

The Management of Youth Involvement in Election Violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa: Causes, Issues, Actors and Management

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Abstract: This study examined the management of youth involvement in election violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. All violence linked to election is mostly perpetrated by the youths who are not only in the service of the politicians but also financed by them so long as they do the biddings. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Data was collected through primary and secondary sources. A total of 125 questionnaire were administered and 110 retrieved for analysis using SPSS 21. Poor implementation of electoral laws, lack of self-confidence of politicians, difficult environmental terrain, godfatherism, proliferation of small and light weapons cause violence during elections in the study area. Ex-militant and other criminal gangs, the independent National Electoral Commission and Security personnel are the major actors in election violence in the study area. The creation of skill acquisition programmes, sensitization and legal framework designed for combating electoral violence, address the issue of youth involvement in election violence, and difficult terrain, no access roads, inaccessibility of police stations in the area, poor communication network are clog on the wheel of managing youth involvement in election violence in the study area. Adequate empowerment programs must be put in place for youths; government should establish more security posts in the study area. State and federal government should construct more roads to link the area together. The role most youths perform in the political and electoral process is violent in nature and that youths are vulnerable instrument of electoral violence.

Keywords: Management, Empowerment Programmes, Electoral Violence

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Bayesians are lazy people, lazy in the sense of not responsible to do something for their siblings, and for that reason, when politics came to Bayelsa state in 1999 with late D. S. P Alamiyeseigha (JP) as the first executive governor of Bayelsa State, the youth went cap in hand are begging with the language “we are loyal, I am loyal” and this we are loyal syndrome gave birth to chains and chain of unemployed youths though educated to join the unemployed labor market. The present breed of politicians from Alamiyeseigha era gave vent to this syndrome-“we are loyal”. Why? The politicians always throw money to these unemployed youth

in occasions, in ceremonies and in the highway when they see teem of unemployed youths. In the course, they struggle to get a lion's share of the money so thrown into the air they fight, box, and even dagger themselves. This is been encouraged by the politicians so that these youths will not get access to them for meaningful employment.

It is for this reason that that Michael suggested that politicians group youths and give them different names and prepare them – on how to perpetrate election violence because we are in a winner take it all society, it is either me or nobody, hence we hear cases of youth snatching ballot boxes, the kidnapping of ad-hoc electoral officers at the field, maiming and wounding members of opposing parties and supporters and free display of the use of firearms. [1] The top politicians blame it on the supporters of opposing parties, this

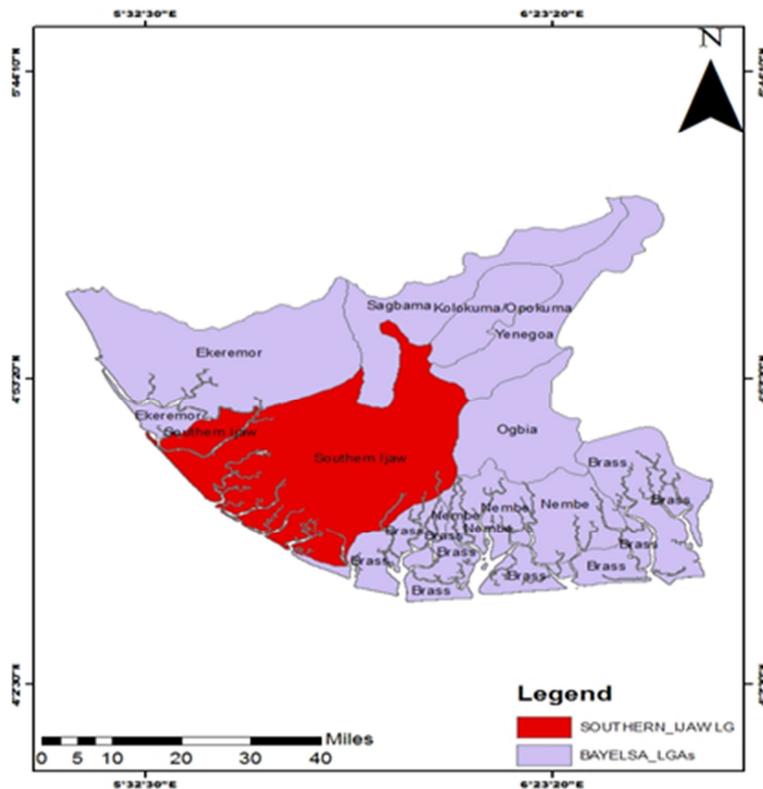
is quite untrue, it is untrue because the politicians before election advise the youths to commit any amount of havoc so he or she may gain political power and that whatever happens he or she is solely responsible for the finance. “Do whatever I say, I am solidly behind you”.

The lifestyle of the youths in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State is volatile in nature on Election Day, Election Day violence is not controllable, “it is a case of either I am killed or I kill you.” When the havoc is done, the said youths go to the woods to avoid any police arrest, the youths are not to be blamed because the politicians are greedy to a fault, they use the innocent youths who are hungry as launching pads to achieve their aims and once their aims are achieved, they lock their doors against the youths they have earlier used. These make the youth start nursing grievance towards whom they have done illicit jobs for and begin to change camps and so they belong to different political classes. And on the day of the election, they express their anger which manifests in the form of violence. Violence has become a regular character of election such that the democratic process, values, and institutions are prevented from developing because power is gained and retained through violence. Like the proliferation of small arms and peddling of hate, speeches sustain the culture of intolerance and electoral violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area.

Electoral violence in the study area manifests in forms of killings, looting, destruction, and damage of property; assault and death threats; bombings; forceful dispersion of political

rallies; destruction of campaign billboards; fighting among political parties; violent street protests and hooliganism; arbitrary detentions and arrests without warrant and abduction. Unless these obstacles are addressed, elections in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa state will continue to experience violence.

Electoral violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area varies across communities. These disparities can be attributed to different exposure to risk and protective factors in Southern Ijaw local government. The violence of all forms exists in the area with no social amenities, security, youth empowerment, skill acquisition programs. Youths of Southern Ijaw Local Government deeply are involved in electoral violence, most of them are used as thugs in pre, during, and post elections, in most cases, youths are used by their god-fathers to maim and kill perceived enemies after elections in Southern Ijaw Local Government, they harm not only their victims but also their families, friends, and communities. No wonder Enebraye opined that the effects of electoral violence are seen not only in death and disability of people but also in terms of the quality of life of the people occupying the area.[2] This is not unconnected with the fact that Southern Ijaw local Government Area is a highly volatile place, which at a time hosted the highest number of militant camps and leaders in the Niger Delta, it is also the largest council area in Bayelsa State and because of a large number of registered voters makes the areas very strategic in the political landscape of Bayelsa state and Nigeria.



Source: Cartography Department University of Ibadan

Figure 1. Map of Bayelsa State Showing the Study Area.

1.2. Research Questions

Having stated clearly the problem, the following research questions are raised.

What are the issues and causes of election violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State?

Who are the actors and stakeholders involved in election violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area?

Are there challenges facing the management of election violence in the study area?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the paper is to examine “The Management of Youth Involvement during Electoral Violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State”. The specific objectives are:

- 1) Examine the issues and causes of Election Day violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.
- 2) To identify the actors in Election Day violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.
- 3) To determine the challenges facing the management of election violence in the study area.

1.4. Methodology

The researcher adopted a descriptive survey design, which conforms to the empirical research methodology. Data was collected through primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources of information include books, articles in journals, newspapers, and news magazine papers on conference proceedings and other relevant materials. Descriptive statistic was employed for the data analysis. Since this study is exploratory in nature, no rigorous statistical technique was used in analyzing the data.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the frustration-aggression theory. The theory was propounded by scholars such as John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Millers, O. H Mower, and Robert Sear (1939) at the Yale University Institute of Human Relation. The attempt to explain violence and its cause in any setting could be understood from the lenses of frustration-aggression theory. [3] The theory posits that when people are frustrated, there is a tendency for them to become aggressive. It is because of this that the frustration-aggression theory is used here to explain election violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

2. Findings

The major findings of the study are discussed below according to the stated research objectives in the introduction.

2.1. Issues and Causes of Electoral Violence

On the Issues and causes of violence during an election in

the study area, the following have been identified as causes of electoral violence.

2.1.1. Poor Implementation of Electoral Laws

Majority of the respondent agreed that poor implantation of electoral laws are responsible for Election Day violence, these means that weak electoral laws do cause youth involvement in electoral violence but non implementation of the laws made to guide the process. This means that the laws themselves are not weak but the lack of implementation makes them appear weak. No wonder, Agai posits that youths who are involved in electoral violence commit this crime with impunity, knowing that even they are arrested, they will be released almost immediately by their godfather or politicians who sponsors such crime. [4] The punishment for such crimes are not followed to the end, as such people freely cause a problem during an election. We find that most times nobody is properly tried even with clear evidence showing a violation of the electoral laws. Therefore, it is not the case that weak laws per se cause electoral violence but it is near lack of punishment for such crimes that sustains election violence in the study area.

2.1.2. Vote Buying and Patron – Client Network

Vote buying is a common trend in the body politics of Nigeria. If a candidate must win elections, such a candidate must be willing to make money available for vote-buying. The truth of the matter is that, if votes are not bought electorates may not even come to participate in the electoral process, vote-buying in Nigeria is one means through which elections are won, this is not peculiar in any specific area of the country. So, in the process of vote-buying, political parties disagree, maybe party A is paying more than party B or Party b is paying in cash while party A gives wrapper or any other item. Issues of this sort most of the time cause violence during the election and have remained a challenge confronting democracy in the 21st century. Patron-client network causes electoral violence in the study area. This might be a result of a culture of impunity. “Government officials, the police and military and ordinary citizens break the law without fear of punishment, for there is a shared understanding that each person will be silent about the other’s abuses as long as the favor is returned”. For Erdman and Engel, Patron-client gives a level of support to whomever patron wants so that they could get certain benefit from a system they installed. [5] Chnadra however argued that there a difference in the level of relations between patrons and clients. [6]

2.1.3. Corruption and Partiality of the Independent National Electoral Commission

The character of the National Independent Electoral Commission is a major issue and cause of violence in the election, in the ideal sense, INEC is supposed to free from manipulation even by the government, this is not the case for INEC this is in line with the findings of Sarah, Birch, Ursala, and Kristine Hoglund opinion that electoral violence has

institutional foundations. [7]

The truth is that we do not have a democratic system that is reflective of the best we are willing to give. INEC for example declares results from a community that devastated by thuggery, violence, maiming and sensitive electoral materials hijacked – INEC could address is a press conference to say, electoral materials have been hijacked by hoodlums, yet will go ahead to declare results. The problem is, the kind of INEC we have is not building a strong democracy for Nigeria, it does not have the ability and character or independence enough to conduct a free a fair election or declare results based on votes cast that will not necessitate violence

Institutions play a major role in ensuring free, fair, and violent free elections, however, this is not the case in developing countries. For example, in the study area, it is though institutions do not exist, the reason could be linked to the low-level development in the area/ this finding is in line with Hoglund finding, that when elections are conducted in places where institutions are absent, the government fails to prevent fear and provide security among citizens. [8]

2.1.4. Incumbent Fear of Losing Power

Incumbent fear of losing power is another cause of violence during the election in Southern Ijaw Local Government. Incumbent fear of losing power although may not be a very popular cause of election violence; however, a study revealed that it is also a source of violence during an election in the study area. Normally, insecurity, lack of self-esteem tend to make people very violent. This may be because the incumbent may not be able to bear the shame of losing an election. in the history of Nigeria, it is only former president Goodluck Jonathan that has sincerely accepted defeat when though he had the option of rigging the elections or better still use violence to overturn the result in his favor. The idea here is that, in Nigeria, the incumbent fear of losing power is responsible for election violence.

2.1.5. Availability of Small and Light Weapons

Availability of light weapons is a cause of violence during an election in the study area, findings show that availability of weapons may not necessarily be a cause of electoral violence in the study area. Although, the availability of weapons could cause electoral violence. This cannot be regarded as a good cause of election violence. Nevertheless, it is a known fact that the area is a volatile terrain, past elections since 1999 has been marred by violence. As such, the availability of small and light weapons in that area makes it possible for youths to take to the arm. In some instances, politicians make such weapons available for their thugs to kill and maim opposition.

2.1.6. Little or No Voter Education in Riverine Communities

Poor voter education as a cause of electoral violence, respondents strongly agreed that poor or no voter education does make youth get involved in election violence, but a majority of them disagreed. These responses are a clear

indication that lack of voter education does cause electoral violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, however, some other have contrary opinion to this view. There was no adequate voter education even as few Non-governmental organizations came for sensitization programs just to expose the voters to electoral laws, obligations of the electorates and expected behavioral pattern etc. the government too through various agencies like the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Ministry of Information and the media embarked on many enlightenment campaigns against electoral violence. For this reason, one cannot say there was no voter education; it is also difficult to accept that, the voter education given was poor in the pre-election period as the researcher is aware that NGOs spend millions of Dollars on sensitizing youths in the study area.

2.1.7. Lack of Self-Confidence of Politicians and Youths

Lack of self-confidence of youth and politicians make youths get involved in electoral violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government. This means that, because the youth do not have confidence in themselves they get involved in violence especially during the election period, most of the boys involved in this act are not eager to develop their brains to maximum potentials, by this reason, they are easily used by politicians to carry out a violent act in the study area.

2.1.8. Difficult Terrain

Difficult terrain as a cause of youth involvement in electoral violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, the long neglect, despite the oil richness in the area, no meaningful development, no infrastructure, no development, no social amenities. Therefore, it is only during an election period that these youths express their anger and this leads to violence. There is no comprehensive planning in the whole area of development followed by action planning. There is nothing like management planning in the whole area. The government's failure to construct roads to link the area, supply electricity contributes to the violence during an election. So when it is time for elections, it is an expression of anger. Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State can be compared to 2 local government area compared to some L. G. As in other states of the federation, administratively, it becomes very difficult to manage because of the largeness of the area with no road network. In this context, nobody expects peace in this area not just for the election period – the condition they find themselves in makes them very hostile.

Gaslow's and Galtung opinion aligns with this finding, that when security personnel are not doing their job very well and the government's failure to provide security necessitates violence in elections. [9]

2.2. The Actors

On the actors and stakeholders in election violence in the study area, the following have been identified;

2.2.1. Politicians

Findings revealed that politicians are major actors in

election violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government, Politicians are the ones who provide the funds, manipulate the process of electioneering, including using the youths as thugs. Politician's choice for being violent during an election is born out of their dear need to win elections through any means available and necessary; sometimes the fear of losing elections makes the use of violence appealing to politicians.

2.2.2. The Youths

Youths are also very active when it comes to elections and the whole process of electioneering, most of the violence that characterized election is perpetrated by youths, the presence of youth can produce negative and positive results, and it is fact that the elderly do not really the violent role in elections but youths and even if they do, the percentage cannot match that of the youth. There is also the gender dimension to this, majority of youths involved in election violence are male which aligns with Elin that exist gender difference. The youths are gullible so much that they are easily manipulated - As a consequence, we find that where cases of violence are recorded during elections, it is expected youths must be involved. Youths are ready tools for politicians to rig elections and hijack electoral materials for the different contending political parties and politicians.

2.2.3. Ex-Militants

Ex-militants play a major role in the election and the major thing they do is perpetuate violence. In recent times, especially in Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers states respectively, if a politician does not have militants and ex-militants as part of his or her support base, it is quite difficult for the candidate to win elections in the area. On this, the majority of the respondents agreed. In the study area, for example, ex-militants have become so important in election time, it is as though without them one cannot win elections, politicians have made them so important that they now see themselves as major determinants of who gets what in the political landscape of Bayelsa state. Giving the compensation or rewards that come after elections, we find that, ex-militants and can kill to ensure the victory of their clients. This is why, in the study area, an election is characterized by violence.

2.2.4. Security Personnel

Those that are supposed to protect innocent Nigerians and prevent electoral violence are here identified to be responsible for electoral violence in the study area. this may be so because of the unprofessionalism of military personnel or corruption of this personnel or a superior order to influence the outcome of the election to favor a particular candidate, findings revealed that in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa military personnel, the Nigerian Army, Navy, Nigerian Police Force, and the Civil Defense are all involved in election violence. To buttress, I will bring to our notice the concept of Federal Myth in Nigeria's democracy. The government has never in anytime remained neutral in any election in the Country, (i) the ruling party always struggles to increase the number of states it controls, (i) protects the elite class in those places, and (iii) to oppress

the people of the area. When this happens, we find that the government and her instrument of oppression will be on one side and the community (electorates) will be on the other side. These opposing positions eventually lead to violent conflict because; the people must resist the federal might exercise by the government of the day. So, the people that are designed to protect the civilian population later turn out to be the people perpetrating violence and killing innocent civilians, and causing problems during the election. By right, they are supposed to be neutral in their dealings and involvement in the election, their mandate is supposed to prevent violence yet they now cause conflicts.

2.2.5. Independent National Electoral Commission

The role of the commission is supposed to be independent, neutral and above all conduct free and fair elections without any form of intimidation. Over the years, we find that the commission has not been neutral in discharging our responsibilities, often than not commission is used rigged elections in favor of the federal government, as result, the masses have lost trust in the commission (INEC).

2.3. Management Strategies

A thorough assessment of the strategies that are used to manage youth involvement in election violence in the study area revealed the following:

2.3.1. Presence of Electoral Observers

Results revealed that the presence of election observers (local and International) is a strategy for managing youth involvement during election violence. This is because as of the fact that election observers independently write reports of what they have witnessed on the day of the election, which has the likelihood of containing youths who are involved in election violence in the study area. Again, observers are people considered to be neutral in the election process, as such, persons involved in violence will be very careful not to see themselves in national dailies including being called by the police for electoral offenses. The outcome of the 2015 gubernatorial election in Bayelsa State showed that the effort of election observers led to the cancellation of the December 6th elections in Southern Ijaw, as the observers were able to write reports on the violence that marred the election and largely reduced electoral violence in the study area.

2.3.2. Sensitization of the Electorates

The researcher in the last election observed that, when violence occurs before, during, or after the election, sensitization was used as a strategy for reducing the violence. While this may not be the case always, in some areas, it did not work, especially at Oporoma and Olugbobiri communities of Southern Ijaw, where it was very violent. It was so violent that it ended in a stalemate. To this extent, one will agree with the respondents that sensitization is a strategy for managing electoral violence in the study area. Academic Associates Peace works did much in sensitizing the electorates and rural dwellers on the need to be orderly during elections. This helped significantly in shaping the

attitude of the electorates, the result was positive, although did not see violence in the 2015 gubernatorial elections in Bayelsa state. In a research conducted by YALI “vote not fight” campaign in the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria where young people and media platforms demonstrated the need for elections to be peaceful. [10]

2.3.3. Deployment of Security Personnel

The presence of security personnel like the civil defense, navy, and air force is a strategy for managing youth involvement during election violence in the study area. This means that the presence of the JTF is an effective strategy for the management of election violence perpetrated by youths in the study area. During an interview session, a respondent confirmed to the researcher that youths around the study area are scared of military personnel. He added that most of the violence going on in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area is a result of the absence of security personnel in the area, noting the presence of the military brings about law and order and it forces the voters, youths to observe all electoral guidelines during an election. However that, some parts of the L. G. A do not care whether there is military or not, as they see the military as a threat to their existence, hence can do whatever can to resist them. Agai argued the overwhelming force and federal might is a source of violence during the election because of the oppressive role played by the military during elections in the area.

2.3.4. Implementing Electoral Laws

Weak electoral laws have been identified in his paper as a cause of election violence in the study area, however, findings revealed that in order to effectively manage electoral violence in Southern Ijaw LGA, the laws made to compel the obedience of electoral laws must be implemented if not, the problems associated with electoral violence will persist. It is the poor or non-implementation of these laws that makes it seem the laws are weak or deter people from using violent means during an election as a means of winning elections.

2.4. The Challenges

On the challenges facing the management of youth involvement during election violence in the study area, respondents agreed on several factors militating against the management of election violence.

2.4.1. Poor Implementation of Electoral Laws

Poor implementation of electoral laws is a challenge facing the management of election violence. We can attribute this to the fact that the laws don't bite, and are very flexible to manipulate and oftentimes, broken by politicians' criminal impunity. If the punishment for the violation of electoral guidelines is followed to the letter, it is expected that youths would not be involved in violence during an election. Unfortunately, these laws are not respected because violators are not duly punished. It is not the case that, these laws are not there; the laws are there but are not implemented or enforced to the latter.

2.4.2. Societal Divide

The societal divide is a major challenge in the management of youth involvement in election violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government. When a society is divided, it is very cumbersome to have a common ground concerning the best ways of punishing these youths who violate election laws. This is in line with the view of Høglund, the already existing division within communities contributes to the violence happening during elections. [11]

2.4.3. Corruption of Electoral Officials (Ad-hoc Staff)

Electoral officials are very important in elections, the success, and failure of an election are determined by the conduct and behavior of the officials and the major role they are designed to play in an election is to remain neutral and free from being corrupt. Often, we find that officials are truly not neutral and free from corruption, somehow they are fully involved in the corruption that characterizes elections in Nigeria and particularly Southern Ijaw L. G. A. Corruption of electoral officials is a challenge in the management of election violence. In fact, in the 2015 gubernatorial election in Bayelsa State, as it concerned Southern Ijaw Local Government, it was observed that some electoral officials were bought over by political parties to either manipulate results or cover up irregularities during an election. It can then be argued that corruption among electoral officers may be the reason why electoral laws are not properly respected because there is not enough evidence to prosecute violators. From another lens, the incompetence of these officials may also generate conflict at the polling units, the electorates expect that the INEC official is patient with them through the voting process, accreditation, after voting, and pasting of a polling units results. When all of these are not properly done, we find that people become agitated and want to take laws into their hands. The actions and inaction of officials contribute to a large extent to electoral violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

2.4.4. Difficult Terrain

The terrain is a constraint to the management of youth involvement during election violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government; respondents agreed that the terrain makes it hard to manage youth involvement in electoral violence. The terrain of Southern Ijaw is a difficult one where there are no roads except rivers and creeks, creeks that can only be accessed by the natives, one has to travel a very long distance before one can access a police station, a military checkpoint, this, in turn, makes the area lawless, the difficult nature of Southern Ijaw terrain to a large extent explains why the Local Government is known for violence especially during an election. The near absence of government in the area caused by terrain may account for reasons why elections are always violent in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area. Added to this is the unavailability of police posts, unavailability of police posts is a challenge in the management of the election. The researcher in the course of the study observed that most of the communities in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area do not have police posts that fit the terrain only a few towns

do have police post, this makes it very hard to arrest youths involved in election violence and related crimes. The youth involved in electoral violence might have escaped before security personnel gets to the scene. Availability of police posts in communities deters youths from committing crimes but where they are not available youth become very difficult to control. According to a stakeholder of Oweikorogha Community in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State; “When some youths are caught during election violence, the community will have to transfer them to Yenagoa the capital of Bayelsa State for onward prosecution, unavailability of police stations in the area is one of the major challenges facing the management of youth involvement during election violence in the area”. This is a serious problem. However, the Amanana-owei of Amassoma said to the researcher during an interview session that “youths in Amassoma don’t normally get involve in electoral violence compared to other communities in the creeks of Southern Ijaw Local Government. This is due to the fact there is a police post in Amassoma which makes it easier for the Amassoma Community to curb this menace, this does not mean that there is no such thing, but that it is not very serious like the communities that do not have police posts road means of transportation. [12]

3. Conclusion

The study reveals that most cases of election violence in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa state can be traced to politicians’ use of youths as thugs to hijack electoral materials or intimidate opposition supporters. The study was also able to establish that youths are vulnerable instruments of electoral violence as a result of vote buying, political manipulation, incumbent fear of losing power, patron – client network, availability of weapons, lack of self-confidence and electoral system, poor voter education, unemployment and under employment, and lack of development in the study area.

4. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the effective management of youth involvement in election violence is constrained by so many factors such as difficult terrain, unavailability of communication networks, shortage of security posts, inadequate or no linking roads in the study area makes the management process cumbersome, hence, government should as a matter of necessity establish more

security posts, construct more roads and encourage network providers to establish more communication network in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Youths are very crucial to the development of a nation, as such, the government of Bayaelsa astate should engage the youth constructively by creating jobs for them and empowerment programmes geared towards building capacity.

Finally, conscious attempt should be made by the political class not use youths as thugs during election, instead, they should be used as bridge builders and advocates of peace during and after elections.

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