

EXPLORING CONFORMITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON VIOLENT ELECTORAL CHANGE ON RESIDENTS OF ENUGU COAL CITY

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the influence of conformity and social media use on violent electoral change among respondents in Enugu State, Nigeria. Three hundred and thirty-six (336) persons within the ages of 18 to 47, mean age of 23.02 years and standard deviation of 4.44 were purposively recruited using standardized instruments such as the Political Violence Scale (PVS), Social Media Use Inventory and Conformity subscale of Groupthink Scale. In testing study's hypotheses, descriptive and inferential statistical analysis such as means, frequencies, and multi-linear regression was employed. Results confirmed that persons with high level of social media use were high on violent electoral change and vice versa. Also, high levels of conformity resulted to high levels of violent electoral change. To this end, the study concluded that social media use and conformity are important constructs that should be considered by policy makers and corporate institutions whether in public or private corporations, when it comes to addressing electoral violence and social problems in Nigeria. Based on the findings, recommendations were mostly tailored towards positively engaging young people in order for them to have less idle and positively engaging time while using social media and at the same time equip them with social communication skills or assertive skills that will help them build their career and lives meaningfully.

Keywords: Violent change, conformity, social media, young people, electoral violence

Introduction

The Nigerian electoral political space is replete with all kinds of activity that are in most cases aggressive in nature and brings about negative societal change. The direction of the social change has

remained a subject of academic and political discuss for a long time now. In most cases, political players and bourgeoisies employ the services of young people in running errands for them and doing their 'dirty jobs' as well. When



considered closely, it is becoming clearer that the whole political process in Nigeria as it were culminates in violence where opposing parties draw blood by verbal abuse, emotional blackmailing, vicious attacks, character assassination, libeling, political assassination, disappearances, and violent behaviour that have consumed so many lives and capable of consuming more lives if nothing is done about the ugly trend. According to Ladan (2006, as cited in Ogboji et al., 2022), violence has become part of the political culture of Nigeria. Be that as it may, it is imperative at this stage to examine some key factors responsible for election violence in Nigeria. These are greed, electoral abuse, and corruption of electoral process, rigging of elections, electoral fraud, thuggery and abuse of power. Other causes of electoral violence in Nigeria include general poverty and illiteracy; narcissistic personality of political players, absence of clear ideology, religious bigotry and ethnic chauvinism; delivery of skewed judicial rulings; and cross-carpeting of elected candidates at the expense of the initial sponsored party amongst others (Ogboji et al., 2022).

The violence that is perpetrated before, during and after elections tends to affect most areas of a country's development thereby leading to poor governance, insecurity, corruption among other effects (Ajoku & Adigwe, 2022). The violence is used at times to intimidate voters and electoral officers and opposition supporters amongst other victims. Yusuf (2019) noted that while

the main purpose of electoral violence is the to bring about negative social change that will not be the will of majority of the electorates, to favour particular candidates or political parties through the use of violence, and to bask in political favour. Violence in all ramifications is a debilitating act that endangers humanity and electoral violence is not any better. Throughout the history of democratic governance in Nigeria, electoral violence have affected negatively the socio-political and economic wellbeing including the democratization process that political stakeholders have been trying to put in place in the country since Nigerian's independence in 1960. Even before the independence of Nigeria, youths have been the prime agents and wherever youths are more in number, they appear to champion violent electoral processes; because youth constitute an overwhelming majority of the work force and active population of Nigeria. The recognition of youths in development trajectory may have led to the establishment of the National Youth Policy to cater for the yearnings and aspirations of youths in Nigeria (Amzat & Abdullahi, 2016).

Gadau and Malami (2022) in a qualitative study examined the manifestations of electoral violence instigated by youth in Nigerian democracy and found that numerous factors (i.e., electoral rigging which manifests in various stages such as snatching of ballot box, and voters buying, godfatherism and institutional incapacity in managing election and mismanagement) has contributed to the

electoral violence in democratic governance of Nigeria. Regrettably, this situation has worsened with the advent of social media and the global community as it were.

Specifically, the globalisation of the world has been transformed by the advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT) since the 1990s. Today, communication barriers have been reduced to the barest minimum as local events easily become global and vice versa. Technological innovations are not only expanding the effects of social media on politics but are also involving citizens in political debate like never before (Ruskell, 2021). The impact has been that a critical mass of once 'voiceless' population have got their persuasive 'voice' through the internet and their political participation has evolved especially with the recent involvement of younger and more vibrant politicians in the political arena (Ruskell, 2021).

With the participation of youths in the social media, the implication has become imperative in the context of democracy and good governance. This becomes important, as youths, through the use of social media, have not only evolved from an identity of stable consumers of news and political narratives but have also become sources of newsfeeds, trendy agenda framers concerning leadership, accountability and good governance within the polity, and in some cases harbingers of violence that could be devastating. Little wonder, Obisesan

(2022) examined the roles of social media on youth's political participation in the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria and concluded that social media played a vital role in contributing to citizens' power and agency through debates and narratives which were instrumental in agenda-setting during the past general elections in Nigeria from February to March, 2023.

Statement of the Problem

Violent electoral change may involve the act of violence perpetrated in the course of political activities, including during and post-election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meeting or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters, intimidation of candidates and voters, physical harassment, assault on journalists, imprisonment and assassinations, confrontations with security forces, attacks on local party headquarters, and other stakeholders or to cause bodily harm, or injury to any person connected with the electoral process. These situations give rise to unrest, economic hardship and the polity of the nation – which is the change due to the violent electoral process.

Badmus (2017) agrees, and further notes that displaced people as a result of the post electoral violence are in most cases faced with challenges such as poor access to quality healthcare, accommodation, lack of portable water, proper sanitation and higher possibilities of the outbreaks



of communicable diseases among others. However, in most cases where electoral violence is obtainable, security operatives have been allegedly known to be involved, they are known to mostly collaborate with political candidates and parties to influence electoral outcomes (Ajoku & Adigwe, 2022). Violent electoral change is mostly triggered by the interaction of three principal agents: political parties, elite groups, and youth groups. Many societies in contemporary Nigeria are now coming to terms with the fact that youth questions, if not fully addressed, is a ticking time bomb ready to explode. This concern is neither unfounded nor misplaced, not just because more than two-thirds of the country's populations are under the age of 35 years – making it the most 'youthful' country (Rottweiler & Gill, 2022). From the foregoing, it is therefore clear that a peaceful environment devoid of electoral violence is necessary for the achievement of free and fair elections as well as a progressive, prosperous, and economic viable society. It is upon this backdrop for the attainment of peaceful elections that this study sets out to create a better understanding of the existing knowledge in this area as well as provide a deeper understanding of the role of social media use and conformity on violent electoral change among respondents in Enugu state.

Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this study is to investigate the influence of social media use and conformity in predicting violent

electoral change among respondents. The specific objectives are:

1. To investigate the role of social media use on violent electoral change among youths.
2. To examine the impact of conformity on violent electoral change among youths.

Literature Review

Fomenting violence during elections is a strategy that politicians and elites routinely, and deliberately, employ to shape political outcomes. Over the past twenty-three years (i.e., since 1999) when democratic dispensation was restored in Nigeria, savants or scholars have undertaken a series of cross-national empirical studies to understand the conditions under which electoral violence is likely to occur, but little or no study has investigated how election violence may be mitigated or prevented. The case is more agonizing in Africa where violence in elections with varying degrees of brutality has culminated in outright national upheavals and conflicts (Momoh et al., 2022).

Recently, social media platforms are often used to gather people to participate in politics and demonstration from place to place in the world (Carlisle & Patton, 2013). Specifically, bearing in mind African democracies where researchers are skeptical with the apathy of youth in political activities (Putnam, 2000), social media use appears to hold promise to increase political participation and reinforce democracy around the world (Skoric & Kwan, 2011). Njuguna *et al.*

(2020) in their work, investigated social media use and electoral violence among 384 enrolled youth and showed that the use of social media platforms in communication has been growing; on the other hand, social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram) had a strong explanatory strength on electoral violence accounting for 65.9 percent of electoral violence among the Kenyan youth. Rottweiler and Gill (2022) utilising a survey of 1,500 respondents, examined the effects of group-based relative deprivation on violent extremist attitudes and found that stronger group-based injustices lead to increased support for and intentions to engage in violent extremism. Erubami (2020) assessed the public perception of social media contributions to political participation processes in Delta State by recruiting 500 respondents and found an increase in hate speech and political unrest. Mustapha and Omar (2020) findings show that youths are more interested in online political participation than offline politics. Omotayo and Folorunso (2020) investigated the use of social media for political participation by recruiting 322 youths in three Nigerian universities and showed that social media was highly used by the youths for political participation. Facebook was the most used, followed by Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter and Yahoo Messenger respectively. Jahnke *et al.* (2022) in investigating the links between psychologically meaningful risk factors and political violence outcomes among young adults, found significant effects for depression; empathy; aggression;

identification; realistic threat; symbolic threat; experiences of discrimination; dissatisfaction with the police, political actors, and institutions; and negative attitudes toward democracy. Orhero (2022) after selecting 378 participants, discovered that there is political apathy among citizens, INEC officials and political party members are interested in the use of forensic analysis, and security use incumbent to influence human activities.

For instance, Gøtzsche-Astrup's (2019) survey studies found significant interactive effects between different personality traits and factors such as uncertainty, on violent extremist intentions. Ozer *et al.* (2020) observed similar findings on different extremist measures. Similarly, Pavlović and Franc's (2021) results highlighted significant interaction effects among individual dispositions and perceptions of violence. Bleize *et al.* (2021) reported two experiments that examined the effects of group centrality and accountability on conformity to cyber aggressive norms and found that accountability affected conformity to cyber aggressive norms. That is, adolescents who did not think they had to discuss their responses in class conformed more than those who did. With regard to conformity to aggressive behaviors, studies have shown that youths are more likely to go along with aggressive behaviors of close peer, like friends, than of distant peers, like acquaintances (Bastiaensens *et al.*, 2014; Piccoli *et al.*, 2020). Generally, groups



that consist of strong social ties such as friends are perceived as high in group centrality (Svirydzienka et al., 2010). This means that these groups are typically perceived as highly important by their group members.

Hypotheses

1. Respondents who are high on social media use will be susceptible to high levels of violent electoral change.
2. Respondents with high level of conformity will be susceptible to behave in a manner geared towards violent electoral change.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized an ex-post facto survey design in exploring the influence of social media use and conformity on violent electoral change. This type of design is a category of research in which the investigation into the study begins after the fact has occurred without interference from the researcher.

Study Area

The study was carried out in Enugu capital city in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Study Population

Population of this study consists of males and female adults who lives and work within Enugu capital city.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study was conducted in a systematic and standardized way; while purposive

sampling technique was adopted in recruiting the participants that served as the sample in the study.

Instruments for Data Collection

In this study, the instrument employed to gather information on variables of interest was divided into 3 sections. Section A includes demographic features such as age, gender, marital status and level of education. In addition, a structured inventory assessing social media use was developed presenting a list of the most popular social media. Section B comprises an instrument measuring violent electoral behaviour; while Section C is made up of scale measuring conformity.

1. **Social Media Use:** Social media use was measured via 5 questions: "How many times did you use social media in the past month?" and the scoring being 1 = "Less than once a week"; 2 = "Less than once a day"; 3 = "2 - 3 times a day"; 4 = "4 - 5 times a day"; 5 = "6 or more times a day", "How much time are you online on social media every day?": and the scoring being 1 = "Less than 30 min"; 2 = "31 min - 2 hours"; 3 = "2 - 6 hours"; 4 = "6 - 12 hours"; 5 = "12 or more hours", "How much time do you actually spend on social media every day?" (the actual time you use social media for every day: 1 = "Less than 30 min"; 2 = "31 - 60 min"; 3 = "1 - 2 h"; 4 = "2 - 4 h"; 5 = "4 or more hours"), "How many years has it been since you started

being involved with social media?” (the length of time since you started being involved with social media: 1 = “Less than 3 years”; 2 = “4 - 5 years”; 3 = “6 - 7 years”; 4 = “8 - 9 years”; 5 = “10; or more years”), and “How many friends do you have on social media?” (the number of friends on social media: 1 = “Less than 50 persons”; 2 = “51 - 100 persons”; 3 = “101 - 150 persons”; 4 = “151 - 200 persons”; 5 = “More than 200 persons”). Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.53 was obtained for the structured inventory to establish the fact that it has a good internal consistency.

2. Violent Electoral Change: In this study, violent electoral change was measured using the 6-item Political Violence Scale (PVS) developed by Bélanger *et al.* (2019). Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with these statements using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Of the 6-items, 3 were positively scored, while 3 were negatively scored. Validation results revealed high levels of reliability for the PVS ($\alpha = 0.83$). The single factor solution was the best fitting model, as it had a best fit to the data $\chi^2 = 19.06$, $p < 0.01$. Items of PVS scale include, “Violence is necessary for social change,” “It is acceptable to retaliate against someone who insults my values and beliefs,” “I would never consider physical violence to further a just cause

(reverse scored),” “There are effective ways of changing society other than resorting to violence (reverse scored),” “When using violence to further a just cause, everybody is fair game,” and “We should never use violence as a way to try to change society”. Alpha reliability of the scale in the present study was 0.57.

3. Conformity: Further, in order to assess majority influence, the study employed the 7-item Conformity subscale of Groupthink Scale which was developed by Baptist (2015) with eight subscales entitled *Highly Cohesive* (9 items), *Promotional Leadership* (11 items), *Conformity* (12 items), *Concurrence Seeking* (13 items), *Anxiety* (12 items), *Collective Efficacy* (12 items), *Hidden Profiles* (9 items), and *Trust* (10 items). However, for the present study, to measure majority influence, that of Conformity subscale was adopted. Examples for the *Conformity* scale included: “I often agreed openly with the group’s decision, even if I disagreed privately,” “I often kept my opinions to myself,” and “Everyone in the group had a voice.” While an alpha of .65 to .70 is considered minimally acceptable, a respectable coefficient alpha for a scale is .70 to .80, a very good alpha is .80 to .90, and an excellent alpha is .90 or above (DeVellis, 2003). Items 1 to 5 are directly scored while items 6



and 7 are recoded or reverse scored. After the factor analysis by the scale developer, 5 items were eliminated from the Conformity subscale, with only 7 items remaining. The seven-item *Conformity* scale produced very good reliability ($\alpha = .82$); both the KMO measure (.797) and the Bartlett's test [$\chi^2 = 603.949 (21), p < .001$] were acceptable. Cronbach's alpha value of the scale in the present study was 0.76 which implies a respectable alpha coefficient.

Method of Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency and standard deviation was employed to assess the demographic features of the respondents; while multi-regressions were employed to test the study's hypotheses.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Nigeria to conduct the study. The researchers also ensured that the study met the ethical conditions of the World Medical Association *Declaration of Helsinki*.

Results

Table 1: Summary of frequencies and percentages showing demographic features of respondents in the study (N = 336)

Variables	Category	Frequency	%
Age			
Age range:	18 to 47 years	336	100
Mean age:	23.02 years		
Standard deviation:	4.44		
Gender			
	Male	180	53.6
	Female	156	46.4
Favourite Social Media			
	Facebook	86	25.6
	WhatsApp	107	31.8
	Instagram	26	7.7
	YouTube	2	0.6
	Twitter	30	8.9
	Multiple Social Media	85	25.3
Marital Status			
	Single	318	94.6
	Married	13	3.9
	Separated	3	0.9
	Divorced/Engaged	2	0.6
	Total	336	100

The demographic factors in this study were assessed descriptively and the results in Table 1 reveal that out of the 336 recruited respondents, male were 180 (53.6%), while females were 156 (46.4%). With regards to the age of the participants, the results showed that their ages ranged from 18 to 47 years with an average age of 23.02 years and a standard deviation of 4.44. When participants were assessed based on their marital status, results indicated that 318 (94.6%) were single, 13 (3.9%) were married, 3

(0.9%) were separated and 2 (0.6%) were either divorced or in a relationship. Going further, when youths were asked about their favorite social media platform, 86 (25.6%) chose Facebook, 107 (31.8%) reported WhatsApp, and 26 (7.7%) said Instagram, 30 (8.9%) ticked Twitter, another 2 (0.6%) chose YouTube, while 85 (25.3%) reported of a multiple social media platform. In other words, they were using up to 2 or more social media platforms.

Table 2: Summary of social media use inventory showing the frequency of respondents in the study (N = 336)

ITEMS	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
How many times did you use social media in the past month?	<than once a week 16 (4.8)	<once a day 18 (5.4)	2-3 times a day 68 (20.2)	4-5 times a day 66 (19.6)	6 times or more 168 (50.0)
How much time are you online on social media every day?	<30 mins 59 (17.6)	31mins-2hr 99 (29.5)	2hrs-6hrs 61 (18.2)	6hrs-12hrs 47 (14.0)	12hrs or more 70 (20.8)
How much time do you actually spend on social media every day?	<30 mins 53 (15.8)	31mins-2hrs 38 (11.3)	1hr-2hrs 67 (19.9)	2hrs-6hrs 51 (15.2)	4hrs or mor4 127 (37.8)
How many years has it been since you started being involved with social media?	<3 years 53 (15.8)	4-5 yrs 98 (29.2)	6-7 yrs 60 (17.9)	8-9 yrs 24 (7.1)	10 yrs or more 101 (30.1)
How many friends do you have on social media?	<50 persons 54 (16.1)	51-100pers 38 (11.3)	101-150pers 16 (4.8)	151-200pers 23 (6.8)	201 & above 205 (61.0)

The descriptive results in Table 2 clearly shows from the first item (How many times did you use social media in the past month?) to the last item (How many friends do you have on social media?),

respondents results indicates that majority of them invested a lot of time, frequently use it and had a lot of online friends in various social media platforms. This outcome reveals the ‘out of the

ordinary' effect that social media use can have on people's lives.

contributions of social media use and conformity on violent electoral change among respondents in Enugu metropolis

Table 3: Summary table of multiple regression analysis showing relative

Independent Variables	Beta β	T	Sig	R	R ²	F	P
SMU	.03	.54	<0.05				
Conformity	.21	3.98	<0.05	0.213	0.046	7.94	<0.05

Note: SMU: Social Media Use; AR² = 0.040; N = 336

Hypothesis One: Respondents who are high on social media use will be susceptible to high levels of violent electoral change.

The results presented in Table 3 indicates that social media use and conformity had a coefficient of multiple correlation (R) of 0.213 and multiple correlation square (R²) of 0.046; showing that 4.6% of the variance in violent electoral change was explained by the predictor variables. Table 3 also revealed that social media use was an independent positive predictor of electoral violence ($\beta = .03$; $t = .54$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis which states that respondents who are high on social media use will be susceptible to high levels of violent electoral change was accepted.

Hypothesis Two: Respondents with high level of conformity will be susceptible to behave in a manner geared towards violent electoral change.

From the regression analysis in the same Table 3 above, conformity exhibited a significant prediction of violent electoral change ($\beta = .21$; $t = 3.98$; $p < 0.05$). This

implies that the relationship was positive in the sense that high conformity precipitated high violent electoral change and low conformity contributed to less violent electoral change. Therefore, the second hypothesis which stated respondents with high level of conformity will be susceptible to behave in a manner geared towards violent electoral change was confirmed. In addition, Table 3 revealed a significant joint prediction of social media use and conformity on violent electoral change F (2, 335) = 7.94, $p < 0.05$.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to explore conformity and social media use and understand their influence on violent electoral change among residents in Enugu city. The first hypothesis which stated that respondents who are high on social media use will be susceptible to high levels of violent electoral change was confirmed. This means that social media use has a significant role to play in electoral violence. This finding is in line with the study of Jahnke *et al.* (2022) who

while investigating the links between psychological risk factors and political violence found significant relationship between aggression and negative attitudes. The finding is also in consonance with the study of Njuguna *et al.* (2020) who investigated social media use and electoral violence and showed that the use of social media platforms contributed to electoral violence among youths. A possible explanation of this finding is that young people these days tend to live most of their lives on social media and are highly influenced. Also, judging from the mean age of total participants in the study which is approximately 23 years, one can opine that these set of people are highly impressionable and suggestible and could be either negatively or positively swayed depending on who is doing the persuasion.

The second hypothesis which stated that respondents with high level of conformity will be susceptible to behave in a manner geared towards violent electoral change was also confirmed. This finding is in line with the studies of Piccoli *et al.* 2020 and Bastiaensens *et al.* (2014) with regard to conforming to aggressive behaviors, in which these studies have shown that young people are more likely to go along with aggressive behaviors of close peer, like friends, than of distant peers, like acquaintances. The study is in line with Bleize *et al.* (2021) who found no effect of group centrality or moderating effects of susceptibility to peer pressure. A plausible explanation of this finding is that right from the stone

age, humans have the evolutionary tendency to behave in ways akin to the group they belong to; and this trait probably is in play as seen from the finding.

Policy Implications

Taking into account these findings, this study makes important theoretical contributions by causally testing the determinants of violent electoral behaviour such as social media use and conformity; and has found these constructs to be vital for policy makers to adopt. On a practical level, the findings of this study have implications for prevention and intervention initiatives that can prevent or reduce electoral violence in Nigeria, as increasing perceptions of accountability on the use of social media may help young people to become more resilient and being positively and cognitively objective in conforming to group norms and societal expectations.

Limitations of the Study

The study encountered the following limitations:

1. This study utilized three self-report measures, and at such, the possibility of response bias was possible; especially the issue of social desirability bias.
2. In addition, seeing all data were self-reported, which is limited by the fact that it cannot be independently verified; and therefore, the study sample may not be sufficient to comfortably generalize the findings.



Suggestions for Further Study

In line with limitations stated above, the researchers recommend that future studies should focus on exploring other constructs not assessed in this study. Also, behavioral measures could be employed to measure violent electoral behavior. In addition, future studies should recruit more participants from different geopolitical zones of Nigeria in order to capture views from various zones that can lay more support for robust generalizations of study findings.

Recommendations

In view of the findings, the following recommendations were outlined:

1. There is urgent need to create jobs and multiple economic opportunities for youths across all sectors. This will play crucial roles in reducing their social media time that predisposes people to violent behavior particularly during electioneering period.
2. Another recommendation is for an effective and meaningful youth political participation in politics especially having sports and entertainment superstars getting involved in the political space where young people can have a direct impact on decision-making within their own youth communities.

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