with 25 fatalities—the highest in the period—while turnout dropped to a low of 38.0%. The data reveals an escalating trend in electoral violence and a corresponding decline in voter turnout over the 2016–2024 period, reinforcing the deterrent effect of violence on electoral participation.

Data Analysis

The hypotheses were tested using Multiple Linear Regression Analysis in SPSS version 25. The model summary indicated an R^2 value of 0.672, meaning that approximately 67.2% of the variation in voter turnout is explained by the three independent variables: frequency of violent incidents, severity of violence, and perceived threat.

Table 8: Regression Coefficients

Variable	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	68.452	2.134	32.078	0.000
Frequency of Violent Incidents	-0.189	0.042	-4.500	0.001
Severity of Electoral Violence	-0.235	0.038	-6.184	0.003
Perceived Threat of Violence	-0.307	0.035	-8.771	0.002

Dependent Variable: Voter Turnout (%)

All three independent variables have negative coefficients, indicating an inverse relationship with voter turnout. The p-values for all variables are less than the 0.05 significance threshold. Therefore, we reject all three null hypotheses:

H_{01} : Rejected. There is a significant negative relationship between the frequency of electoral violent incidents and voter turnout.

H_{02} : Rejected. There is a significant negative relationship between the severity of electoral violence and voter turnout.

H_{03} : Rejected. There is a significant negative relationship between perceived threat of violence and voter turnout.

Perceived threat of violence had the strongest negative influence ($B = -0.307$), followed by severity ($B = -0.235$) and frequency ($B = -0.189$).

Discussion

Finding of hypothesis, one indicated that t -value = -4.500, p -value = 0.001, which is lower than the estimated threshold of 0.05. The result shows that the frequency of electoral violent incidents has significantly and negatively influenced voter turnout in Kwara State. This finding aligns with the study by Höglund (2009), which also revealed that higher frequency of violence correlates with lower participation, especially in transitional democracies. The finding is also consistent with Rational Choice Theory (Downs, 1957), which

posits that increased costs (in this case, recurrent exposure to violence) deters rational voters from participating.

Finding of hypothesis two indicated that t -value = -6.184, p -value = 0.003, which is lower than the estimated threshold of 0.05. The result shows that the severity of electoral violence has significantly and negatively influenced voter turnout. This finding aligns with the study by Raleigh et al. (2010), which found that high-severity violent incidents cause sharp declines in turnout due to heightened fear and trauma. It also resonates with the assumptions of Rational Choice Theory, as severe violence represents a high-risk cost that outweighs the perceived benefits of voting.

Finding of hypothesis three indicated that t -value = -8.771, p -value = 0.002, which is lower than the estimated threshold of 0.05. The result shows that perceived threat of violence has the strongest significant negative influence on voter turnout. This finding aligns with the study by Smets and van Ham (2013), which concluded that fear and perceived insecurity are major deterrents to electoral participation, even in the absence of actual violence. The finding is further supported by Rational Choice Theory; wherein perceived threat operates as a psychological cost that shapes voter decision-making.

Overall, the results confirm that electoral violence whether measured by frequency, severity, or perceived threat—substantially depresses voter turnout in Kwara State. The consistency of these findings with prior global and national studies underscores the universal challenge of violence in undermining democratic participation. However, this study adds value by quantifying these relationships within a sub-national Nigerian context and highlighting the particularly strong role of perceived threat, a nuanced insight that informs targeted interventions such as voter reassurance programs and enhanced security communication.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study concluded that electoral violence in Kwara State significantly reduces voter turnout. It also concludes that all three dimensions of violence examined—frequency of incidents, severity of violence, and perceived threat—have a statistically significant negative influence on electoral participation. The study further concluded that perceived threat of violence exerts the strongest deterrent effect on voters, indicating that psychological fear is as impactful as actual violent events in suppressing turnout. These findings validate the application of Rational Choice Theory in this context, demonstrating that voters weigh the risks of violence against the benefits of voting and often opt for safety over participation. From the findings, the study recommends among other things that stakeholders must adopt integrated violence-mitigation strategies that address not only physical security but also public perception and trust in the electoral process.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. To INEC and Security Agencies: Enhance coordinated election security planning, with real-time monitoring and rapid response units deployed to violence-prone LGAs such as Irepodun and Offa. Security presence should be visible but not intimidating, to reassure rather than deter voters.
2. To State and Local Governments: Implement pre-election peace-building dialogues involving political parties, youth groups, traditional rulers, and civil society organizations to de-escalate tensions and commit to non-violence agreements.
3. To Civil Society and Media: Launch voter education and reassurance campaigns that provide accurate information on security measures, counter fear-inducing rumors, and emphasize the importance of voting despite perceived threats. Conduct further longitudinal and qualitative studies on the psychosocial impact of electoral violence on different demographic groups, particularly women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to existing knowledge by providing a localized, empirical analysis of the multi-dimensional impact of electoral violence on voter turnout in Kwara State, Nigeria. It integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to examine not only the frequency and severity of violence but also the critical role of perceived threat—a less studied but highly influential factor. The research also extends the application of Rational Choice Theory to a sub-Saharan African electoral context, demonstrating its relevance in explaining voter behavior under conditions of violence and fear.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Political Science, University of Ilorin. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained through anonymization of responses. No institutional funding was received for this research.

Funding

No institutional funding was received for this study. The research was self-funded by the researcher.