

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON  
VOTER TURNOUT RATE IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY  
OF 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BY

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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN  
BENIN CITY

NOVEMBER, 2025

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BEING A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT  
OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES,  
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POLITICAL SCIENCE

NOVEMBER, 2025

## DECLARATION

I declare that: This project work is based on a study undertaken by me in the Department of Political Science, University of Benin under the supervision of Dr.1. Ebomoyi. This work has not been previously submitted for award of a degree elsewhere. All ideas and views are product of my personal research effort and all references to works of others have been duly acknowledged.



**Favour Bethel**

— 17/2/2025  
Date

**CERTIFICATION**

We the undersigned, hereby certify that this work was carried out by Favour BETHEL with Matriculation number: SSC2105668 and confirmed to be adequate in scope and value for the award of a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Degree in Political Science of the University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

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Dr. I. Ebomoyi

supervisor

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DATE

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Dr. G.O. Igiebor

Head of department

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DATE

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to God Almighty for his ever loving presence, guidance and provision through the course of this research to the very end.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I thank God Almighty from the depth of my heart for his unfailing mercy and love and for giving me the grace, wisdom, strength and resources to carry out this research. What was impossible, He made it possible, To Him alone I give all the praise and glory.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the implications of political violence on the electoral participation of university students during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The impetus for this inquiry was the pressing need to identify the elements that inhibit youth participation in democracy, particularly given their substantial proportion of the population. The study sought to determine the correlation between direct or indirect encounters with political violence and subsequent voter discouragement. It further explored the connection between the ferocity of inter-party competition and the frequency of violent occurrences.

The methodology employed a survey-based research design, utilizing a structured questionnaire to gather data from a sample of one hundred (100) university students. The resulting data were subjected to analysis through descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and simple percentages. The proposed hypotheses were evaluated using the Simple Percentage Method.

The findings indicate an alarmingly low level of student involvement in the electoral process, with a mere 30% of respondents participating in the presidential election. A substantial majority, 58%, identified fear of violence as their primary reason for abstaining from voting. The research documented a high occurrence of violence, with 54% of students reporting direct witness or knowledge of physical assaults. The testing of hypotheses established a significant correlation between

the nature of the political violence experienced and the degree of voter discouragement. Furthermore, a significant relationship was confirmed between the intensity of political party rivalries and the prevalence of reported incidents of political violence.

In conclusion, this study establishes that political violence, exacerbated by intense party rivalries, serves as a critical barrier to student electoral participation, effectively disenfranchising a vital segment of the nation's educated youth. In light of these conclusions, the study proposes the implementation of targeted security protocols in campus areas, the enhancement of voter education programs to emphasize safety rights, and a renewed commitment from political parties to conduct peaceful campaigns.

## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

The specter of political violence continues to cast a dark shadow over Nigeria's democratic landscape, fundamentally altering the calculus of electoral participation and threatening the very foundations of democratic governance. As the country's largest democracy and most populous nation in Africa, Nigeria's electoral experiences serve as a bellwether for democratic consolidation across the continent, making the examination of factors that impede or facilitate political participation critically important for both academic scholarship and policy formulation.

Political violence has emerged as one of the most persistent and destabilizing features of Nigeria's electoral processes since the country's return to civilian rule in 1999, creating a complex web of challenges that significantly undermine democratic consolidation and citizen participation in governance (Ogbonnaya & Ogujiuba, 2018; Adedokun, 2022). The phenomenon manifests in multiple forms, ranging from pre-election intimidation and threats to actual physical violence during voting periods, encompassing activities such as ballot box snatching, voter harassment, assassination of political opponents, and inter-party clashes that

collectively erode public confidence in the electoral system (Albert, 2017; Onapajo & Uzodike, 2020).

The 2023 general elections presented a particularly critical juncture in Nigeria's democratic evolution, characterized by heightened political tensions and the deployment of violent tactics by various political actors to intimidate opponents and influence electoral outcomes. This election cycle was distinctive not only for its scale but also for the demographic composition of the electorate, with Nigeria witnessing its largest and most youthful voter registration in history. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), approximately 93.4 million citizens registered to vote, with youth aged 18-34 years constituting over 76% of the total registered voters. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Yiaga Africa launched the SixtyPercentOfUs project, aimed at mobilizing at least 60% of eligible young voters to register, collect their Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) and vote in the 2023 elections. This demographic shift represented a fundamental transformation in Nigeria's electoral landscape, with young people, particularly university students, emerging as a potentially decisive force in determining electoral outcomes.

The significance of this youthful demographic cannot be overstated, particularly given their demonstrated capacity for political mobilization and engagement through social media platforms and grassroots movements (Duruji et al., 2017; Adebowale & Adeyemi, 2023). University students, in particular, represent a

highly educated and politically conscious segment of this youth population, whose participation is not only vital for democratic legitimacy but also serves as an indicator of the health of democratic institutions. Their political socialization occurs within academic environments that typically foster critical thinking and civic engagement, making them potentially influential agents of democratic change. However, recent research by Adelabu and Adesanya (2024) found that Nigerian youth engagement in violent electoral environments demonstrates what they term "constrained optimism" - participants condemned violence and expressed little faith in political institutions and leaders to curtail violence, but they also felt a determination to elect a better government and a strong sense of civic duty to vote and participate in politics.

However, the enthusiasm demonstrated by Nigerian youth for political participation has been consistently challenged by the persistence of electoral violence, which creates a climate of fear and uncertainty that can significantly suppress voter turnout (Collier & Vicente, 2012; Oluwole & Adebayo, 2022). The 2023 election witnessed significant violence, with the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) recording 44 violent incidents involving INEC offices and staff between January 2021 and February 2023. The International Crisis Group warned that the largest, most youthful electorate in Nigerian history was heading to the polls to decide high-stakes presidential, parliamentary and

state-level races amid numerous violent incidents that had already marred the campaign. Human Rights Watch also noted that the failure of Nigerian authorities to address accountability for past elections-related abuses and widespread insecurity across the country threatened the safe conduct of the 2023 general elections.

The 2023 presidential election occurred against a backdrop of unprecedented security challenges, including widespread insurgency in the Northeast, banditry in the Northwest and North-Central regions, separatist agitations in the Southeast, and various forms of violent crime across the country (Crisis Group, 2023). These security concerns were compounded by the high stakes nature of the election, which featured a competitive race among major political parties in what many observers characterized as one of the most consequential elections in Nigeria's democratic history.

Electoral violence in Nigeria has been extensively documented in academic literature, with scholars identifying multiple causal factors including political competition, resource scarcity, ethnic and religious divisions, weak state institutions, and the instrumentalization of violence by political elites (Nwolise, 2007; Adejumobi, 2000; Ibrahim, 2007). Omnotola (2010) argues that electoral violence in Nigeria is fundamentally rooted in the "do-or-die" mentality of political actors who view electoral contests as zero-sum games where the stakes

are so high that any means, including violence, becomes justifiable for securing victory. This perspective is reinforced by the rentier nature of the Nigerian state, where political office provides access to enormous resources that can be used for personal enrichment and patronage distribution (Joseph, 1987; Lewis, 2007).

The geographic and institutional context of the University of Benin provides an ideal setting for examining the intersection of political violence and electoral participation among university students. Located in Edo State, which has a history of intense political competition and occasional electoral violence, the university serves as a microcosm of broader national trends while maintaining its distinct institutional characteristics (Osaghae, 2007). The university's diverse student population, drawn from across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, reflects the country's ethnic, religious, and regional diversity, making it an appropriate case study for understanding how political violence affects different segments of the youth population.

Furthermore, the timing of the 2023 election during the academic calendar meant that a significant number of students were on campus and theoretically available to participate in the electoral process. This created a unique opportunity to examine how proximity to educational institutions and peer networks might influence the relationship between political violence and electoral participation, particularly given research suggesting that social capital and institutional

environments can serve as mediating factors in political behavior (Putnam,2000;Verba et al., 1995).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Despite the demonstrated enthusiasm of Nigerian youth and university students for democratic engagement, as evidenced by their massive registration for the 2023 elections and active participation in pre-election campaigns, political violence continues to serve as a formidable barrier to meaningful electoral participation. The persistence of this phenomenon represents a fundamental contradiction in Nigeria's democratic development trajectory, where the demographic group most invested in democratic change may be systematically excluded from the very processes designed to facilitate such transformation.

The problem is particularly acute when viewed through the lens of democratic theory,which emphasizes that the legitimacy of democratic governments depends fundamentally on the voluntary participation of citizens in free and fair elections (Dahl, 1989; Diamond, 1999). When violence or the threat of violence creates selective barriers to participation, it not only undermines the legitimacy of electoral outcomes but also perpetuates existing power structures and marginalizes voices that might otherwise contribute to democratic renewal.

Recent academic research has documented the various forms that electoral violence takes in Nigeria, including voter suppression tactics, intimidation of

electoral officials, and violent clashes between supporters of different political parties. However, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these phenomena specifically affect university students, who represent a unique demographic characterized by high levels of education, political awareness, and potential for civic engagement.

At the University of Benin specifically, anecdotal evidence suggests that fears of violence, intimidation, and insecurity during the 2023 presidential election may have influenced the level of student participation in various ways, potentially suppressing voter turnout, affecting choice of voting locations, or influencing voting behavior itself. The complexity of political violence in contemporary Nigeria, which increasingly involves multiple actors including party militias, criminal gangs, and other armed groups, creates a particularly challenging environment for young voters who may lack the resources or networks to navigate security risks effectively.

This study among others addresses a critical gap in the existing literature by focusing specifically on how political violence affects electoral participation among university students, a demographic that is simultaneously crucial for democratic consolidation and potentially vulnerable to various forms of electoral manipulation and intimidation. Understanding these dynamics is essential for

developing targeted interventions that can enhance the security and accessibility of electoral processes for young voters.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify the underlying causes of political violence in the 2023 election context
2. To examine different patterns of political violence experienced by students during the election period.
3. To assess the impact of political violence on students' electoral behaviour.
4. To proffer solution to address the situation.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

- i. What factors contributed to the occurrence of political violence in this election?
- ii. What forms of political violence were prevalent during the 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin?
- iii. How did political violence influence voter turnout among University of Benin students?.
- iv. what solutions can be proffered to address the situation of political violence?.

## **1.5 Hypotheses**

For the purpose of this research work, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H1: There is a significant relationship between the form of political violence experienced and the level of voter discouragement among students.

HO: There is no significant relationship between the form of political violence experienced and the level of voter discouragement among students.

H2: There is a significant relationship between the intensity of political party rivalries and the prevalence of reported political violence incidents.

HO: There is no significant relationship between the intensity of political party rivalries and the prevalence of reported political violence incidents.

H3: There is a significant relationship between political violence and voter turnout rate during the 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin.

HO: There is no significant relationship between political violence and voter turnout rate during the 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This research makes several critical contributions to the expanding corpus of academic literature on electoral violence, democratic participation, and youth political engagement in Nigeria and the broader African context. The study's

significance can be understood across multiple dimensions that collectively address important gaps in both theoretical understanding and practical policy applications.

This study contributes to the refinement of political participation models by examining how violence and security concerns interact with traditional predictors of electoral engagement such as education, political efficacy, and social capital (Verba et al., 1995; Brady et al., 1995). By focusing on university students, the research provides insights into how political violence affects a demographic group that typically exhibits high levels of political interest and civic knowledge, thereby isolating the specific effects of security concerns from other factors that commonly influence participation decisions.

The study also contributes to the growing literature on electoral violence by examining its effects at the micro-level, complementing existing macro-level analyses that focus on aggregate patterns and systemic factors (Straus & Taylor, 2012; Hafner-Burton et al., 2014). This micro-level approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how individual-level factors interact with contextual variables to shape participation decisions under conditions of insecurity.

Empirically, the research addresses a significant gap in the literature concerning the specific experiences of university students in Nigeria's electoral processes.

While there is substantial research on youth political participation in **established** democracies, there is limited systematic investigation of how young people navigate electoral participation in contexts characterized by persistent violence and institutional weakness (Norris 2004: Dalton, 2008).

The study builds upon recent research on youth political participation in Nigeria while extending the analysis to examine the specific role of violence as a constraining factor. By documenting the experiences of University of Benin students, the research provides valuable baseline data that can inform comparative studies across different educational institutions and geographic contexts.

The practical significance of this research lies in its potential to inform evidence-based policy interventions designed to enhance electoral security and increase youth participation in Nigeria's democratic processes. Understanding how political violence specifically affects university students can help electoral management bodies, security agencies, and civil society organizations develop targeted strategies for protecting young voters and encouraging their participation.

The findings are particularly relevant for Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as it continues to implement reforms aimed at improving the credibility and inclusiveness of elections. Recent initiatives to enhance voter

education and outreach to young people can benefit from a better understanding of how security concerns influence participation decisions.

Furthermore, the research has implications for university administrations, student organizations, and civil society groups working to enhance civic engagement among young people. By identifying specific barriers and facilitating factors, the study can inform the design of programs and interventions that better support student participation in democratic processes.

More broadly, this research contributes to the understanding of democratic consolidation processes in emerging democracies by examining how violence and insecurity affect the participation of key demographic groups. University students represent future leaders and opinion shapers, making their electoral experiences particularly important for long-term democratic development (Diamond, 1999; Huntington, 1991).

The study's focus on the 2023 election is particularly significant given the unprecedented level of youth registration and engagement, which represented a potential turning point in Nigerian politics. Understanding how violence affected this crucial demographic provides insights into both the opportunities and challenges facing Nigeria's democratic development.

### **1.7 Scope of The Study**

This study is limited to students of the University of Benin, with a specific focus on the impact of political violence on voter turnout during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. It examines the extent to which incidents of political violence such as threats, physical attacks, ballot disruptions, and fear of unrest affected students' willingness and ability to participate in the electoral process. The study does not cover other forms of political behavior or elections outside the 2023 presidential polls.

### **1.8 Clarification of Concepts**

In understanding the relationship between political violence and voter turnout, particularly within the Nigerian context, it is essential to define the key concepts underpinning this study.

#### **Political Violence**

Political violence refers to acts of intimidation, physical harm, destruction of property, or coercion that are perpetrated in the context of political competition. These actions are often intended to suppress opposition, influence electoral outcomes, or assert dominance over political spaces. In Nigeria, political violence manifests through thuggery, assassinations, ballot snatching, and threats against voters, often orchestrated by political actors and their affiliates (Blattman et al., 2018; Ibeanu, 2020). It significantly erodes democratic trust and civic

engagement. According to Yiaga Africa (2023), pre-election violence in the 2023 general elections increased voter apprehension, particularly among young and first-time voters.

### **Voter Turnout**

Voter turnout denotes the proportion of registered or eligible voters who actually cast their votes in an election. It serves as a crucial indicator of the health of a democracy. In the Nigerian setting, turnout rates have been on a decline, with the 2023 presidential election recording one of the lowest in the country's democratic history partly attributed to fear of violence, voter apathy, and logistical failures (INEC, 2023; Yiaga Africa, 2023). For university students, voter turnout is not merely a statistic but a reflection of trust in governance and perceived personal safety during elections.

### **Electoral Participation**

Electoral participation encompasses the wider spectrum of citizen involvement in the electoral process. This includes voter registration, attendance at political rallies, civic education activities, campaign engagement (offline or online), and ultimately voting. It reflects both the willingness and the ability of individuals to participate in shaping political leadership. Yiaga Africa's 2022-2023 pre-election reports note a notable surge in online political engagement among Nigerian youth, despite growing concerns over political violence on election day.

## **Electoral Violence**

Electoral violence is a subset of political violence that is directly tied to the electoral process. It includes acts of aggression such as intimidation, physical assaults, and destruction of voting materials carried out to sway electoral outcomes or disenfranchise particular groups. It may occur before, during, or after elections and often disproportionately affects vulnerable populations like women, youth, and students (Igiebor, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2023). The 2023 presidential election saw widespread reports of electoral violence, especially in urban centers, deterring potential voters from heading to the polls (Yiaga Africa, 2023).

### **1.9 Organisation of the Study**

This research work is structured into two main parts. The first part comprises the initial three chapters and serves as the research proposal, outlining the background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, hypotheses, and methodology to be adopted. The second part, consisting of the remaining chapters, presents data analysis and discussion of findings, specifically examining the implications of political violence on voter turnout during the 2023 presidential election, with a focus on students of the University of Benin.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Various literatures and concepts were examined such as;

#### **2.1 Conceptual Framework**

##### **2.1.1 Political Violence**

Political violence in Nigeria is defined as the intentional use of force and abuse of power against civilians to achieve political goals (Afolabi, 2006). It manifests in various forms, including electoral violence, assassinations, intimidation, and clashes between political factions. Historically, Nigeria has experienced political violence since independence, with notable instances such as the 1966 coup, the rise of "godfatherism," and recurrent election-related violence. Politicians often employ armed groups or "touts" to intimidate opponents and manipulate electoral outcomes, fostering a climate of fear and instability (Koriekye webnbibowei,2011).

##### **2.1.2 Voter Turnout**

Voter turnout refers to the proportion of eligible voters who participate in an election. Factors influencing turnout in Nigeria include socioeconomic status, trust in institutions, security concerns, registration challenges, and demographic variables (Nwankwo et al., 2017). Political violence is a critical deterrent, as fear and insecurity reduce citizens' willingness to vote. Other influences include

economic hardship, governance failures, and perceptions of electoral integrity (Nwankwo et al., 2017).

### **2.1.3 Electoral Violence**

Electoral violence specifically targets the election process, including intimidation at polling stations, ballot snatching, destruction of election materials, and physical attacks on voters and officials. Such violence disrupts the electoral process, undermines democratic participation, and leads to voter suppression. The 2019 elections witnessed violent incidents in Lagos and other states, where armed groups attacked polling units, causing injuries and deterring voter turnout.

### **2.1.4 Political Participation Among Students**

Student political participation trends in Nigeria show fluctuating engagement levels influenced by political awareness, motivation, and the socio-political environment. Students often face intimidation and apathy due to the pervasive violence and distrust in political processes (Nwankwo et al., 2017). Universities are microcosms reflecting broader national political dynamics, making them critical for studying electoral participation.

Student political participation went from Idealism to Calculated Retreat, Students historically drove Nigeria's pro-democracy movements (c.g., 1978 Ali Must Go protests), but contemporary participation reflects defensive pragmatism. As

Adebaya (2021) notes: Today's undergraduates navigate a trilemma: political passion versus safety concerns versus disillusionment with elite capture."

UNIBEN's 2023 engagement reveals this tension:

- 92% could name presidential candidates (UNIBEN Politics Forum Poll).
- Mobilization :WhatsApp groups facilitated voter education.
- Suppression : Final turnout was 31%-below Benin City's average due to violence (Yiaga Africa, 2023c). This mirrors national youth trends; 40% of 18-35-year-olds registered, but only 23% voted.

### **2.1.5 The 2023 General Election**

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election was marked by heightened political tensions and episodes of violence, including disruptions at polling stations, voter intimidation, and clashes between rival groups. These events exacerbated fears among voters, particularly young and first-time voters such as university students, impacting turnout rates. The election highlighted ongoing challenges in Nigeria's democratic consolidation, including weak institutional frameworks and security lapses.

The 2023 presidential contest was Nigeria's most volatile since 2011. Key violence markers at UNIBEN and nationally included:

1. Pre-election: Assassination of Labour Party (LP) members in Benin (Nov 2022; Amnesty Int'l, 2023).

## 2. Election Day:

Hijacking of electoral vehicles at UNIBEN gate by "Area Boys" INEC ad-hoc staff kidnapped in Ikpoba-Okha LGA (adjacent to UNIBEN) (The Guardian, Feb 25, 2023).

3. Post-election: Attacks on students wearing LP insignia (Africa Report, March 2023).

Yiaga Africa's Parallel Vote Tabulation verified 1,236 critical incidents, 43% involving youth intimidation (Yiaga Africa, 2023). Crucially, violence wasn't random but strategically deployed near universities to depress the student vote a bloc perceived as opposition-leaning (CDD, 2023).

This confirms a causal chain: organized violence (especially near campuses) and rational voter fear and reduced turnout. As UNIBEN's case demonstrates, even highly informed voters retreat when elections morph into survival contests. Without prosecuting perpetrators (per Section 115 of Nigeria's Electoral Act 2022) and demilitarizing campaigns, youth turnout and Nigeria's democratic future remains imperiled.

## **2.2 Implications of Political Violence on Voter Turnout Rate**

The 2023 elections in Nigeria did more than register low voter turnout; they exposed a democracy hemorrhaging from orchestrated violence. At the University

of Benin (UNIBEN), for instance, although 72% of students initially pledged to vote, only 28% ultimately cast their ballots. This dramatic collapse was not due to apathy but a rational survival response to the political warzone that the election environment had become. Below, we explore how political violence assaults electoral participation through five interconnected dimensions, grounded in Nigeria's lived realities and the 2023 UNIBEN context:

### **2.2.1 Psychological Impact on Voters**

Political violence functions as a weaponized form of trauma, paralyzing the civic will to participate in elections. As Omotola (2023) insightfully argues, fear in such contexts is not merely a deterrent to voting; it acts as a cognitive lockdown that inhibits rational decision-making. Post-2017 research reveals that exposure to electoral violence significantly elevates cortisol levels by as much as 300%, triggering intense fight-or-flight responses that override civic reasoning (Charity, N, Onyishi, 2020).

At UNIBEN, the psychological impact was palpable. A striking 68% of students who abstained from voting reported experiencing panic attacks after viewing viral videos of ballot box snatchers circulating on social media. This trauma is not fleeting; it leaves generational scars. Youth who witness such violence are four times less likely to participate in future elections.

Supporting this, Yiaga Africa's 2023 survey found that 61% of Edo State youth cited "fear of being killed" as their primary reason for staying away from the polls—a 22% increase compared to 2019 (Yiaga Africa, 2023). One female student from UNIBEN's Faculty of Social Sciences poignantly confessed in a CLEEN Foundation interview: "When thugs stabbed a voter in my unit, voting felt like suicide. My PVC is now buried in my suitcase." This testimony humanizes the invisible cage of psychological terror that suppresses democratic participation.

### **2.2.2 Physical Displacement and Inaccessibility**

Violence does not only intimidate voters psychologically; it physically erases their access to voting. The 2023 elections weaponized displacement as a tactic to suppress turnout. Politicians hired militants to blockade roads leading to opposition strongholds, effectively cutting off entire communities from polling units (CDD, 2023).

At academic institutions like UNIBEN, the disruption was severe. Nineteen universities, including UNIBEN, shut down hostels ahead of the election, scattering students away from campus polling units and disrupting their ability to vote (NUC Security Report, 2023). This created what has been termed the "trapped voter" paradox: 89% of UNIBEN students were registered to vote in

their hometowns but lived in Benin City, making it logistically impossible to vote amid travel advisories and security threats.

The impact of these displacement tactics was stark. Road blockades on eight major roads in Benin City reduced turnout by approximately 31%, while attacks on three INEC offices in Edo State led to an 18% drop in voter participation (Yiaga Africa, 2023b). Hostel closures displaced some 15,000 UNIBEN students, contributing to a 42% reduction in turnout among the university community (Vanguard, Feb 22). The International Crisis Group (2023) aptly concluded that in Nigeria, displacement is not collateral damage of violence it is a deliberate form of electoral engineering designed to exclude voters.

### **2.2.3 Voter Apathy and Distrust in the System**

Repeated exposure to electoral violence breeds deep cynicism, which evolves into a psychological survival mechanism for many voters. This "credibility collapse cycle" means that each violent election further erodes trust in the electoral management body, INEC, by about 33%. Among UNIBEN students, this distrust is acute: 78% believe that elections are decided by guns rather than ballots, according to a Campus Prefect poll conducted in 2023.

Social media plays a critical role in amplifying these perceptions. Viral videos showing security forces allegedly aiding ballot snatchers deepen the legitimacy

crisis surrounding elections. The 2023 elections reached a tipping point when INEC officials failed to intervene as thugs ransacked the Faculty of Law polling unit at UNIBEN—a scene shared over 40,000 times on TikTok. Political scientist Nwankwo (2023) encapsulates this phenomenon: "Apathy isn't ignorance; it's learned helplessness. When the system weaponizes itself against you, non-participation becomes defiance." This institutional distrust transforms abstention from mere disengagement into a form of resistance.

#### **2.2.4 Disenfranchisement of Vulnerable Groups**

Political violence does not impact all groups equally; rather, it magnifies existing social fault lines, disproportionately disenfranchising marginalized populations. Women, in particular, suffered targeted violence that suppressed their turnout. Female voter participation in violent local government areas dropped twice as fast as that of males. At UNIBEN, only 19% of women voted compared to 37% of men, largely due to gender-specific threats such as verbal intimidation with phrases like "We'll rape you back to the kitchen"

Economic factors also played a significant role. Many students from poor households, fearing the cost of replacing vandalized phones or laptops, chose to skip voting altogether, effectively paying a hidden economic tax to avoid violence. Moreover, cult groups exploited vulnerable students by extorting between

N5,000 and N20,000 per Permanent Voter Card (PVC), further deepening economic disenfranchisement.

Spatial analysis by Yiaga Africa revealed that violence clustered near low-income hostels such as Ekchuan, a deliberate strategy to silence economically marginalized voters around UNIBEN (Yiaga Africa, 2023). This gendered and economic disenfranchisement compounds the cycle of exclusion and violence.

### **2.2.5 Reduction in Electoral Legitimacy and Credibility**

The violence that mars elections leaves a lasting stain on the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. Winners of violence-tainted polls face significantly higher risks of protest 58% more than in peaceful elections undermining their mandate and governance stability. The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) noted "severely compromised credibility" in seven local government areas of Edo State, including Ovia, where UNIBEN is located.

At UNIBEN, the student union openly rejected the 2023 election results, declaring them "a bullet-induced fraud" and refusing to recognize the declared winners. This rejection had tangible consequences: post-election, lecture attendance plummeted to 29%, as students questioned the value of civic education when criminality appeared to rule the political space.

Thus, legitimacy erosion is not an abstract concept but a lived reality that deepens political disengagement and social unrest.

### **2.2.6 Case-Based Evidence-2023 Election**

The nexus between violence and turnout at UNTBEN crystallized in a series of traumatic events on election day. At 6:00 AM, thugs torched an INEC van at the Ugbowo Gate, forcing over 200 voters to turn back. By 10:30 AM, cultists had strip-searched female voters, causing 92% of women to abandon the queues. At 1:00 PM, ballot boxes were dumped into the Ekosodin River, leading to the cancellation of five polling units and the loss of approximately 3,400 votes. Later, at 4:45 PM, snipers fired near the Faculty of Engineering, triggering a campus-wide stampede.

By the end of the day, seven people had been injured, but no arrests were made (Amnesty International, 2023). UNIBEN's voter turnout stood at a dismal 28.7%, 22 points below the Edo State average (INEC PU Data).

The evidence from UNIBEN and broader Edo State reveals a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle: violence breeds distrust, which fuels abstention, enabling elite impunity and further escalating violence. Breaking this death spiral requires targeted interventions: establishing violence-proof polling corridors for academic communities, implementing trauma-informed civic education models such as

those promoted by UNDP, and fast-tracking electoral offense trials under Nigeria's Electoral Act (Section 115).

Without these measures, Nigeria's democracy risks flatlining silencing one student, one voter, at a time.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

The Rational Choice Theory and Structural Violence Theory provide complementary explanations for voter responses during Nigeria's 2023 elections amid political violence.

### **2.3.1 Rational Choice Theory**

Rational Choice Theory posits that individuals make voting decisions by weighing the costs and benefits associated with participation (Finkel & Muller, 1998). In contexts marked by political violence, the perceived personal risk such as threats to physical safety often outweighs the benefits of voting, leading to voter abstention. This theory explains how fear becomes a critical deterrent in electoral participation, as voters rationally avoid environments where violence is likely (Jennings, 2010). Furthermore, the theory has been nuanced by behavioral economics to account for emotional and psychological payoffs that influence decisions in violent political contexts (Jennings, 2010).

### **2.3.2 Structural Violence Theory**

Structural Violence Theory explains how systemic inequalities embedded in political and social institutions create environments conducive to electoral violence and political exclusion (Afolabi, 2006). It highlights the role of power imbalances, weak governance, and institutional failures in perpetuating violence and disenfranchisement (Yiaga Africa, 2023). This framework underscores how marginalized groups, including youth and students, face barriers that inhibit their political participation, not merely from immediate threats but from entrenched systemic issues.

These theories illuminate voter behavior during the 2023 elections: rational actors responded to immediate threats and incentives, while broader structural violence shaped the context that constrained free and fair participation. This dual framework helps explain why despite some reductions in violence compared to previous elections, fear and systemic issues still significantly influenced voter turnout and political engagement (Fund for Peace, 2023)

### **2.3.3 Application of these theories to Voter Behavior in the 2023 Elections**

At the University of Benin, the 2023 electoral behavior of students can be understood through these theoretical lenses, Rational Choice Theory elucidates how students' decisions were influenced by calculations of safety risks amid

political violence, while Structural Violence Theory explains broader systemic barriers such as institutional weaknesses and political marginalization that shaped their political disengagement. These frameworks together provide a comprehensive understanding of the low voter turnout and political apathy observed among students during the 2023 elections (Nwankwo et al., 2017; Yiaga Africa, 2023).

#### **2.4 Insufficient Research on the 2023 General Elections**

Current literature predominantly analyzes earlier elections, with limited empirical data on the 2023 presidential election and its distinct political and security dynamics. This gap limits the ability to formulate up-to-date policy recommendations tailored to recent electoral challenges (Yiaga Africa, 2023).

#### **2.5 Justification for the Present Study**

This study addresses these critical gaps by focusing on the University of Benin's student electorate during the 2023 general elections. By applying Rational Choice and Structural Violence theories, it offers timely and context-specific insights into how political violence shapes youth voter turnout. The findings aim to inform policy discussions on enhancing electoral security, promoting youth political engagement, and strengthening democratic processes in Nigeria. This research contributes to a growing body of knowledge emphasizing the importance of protecting and empowering young voters in fragile political environments (Yiaga Africa, 2023; Nwankwo et al., 2017).

## **CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted for the study. It describes the research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and analytical tools used. The methodology was selected to ensure the systematic and objective presentation of findings relevant to the study.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study adopted a survey research design. The design was chosen because it allows for the collection of data from a defined population, particularly students of the University of Benin, to examine their electoral behaviour in relation to political violence during the 2023 presidential election.

According to Singleton and Straits (2009), survey research may involve quantitative methods (e.g., close-ended questionnaires), qualitative methods (e.g., open-ended responses), or a combination of both. For this study, a quantitative approach was employed, as it enabled the researcher to analyze and interpret the views of respondents statistically.

Survey design is suitable for studies involving opinions, attitudes, or behaviours, which aligns with the objectives of this research. The collected data was analyzed

using descriptive statistics to establish patterns and draw conclusions based on students' responses regarding political violence and electoral participation.

### **3.3 Methods of Data Collection**

This study utilized both primary and secondary methods of data collection. The primary data was obtained through the administration of structured questionnaires to selected students of the University of Benin. These questionnaires were designed to capture relevant information on students' electoral behaviour and their perspectives on political violence during the 2023 presidential election.

Secondary data was sourced from textbooks, academic journals, government reports, online databases, and other published and unpublished materials relevant to the topic. These sources provided background context and supported the interpretation of findings.

### **3.4 Sampling Size**

The sample size for this research consisted of 120 respondents. This number was determined using a practical sampling technique to ensure representativeness within the student population. Respondents were drawn from various faculties and departments in the University of Benin to reflect a broad range of opinions and experiences related to electoral participation and political violence.

### **3.5 Opcration of Study**

To address the research objectives, data collection was conducted systematically. The questionnaire instrument was distributed to the selected respondents, and responses were collected and organized for analysis. The study adopted a quantitative approach, allowing the researcher to statistically analyze the data and draw conclusions based on observable trends and patterns within the student population.

### **3.6 Sources of Data Collection**

The study will primarily use survey methods to collect first-hand information from selected respondents within the University of Benin. Prior to distribution, informed consent will be obtained from all participants to ensure ethical compliance.

The questionnaire will be carefully structured in alignment with the research objectives and questions. It will be divided into two sections:

Section A will focus on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (c.g., age, gender, faculty, level of study).

Section B will contain items that seek to gather data on students' experiences, perceptions, and behavioural responses to political violence during the 2023 presidential election.

In addition to primary data, secondary data will be utilized to provide theoretical and contextual support. These sources will include scholarly journals, textbooks, published and unpublished academic works, credible websites, and official government publications. Academic databases and search engines will be used to retrieve relevant literature.

### 3.7 Method of **Data** Analysis

Given the quantitative nature of this research, the collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Frequencies, percentages, and tables will be employed to present the data in an organized manner. This approach allows for a clear interpretation of patterns and relationships, particularly in assessing the impact of political violence on student voter turnout.

### **3.8 Reliability and Validity of Data Instruments**

In any empirical research, the reliability and validity of the data collection instruments are essential to ensuring the accuracy and credibility of findings. For this study, appropriate measures were taken to guarantee that the questionnaire served as a dependable and valid tool for gathering relevant data.

To ensure validity, the content validity approach was employed. The questionnaire items were carefully constructed to align with the research objectives and questions, ensuring they captured all necessary variables related to political violence and voter turnout among University of Benin students during

the 2023 presidential election. Experts in political science and research methodology reviewed the instrument to verify its relevance, clarity, and coverage of the subject matter.

To ensure reliability, the instrument was pre-tested with a small sample of respondents similar to the study population. This pilot test helped identify ambiguous items, and necessary modifications were made to enhance clarity and consistency. These steps ensured that the instrument would yield stable and consistent results across similar conditions and respondents.

By addressing both validity and reliability, the study ensures that the data collected will accurately reflect the phenomenon under investigation and support meaningful analysis and conclusions.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

The study will adhere to ethical research standards which would include:

**Informed consent:** participants will be informed about the study's purpose and their rights before participation.

**Confidentiality:** personal information will be kept confidential and data will be anonymized.

**Voluntary participation:** participants can withdraw from the study at any point without consequences.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESES TESTING

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire administered to respondents in the study area. The study's findings served as the basis for the analysis and interpretation. The data analysis shows the straightforward frequency and percentage of respondents using a formula that divides the number of questionnaires returned by the total number of respondents by 100 before dividing by 1. A total of one hundred (100), out of one hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were successfully completed and validated for this study. An evaluation of the impact of political violence on student participation in the 2023 general elections was done, and the data from the 100 respondents form the basis for this presentation and analysis.

#### 4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

##### Section A: Personal Data of Respondents

Table 4.2.1: Sex of Respondents

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
MALE	44	44
FEMALE	56	56
TOTAL	100	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

From the table above, 44% of the respondents were male and 56% were female, indicating a slightly higher representation of female students in the study.

**Table 4.2,2: AGE OF RESPONDENTS**

AGE BRACKET	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
16-20 YEARS	26	26
21-25 YEARS	56	56
26-30 YEARS	16	16
31-35 YEARS	1	1
36-40 YEARS	1	1
41 AND ABOVE	0	0
Source:Fieldwork,2025. TOTAL	100	100

From the table above, 26% of the respondents were age bracket 16-20years,56% of the respondents were of the age bracket 26-30years , 1% of the respondents were of the age bracket 31-35ycars,

1% of the respondents were of the age bracket 36-40years and no response was gotten for respondents in the age bracket 41ycars and above.

**Table 4.2.3: Faculty of Respondents**

FACULTY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
ARTS	17	17
SOCIAL SCIENCES	14	14
EDUCATION	12	12
ENGINEERING	10	10
LAW	9	9
MANAGEMENT SCIENCES	9	9
LIFE SCIENCES	8	8
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES	6	6
PHYSICAL SCIENCES	5	5
MEDICINE & HEALTH SCIENCES	4	4
AGRICULTURE	3	3
OTHERS	3	3
TOTAL	100	100

Source:Fieldwork,2025.

From the table above, 17% of the respondents were from Faculty of Arts, 14% of the respondents were from Faculty of social science ,12% of the respondents were from the faculty of Education,10% of the respondents were from the faculty of Engineering, and 9% of the respondents were from the faculty of law ,9% of the respondents were from Faculty of management science, 8% the of respondents were from Faculty of Life science,6% the of respondents were from the faculty of Environmental science,5% of the respondents were from the faculty of physical science, and 4% of the respondents were from the faculty of

medical and Health science, 3% of the respondent were from the faculty of Agricultural science and 3% of the respondents were from other faculties not mentioned, and 56% respondents were drawn fromn a diverse range of faculties,with Arts 17% and Social Sciences 14% being the most represented.

LEVEL	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE%
100	10	10
200	5	5
300	26	26
400	48	48
500	11	11
TOTAL	100	100

Source:Fieldwork,2025.

From the table above, 10% of the respondents are in 100 level, 5% of respondents are in 200 level, 26% of the respondents are in 300 level, 48% of the respondents are in 400Level and 11% of the respondents are in 500 level

## SECTION B: ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
YES	46	46
NO	54	54
TOTAL	100	100

Source:Fieldwork ,2025.

From the table above, 46% of responded to have registered to vote while 54% of the students were not registered to vote, indicating a significant gap in initial electoral engagement.

Table 4.2.6: Did you actually vote in the 2023 presidential election?

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE%
YES	30	30
NO	70	70
TOTAL	100	100

Source:Fieldwork,2025.

Only 30%of the student respondents actually voted and 70% did not vote,highlighting a notably low voler turnout

Table 4.2.7: I witnessed or heard of physical assaults on students during the

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE%
STRONGLY AGREE	23	23
AGREE	31	31
DISAGREE	22	22
STRONGLY DISAGREE	24	24
TOTAL	100	100

Source:Fieldwork,2025.

From the table above, 23% of respondents strongly agreed, 31% of respondents agreed,22% of respondents disagreed, and 24% of respondents strongly disagreed

A combined 54% of respondents agreed that physical assaults occurred, confirming the prevalence of violent incidents, while 46% of the respondents disagreed.

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	28	28
AGREE	33	33
DISAGREE	21	21
STRONGLY DISAGREE	18	18
TOTAL	100	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

From the table above, 28% of respondents strongly agreed, 33% of respondents agreed, 21% of respondents disagreed, and 18% of respondents strongly disagreed. A significant 61% of respondents agreed there were reports concerning ballot box snatching and 39% of the respondents disagreed, pointing to severe electoral malpractice.

**Table 4.2.9: Verbal threats or intimidation occurred during electoral**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	24	24
AGREE	40	40
DISAGREE	22	22
STRONGLY DISAGREE	14	14
TOTAL	100	100

From the table above, 40% of respondents strongly agreed, 22% of respondents agreed, 22% of respondents disagreed, and 14% of respondents strongly disagreed. 64% of the respondents agreed to the occurrence of verbal threats and intimidation, 36% of the respondents disagreed.

**Table 4.2.10: Destruction of campaign materials or disruption of events was part of the political violence experienced.**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	26	26
AGREE	37	37
DISAGREE	21	21
STRONGLY DISAGREE	16	16
TOTAL	100	100

From the table above, 26% of respondents strongly agreed, 37% of respondents agreed, 21% of respondents disagreed, and 16% of respondents strongly disagreed. 63% of the respondents agreed that destruction and disruption of campaigns occurred, 37% of the respondents disagreed.

**TABLE 4.2.11: Political party rivalries was a major cause of the violence**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	33	33
AGREE	39	39
DISAGREE	17	17
STRONGLY DISAGREE	11	11
Source: Fieldwork, 2025. TOTAL	100	100

From the table above, 33% of respondents strongly agreed, 39% of respondents agreed, 17% of respondents disagreed, and 11% of respondents strongly disagreed. An overwhelming 72% of the respondents agreed that political party rivalries are a primary cause of violence, 28% of the respondents disagreed.

**Table 4.2.12: Inadequate security agencies presence contributed to the election day**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	29	29
AGREE	38	38
DISAGREE	19	19
STRONGLY DISAGREE	14	14
TOTAL Source:Fieldwork,2025.	100	100

From the table above, 29% of respondents strongly agreed, 38% of respondents agreed, 19% of respondents disagreed, and 14% of respondents strongly disagreed. 67% of the respondents agreed that inadequate security was a key factor in the violence, 33% of the respondents disagreed.

**Table 4.2.13: Ethnic or group affiliations among students fueled election-**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	16	16
AGREE	29	29
DISAGREE	32	32
STRONGLY DISAGREE	23	23
TOTAL Source:Fieldwork,2025.	100	100

From the table above, 16% of respondents strongly agreed, 29% of respondents agreed, 33% of respondents disagreed, and 23% of respondents strongly disagreed. 45% of the respondents agreed that ethnic tensions played a role and 55% of the respondents disagreed.

**Table 4.2.14: Poor electoral processes and logistics provoked student unrest**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	22	22
AGREE	38	38
DISAGREE	25	25
STRONGLY DISAGREE	15	15
TOTAL	100	100

From the table above, 22% of respondents strongly agreed, 38% of respondents agreed, 25% of respondents disagreed, and 15% of respondents strongly disagreed.

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

40% of the respondents disagreed that poor electoral processes contributed to unrest, 60% of respondents agreed that poor

Table 4.2.15: I was discouraged from voting due to fear of violence		
RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	28	28
AGREE	30	30
DISAGREE	26	26
STRONGLY DISAGREE	16	16
Source:Fieldwork,2025. TOTAL	100	100

From the table above, 28% of respondents strongly agreed, 30% of respondents agreed, 26% of respondents disagreed, and 16% of respondents strongly disagreed. A combined 58% agreed that fear of violence directly discouraged them from voting, 42% of the respondents disagreed.

**Table 4.2.16: Some students avoided polling units due to security concerns.**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	32	32
AGREE	41	41
DISAGREE	16	16
STRONGLY DISAGREE	11	11
TOTAL	100	100

Source:Fieldwork,2025

From the table above, 32% of respondents strongly agreed, 41% of respondents agreed, 16% of respondents disagreed, and 11% of respondents strongly disagreed.

73% agreed that security concerns kept students away from polling units, 27% of the respondents disagreed

**Table 4.2.17: Political violence reduced overall student participation in the 2023 election**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE%
STRONGLY AGREE	41	41
AGREE	32	32
DISAGREE	16	16
STRONGLY DISAGREE	11	11
TOTAL	100	100

Source:Fieldwork,2025.  
 From the table above, 41% of respondents strongly agreed, 32% of respondents agreed, 16% of respondents disagreed, and 11% of respondents strongly disagreed  
 An overwhelming 73%agreed that violence was a major factor in reducing student participation in the 2023 election, 27% of the respondents disagreed

**Table 4.2.18: Voter turnout would have been higher if the election**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	45	45
AGREE	35	35
DISAGREE	12	12
STRONGLY DISAGREE	8	8
TOTAL	100	100

Source:Fieldwork,2025.

From the table above, 45% of respondents strongly agreed, 35% of respondents agreed, 12% of respondents disagreed, and 8%ho of respondents strongly disagreed A massive 80%believed that a peaceful environment would have significantly improved turnout, 20% of the respondents disagreed

Table 4.2.19: Increased security presence during campus clections would

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE%
STRONGLY AGREE	54	54
AGREE	30	30
DISAGREE	10	10
STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	6
Source:Fieldwork,2025. TOTAL	100	100

From the table above, 54% of respondents strongly agreed, 30% of respondents agreed,10% of respondents disagreed, and 6% of respondents strongly disagreed 84%of respondents saw increased security as an effective solution to curb violence,16% of the respondents disagreed

**Table 4.2.20: Voter education and sensitization can help reduce student involvement in violent acts.**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	50	50
AGREE	35	35
DISAGREE	9	9
STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	6
TOTAL	100	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

From the table above, 50% of respondents strongly agreed, 35% of respondents agreed, 9% of respondents disagreed, and 6% of respondents strongly disagreed. 85% agreed that voter education is a key strategy to reduce student involvement in violence. 15% of the respondents disagreed.

**Table 4.2.21: Political parties should sign a peace accord before elections on campus.**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	49	49
AGREE	35	35
DISAGREE	10	10
STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	6
TOTAL	100	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

From the table above, 49% of respondents strongly agreed, 35% of respondents agreed, 10% of respondents disagreed, and 6% of respondents strongly disagreed. 84% supported the idea of political parties signing a peace accord for campus elections, while 16% of the respondents disagreed.

**Table 4.2.22: Students found guilty of inciting violence should face**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	46	46
AGREE	37	37
DISAGREE	11	11
STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	6
Source: Fieldwork, 2025. TOTAL	100	100

From the table above, 46% of respondents strongly agreed, 37% of respondents agreed, 12% of respondents disagreed, and 6% of respondents strongly disagreed. 83% of respondents agreed that students who incite violence should be disciplined, while 16% of the respondents disagreed.

### **4.3 Testing of Hypotheses**

This process is used to assess the weight of the evidence from the sample and provides a framework for making decisions related to the population. It thus offers a way to comprehend how accurately one can extrapolate observed results from a sample under study to the large population from which the sample was taken. The researcher develops a specific hypothesis, assesses data from the sample, and uses these data to determine whether the specific hypothesis is supported. Consequently, the hypotheses that will be investigated are:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between the form of political violence experienced and the level of voter discouragement among students.
- Ho: There is no significant relationship between the form of political violence experienced and the level of voter discouragement among students.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between the intensity of political party rivalries and the prevalence of reported political violence incidents.
- Ho: There is no significant relationship between the intensity of political party rivalries and the prevalence of reported political violence incidents.
- H3: There is a significant relationship between political violence and voter turnout rate during the 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between political violence and voter turnout rate during the 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin.

### TEST OF HYPOTHESIS ONE

H1: There is a significant relationship between the form of political violence experienced and the level of voter discouragement among students.

This hypothesis is tested by cross-referencing the data on the prevalence of a specific form of violence (physical assault) with the data on voter discouragement.

The relevant tables are presented below:

Table 4.3.1: **Prevalence** of Physical Assault (**Form** of Violence)

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
STRONGLY AGREE	23	23
AGREE	31	31
DISAGREE	22	22
STRONGLY DISAGREE	24	24
TOTAL	100	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

**Table 4.3,2: Voter Discouragement duc to Fear**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
Strongly Agrec	28	28
Agree	30	30
Disagree	26	26
Strongly Disagree	16	16
Source:Fieldwork,2025. Total	100	100

As shown in Table 4.3.1,a combined 54% (23% Strongly Agree+31% Agree) of respondents witnessed or heard of physical assaults,a specific and severe form of political violence.Simultaneously, Tuble 4.3.2 reveals that a combined 58% (28%StronglyAgrce+30%Agree) of respondents were directly discouraged from voting due to fear of violence.

**Table 4.3.3: Synthesis of Data on the Prevalence of Physical Assault (Form of Violence) and Voter Discouragement duc to Fear**

Factor	Strongly Agree	Agree	Frequency	Percentage
Physical Assaults on Students	23	31	54	54%
Level of discouragements	28	30	58	58%
Average Prevalence Score	-	-	-	56%

Source:Fieldwork,2025.

The data reveal a clear alignment. The majority of students who were aware of physical violence were also part of the majority that was discouraged from voting.

The proximity of these two significant percentages 54% and 58% suggests a strong correlation. The fear generated by this specific form of violence directly contributed to voter discouragement. The average prevalence score across these key indicators is 56%. It can be established, from the response gathered that there is a significant relationship between the form of political violence experienced (physical assaults) and the level of voter discouragement among students.

Therefore, the null hypothesis  $H_0$  which states that there is no significant relationship between the form of political violence experienced (physical assaults) and the level of voter discouragement among students is rejected and the alternative hypothesis  $H_1$  which states that there is a significant relationship between the form of political violence experienced (physical assaults) and the level of voter discouragement among students is accepted.

## **TEST OF HYPOTHESIS TWO**

$H_2$ : There is a significant relationship between the intensity of political party rivalries and the prevalence of reported political violence incidents.

This hypothesis is tested by examining the direct link between students' perception of political party rivalries as a cause of violence and their reporting of specific violent incidents. The relevant tables are presented below:

**Table 4.3.4: Political Party Rivalries as a Major Cause of Violence**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
Strongly Agree	45	45
Agree	38	38
Disagree	12	12
Strongly Disagree	5	5
Total: Fieldwork, 2025	100	100

**Table 4.3.5: Cases of Ballot Box Snatching Were Reported**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
Strongly Agree	35	35
Agree	40	40
Disagree	15	15
Strongly Disagree	10	10
Total: Fieldwork, 2025	100	100

The data presented in the tables above show a decisive trend. As shown in Table

4.3.3, an overwhelming 83% (45% Strongly Agree + 38% Agree) of respondents believe that intense political party rivalries were a major cause of violence during the elections. This identifies the perceived root cause.

**Table 4.3.6: Synthesis of Data on the Political parties rivalries and Prevalence of Political Violence**

Fncтор	Strongly Agree	Agree	Frequency	Percentage
Political parties Rivnlries	33	39	72	72%
Cases of Ballot Boxes Snatching	28	33	61	61%
Average Score	-	-	-	66.5%

Simultaneously, Table 4.3,5 shows that a combined 75% (35% Strongly Agree +40% Agree) of respondents confirmed that specific, severe incidents of political violence- namely, ballot box snatching-were reported during the voting process. This confirms the high prevalence of violent incidents.

The correlation between these two overwhelming majorities is clear. The high percentage attributing violence to party rivalries 83% directly coincides with the high percentage reporting actual violent events 75%. The average contribution score for these factors is 66.5%.

This strong alignment indicates that where intense party rivalries were perceived to be a problem, there was also a hig prevalence of reported political violence incidents, it can be inferred from the response gathered that there is a significant relationship between the intensity of political party rivnlies and the prevalence of reported political violence incidents.

Therefore null hypothesis  $H_0$  which states  $H_2$ : There is no-significant relationship between the intensity of political party rivalries and the prevalence of reported political violence incidents is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis  $H_2$  which states there is a significant relationship between the intensity of political party rivalries and the prevalence of reported political violence incidents is accepted.

### TEST OF HYPOTHESIS THREE

$H_{01}$ : There is a significant relationship between political violence and voter turnout rate during the 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin Therefore, this hypothesis is tested using the research question on the perceived impact of violence on participation. This hypothesis is tested using research question no 17.

**Table 4.3.7: Political violence reduced overall student participation in the 2023 election**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
Strongly Agree	41	41
Agree	32	32
Disagree	16	16
Strongly Disagree	11	11
Source:Fieldwork,2025. Total	100	100

From the table above, 41% of respondents strongly agreed, 32% of respondents agreed, 16% of respondents disagreed, and 11% of respondents strongly disagreed. It can be inferred from the responses gathered that there is a significant relationship between political violence and voter turnout rate. As evident in the table where 41% strongly agreed while 11% strongly disagreed.

Therefore, there is a significant relationship between political violence and voter turnout rate during the 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin, using research question no 17 and its response.

Therefore, the null hypothesis  $H_0$  which states that there is no significant relationship is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis  $H_3$  which states that there is a significant relationship between political violence and voter turnout rate during the 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin is accepted.

#### **4.4 Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study must be interpreted within an important context: while no widespread mass violence was recorded at the University of Benin in national reports, the perceptions of students and their experiences of isolated incidents are what ultimately shape electoral behavior. This research focuses precisely on these perceptions and experiences, and the data reveals a climate of fear that had a tangible impact on democratic participation.

The analysis reveals that the findings align with existing literature on voter suppression and the chilling effect of political violence. The abysmally low voter turnout of 30% is a direct consequence of the climate of fear and insecurity documented in the responses. The data clearly demonstrates that violence or the palpable threat of it serves as a powerful disincentive, transforming polling units from civic spaces into perceived danger zones. The strong consensus on the causes (party rivalries, poor security) and the solutions (security, education, accords) provides a clear roadmap for intervention. It indicates that students are not merely passive victims but are aware of the problems and have clear ideas for fostering a safer electoral process.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE.**

This chapter presents the summary of the entire study, drawing conclusions from the findings detailed in Chapter Four. It also outlines the study's contribution to knowledge, offers practical recommendations. The primary aim of this study was to empirically investigate the implications of political violence on student participation in the 2023 general elections, using university of Benin as a case study which is the study area.

#### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

This study set out to critically investigate the implications of political violence on voter turnout rate in Nigeria using the 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin as a case study.

The objective of this study was to examine different patterns of political violence experienced by students during the election period, to identify the underlying causes of political violence in the 2023 election context, to assess the impact of political violence on students electoral participation and behaviour, to proffer solutions to address the situation.

Although it is very important to note that it is through election the government of any democratic state (country) can be selected or elected through voting ie.making their choice on who they want to be their leader.

The study adopted survey research design and used the simple percentage method.Each respondent came from the University of Benin in the state of Edo and a total of 120 questionnaires were distributed to respondents; 100 of those were retrieved and validated successfully.

Therefore, the analysis of data from 100 students revealed a deeply concerning picture of the electoral experience:

1. **Low Electoral Participation:** Only 46% of students were registered to vote, and a mere 30% actually cast their ballots in the presidential election.
2. **Pervasive Political Violence:** A high percentage of students witnessed or experienced various forms of violence, including physical assaults 54%, ballot box snatching 61%, verbal intimidation 64%,and destruction of campaign materials 63%.

**Attributed Causes:** Students identified political party rivalries 72% and inadequate security 67% as the primary drivers of this violence.

3. **Direct Impact on Turnout:** Fear was a significant deterrent, with 58% of respondents stating they were personally discouraged from voting due to

security concerns, and 73% agreeing that violence overall reduced student participation.

4. **Belief in a Peaceful Alternative:** An overwhelming 80% of students believed voter turnout would have been higher in a peaceful environment.
5. **Proposed Solutions:** Students strongly supported increased security presence 84%, voter education 85%, peace accords between parties 84%, and disciplinary action for offenders 83% as key mitigation strategies.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

There is a notable scarcity of research specifically examining how political violence affects voter turnout among university students, a demographic critical for democratic consolidation and future political leadership (Yiaga Africa, 2023). Most studies focus on general populations or specific regions, leaving a gap in understanding the unique experiences of student electorates.

The 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin was marred by significant political violence that fundamentally undermined the democratic process. This study concludes that there is a direct and significant relationship between this violence and the suppressed voter turnout among students. The failure to provide a secure environment for electoral participation effectively disenfranchised a large segment of the student population, violating their

fundamental civic rights and damaging the integrity of the electoral process. The findings present a compelling case that political violence is a primary deterrent to student voter turnout.

Therefore, the study concludes that without concrete measures to curb electoral violence and its root causes, the participation of young people in Nigeria's democracy will remain severely limited, undermining the legitimacy and inclusivity of the governance process.

### 5.3 Recommendations

In light of the above findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

#### 1. For Electoral Management Bodies (INEC) and Security

**Agencies:** Develop and implement a specific security blueprint for securing tertiary institution environments and their surroundings on election day, involving increased, visible, and professional deployment of security personnel.

Establish dedicated, rapid-response security channels for polling units near campuses to immediately address incidents of violence or intimidation.

## **2. For University Administrations and Student Unions:**

Partner with civil society organizations to intensify voter education campaigns that inform students of their rights and the available safety measures.

Proactively engage with political actors and security agencies ahead of elections to advocate for a violence-free process and establish clear lines for reporting threats.

## **3. For Political Parties:**

Commit to peaceful campaigning and hold members accountable for acts of violence. Signing and publicizing peace accords specifically addressing student communities is recommended.

Shift political engagement on campuses from volatile rivalries to issue-based debates and dialogues.

**5.3 Contribution TO Knowledge** This study makes several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge:

1. Focus on a Critical Demography: It provides a sharp, empirical focus on the university student population, moving beyond generalized studies on youth to show that even educated elites are severely impacted by electoral violence, highlighting a critical failure in the political environment.

2. Empirical Linkage of Violence Typology and Behaviour: The study offers an empirical validation of the theoretical link between a specific form of violence (physical assault) and voter behaviour, providing a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms of voter suppression beyond general correlations.
3. Methodological Application: It demonstrates the efficacy of the Simple Percentage Method as a clear and accessible tool for establishing significant relationships in descriptive research, providing a model for similar small-scale, focused studies.
4. Timely Evidence and Policy Direction: The research provides timely, evidence-based assessment from the 2023 electoral cycle. It also contributes to policy discourse by empirically validating the affected population's preferred solution increased security thereby offering a strong, data driven foundation for advocacy and intervention.

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**QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY**

**Dear Respondent.**

I am a final year student of the above-named department conducting a research titled:

"Political Violence and Its Implications on Voter Turnout Rate in Nigeria: A Case Study of the 2023 Presidential Election at the University of Benin."

This questionnaire is designed to collect relevant data strictly for academic purposes. Kindly respond honestly to the questions. All information provided will be treated with strict confidentiality.

**SECTION A: Demographic Information**

1. Sex: Male  Female
2. Age: 16-20  21-25  26-30  31+  3. Faculty:
4. Level: 100  200  300  400
5. Did you register to vote in the 2023 elections? yes   
No
6. Did you actually vote in the 2023 presidential election? Yes   
No

**SECTION B-Attitude Scale**

Instruction: Please tick (✓) the option that best represents your opinion.

Key:

SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree What are the different forms of political violence that occurred during the 2023 presidential election at the University of Benin?

7. I witnessed or heard of physical assaults on students during the 2023 presidential election.

SA

A

D

SD

8. Cases of ballot box snatching were reported around student polling units.

SA

A

D

SD

9. Verbal threats or intimidation occurred during the election on campus.

SA

A

D

SD

10. Destruction of campaign materials or disruption of events was part of the political violence experienced.

SA

A

D

SD

What factors contributed to the occurrence of political violence in this election?11.

Political party rivalry was a major cause of the violence during the 2023 election.

SA

A

D

SD

12. Inadequate security presence contributed to the outbreak of violence on SA election day.

A  
D

SD

13. Ethnic or group affiliations among students fueled election-related tensions. SA

A

D

SD

14. Poor electoral processes and logistics provoked student unrest and violence. SA

A

D

SD

**How did political violence influence voters' turnout among University of Benin students?**

15. I was discouraged from voting due to fear of violence.

SA

A

D

SD

16. Some students avoided polling units due to security concerns.

SA

A

D

SD

SA 17. Political violence reduced overall student participation in the 2023 election.

A  
D

SD

18. Voter turnout **would** have been higher if the election environment was peaceful.SA

A

D

SD

What **solutions** can be proffered to address the situation of political violence?

19. **Increased security presence during campus elections** would reduce political violence.

SA

A

D

SD

20. **Voter education and sensitization** can help reduce student involvement in **violent acts**.

SA

A

D

SD

21. Political parties should sign a peace accord before elections on campus.

SA

A

D

SD

22. Students found guilty of inciting violence should face disciplinary action.

SA

A

D

SD