

Framing and the Social Construction of Violence in Select Online News Discourse on the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract: Violence undermines the democratic character of elections, and the news discourse is a significant route through which such issue is socially constructed. This study investigates how the *Vanguard* and *Arise News* employed transitivity theory as an interpretive schema in framing the violence that marked the 2023 general elections in Nigeria to determine the impact of election violence on voters. Fourteen extracts (7 each from *Vanguard* and *Arise News*) as well as responses from 20 participants (5 each from the fields of Journalism, education, accounting and public relations) were purposively selected and analysed using mixed methods comprising descriptive content analysis and in-depth interviews. The findings unveil both news reports' usage of material, verbal, and relational processes as frames to foreground shades of electoral violence such as the snatching of ballot boxes, disrupting of the voting process, intimidating of voters, disrupting of the collation of results, kidnapping of INEC officials, decimating of innocent citizens, vandalizing of polling units, assaulting of election observers, and carting away of electoral materials. Transitivity processes highlight power relations between groups as well as label certain groups positively and others negatively. The responses from the in-depth interview reveal that electoral violence have a detrimental influence on voters because it produces feelings of dissatisfaction, dread, and dejection in them thereby preventing them from wanting to vote in subsequent elections.

Keywords: Arise news, election, transitivity, vanguard news, violence

1. Introduction

Language and politics have always had an intimate affinity. Language is vital to the undertakings of politicians because it is used for seeking consensus, formulating policy, resolving disputes, advocating interests, and challenging the views of others (Bayley, 2005). It is the formation as well as preservation of human communities, the operation of organizations and institutions, and the social existence of everyday individuals (Kirvalidze & Samnidze, 2016, p.162). Chilton and Schaffner (2002, vi) emphasize the reciprocal nature of the ties between language and politics, when they observed that political engagements cannot occur in the absence of language use, and that the use of language in the formation of social groups is what is regarded as politics in a wide sense. Therefore, they conclude that

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the apparent connection of political activity with linguistic activity demonstrates a close connection between the study of politics and language. One critical point to note in Chilton and Schaffner's submission is the relevance of language in political activity. Individuals engage in political activities such as policy-making, political campaigns, political parties, and elections with a view to influencing the government.

Election is one significant aspect of political activity where language is instrumental. Election is an institutional framework for occupying positions of power through an intense contest for the vote of people. It is the process by which people are elected to public office or members of a community or organisation select one or more people to wield power on their behalf. Elections, as evidenced by the preceding delineations, are major events in the political landscapes of all countries around the world. This is due to their use in recruiting politicians, forming governments, providing representation, influencing policy, educating people, developing legitimacy, and consolidating elites (Okafor & Agu, 2019). Since the 17th century, elections have been the primary vehicle through which contemporary representative democracy has functioned. They are practiced in almost every country in the modern world. In principle, adopting elections to elect leaders should provide a peaceful replacement to resorting to coercion to judge between conflicting claims to rule, and it should be a method that gives citizens more say over how they are ruled. However, in implementation, these expectations frequently fail to match reality. Regardless of their goal of allowing for peaceful transfers of power, many elections, particularly those in recently consolidated democracies, are plagued with substantial amounts of electoral violence throughout the campaign period, on polling day, or in the aftermath of voting (Birch et al., 2020).

Electoral violence, as mentioned above, has been accorded different delineations by scholars. Fischer (2002, p. 4) views it as "any harm or threat of harm to any person or property involved in the election process, or the process itself, during the election period." To Laakso (2007, p. 227), electoral violence "is an activity motivated by an attempt to influence the results of the elections – either by manipulating the electoral procedures and participation or by contesting the legitimacy of the results." In his own submission, Høglund et al. (2009, p. 417) "separated electoral violence from other forms of political violence by deploying the features of timing and motive." The timing feature relates to violence carried out during the election period while that of motive relates to the influence of the electoral process and in extension its outcome". Finally, Bardal (2016) construes electoral violence as a subtype of "political violence involving the controlling and/or oppressing of an individual or group's right to participation in political processes and institutions through the use of emotional, social or economic force, coercion or pressure, as well as physical and sexual harm." From the foregoing submissions, it can be established that electoral violence undermines the democratic character of elections by substituting free choice with coercion and deterring participation.

In Nigeria, for example, general elections were held on February 25th and March 18th, 2023. The first election was held to elect the president, vice presidents, members of the senate, and members of the house of representatives, while the second was to elect state governors in 31 of Nigeria's 36 states. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), introduced technology to the elections, which many believed would solve the issue of election rigging. Professor Mahmood Yakubu, the chairman of the Commission, also gave assurances that the results would be transmitted in real time to the commission's central server, where everyone would be able to view them. These developments gave the elections a great deal of promise. Unfortunately, INEC could not live up to the expectation; instead, the results of the presidential election were not posted as promised, which allowed for fraud and other irregularities. Almost every state in the federation experienced the election violence that was documented during the polls. Given the substantive relevance of electoral violence as a global problem, this paper examines this subject with a view to determining how the reporters of *Vanguard* and *Arise news* used transitivity theory as a schema of interpretation in framing the violence that marred the 2023

general elections in Nigeria. The study seeks to answer the following questions: (a) What are the transitivity processes employed by *Vanguard* and *Arise News* as frames in reporting the violence that characterised the 2023 general elections in Nigeria? (b) What is the impact of electoral violence on voters?

2. News Discourse and the Social Construction of Reality

The term “news” refers to a social construction that provides a processed reality of events and concerns that are chosen, framed, and presented by news media professionals (McQuail, 2010). It can also be viewed as a mode of communication that alerts the general public to current matters, problems, and social trends (Croteau & Hoynes, 2013). News discourse can be perceived as a particular kind of news information that represents recent occurrences that are made public by the news media. It is essential for informing the public, encouraging social responsibility, awareness, and accountability, fostering public discourse, advancing democracy, acting as a forum for debating difficult subjects, serving as a watchdog by exposing social ills, as well as a form of entertainment and leisure. From the aforementioned, it follows that news discourse is fundamental to contemporary society since it provides a window through which individuals can learn about the outside world (Xie, 2018). The sources of news discourse are extremely diverse and include items like newspapers, radio, television, websites, social media, podcasts, and mobile applications. This article is concerned mostly with news in the press, that is, with news discourse or news articles published online in daily newspapers. To this end, it selects *Vanguard* and *Arise news* discourses as data for investigation.

3. Literature Review

Several studies have analyzed the 2023 general elections in Nigeria from various angles, employing a variety of theoretical approaches. Olabanjo et al. (2023), for example, investigated tweets linked to the three main presidential contenders in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election to determine the power of social media and how it has been utilized to influence elections and the electoral system in Nigeria. Abubakar & Olatunji-Ohwovoriole (2023) evaluated the media engagement techniques of Nigeria's three main presidential contenders during the 2023 general election media debate. Aluya & Iangba (2024) explored visual images in selected news discourses on the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria from a multimodal discourse viewpoint to find the many meanings that the images were utilized to transmit. Ifedi et al. (2023) studied the implications of security concerns for the conduct of Nigeria's 2023 general election. Onyenekwe & Okpara (2023) focused on the discourses surrounding religious story headlines preceding the 2023 presidential elections to identify how religion influenced the discourse preceding the election. Ijeh & Abimbola (2023) conducted a study on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria to determine the constraints of voter education and how the mass media could be deployed as a tool to educate voters on the 2023 general elections. Salahu (2023) focused on the roles played by two dominant religions (Christianity and Islam) in Nigeria in shaping the outcome of the 2023 presidential election. Finally, Nwaoboli & Ajibulu (2023) investigated the tones and frames employed by the *Vanguard* online daily in their coverage of Nigeria's presidential election in 2023. The preceding studies are related to the current one in that they focused on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. This study differs from the others on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria because it approaches the subject of electoral violence from a linguistic standpoint, demonstrating how the *Vanguard* and *Arise News* use transitivity theory as frames in reporting the violence that characterized the elections. This is one aspect of the 2023 general elections that has received insufficient linguistic attention.

4. Theoretical Approach

Language has developed to convey ideational, interpersonal, and textual meaning concurrently (Wales, 2011). This section solely discusses the ideational component of meaning because it provides the theoretical foundation for this study. Ideational meaning, also known as experiential meaning, is concerned with how language is used to express or construct experience. It is separated into two parts: the logical and the experiential. The logical component pertains to an embodiment of the language user's perception of the inner workings of his own mental state, whereas the experiential component refers to a representation of the user's perception of his actual world (Simpson, 2004). The ideational aspect of language is what enables a language user to assign labels to objects in a scenario or to show relationships and categories. It is accomplished through the linguistic system known as transitivity, which is configured according to participants, processes, and circumstances (Norgaard, Busse, and Montoro, 2010). The concept of transitivity refers to the different kinds of processes that are expressed in language or the way meanings are conveyed in the clause. It plays an important part in explaining the ideational aspect of language. The transitivity system is composed of three elements. They are the participants, the process, and the circumstance. Participants are often represented by nominals, processes by verbals, and circumstances by adverbials (Aluya, 2018, p. 67).

Semantic content takes precedence over form in transitivity pattern analysis, as constituents are labeled based on their semantic roles (Jefferies and McIntyre, 2010). Therefore, according to Halliday and Matthiessen, all experiences can be categorized into six fundamental process categories (along with related participants and situations). Material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioral, and existential processes are among the different types of processes. Material processes are actions or events that take place in the material world, such as "eating," "running," and "giving." They have a more sophisticated linguistic representation. The mental processes include perception (e.g., see), affection (e.g., hate), and cognition (e.g., know). Verbal processes deal with utterance or speech (for example, 'say', 'respond', 'suggest'). Relational processes describe being in terms of some form of relationship: 'appear', 'become', 'have'. Behavioural processes fall somewhere in the middle of material and mental processes. They represent physiological actions such as 'breathe' or 'cough'. Existential processes are those that demonstrate the existence or occurrence of something (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This study focuses on how the *Vanguard* and *Arise News* employs transitivity framework as frames in reporting the violence that characterized the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

5. Methodology

The study is qualitative in orientation. It applies a mixed method approach that includes descriptive content analysis and an in-depth interview to determine the transitivity processes that were used in framing the violence that characterized the 2023 general election in Nigeria, as well as the impact of electoral violence on voters. Fourteen extracts (7 each from *Vanguard* and *Arise News*) and responses from 20 participants (5 each from the fields of Journalism, education, accounting and public relations) served as the study's data. The analysis was segmented into two phases. In the first phase, excerpts capturing various shades of electoral violence in the 2023 general elections were purposively sampled and subjected to critical examination utilizing the transitivity theory. However, the second phase of the data study, which deals with the impact of electoral violence on voters, used an in-depth interview conducted over four days with twenty participants who participated in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. In the study, the participants' names were replaced with labels (from interviewee 1-20), and their ages ranged from 30 to 50 years. The interviews include a series of questions about voters' fears of election violence and the impact of electoral violence on voters. The study adopts Fischer (2002) and Hogg et al. (2009)'s definitions of electoral violence in light of the variety of definitions that exist. The latter defines it as any kind of violence that takes place both during and after the election

period, while the former describes it as any harm or threat of harm to any person or property linked to the election process, or the process itself, during that time. Fear of election violence is indicated by the interview questions: “Have you witnessed any electoral violence in past elections?”, “Did the electoral violence occur at the polling units or outside the polling units?” and “Do you fear becoming a victim of election violence?”. However, the impact of electoral violence on voters is indicated by the interview questions: “Did you experience any form of electoral violence during the 2023 general election?”, “Were you the victim of the electoral violence or someone else?”, “What was your reaction to election violence?” The participants took part in the interview based on the above prepared questions, and their comments provided insight into the impact of election violence on voters. The information gathered was analyzed and presented for discussion in the data analysis and discussion section. While the first phase of the analysis answers the first research question, the second provides a solution to the second research question.

6. Textual Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The current section focuses on textual analysis and discussion of findings. The section is divided into three parts. The first part presents the data for analysis. The second part focuses on the analysis of the data. The third part discusses the findings from the analysis.

6.1. Data Presentation

The following are data selected for analysis in this study. Extracts (1-7) are culled from *Arise News* and (8-14) from *Vanguard*.

Extracts:

[1] No fewer than 17 people were killed in various acts of election violence in Delta, Lagos, Rivers, Cross River, Niger, Akwa Ibom, Osun and Benue State as violence, apathy, and disenfranchisement of voters marred Saturday’s Governorship and State House of Assembly elections (Arise News, 19th March, 2023, p.2).

[2] But despite this assurance, thugs had a field day, snatching BVAS, disenfranchising voters and unleashing violence on those suspected of sympathizing with the state’s opposition parties (Arise News, 19th March, 2023, p.3).

[3] While the PDP accused a member of the APC of killing one of its states officials in Ila Orangun, the chairman of the Ila Orangun, L.G.A chapter of the APC, Mr. Joseph Adedokun, said in a statement that it was the PDP thug that mistakenly killed the PDP member when he fired at APC members who were protesting over-voting recorded in one of the polling units in ward 4 (Arise News, 19th March, 2023, p.4).

[4] Some men who allegedly dressed in Army uniform also beat up a member of the House of Representatives, representing Buruku Federal Constituency in the state, Kpam Jimin Sokpo. The Resident Electoral Commission (REC), Prof. Sam Egwu, has, however, announced the postponement of the Governorship and State Assembly Elections in Kwande LGA of the state (Arise News, 19th March, 2023, p.6).

[5] Meanwhile, the presidential candidate of the LP, Obi, who voted at his Amatutu polling unit in Agulu, Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State, at

around 11:20am, said that he observed voter apathy and transactional politics, unlike the February 25 presidential polls. He condemned a situation where politicians buy votes at all costs (Arise News, 19th March, 2023, p.7).

[6] Yiaga Africa, a pro-election civil society group, in its preliminary report, said yesterday's elections were marred by vote-buying, intimidation of voters, and thuggery across the state. In its preliminary report released in Abuja, Yagia Africa said, "party agents also attacked election observers in Kano and Ebonyi. Pary agents attacked Yiaga Africa Observers for observing the election in Kano (Arise News, 19th March, 2023, p.8).

[7] Meanwhile, following their inability to vote in some poling units in the states, INEC has postponed the Governorship and State Assembly Elections in 10 poling units in the Victoria Garden City (VGC), Lekki, to Sunday, March 19 today. The Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), Segun Agbaje, announced this when he addressed reporters at the VGC (Arise News, 19th March, 2023, p.4).

[8] Also, more than 50 political thugs at about 2:15am on Sunday March 19 invaded INEC collation centre for the Ogoja State constituency disrupting collation of results, vandalized the place, carted away election materials, phones and inflicted injuries on many ward collation officers. An injured collation officer, Mbube East, Dr. Paul Basseyy told Vanguard at the police clinic Ogoja where he was being treated for injuries inflicted on him by the invaders that the thugs also attacked one of his colleagues with heavy stones and planks and prayed that he survived it (Vanguard, 25th March, 2023, p.3).

[9] In Kogi, 10 INEC official and ad hoc staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC while on their way from Kupa North and South wards to the constituency collation center in Lokoja were kidnapped by armed hoodlums at about 2am on Sunday 19th of March 2023 at Obajana junction which is less than 20km from the state capital. 99 of the abducted staff were rescued by the police (Vanguard, 25th March, 2023, p.4).

[10] Yola, the Adamawa state capital was in turmoil late on Sunday. March 19 after political thugs and miscreants unleashed terror on the citizens following the stalemate arising from the National Electoral Commission, INEC to declare the governorship election results (Vanguard, 25th March, 2023, p.5).

[11] No fewer than six persons were killed while many were injured in Benue State during the Governorship and State House of Assembly election. Security personnel were said to have shot dead six persons in Gboko area of the state for allegedly snatching ballot boxes (Vanguard, 29th March, 2023, p.7).

[12] The election violence in Edo State claimed the lives of Festus Idahosa, 33 years old, and late Mrs. Elizabeth Owie, a 43-year-old mother of three. They were killed when political thugs stormed their poling units where they had gone to exercise their civic rights during the presidential and National Assembly Elections in the State (Vanguard, 25th March, 2023, p.8).

[13] Trouble began at the collation center at the INEC headquarters moments after the returning officer of the poll, Professor Mohammed Mele announced the shift of the declaration of the result to Monday morning at about 1am. When news of the postponement filtered into the capital city, thugs in their hundreds took over strategic locations to attack innocent citizens and passersby, motorists and other commuters (Vanguard, 25th March, 2023, p.6).

[14] Another thug who disrupted the polling exercise at Utagaba-Uno in Ndokwa West Local Government Area was reportedly killed. Some hoodlums also ambushed and snatched voting materials from INEC officials in Tuomo area in Boma di Local Government Area (Vanguard, 25th March, 2023, p.9).

6.2. Data Analysis

The extracts in section 6.1 are analysed in this section in order to demonstrate how both news reports employed transitivity as a schema of interpretation in framing the violence that hampered Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The first research question is: what are the transitivity processes employed by the *Vanguard* and *Arise News* as frames in constructing the violence that characterised the 2023 general elections in Nigeria? The transitivity processes used in both news reports are discussed below.

The first extract highlights the issues that hampered the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections in numerous Nigerian states. The material clause serves to identify these issues. The clause begins with the goal "No fewer than 17 people," specifying the number of casualties of electoral violence in a particular state. The goal is succeeded by the process "killed." The underlying cause of death for the seventeen people is linked to the "various acts of violence." The circumstance "in Delta, Lagos, Rivers, Cross River, Niger, Akwa Ibom, Osun, and Benue State" identifies the specific states within the nation, where these acts of violence occurred. Apart from the loss of lives, as the foregoing analysis has shown, attention is drawn to the second goal of the material clause, "Saturday's Governorship and State House of Assembly elections," which is also affected by the process "marred", an action that is attributed to "violence, apathy, and voter disenfranchisement." Both material processes, that is, "killed" and "marred," are employed to describe the election violence that hampered the electoral process in these states.

Extract two recounts the assurances issued by the country's numerous security agencies on the protection of lives and properties during the election, and how this promise failed due to the awful activities of thugs. The reporter, like in extract one, uses the material clause to define his experience during the election. The extract features a single actor with a range of processes, goals, and circumstance. The actor is denoted by "Thug." The activities of the actor are introduced by the following processes: "snatching," "disenfranchisement," and "unleashing." However, the goals are signified by "BVAS", "voters", and "those suspected of sympathizing with the state opposition party". These goals are the elements that are affected by the actor's actions. The processes and goals serve to describe the many ways in which the electoral process was disrupted by thugs. It is vital to note that the material clause employed in this extract illustrates power dynamics between two groups. The first group is represented by the thugs, while the INEC officials, voters, and security agencies represent the second group. The thugs demonstrate their dominance over voters, INEC officials, and security agencies by interfering with the election. This elucidates one of the reasons they were able to execute their heinous acts. Furthermore, the material processes, as demonstrated in this extract, have negative connotations. They are used to discredit the thugs because of their destructive activities.

Another facet of Nigeria's 2023 general elections covered by *Arise News* is the shifting of blame among party supporters. This is introduced by the verbal clause in extract three, in which some APC and PDP supporters exchange blame for the disorder that resulted in the death of one of their party members. All parts of the verbal clause in this extract contribute to the meaning that is formed. For example, the two political parties participating in the dispute are indicated by the Sayers of the verbal clauses "PDP" and "the chairman of the Ila Orangun, LGA chapter of the APC." The first process "accused" is attributed to a PDP supporter while the second "said" to an APC supporter. The target of

the first process is denoted by “a member of the APC” while the verbiage “killing one of its state officials” denotes the accusation levied against members of the APC. In reaction to this indictment, the second part of extract three presents the APC chairman’s defense, in which he exonerated his party’s members by his verbiage. It is through this verbiage that we are informed that it was the issue of over-voting in one of the polling units that precipitated the controversy between supporters of both parties eventually leading to the demise of a party member.

The fourth extract details how some individuals impersonated the Nigerian military and used their uniforms to cause chaos during the election. This is another dimension to the election violence reported by the Arise news. There are two transitivity clauses in this extract: material and verbal clauses. The extract begins with the material clause, in which the actor “some men dressed in Army uniform” refers to the unnamed men mimicking the Nigerian army. The process “beat up” indicates the action of these men, while the goal “a member of the House of Representatives” identifies the victim of their brutality. The material clause portrays the destructive acts of the so-called men imitating the Nigerian military. The second part of the extract introduces the verbal clause, in which the Sayer “the resident electoral commission, Prof Sam Egwu” uses the process “said” in addressing the situation described above. The verbiage emphasizes the resident electoral commissioner’s prerogative to reschedule the election.

Transactional politics and voter apathy have been hallmarks of elections in Nigeria and other African countries where democracy is still evolving. Using the verbal clause, the Arise News effectively captures this aspect of the 2023 election in extract five. The issue raised above is credited to the Sayer of the verbal clause, who is the Labour Party’s presidential candidate. It is relayed through the verbal process “said”. The verbiage of this clause contributes maximally to the overall meaning of the extract by informing us of the Sayer’s observations of voter indifference and vote buying during the election, as well as his disapproval of such acts.

The sixth extract alludes to a report that was submitted by an international agency regarding how the 2023 general elections were conducted. The verbal clause is used in this extract. All components of the clause contribute to the message related by the reporter. For instance, the Sayer, represented by “Yiaga Africa”, serves as the source of the report. The process “said” and verbiage of the clause is attributed to this same Sayer. The verbiage functions to uncover the content of what was said by the Sayer. The content identifies vote-buying, intimidation of voters, attack of election observers and thuggery across some states as factors that marred the election.

Two transitivity processes feature in extract seven. They are material and verbal clauses. The material clause consists of a main and subordinate clause. The main clause comprises the actor “INEC”, process “has postponed”, goal “Government and State House Assembly Elections” and circumstance “in 10 polling units in the Victoria Garden City...” It serves to introduce the topic of the extract which relates to the rescheduling of election in certain polling units. The main clause is succeeded by the subordinate clause which comprises the actor “their”, process “vote” and circumstance “in some polling units in the states”. The subordinate clause functions to complement the main clause in that it provides additional information to support the subject that was introduced by the main clause. The additional information identifies the inability of some voters to exercise their civic right as the reason for the rescheduling of the elections. The second part of extract seven introduces the verbal clause. The clause consists of a Sayer “the resident electoral commissioner, Segun Agbaje”, process “announced” and verbiage “this when he addressed reporters at the VGC”. As this analysis has shown, the material clause functions to identify the disenfranchised voters and INEC’s decision to postpone the election. However, the verbal clause serves to report the step taken by INEC to address the situation. Note that verbs such as “postponed”, “announced” and “addressed” in this text are employed to foreground the aspect of power relations. These verbs are attributed to the INEC official who exercised his power by postponing the elections in locations where voting was disrupted.

The *Vanguard* news uses extracts (8-14) in reporting the forms of violence that characterized the 2023 general elections across some states in Nigeria. A study of each extract shows the vivid description of the activities that marred the election in the states covered by the *Vanguard*. Such vivid description of actions and events is realized through different transitivity processes as we shall soon see from the discussion. For instance, in extract eight, the material processes, “invaded”, “disrupting”, “vandalized”, “carted”, “inflicted”, and “attacked” foreground the presence of a receptive material clause employed to characterize the election violence in one of the states in Nigeria. These processes signify the deadly activities of the actor represented by “50 political thugs”. However, each of the processes has a goal that is affected by its action. The goals of the material clause collaborate with the material processes to unveil the brutality of the 50 political thugs during the election as exemplified in the following expressions, “invaded INEC collation center”, “disrupting collation of results”, “vandalized the place”, “carted away election materials”, and “inflicted injuries on many collation officers”. The circumstantial element of the clause is denoted by the prepositional phrase complex “at about 2:15am on Sunday March 19” and “for the Ogoja State constituency”. This aspect of the text is worth commenting on because it sheds light on the exact time, day and location where the incident occurred. Also, it is important to state that extract eight features the verbal clause which is introduced by the verbal process “told” and employed by the Sayer “an INEC official, Dr. Paul Bassey”, a victim of electoral violence, to address some Vanguard journalists. Through the verbiage of the Sayer, we are informed of another INEC collation officer who was also attacked and terribly injured by the political thugs.

Unlike in extract eight where the INEC collation center was invaded by political thugs in Cross River State, extract nine recounts the ambush of INEC officials and ad hoc staff in Kogi State. The framing of this issue is done using a receptive material clause. All components of the clause comprising the actor “armed hoodlums”, process “were kidnapped”, goal “101 INEC official and ad hoc staff” and circumstance “while on their way from Kupa North and South wards to the constituency collation center in Lokoja, in Kogi...” contribute to the overall meaning of the extract. The process “kidnapped” indicates the activity of the armed hoodlums and affects the 101 INEC official and ad hoc staff. The circumstance of the material clause as seen above provides us with information about the victims of kidnapped. First, it informs us of what the INEC official and ad hoc staff were doing before being kidnapped, and secondly, identifies the time, date and state where the kidnap occurred. The choice of “armed hoodlums” as the actor of the material clause and “kidnapped” as its process portray a negative representation of the perpetrators of the election violence. Apart from the negative representation of these perpetrators, the material clause illustrates power relation between the armed hoodlums and INEC officials. As seen in the extract, the armed hoodlums exercised dominance over the INEC official and ad hoc staff. Finally, the second part of the extract is equally framed using a receptive material clause. It employs the actor “the police”, process “rescued” and goal “99 of the abducted staff” to conceptualize how the abducted INEC staff were delivered from the captivity of the kidnappers. The choice of verb “rescued” as an action performed by the police serves to positively label the Nigerian police due to their successful rescue operation. Also, it illustrates power relations between the police and the kidnappers where the police’s dominance over the kidnappers led to the rescue of the abducted staff.

In extract ten, the vanguard relates the chaos that engulfed Yola, the Adamawa state capital after the 2023 election. The election violence is framed using the relational and material clauses. The extract begins with a relational clause introduced by the relational process “was” functioning to characterize and identify post-election experience in Yola. This is followed by an operative material clause comprising the actor “political thugs and miscreants”, process “unleashed”, goal “terror”, receiver “on the citizens” and circumstance “following the stalemate arising from the National Electoral Commission, INEC...”. All components of the material clause add significance to the theme of election

violence that is relayed in the text. For instance, it is through these components that we are informed about the political thugs responsible for the protest and also that the protest was hinged on INEC's decision not to announce the governorship results of the state.

Extract eleven foregrounds the snatching of ballot boxes by political thugs and their elimination by security operatives. The vanguard reporter uses the material and verbal clauses to represent this issue. The material clause reports the death of six individuals as well as the injury inflicted on many voters. This is realized through the material goals "six persons" and "many" as well as the material processes "were killed" and "were injured". Both material processes and goals collaborate in drawing attention to the people who were killed and those injured. The circumstance of the material clause identifies Benue State as the location where the election violence occurred. However, the second part of the extract introduces the verbal clause comprising the Sayer "security personnel". The Sayer employs the process "said" in relaying the verbiage which uncovers the offence committed by the six people before they were eliminated by the security operatives.

Extract twelve recounts the untimely death of two individuals during the Presidential election. The sad end of these individuals is related using the actor "The election violence", the process "claimed" and goal "lives of Festus Idahosa... and late Mrs. Elizabeth Owie...". While the goal introduces us to the victims of election violence, the circumstance "in Edo State" identifies the location in the country where the sad incidence occurred. The second part of the extract complements the first by providing additional information regarding the events surrounding the death of the two individuals. Observe that the actor of the second part of this extract is denoted by "political thugs", process by "were killed" and goal by "they". From this analysis, it is obvious that the action of killing is attributed to the political thugs who stormed the polling units where the two individuals were exercising their civic rights. Through the circumstance of the second extract, we are informed that the two individuals met their tragic death when they were trying to exercise their civic rights during the presidential election.

Extract thirteen alludes to a problem that arose at INEC headquarters leading to the erupting of violence in the capital city. This issue is related using the material actor "trouble", process "began" and circumstance "at the collation center at the INEC headquarters". The cause of the trouble is captured in the preceding subordinate clauses. The first subordinate clause comprises a sayer "the returning officer of the poll, Professor Mohammed Mele", process "announced" and verbiage "the shift of the declaration of the result to Monday morning at about 1 am", while the second consists of actor "news of the postponement", process "filtered" and circumstance "into the capital city". Both subordinate clauses introduced by a verbal and material clauses respectively attribute the problem to the shift in the declaration of the election results and the masses' knowledge of the postponement. However, the second aspect of the extract introduces us to the initiators of the trouble as well as their violent activities using the actor "thugs in their hundreds", process "attack", circumstance "over strategic locations" and goal "innocent citizens, passersby, motorist and commuters".

Extract fourteen captures how justice was meted out to a political thug for disrupting the voting exercise at a particular polling unit. The "thug" representing the goal of the material clause is affected by the process "killed". However, the circumstance of the clause highlights the electoral offence that was committed by the thug that led to his death and the location where the offence was committed. Also, the latter part of extract fourteen employs the actor "some hoodlums", process "ambushed and snatched", goal "voting materials", receiver "from INEC officials" and circumstance "in Tuomo area in Boma di Local Government Area" to underscore the deadly activities of political thugs and miscreants who were bent on ensuring that election did not hold in some parts of the states.

As the foregoing analysis has shown, the reporters of *Vanguard* and *Arise News* employ material, verbal and relational clauses to represent the shades of violence that characterised the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Apart from representing the shades of violence, these transitivity processes function to indicate power relations between groups as well as for positive and negative representation

of participants. The second phase of the analysis begins with the second research questions as captured thus: what is the impact of electoral violence on voters?

The responses gathered from the interview are discussed below. First, participants were asked if they had witnessed any type of violence in previous elections. Eighteen (18) participants reacted positively, while two (2) responded negatively. The participants were asked to state whether the election violence occurred inside or outside the polling stations. Fifteen (15) participants said they witnessed electoral violence at polling stations, while two (2) indicated seeing it outside polling stations. The participants were asked to indicate whether they feared becoming a victim of election violence. All the participants responded in the affirmative. Participants were asked if they had witnessed any violence during the 2023 general elections. Four (4) participants answered negatively, while sixteen (16) participants gave an affirmative response. When asked if they had been victims of electoral violence, fifteen (15) claimed not to have been victims of electoral violence, whereas five (5) said they were. The participants were asked to explain their reactions at their polling units during the election violence. All participants who witnessed electoral violence described their experiences as distressing in response to this question. They all agreed that they expected the 2023 general election to be the best of all elections in the country's history, but they were disappointed with what they saw. One of the participants said, "I was disappointed with the whole process. I don't think I will ever exercise my civic rights anymore due to the intimidation of voters by political thugs." (Interviewee 10, male). Another participant stated, "my colleagues and I were intimidated and almost beaten if it hadn't been for the timely intervention of security operatives. I believe it is preferable to stay at home in subsequent elections and watch how things evolve rather than going out and getting attacked by these miscreants who have been backed by politicians." (Interviewee 14, female).

A participant who described his experience during the election said, "I am not concerned about the election materials that were destroyed by the thugs in my polling unit but for those who sustained one injury or the other. The politicians are in their respective residence having a nice time now while the victims of election violence are still nursing the wounds they sustained from the exercise. In fact, risking one's life for these politicians or their political party all in the name of voting in a good government is not worth it because they will not remember the poor masses when they get into the office tomorrow." (Interviewee 8, male). Another participant who witnessed the violence in her polling unit said, "I was scared when the hoodlums stormed my polling unit and began to shoot sporadically. It was God that saved me. I have never experienced this before since I have been voting. I don't think I will ever take this kind of risk anymore. It's not worth it." (Interviewee 19, female). Similarly, one of the participants who equally witnessed the violence said, "It's a waste of time, effort and resources for one to bother herself about elections in Nigeria. I will score the security operatives low because of their poor performance. I think they were not adequately prepared for the elections because if they were, those hoodlums would not have had their way in the various polling units where election materials were destroyed and voters beaten. This is the last time I will ever vote." (Interviewee 13, female). When asked to generally assess the election, another participant notes, "with what I witnessed in this election, I don't think I will ever vote again. No body will kill me before my time and no politician or political party is worth dying for" (interviewee 6, male).

6.3. Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate how the *Vanguard* and *Arise News* employ transitivity theory as frames in reporting the violence that marred the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The specific objectives were to identify the types of transitivity processes utilised as frames in constructing the violence as well as the impact of electoral violence on voters. The analysis was segmented in two parts.

The first part, which examined purposively sampled extracts from *Vanguard* and *Arise News* addresses the first research question while the second part, which documented the responses obtained from the interview conducted, focuses on the second research question. Based on the analysis of the extracts from the *Vanguard* and *Arise News*, the dominant transitivity processes employed as frames by both news reports are material and verbal processes. The material clauses used as frames are operative and receptive in configuration. Most of the material processes are dynamic in nature in that they conceptualize actions carried out by INEC officials, voters, security operatives and political thugs as well as events surrounding the election. This corroborates Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004, p.179) submission that material clauses are "clauses of doing-happening and construes a quantum of change in the flow of events as taking place through some input of energy." However, the verbal clauses play significant roles in the reportage as well. They contribute to the creation of the news report by making it possible to set up dialogic passages. Also, through the verbal processes, the content of the news reports is attributed to their sources (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p.252). The material and verbal processes serve to positively and negatively label different participants. This labeling is achieved through the actions of the participants. For instance, political thugs and miscreants are labeled negatively all through the news reports owing to their atrocious activities. While INEC officials and voters are labeled positively, the security operatives are sometimes labelled positively and some other times negatively. Apart from the labelling of participants, these transitivity processes equally function to exemplify power relations between groups. First, they depict power relations between one group represented by political thugs and another group by INEC official, voters and security operatives. Here, the dominance exercised by political thugs over INEC officials, voters and security operatives is exemplified in the success recorded in their destructive activities reported across the various poling units. The second dimension of power relations is identified between a group represented by security operatives and another group by the political thugs. Here, the security operatives are seen to have an upper hand over the political thugs as exemplified in their killing of some political thugs and miscreants who were out to disrupt the elections and intimidate voters. Also, the successful operation conducted by security operatives leading to the rescue of the INEC officials abducted by political thugs across some of the states confirms the security operatives' dominance over the thugs.

As regard the impact of the election violence on voters, sixteen (16) out of the twenty (20) participants describe their experience as harrowing even though they were not the direct victims. However, five (5) of the participants who were victims said that the experience was terrifying. They said that when they were being beaten by the thugs, they had thought that their end had come but God decided to spare their lives. Overall, all the participants said that they will not exercise their civic rights in subsequent elections unless their safety is guaranteed by the government. The responses of the participants corroborate the submissions of previous studies (Lawal, 2007 & Nife & Olabisi, 2018) that most of the general elections that have been conducted in Nigeria since independence have been characterised by different forms of violence ranging from thuggery, assault, intimidation, harassment, assassination and maiming. Lawal (2014) observes that candidates and supporters of opposition parties carry out these acts of violence in pursuit of electoral victory while Ogunbodede & Adalakun (2018) contend that the culture of violence and crisis have been the potent causes of political decadence and underdevelopment in Nigeria.

Electoral violence retard political, economic, social growth and development. It causes insecurity of lives and properties. This study, from the linguistic perspective, is in line with the submissions of previous studies that electoral violence has a negative effect on voters' participation in elections. Voters who perceive election violence or are victims of electoral violence are not likely to exercise their civic rights in subsequent elections. Violence undermines the democratic character of elections. The government and relevant stake holders must take proactive steps in addressing this problem so that

citizens can come out to exercise their civic rights without apprehension. Fixing this problem will certainly lead to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

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TEXTS ANALYSED

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