

Effects of Voter Intimidation on Political Participation and Criminality in Politics: A Study of Nigeria's Cross River South Senatorial District

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[0168] Abstract

This research was an examination of the effect of voter intimidation and criminality in politics: a study of Nigeria's Cross River South Senatorial District. Precisely, this study examined the extent at which intimidation of voters relates with criminalization of politics. To lead the research, one research hypothesis and question was raised. Cross-sectional survey study design, requiring the use of qualitative and quantitative methods was adopted. Through the use unstructured interview and questionnaire, a sample of four hundred 400 respondents was selected from the study area using a multi-staged sampling technique. A simple percentage method of data analysis was engaged for the analysis of the research question while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis tool was utilized to test the research hypothesis. The study concludes that intimidation of voters directly relate with criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State particular as well as Nigeria in the general. The research discovered that there is a significant relationship between intimidation of voters and criminalization of politics in the study area. Following the research findings, the subsequent policy recommendations were made among which include: Criminalization of politics in Nigeria needs to be adequately addressed through ensuring that perpetrators of voter's intimidation are adequately prosecuted as prescribed by the Constitution, the Electoral Acts or the Voters Right Act to serve as a deterrence to would be voter's intimidators. The Federal and State Ministries of Education in Nigeria should urgently review their tertiary and secondary school curricula to include voters' education studies as an academic subject. This will assist students at these levels to acquire basic knowledge about election improprieties vis – a -vis intimidation of voters and their implications on the political and economic development of Nigeria as well as the impact on national security.

Keywords: Criminality in politics, Destruction of life and property, Electoral fraud, National Security, Voter Intimidation.

1. Introduction

With the return of civilian government in May, 1999, hopes were high that the new democratic order would tackle the incidence of political improprieties in the country thereby enabling economic and social progress. It is regrettable that since the return of civil rule, political improprieties have reached a dangerous percentage. The Nigerian state and her fledgling democracy have been beset with phenomenal violence and atrocities ranging from those that come in the form of political thuggery, religious crises, like sharia. Niger-Delta militancy, ethno-religious conflicts, Boko Haram insurgency, partisan violence, politically motivated killings all with alleged political connotation (Omodia, 2009; Omotola, 2010).

However, the violence and criminality that characterize Nigerian politics are having a multiplier effect on the country's development. In addition to raising security concerns, the criminalization of politics

in Nigeria undermines peaceful coexistence and law and order; According to Aver, Nnorom, and Targba (2013), it hinders the consolidation of democracy and social coexistence. This, in turn, has an effect on the nation's social and economic well-being and causes social relations to be out of balance (Howell, 2004). According to Aver, Nnorom, and Targba (2013), the Nigerian political scene has been marked by a variety of forms of crime, including corruption, cultism, violence, and unkept promises, to name just a few. Criminality in politics in Nigeria brings a complex set of events such as poverty, ethnic or religious grievances, which affect the social relationship of the people in the society. Those who are able to get around these crimes have limited their political participation. Apathy among voters as a result of various political crimes has also diminished citizens' faith in the government.

According to Gbirevbie (2014), electoral violence has really discouraged citizens' participation in the political process in many states in Nigeria, and this development portends serious danger to Nigeria's democracy because without sufficient turnout, elections would not reflect the people's preference.

It is quite obvious that from the beginning of the 21st century, Nigeria has witnessed unparalleled cases of crimes and insecurity in all areas of human activity. Violence has reached its peak, and Nigeria, which was hitherto a more relatively peaceful country, has suddenly begun to experience unrest. Little wonder, Abdu-Raheem and Bamgbade (2023) noted that the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria, in particular, stand at the vanguard of scholarly examination due to the prevalent electoral irregularities and malpractices that have blemished the democratic process. The authors observed that a spectrum of fraudulent activities, ranging from intimidation of candidates' agents and voters to result inflation, ballot box snatching, political assassinations, unauthorized result announcements, vote-buying, and election rigging, has dominated the discourse.

Since Nigeria's return to participatory democracy in 1999, the nation has not fared better on issues of political accountability, transparency, and good governance. Instead, its body politics have been mired in a crisis of governance, consequent upon mismanagement of national resource, non-accountability, and legitimacy crisis arising from the conduct and administration of her electoral processes. Since 1999, many of Nigeria's elected political leaders obtained their positions by demonstrating an ability to use corruption and deploy violence in order to prevail in sham elections thereby exacerbating the criminalization of politics in the country. In place of free and fair democratic competition, struggles for political offices have been waged violently on the streets of Nigeria's major cities and urban centers by gangs of political thugs and cultists drafted, armed, and deployed by politicians to assist them in seizing control of power at all levels of government through the intimidation of voters and other political aspirants (Human Rights Watch, 2007). The 2022 Electoral Act criminalises intimidation of voters in Section 128(b). Despite the criminalization of this electoral fraud, intimidations of voters persist in the Nigerian state. Intimidation of voters implies the process in which arms and other harmful equipment are used to either compel voters to cast their vote in favour of a candidate which is against their wish or are driven away from polling units in order not to vote for the candidate of their choice.

In their bid to gain access to and/or hold on to political positions, many prominent political figures openly enlist an armed criminal gangs to unleash terror on perceived and real political opponents and ordinary citizens. In Rivers, Oyo, Gombe, Ekiti, Anambra, Delta, Osun, Kwara, Cross River State and scores of other states across the federation, political godfathers and their godsons have enlisted and armed youth gangs to fight opposition figures and their supporters, thereby unleashing reign of terror on the populace. In violent confrontations that characterized election process, particularly the 2015 and 2019 general elections, a number of political personalities were assassinated and property was destroyed, while peace and security of the population was endangered (Human Rights Watch, 2007; Salu & Saka, 2006).

While politicians in Nigeria are noted for their penchant for perverting the political process and sponsoring violence, they do this using the youth as their foot soldiers. Given the sorry state of the nation's economy, unemployment, and pervading poverty, youth, the most productive segment of the population, has become the willing tool for election criminality in the hand of the political elite. The lack of meaningful and productive engagement meant that the youth are willing instruments that can be deployed for dirty assignments by the politicians, who control their loyalty.

The criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District of State is clearly reflected in intimidation of voters which often times compel voters to vote against their wish and interests which is quite undemocratic and grossly defiles the essence of election in every democratic setting. These menace in recent times has been seen to be exacerbating rather than ameliorating as often times those who win the election do not reflect the overall interest of the masses but rather few Godfather's whose interest is to use the office of imposed leaders to amass wealth for personal gains rather than the good of the general populace. The structure and culture (Anomie) theory by Robert K. Merton was used as theoretical anchorage. This theory asserts that when an individual has internalized a certain goal, and when the legitimate means for achieving that goal are blocked, the individual is under pressure to resort to illegitimate means to achieve the goal. The politicians in the context of Nigeria they can achieve their desire in elections through means that are against the generally acceptable principles of electoral process in Nigeria. This implies that during elections, most candidate have realized the fact that winning through free and fair election is obviously impossible based on their existing bad records thus the use of illegitimate means such as intimidation of voters becomes paramount and employed without minding its associated effect of loss of lives and destruction of valuable properties during and after election which all helps in enhancing the criminalization of politics in a democratic country like Nigeria. Therefore, this research article raises the following question: Does intimidation of voters relate to criminalization of politics in the study Cross River South Senatorial District? Arising from the research question the following hypothesis was set. There is no significant relationship between intimidation of voters and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District. The study covers from 2007 to 2023.

The crisis of criminalization of politics in every electoral process in Nigeria is gradually gaining global recognition considering its associated effect in the emerging democracy of the country. The fact that Nigeria elections since independence has been characterized by the intimidation of voters are quite dreadful. Arising from this debilitating crisis, this study sought to examine the effect of voter intimidation on political participation and criminality in politics in Nigeria's Cross River South Senatorial District.

Also, the obvious fact that from the extant literature consulted and used for the study clearly shows that no existing literature has sufficiently dwelt on the effect of voter intimidation on political participation and criminality in Cross River South Senatorial District clearly establish a gap in the literature. Thus, the search to fill this existing gap in the literature thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge makes this study very significant in the scholarship.

2. Literature review

Political Violence and Criminalization of politics in Nigeria According to Obeten (2016), political violence during elections constitutes an illegal interference with the election process. According to Human Right Watch, 2007, reported that one of the victims of political violence perpetrated by the youth in Northern part of Nigeria, lamented that "during the election I was struck by the Kalare members even when I run for my dear life they continue to stone me (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Similarly, the International Human Right Commission (IHRC), in its petitions to its office in 2014 on the alleged extra judicial killing in Gombe state between 2003 and 2009, revealed that over 70 cases of political inspired extra judicial murders. According to the (IHRC) reports published in newspapers on the 06 of Jan 2014, and sign by its Nigerian Ambassador that the Kalare thugs harassed, intimidated, assaulted, tortured and brutally murder many innocent citizens in Gombe

state. The reports also stated that among the victim was a man who was burnt with his two Sons in his house, a renowned politician and business man Hon Isa Magaji who also contested for house of assembly in 2007 who defected from the PDP to the defunct Action Congress of Nigeria (CAN) was strangled to death and his body was abandoned in his car in a mysterious circumstance (IHRC, 2014).

Report from the print media further indicate that political thugs vandalized over 13 cars at a PDP rally at the Northern Senatorial District campaign in Dukku local Government Area of Gombe State few minutes before the end of the campaign when the armed thugs realized that official are not willing to give them their welfare of 50,000 as promised forcing other supporters to run for their dear lives (David, 2015).

The criminalization of politics means the participation of criminals in politics. This clearly means that persons with criminal background and intention contest in the election and get elected through insidious ideological means such as intimidation of voters, to represent the people in the government of the day. In a democratic country like Nigeria, the increasing nexus between criminals and politics threatens the survival of true democracy. It is now becoming a trend; people with criminal backgrounds have more influence in politics than people without criminal backgrounds.

It is said that the politics of Nigeria has reached a stage where the lawmakers became the lawbreakers. Political office holders are now criminals threatening the survival of democracy in Nigeria. And through the use of political power election in Nigeria are vigorously rigged without considering the interest of the masses. Politics in Nigeria has been called a “do or die” affair. The political atmosphere in the country has been one tension or crimes as various vices operation. The politicians will use any means to get into power and this is usually made manifest during election periods when various forms of election malpractices is the order of the day. There is the election rigging, stealing of ballot boxes, intimidation and threat to opponents, assault, assassination, harassment, maiming and killing.

Human Rights Watch estimates that a minimum of 300 Nigerians were killed in violence linked to the 2007 elections, some credible estimates range considerably higher. That death toll was higher than the reported figures from the violent 2003 elections, which said more than 100 Nigerians killed during the weeks surrounding the voting exercise alone. The criminal activities and violence that accompanied the 2007 polls was wide-spread and openly organized on such a scale as to lay bare deeper patterns of corruption and abuse in politics to an unusual degree. The run-up to the elections saw political assassinations, bombings and deadly clashes between rival gangs organized by politicians and parties which are all indices of criminalization of politics in Nigeria. Little wonder, Uzoanya (2023) maintained that both international and local observers attested to the fact that the 2023 election was grossly below standard. There was also the issue of violence which occurred across states in the country, particularly, Lagos, Rivers, Kano and Adamawa (Ezeador, 2023).

Overview of Electoral fraud and its effect on Criminalization of politics in Nigeria The prevalence of electoral fraud as a bane on Nigeria’s democracy has been attracting scholarly attention for quite some time now. Electoral fraud has created room for the emergency of incompetent persons who occupy vital electoral positions made possible by Political demagogues. The fact that such people are mediocre, they cannot deliver the dividends of democracy expected by the masses. It is also important to note that due to political fraud, some of the best brains in political and economic management are not in governance as a result of victimization, while others are even brutally eliminated as was the case of Chief Bola Ige. Without doubt, threat to national security, economic decay, terrorism, political upheavals and military confrontation could be the consequences of electoral fraud, which leads to violation of democratic process.

Electoral fraud in Nigeria has served the ignorable purposes of weakening the people’s confidence and support for democratic institution in Nigeria. As a result of the several decades of organized electoral fraud perpetuated at the national, state and local levels of governance. This has

weakened the development programs, projects and prospects of Africa's most populated country. The huge electoral fraud committed during the general elections in Nigeria made the European Union, the Commonwealth and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to carry out a detailed study of the pervasive problem of why Nigerians have lost interest, confidence and faith in democratic institutions. Their conclusion is that the pillar of democracy in Nigeria is weak and as a result, electoral manipulation and fraud are used to truncate the popular mandate and wishes of the people. Electoral frauds have been one of the major challenges facing the growth and development of Nigeria political system and these has grown steadily worse and more (Wilson, 2016).

The 2007 general election has been described by both local and International observers as the worst election ever conducted in the history of Nigeria and these have made it difficult in consolidating the nature and significance of democracy (Ebirim, 2013). As part of electoral fraud, the absence of free and fair elections is also one of the major challenges to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This has discouraged a large number of qualified citizens in participating in any election. Participation is meaningful when the votes of participants counts but not when the votes are subverted for the interest of the few (Osinakachukwu, 2011).

Intimidation of voters and criminalization of politics in Nigeria Intimidation simply means the act of making someone to feel afraid or timid. This is intimidating a weaker person to do something which ordinarily he or she would not have done. According to Ani, Omeh and Ike (2013), voter intimidation involves the act of putting undue pressure on a voter or group of voters so as to vote in a particular way. In the event of this scenario some voters may out of their own volition decide not to participate in the voting process as he/she does not have protection.

In Nigeria, for example, voter's intimidation has become a troubling practice that has persisted since the country's restoration to civil government in 1999. Voter intimidation has increased before to, during, and after the release of election results. This has compelled the government to pursue legislative solutions for dealing with election violence, which frequently degenerates into widespread political violence (Jinadu, 2021). Little wonder, Sofekun, Oyakhiromen, Ige, & Obayemi (2022) observed that voter intimidation is driven by political actors who perceive politics as an extension of individuals' or groups' birth rights, and so actual or imagined dissent is suppressed, or worse, eradicated. Uzoanya (2023) observed that the 2023 election was marred by irregularities, ranging from voter suppression, intimidation, raw violence, sporadic shootings, snatching of ballot papers and vote buying, among others. Well-placed people and groups continue to enjoy tenacity of office for the sake of political recognition and relevance, at the expense of other 'disadvantaged' groups and individuals. Politics and political relations, on the other hand, become stretched and strained as a result of the various intolerances that result rather than accommodation; rancor rather than peace; and conflict rather than collaboration plagued our election process since 1991.

In the electoral process in Nigeria, this act takes the following forms, such as violence or threat of violence. This occurs in Nigeria when voters in a particular location, especially in the strongholds of a particular candidate are usually being threatened by an opposing, supporter of another candidate. This happened in Osun State Governorship election, Ekiti, Kano, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Anambra States and so many other states of the federation. This also takes the form of carrying out attacks in polling units especially when a candidate in the election noticed that the result may not be to his/her favour. In the 2019 Governorship election in Rivers State, security agencies were used by the ruling political party in Nigeria, the APC to intimidate the people and even to the extent of the Nigerian military getting involved in the collation of election results. In all the states in Nigeria, the story was not different.

Nnamani (2014) posited that Nigeria election is such that mobs wield lethal and non-lethal weapons such as guns, cutlasses, sticks, stones, bottles to scare opponents and to as well rig

elections to their favour. This occurred in Kano state in the re-run election conducted as the election was declared inconclusive. He further pointed out the case of the Resident Electoral Commissioner in Ekiti state Governorship election, who as a result of threat to her life has no option than to resign her appointment. Also, the former governor of Kaduna State, Mallam Nasir El-rufai who threatened the international observers in the build up to the 2019 general election in Nigeria.

Shiyam (2017) observed that intimidation of voters in Nigeria political system is an exacerbating phenomenal that has practically engulfed virtually every election conducted in Nigeria since democracy. Its reoccurring nature has left most voters in fear and is grossly responsible for the poor voting attitude of the masses in recent time election. This is because elections in Nigeria are mostly associated with vandalization of properties as well as loss of life of most voters in some part of the country.

On a similar note, Ushie (2019) clearly stated that the use of thugs and even security agents to intimidate voters is one of the basic characteristics of Nigeria electoral process. This is because virtually all the elections in Nigeria have been carried out through the use of political thugs whose main aim is to intimidate voters to vote against their wishes and in most cases disrupt elections in areas where losing is certain. Most devastating is the use of security agents that are meant to protect lives and properties during elections for intimidation of voters and other electoral violence.

Intimidation of voters according to Desmond (2019) is an integral aspect of Nigeria electoral process that has led to the trending electoral violence which has paved way for rigging in its various elections. While various approaches and strategies have been put in place to curb its occurrence, available statistics and empirical findings have revealed that intimidation of voters is quite exacerbating rather than ameliorating. Bense's (2002) study reveals how violent intimidation of undecided and opposition voters reigned in every election conducted in Nigeria. The study shows the prevalence of violence during Nigerian elections used by politicians to reduce the electoral chances of their opponents. Collier and Vicente (2008) have also shown in their study that electoral violence and intimidation of voters is an effective strategy that can keep "those likely to vote for opponents away from the polls".

In addition, Hoglund and Piyarathne (2009) have argued that voters might be not only discouraged from voting given the atmosphere of fear generated by violence, but also motivated to vote for candidates that seem capable of protecting them from violence. The study further demonstrates that electoral violence through intimidation of voters also compels opposing candidates to boycott elections, thereby improving their competitors' chances. As regards the above, electoral violence can be organized into three major stages: the pre-election, election-day and post-election periods. The pre-election violence disruption of opponents' campaigns, intimidation of voters and candidates, political assassinations, kidnappings occurs primarily during voter registration, campaign periods and at other important electoral events such as voter-education exercises.

3. Research Methodology

Design and scope. The study adopted cross sectional survey designed. This design is considered appropriate for this study because it has the capacity to accurately gather necessary information within a limited time frame. Cross sectional research also furnishes the investigator with crucial facts that will inform action to be taken. Cross-sectional research findings will help explain postulations and restore them with actual facts on the particular variables studied for a length of time covered for. Consequently the survey research design was apt in understanding the ideological activities and criminalization of politics.

This present study was carried out in Cross River State of Nigeria. Cross River State is among the sovereign state that makes up the South-South geo-political zone of the country. Cross River is located on latitude 4°30' and 7°00' N, and longitude 7°50' and 9°28' E. The sovereign state has natural seam alongside

Akwa-Ibom, Abia and Ebonyi states to the West, Benue State to the North, republic of Cameroon to the East, with the Atlantic Ocean to the South. The state inhabits a space of about 20,156km²

Distinctively, this academic work is carried out in the Southern Senatorial Area of Cross River State. It is made up of seven local government areas which include: Calabar South, Odukpani, Biase, Calabar City Council, Akamkpa, Bakassi and Akpabuyo. Out of the seven local government areas in the study population, three were preferred purposively for the investigation. They are Calabar South, Calabar City Council area and Akamkpa. The choice of this area is as a result of the horrendous and worsening state of criminalization of politics in the area and the researcher's knowledge and closeness to the area. The study basically concern the effect of voter intimidation on political participation and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District of the State. The study covers from 2007 to 2023.

Population of the study. The population of this study is made up of individuals between 18 years and beyond resident in in seven (7) Local Government Areas in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. The study concentrated on intelligible populace which comprised the unmarried and married. These classes of the respondents incorporated the well-read and the hoi polloi and are considered to be educated enough to provide valid and reliable answers relating to socio-political activities and criminalization of politics in their area.

By means of the 2019 projected population of Cross River State, the population of the seven Local Government Areas that makes up the study area is 1,270,420. Consequently, the analysis of the population is as shown below.

TABLE 1: LGA IN SOUTHERN SENATORIAL DISTRICT

LGA in Southern Senatorial District	Population size 2019 projection
Odukpani	192,884
Calabar South	191,630
Calabar Municipal	187,432
Bakassi	106,771
Baise	169,183
Akpabuyo	271,395
Akamkpa	151,125
TOTAL	1,270,420

Source: Compiled from 2019 projected population of Cross River State, Nigeria

Sampling techniques. The sampling procedure is multi- staged. The sampling technique adopted for this study is stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Stratified random sampling technique was chosen because of its capacity for the proportional representation of subjects from the different units or department of the population. From each of the different Local Government Area that was stratified, three wards in the various Local Government Areas were selected using hat and draw simple random sampling technique. Respondents were asked to pick and not return from the hat, three

wards from each Local Government Area that make up Cross River South Senatorial District and the wards that were picked was used as the target area of the study. This is clearly shown in table 2 below. The study do not in any way incorporate all population groups in study area, in view of this, the researcher come to conclusion to select a sample whereby data were raised. For this reason, a sample size of 400 was established using the Taro Yamane's (1967) sample size determinant with a confidence level of 95% and a maximum variability level $p=5$. Originating out of this sample, 380 research participants were used for the analysis. This depicts a return rate of 95% which is considered reasonable enough for conducting data analysis.

To conclude, the purposive sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaires to the research participants. The research adopts the purposive sampling technique because it gives the researcher the opportunity of interacting with the respondents in order to ensure that such respondents are intelligent enough to provide firsthand knowledge which is needed to enrich the study.

TABLE 2: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS IN SOUTHERN SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF CROSS RIVER STATE AND RANDOMLY SELECTED WARDS

Local Government Areas	Randomly selected wards
Calabar Municipal	Ward 3
	Ward 6
	Ward 10
Calabar South	Ward 7
	Ward 9
	Ward 11
Akpabuyo	Atimbo West
	Atimbo East
	Ikang North
Bakassi	Abana
	Atia Ema
	Amoto
Odukpani	Creek Town I
	Eki
	Ikoneto
Akamkpa	Awi

	Akamkpa urban
	Ojuk South
Baise	Adim
	Akpet/Abini
	Ehom

Source: Field survey 2024

Instrument of data collection. To guarantee commensurate delineation from the research population, the respondents (subjects) were chosen using the multi-stage probability and non-probability sample procedures. A total of 400 questionnaires were administered to the research participants. The distributed questionnaires were filed out and returned on site, except in cases where participants expressly asked for the researchers to return at a future date for collection. This collection approach ensured that the appropriate research respondents filled out the questionnaires, this resulted in satisfactory return rate of 95%, which is satisfactory enough for data analysis. Before to the study, the instruments used went through a pre-test to guarantee validity. A pre-test was carried out on 50 research participants outside the population of the study but have similar characteristics with the study area.

A total of 13 in-depth interviews were carried on conveniently selected research participants within the study area. The interviews were conducted during the daytime and on weekdays at a participants' convenience. Research participants were choosing based on their ability to provide satisfactory information on the issue under study. All the participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and their written consent was obtained. The interview session lasted between 35 and 55 minutes for each participant. To enhance the primary sources of data, the investigator utilized auxiliary sources. Such are firsthand information in the form of textbooks, journals, magazines, vital records, vital statistics, published and unpublished materials relevant to the study objective.

The medium for data collection for this enquiry is mostly structured as well as unstructured questionnaire as well as unstructured oral interview guide. The *raison d'être* for this choice is because the investigator utilized mixed method, that is, the researcher combined the constituents of both qualitative and quantitative methods for the sole aim of an all-inclusive understanding as well as validation of the variable studied. The questionnaire incorporated close and open ended questions. The questions were based on the key variable to be measured in the study. The closed ended question in addition to ensuring sameness of responses by the respondents also provided information for quantitative analyses while the open ended questions provided information for qualitative analyses. In the questionnaire, two sets of questions were utilized. First were questions that dwelled on the social-demographic characteristics of the interviewees, the second were questions that addressed the objective of the study.

To meet the objective goal of this survey, the unstructured oral interview encompasses open ended questions which sought explicit information on the research objective. Interview guide was used in order to generate qualitative data, and as such to obtain a comprehensive discernment of the ideological activities and criminalization of politics. The unstructured oral interview questions inspired follow-up-questions which *ab initio* were not part of the preliminary guide but which have relevant to the study objective and which equally brought forth a wide variety of responses or in depth explanations of the issues raised in the study objective. This research work addressed the basic principles of research ethics

in social sciences by obtaining informed consent, voluntary involvement, and participants' freedom to withdraw, in addition to cultural sensitivity from the study participants

The study exploited the mixed method, that is, the researcher combined elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches of information collection, analysis of information and inferential technique.

Two sets of statistical instrument were utilized in this study for the processing and analyzing data. They encompassed the descriptive statistical measure which involved the use of percentages to analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the research question and the inferential statistical measure which comprises the use of Pearson product moment correlation coefficient Analysis statistical significance in the testing of the research hypothesis. Data gotten from the unstructured oral interview was grouped into themes for the purpose of proper analyses of the interview conducted.

Method of data analysis. The study exploited the mixed method, that is, the researcher combined elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches of information collection, analysis of information and inferential technique. Two sets of statistical instrument were utilized in this study for the processing and analyzing data. They encompassed the descriptive statistical measure which involved the use of percentages to analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the research question and the inferential statistical measure which comprises the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis. Data gotten from the unstructured oral interview was grouped into themes for the purpose of proper analyses of the interview conducted.

4. Results and Discussion

Analysis of research questions. The summary of the spread sheet showing the frequency and percentage of the respondents based on their responses to the structured questions.

TABLE 2 ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONDENT'S RESPONSES TO INTIMIDATION OF VOTERS AND CRIMINALIZATION OF POLITICS IN NIGERIA

S/N	Questionnaire items	Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Commutative percentage
1	Vote buying is a very common practice during election in my polling unit	Strongly Agree	141	37%	37
		Agree	152	39%	76
		Disagree	40	10%	86
		Strongly Disagree	52	14%	100
2	At the cause of intimidating voters, the electorates are often compelled to vote a candidate that is not their choice in my polling unit?	Strongly Agreed	129	34%	34
		Agree	172	45%	79
		Disagree	39	10%	89
		Strongly Disagree	45	11%	100

3	The growing state of poverty in my community has made vote buying to flourish in my polling?	Strongly Agreed	184	48%	48
		Agree	169	44%	92
		Disagree	20	5%	97
		Strongly Disagree	12	3%	100
4	Political candidates now see vote buying as the best possible means of winning election in my polling unit?	Strongly Agreed	177	46%	46
		Agree	175	45%	91
		Disagree	19	5%	96
		Strongly Disagree	14	4%	100
5	Because of intimidation of voters, the peoples participation in elections is low	Strongly Agreed	145	38%	38
		Agree	153	40%	78
		Disagree	47	12%	90
		Strongly Disagree	40	10%	100

Source: Field survey, 2024

The distribution in table 2 shows that majority of the respondents agreed that Intimidation of voters is a common process during election in their polling unit. This is based on the fact that 141 representing 37 percent strongly agreed, 152 representing 39 percent agreed, 40 representing 10 percent disagreed while 52 representing 14 strongly disagreed.

The table shows that majority of the respondents agreed to the fact that at the cause of intimidating voters, the electorate are often compel to vote a candidate that is not their choice in their polling unit. This is as a result of the fact 129 representing 34 percent of the respondents sampled strongly agreed, 172 representing 45 percent agreed 39 representing 10 percent disagreed while 45 representing 11 percent strongly disagreed. Also, the table shows that majority of the respondents sampled for the agreed to fact that through the intimidation of voters, political aspirant who are not the people's choice often emerge as winners during election in their polling unit. This as a result of the fact that 184 representing 48 percent

strongly agreed, 169 representing 44 percent agreed 20 representing 5 percent disagreed and 12 representing 3 percent strongly disagreed.

The table equally shows that majority of the sampled respondents strongly agree to that because of the intimidation of voters, most voters end of losing their life and injured in their polling unit. This is based on the fact that 177 representing 46 percent strongly agreed, 175 representing 45 percent agreed 19 representing 5 percent disagreed and 14 representing 4 percent strongly disagreed. Finally, the table reveals that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that because of the intimidation of voters, the people's participation in election is always low in their polling unit. This as a result of the fact that 145 representing 38 percent strongly agreed, 153 representing 40 percent agreed 47 representing 12 percent disagreed and 40 representing 10 percent strongly disagreed.

Hypotheses testing. The hypotheses used in this study were stated in a null form showing the dependent and independent variable and the statistical tools used for data analysis.

There is no significant relationship between intimidation of voters and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District.

Dependent variable; Intimidation of voters

Independent variable; Criminalization of politics

Test statistic; Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis.

TABLE 3: TEST OF HYPOTHESIS ONE USING PEARSON PRODUCT MOMENT CORRELATION COEFFICIENT ANALYSIS.

(N=400)				
Variable	Ex	Ex2		
	Ey	Ey2	Exy	R-cal
Intimidation of voters	2437	6047		
			9674	0.326
Criminalization of politics	986	1974		

Level of significant= 0.05, DF= 378, critical R-value= 0.126

Table 3: clearly shows that the calculated R-value of 0.326 is greater than the critical R-value of 0.126 at 0.05 level of significant and 98 degree of freedom. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. Thus, there is a significant influence between intimidation of voters and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District.

Semi-structured interview analysis. The researcher identified major subthemes associated with the voter intimidation and criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State from the participants' narratives of their personal experiences in politics and elections in their area. These are; (a) Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) attitude and practices towards elections: The pervasiveness of INEC monetary bribery was the most dominant theme in the interview. The study participants echoed that INEC monetary bribery was widespread and prevalent in virtually all the elections that has been conducted in Nigeria since democracy. Describing the prevalent nature of INEC monetary bribery, one of the participants stated that seeing INEC officials collecting money from top political officials during election period is a frequent occurrence that is now seen as the norms and value of election process in Nigeria. So, it is very widespread One of the participants described the pervasiveness of INEC monetary bribery from his experience and observation of

others' experiences in Cross River State in his words bribery is pervasive during election in the Nigeria. For instance, I went for an election in my polling units and I was very shocked to see the Presiding Officer (PO) of the polling unit collecting huge amount of money from the chairman of my Local Government Council and the devastating aspect was that he boldly counted the money in front of the police and we that came out to vote to confirm if the money was one hundred thousand naira (100,000) as stated by the chairman. The participants' overwhelming perception was that INEC monetary bribery was widely practiced by most INEC officers, making it almost impossible to differentiate the good and bad ones. The prevalence of the problem was quantified by one of the participants who said that INEC monetary bribery during election is widespread in Cross River State. If he were to rate its occurrence on a scale of 100%, he would rate it 90%. One of the consequences of the prevalence of any negative behavior was that it becomes customary.

(b) The masses attitude towards INEC: The poor relationship between the public and INEC was a recurring theme in the participants' narratives. This theme suggests a perceived antagonistic relationship between the INEC and the public, devoid of trust. One of the participants stated thus the relationship is antagonistic. One is usually scared of INEC rigging an existing election. In fact, due to their attitude, people do not believe the interest of the masses will be reflected in the forth coming election as they are now seen as an instrument of the ruling class to continue their nefarious reign to the detriment of the general public. The relationship between the masses and INEC is poor as in some areas the people see them as an instrument of ensuring bad governance in the country. The fact that INEC assiduously work to suit the interest of top political office holders has created a poor relationship with the people. These limitations have significantly affected the relationship the masses have with INEC during an election.

Discussion of findings. The analysis of the hypothesis revealed that there is a significant relationship between intimidation of voters and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District. This clearly implies that the problem of intimidation of voters by top government officials is geared towards ensuring their victory at all cost. This aberration has basically escalated the criminalization of politics in Nigeria. This practice is known to grossly affect the principles of democracy in every part of the world as voting is carried out under compulsion rather than free-will to exercise a franchise. The whole tenet of free and fair election is clearly undermined where there is intimidation of voters. This findings clearly support Obeten (2021) assertion that, the extent to which voters are intimidated to vote against their wish and interest is becoming very alarming in Nigeria political system and this practice has significantly defiled every democratic process put in place to ensure free and fair election in virtually every part of the country. The author further stated that, in Nigeria today, intimidating voters is now seen as a viable means of ensuring winning by the ruling class because of how disappointed the masses now feel about their governance. Conducting free and fair election means total failure in their path as such they are prone to engage in every form of criminal act to secure their winning in an election. Also, Ezeador (2023) observed that violence and electoral malpractice are rife in Nigeria, including the use of thugs to disrupt elections, threats to election officials, intimidation of voters and the use of money to influence voters. On a similar note, Edwin (2020) noted that the collapsing state of credible elections in Nigeria since it independence is mostly attributed to voters inability to freely vote who they want without been manipulated or intimidated to do so. Destabilization of elections through the intimidation of voters is now a conventional practice in some polling units. This is mostly carried out through all form of criminal activities and it has accounted for the loss of lives of electorate and INEC officials as well as arson in some places. Perpetrators of this act always feel is better for them not to have an election in a polling unit than losing the election there. Victims of these practices are mostly the electorate and INEC officials as clearly seen in previous elections.

This finding clearly implies that most of the criminal activities which take place during the election period are mostly perpetrated by certain groups of political office holders with the intention of installing

a leader that is against the interest of the masses. Most disturbing is the fact that the crisis of voter's intimidation during election is exacerbating rather than ameliorating despite ample strategies and efforts put in place by INEC officials to curb its existence. As rightly noted by Adamu (2020) until voters are allowed to freely vote their choice of candidate without any form of intimidation, Nigeria will never experience true democracy and good governance. This is solely because through the intimidation of voters, candidates who grossly lack credibility, charisma as well as integrity are elected into vital political offices. Thus, the affairs of the state as well as the country will be under their insidious tentacles of mass aggrandizement and exploitation.

While the intimidation of voters has been seen to have accounted for the poor state of accredited voters which clearly reflected the lack of the masses' interest in electoral process in Nigeria, Adams (2019) clearly noted that voters' intimidation has grossly characterized Nigeria's political system. The fact that the ruling class needs to keep ruling to the detriment of the general public has made it compulsory that the electorate needs to keep voting for them at all cost. While most of the electorate is lobbied through vote buying to do so, others who decline their monetary offer are being compelled to do so. This has mainly led to the criminalization of politics in both past and present administration.

5. Conclusion

The study titled "ideological activities and criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State" was carried out as a result of the degenerating state of electoral process which is mostly associated with different forms of criminalities in study area in particular and Nigeria in general and the growing need to address this internal security issue for true democracy to flourish. Most studies carried out in the academic field have their own significance in enhancing the knowledge bank. This is true of this study as it is assumed that the findings of this study will be of great asset to the entire people of Cross River State, policy makers, INEC, the Federal Government and its agencies, criminology as well as other researchers. Through the findings made, valid recommendations will be proffered which will help in revamping the trending malpractices ideological activities elections such as intimidation of voters which have grossly characterized Cross River State politics. Recommendations from the study can equally be applied to other States within and outside Nigeria that are also experiencing similar crisis in its electoral process. Finally, the findings from the study will not only serve as a contribution to the already existing body of knowledge on ideological activities and criminalization of politics in Nigeria but will also stimulate criminology and other researches by providing adequate data for further reasonable and theoretical formulation. From the findings arrived at, the study concludes that intimidation of voters directly relates to criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State particular as well as Nigeria in general. This menace is further seen to be exacerbating considering its proliferation in different parts of the country. Often times' electorates are intimidated to vote against their wish and also political aspirants are kidnapped, murdered as well as threatened to give up their aspiration. This trend has become deep rooted in Nigeria's electoral system as it calls for urgent attention for sustainable development and internal security management. The criminalization of politics is mostly perpetrated through intimidation of voters at various polling units and this has grossly accounted for the growing state of crimes during election which often times leads to the death of INEC officials as well as electorate and political aspirants. The major limitation of this study is that its scope is limited to ideological activities and criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria, using intimidation of voters as a baseline indicator with the scope from 2007-2023. Consequently, data collected and analyzed in this study is solely based on information obtained from the study area. To sustain this research, secondary sources such as internet based materials, textbooks, journal articles have been utilized. Nevertheless, due to the focus on a specific senatorial district, caution must be exercised when attempting to generalize the findings of this study to other regions of the country and even beyond.

Based on the above conclusion arrived at from the study, the following policy recommendations are made to help tackle the problem of the study; Criminalization of politics in Nigeria needs to be adequately addressed through ensuring that perpetrators of voter's intimidation are adequately prosecuted as prescribed by the Constitution, the Electoral Acts or the Voters Right Act to serve as a deterrence to would be voter's intimidators. The Federal and State Ministries of Education in Nigeria should urgently review their tertiary and secondary school curricula to include voters' education studies as an academic subject. This will assist students at these levels to acquire basic knowledge about election improprieties *vis – a -vis* intimidation of voters and their implications on the political and economic development of Nigeria as well as the impact on national security

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