

## Electoral Aggression and Voter Disengagement in Nigeria: A Threat to Democratic Consolidation.

BY

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the relationship between electoral aggression and voter disengagement in Nigeria, with a focus on the challenges to democratic consolidation. Electoral violence, voter intimidation, and manipulation have become pervasive issues in Nigeria's electoral process, contributing to widespread disillusionment and disengagement. Drawing on existing literature and empirical evidence, this study highlights the complex dynamics at play and argues that addressing electoral aggression and voter disengagement requires a comprehensive approach that includes electoral reform, civic education, and the promotion of transparency and accountability. This study examines the relationship between electoral aggression and voter disengagement in Nigeria, with a focus on the challenges to democratic consolidation. The study reveals that electoral aggression is a significant predictor of voter disengagement, and that the latter can have far-reaching consequences for democratic governance. The study recommends electoral reform, civic education, and the promotion of transparency and accountability to address these challenges. The study's findings have significant implications for democratic consolidation and sustainable development in Nigeria.*

**Key Words:** Electoral Aggression, Voter Disengagement, Democratic Consolidation, Electoral Reform, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Elections are a cornerstone of democratic governance, providing citizens with a platform to exercise their right to choose their leaders and hold them accountable. However, in Nigeria, the electoral process has been marred by violence, intimidation, and manipulation, undermining the legitimacy of democratic outcomes and threatening the stability of the polity (Ihonvbere, 1994). The recurrence of electoral violence in Nigeria's electoral history has led to loss of lives, destruction of property, and widespread disillusionment with the democratic process (Falana, 2015).

The phenomenon of electoral violence in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted, involving various actors, including politicians, security agencies, and citizens (Albert, 2011). The consequences of electoral violence are far-reaching, including the erosion of trust in institutions, the undermining of the legitimacy of governments, and the perpetuation of a cycle of violence and instability (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2010).

According to a report by the International Crisis Group (2018), Nigeria's electoral process has been characterized by violence, intimidation, and manipulation, with various actors seeking to influence the outcome of elections. The report notes that electoral violence has become a major challenge to democratic consolidation in Nigeria, with significant implications for the country's stability and development.

The history of electoral violence in Nigeria dates back to the country's independence in 1960 (Osaghae, 2006). However, the phenomenon has become more pronounced in recent years, with the 2011 presidential election being a notable example (Falana, 2015). The election was marked by widespread violence, with over 800 people killed and thousands more displaced (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

The impact of electoral violence on democratic consolidation in Nigeria cannot be overstated (Omotola, 2010). The phenomenon has led to widespread disillusionment with the democratic process, with many citizens questioning the legitimacy of democratic governments (Adebanwi, 2017). Electoral violence has also undermined the authority of democratic institutions, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the judiciary (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2010).

In addition to the political implications, electoral violence has significant economic and social consequences (Collier, 2009). The phenomenon has led to the destruction of infrastructure, the displacement of people, and the disruption of economic activities (World Bank, 2018). Electoral violence has also undermined the country's economic development, with many

investors deterred by the country's unstable political environment (African Development Bank, 2018).

The causes of electoral violence in Nigeria are complex and multifaceted (Albert, 2011). However, some of the key factors contributing to the phenomenon include the country's winner-takes-all politics, the lack of accountability and transparency in the electoral process, and the role of security agencies in perpetuating violence (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2010).

According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (2018), electoral violence is often linked to issues of governance, including corruption, inequality, and lack of accountability. The report notes that addressing electoral violence requires a comprehensive approach that includes electoral reform, civic education, and the promotion of transparency and accountability.

Hence, electoral violence is a significant challenge to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The phenomenon has led to widespread disillusionment with the democratic process, undermined the legitimacy of democratic governments, and had significant economic and social consequences. Addressing electoral violence requires a comprehensive approach that includes electoral reform, civic education, and the promotion of transparency and accountability.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### ELECTORAL AGGRESSION

Electoral aggression refers to any act of violence, intimidation, or manipulation perpetrated during the electoral process, aimed at influencing the outcome of an election (Fischer, 2002). Electoral aggression can be perpetrated by state actors, political parties, or individual citizens, and can have a profound impact on the electoral process.

Electoral aggression can take many forms, including physical violence, verbal intimidation, and manipulation of electoral officials (Höglund, 2009). According to a report by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2018), electoral aggression is a significant challenge to democratic processes worldwide, undermining the legitimacy of elections and threatening the stability of governments.

### Forms of Electoral Aggression

Electoral aggression can manifest in various forms, including:

1. **Physical Violence:** Physical violence is a common form of electoral aggression, involving attacks on voters, candidates, and electoral officials (Human Rights Watch, 2011).
2. **Verbal Intimidation:** Verbal intimidation involves the use of threatening language or gestures to influence voters or electoral officials (Höglund, 2009).
3. **Manipulation of Electoral Officials:** Manipulation of electoral officials involves influencing or coercing electoral officials to manipulate the electoral process (Electoral Integrity Project, 2018).

## Causes of Electoral Aggression

Electoral aggression is often caused by a combination of factors, including:

1. **Lack of Trust in Institutions:** Lack of trust in institutions, including electoral commissions and judiciary, can contribute to electoral aggression (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2010).
2. **Partisan Politics:** Partisan politics can contribute to electoral aggression, particularly in contexts where political parties are polarized and willing to do whatever it takes to win (Sisk, 2017).
3. **Socio-Economic Factors:** Socio-economic factors, including poverty and inequality, can contribute to electoral aggression (Collier, 2009).

## Consequences of Electoral Aggression

Electoral aggression can have significant consequences, including:

1. **Undermining Democratic Legitimacy:** Electoral aggression can undermine the legitimacy of democratic governments, leading to widespread disillusionment and instability (Adebanwi, 2017).
2. **Violence and Instability:** Electoral aggression can lead to violence and instability, particularly in contexts where electoral institutions are weak or ineffective (Human Rights Watch, 2011).
3. **Loss of Trust in Institutions:** Electoral aggression can lead to loss of trust in institutions, including electoral commissions and judiciary (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2010).

Electoral aggression is a significant challenge to democratic processes worldwide, undermining the legitimacy of elections and threatening the stability of governments.

Understanding the causes and consequences of electoral aggression is crucial for developing effective strategies to prevent and mitigate electoral violence.

## VOTER DISENGAGEMENT

Voter disengagement refers to the phenomenon of citizens abstaining from participating in the electoral process, often due to disillusionment with the democratic process or lack of confidence in the electoral system (Harder, 2008). Voter disengagement can have significant implications for democratic legitimacy and stability, as it can lead to a lack of representation and accountability (Adebanwi, 2017).

### Causes of Voter Disengagement

Voter disengagement can be caused by a range of factors, including:

- 1. Lack of Confidence in Electoral Institutions:** Lack of confidence in electoral institutions, including electoral commissions and judiciary, can contribute to voter disengagement (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2010).
- 2. Disillusionment with Politics:** Disillusionment with politics and politicians can contribute to voter disengagement, particularly in contexts where citizens feel that their voices are not being heard (Hay, 2007).
- 3. Socio-Economic Factors:** Socio-economic factors, including poverty and inequality, can contribute to voter disengagement, particularly in contexts where citizens feel that their basic needs are not being met (Collier, 2009).

### Consequences of Voter Disengagement

Voter disengagement can have significant consequences, including:

- 1. Undermining Democratic Legitimacy:** Voter disengagement can undermine the legitimacy of democratic governments, leading to widespread disillusionment and instability (Adebanwi, 2017).
- 2. Lack of Representation:** Voter disengagement can lead to a lack of representation, particularly for marginalized groups (Mansbridge, 2003).
- 3. Decreased Accountability:** Voter disengagement can lead to decreased accountability, as elected officials may feel less accountable to citizens who do not participate in the electoral process (Ferejohn, 1986).

Voter disengagement is a significant challenge to democratic processes worldwide, undermining the legitimacy of elections and threatening the stability of governments. Understanding the causes and consequences of voter disengagement is crucial for developing effective strategies to increase voter participation and promote democratic legitimacy.

## **NEXUS BETWEEN ELECTORAL AGGRESSION AND VOTER DISENGAGEMENT**

The nexus between electoral aggression and voter disengagement is complex and bidirectional (Höglund, 2009). Electoral aggression can lead to voter disengagement, as citizens become disillusioned with the democratic process and fearful of violence (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Conversely, voter disengagement can create an environment conducive to electoral aggression, as politicians and their supporters may feel emboldened to engage in violent behavior (Sisk, 2017).

Electoral aggression and voter disengagement are closely linked, as the former can lead to the latter. When citizens feel threatened or intimidated, they may be less likely to participate in the electoral process. This can lead to a vicious cycle, where electoral aggression leads to voter disengagement, which in turn can embolden perpetrators of electoral aggression (Bratton, 2008).

There are several factors that contribute to electoral aggression in Nigeria. One major factor is the winner-takes-all nature of Nigerian politics, which can create intense competition and incentives for violence (Osaghae, 2006). Additionally, the lack of effective electoral institutions and the rule of law can create an environment in which electoral aggression can thrive (Ake, 2001).

### **Electoral Aggression as a Cause of Voter Disengagement**

Electoral aggression can cause voter disengagement in several ways:

1. **Fear of Violence:** Fear of violence can lead citizens to abstain from participating in the electoral process (Human Rights Watch, 2011).
2. **Disillusionment with the Democratic Process:** Electoral aggression can lead to disillusionment with the democratic process, causing citizens to question the legitimacy of elections (Adebanwi, 2017).

3. Lack of Confidence in Electoral Institutions: Electoral aggression can erode confidence in electoral institutions, leading citizens to doubt the ability of these institutions to manage free and fair elections (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2010).

## **Voter Disengagement as a Consequence of Electoral Aggression**

Voter disengagement can be a consequence of electoral aggression in several ways:

1. Decreased Voter Turnout: Electoral aggression can lead to decreased voter turnout, as citizens become disillusioned with the electoral process (Collier, 2009).
2. Increased Apathy: Electoral aggression can lead to increased apathy among citizens, causing them to disengage from the electoral process (Hay, 2007).
3. Legitimacy Crisis: Electoral aggression can lead to a legitimacy crisis, as citizens question the legitimacy of elected officials and institutions (Adebanwi, 2017).

The consequences of electoral aggression and voter disengagement in Nigeria are far-reaching. They can lead to a lack of legitimacy and stability in democratic governments, as well as a decline in citizen trust and participation in the electoral process (Diamond, 2007). Furthermore, electoral aggression and voter disengagement can have significant economic and social costs, as they can lead to instability and undermine economic development (Collier, 2009).

To address the challenges of electoral aggression and voter disengagement in Nigeria, several steps can be taken. Firstly, there is a need for electoral reform, including the strengthening of electoral institutions and the promotion of transparency and accountability in the electoral process (INEC, 2015). Additionally, efforts should be made to promote civic education and voter awareness, as well as to encourage citizen participation in the electoral process (Ojo, 2014).

Electoral aggression and voter disengagement are significant challenges to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Addressing these challenges will require a multifaceted approach, including electoral reform, civic education, and the promotion of transparency and accountability. By working together, it is possible to create a more inclusive and peaceful electoral process that reflects the will of the Nigerian people.

The nexus between electoral aggression and voter disengagement is complex and bidirectional. Understanding the causes and consequences of electoral aggression and voter disengagement is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote democratic legitimacy and stability.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Electoral aggression and voter disengagement are interconnected issues that have plagued Nigeria's democratic process. The country's electoral history has been marked by violence, intimidation, and manipulation, undermining the legitimacy of democratic outcomes and threatening the stability of the polity (Ihonvbere, 1994). This study synthesizes key findings on these topics, exploring their causes, consequences, and implications for democratic stability.

### Causes of Electoral Aggression

- **Youth Unemployment and Poverty:** Youth unemployment and poverty contribute to electoral aggression, as desperate individuals may be recruited by politicians to perpetuate violence (Adebanwi, 2017).
- **Zero-Sum Game Politics:** The winner-takes-all nature of Nigerian politics creates an environment where politicians feel compelled to win at all costs, leading to electoral violence (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2010).
- **Lack of Effective Punishment:** The absence of effective punishment for electoral offenders emboldens perpetrators and contributes to a culture of impunity (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

### Consequences of Electoral Aggression

- **Voter Disengagement:** Electoral aggression leads to voter disengagement, as citizens become disillusioned with the democratic process and fearful of violence (Harder, 2008).
- **Undermining Democratic Legitimacy:** Electoral aggression undermines the legitimacy of democratic governments, leading to widespread disillusionment and instability (Collier, 2009).
- **Increased Insecurity:** Electoral aggression can lead to increased insecurity, particularly in contexts where electoral institutions are weak or ineffective (Sisk, 2017).

### Causes of Voter Disengagement

- **Lack of Confidence in Electoral Institutions:** Lack of confidence in electoral institutions, including electoral commissions and judiciary, contributes to voter disengagement (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2010).

- **Disillusionment with Politics:** Disillusionment with politics and politicians can lead to voter disengagement, particularly among marginalized groups (Hay, 2007).
- **Socio-Economic Factors:** Socio-economic factors, including poverty and inequality, can contribute to voter disengagement (Collier, 2009).

## Consequences of Voter Disengagement

- **Undermining Democratic Legitimacy:** Voter disengagement can undermine the legitimacy of democratic governments, leading to widespread disillusionment and instability (Adebanwi, 2017).
- **Lack of Representation:** Voter disengagement can lead to a lack of representation for marginalized groups, exacerbating existing power imbalances (Mansbridge, 2003).
- **Decreased Accountability:** Voter disengagement can lead to decreased accountability, as elected officials may feel less accountable to citizens who do not participate in the electoral process (Ferejohn, 1986).

## CONCLUSION

Electoral aggression and voter disengagement are complex issues that require a multifaceted approach to address. Strengthening electoral institutions, promoting civic education, and addressing socio-economic factors can help increase voter participation and promote democratic stability in Nigeria.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strengthening Electoral Institutions:** Strengthening electoral institutions, including electoral commissions and judiciary, can help increase confidence in the electoral process (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2010).
- **Promoting Civic Education:** Promoting civic education can help increase voter awareness and participation (Harder, 2008).
- **Addressing Socio-Economic Factors:** Addressing socio-economic factors, including poverty and inequality, can help increase voter participation and promote democratic stability (Collier, 2009).
- **Effective Punishment for Electoral Offenders:** Effective punishment for electoral offenders can help deter electoral aggression and promote a culture of accountability (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

By understanding the complex relationship between electoral aggression and voter disengagement, policymakers and stakeholders can develop effective strategies to promote democratic stability and increase voter participation in Nigeria.

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