



Effects of Boko Haram Insurgency on Voters' Participation in the 2019 Governorship Election in Borno State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Borno State of Nigeria has come under intense Boko Haram insurgency attacks since 2009 with the scuttling of the electoral process as one of its major fallouts. This study examines the effects of Boko Haram insurgency on voters' participation in the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State. The study used mixed research design in which Questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data and Key Informant Interview was utilized to amass qualitative data. The study population comprises of 2,300,000 registered voters in Borno State as of 2019, out of which 350 respondents were randomly selected as sampled population. The 338 retrieved copies of questionnaire were interpreted, using descriptive statistics while the qualitative data was analysed using content and deductive analyses. Findings of the study were that the voters' turn-out during the 2019 gubernatorial election was generally low, especially in eight local government areas including **Abadam, Guzamala, Marte, Dikwa, Goboru-Ngala, Kukawa, Mobbar and Kalabalge**. Findings revealed further that the challenges of voters' in the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State included inadequate logistic support, lack of optimal access of voters to polling units, disruption of the electoral process by the insurgents, inadequate security protection for voters, and hasty closure of voting centres for security exigencies. This study concluded that the Boko Haram insurgency undermined the 2019 Governorship elections in Borno State. The study recommended, among others, that the Federal Government should always provide adequate security for voters while there should be proper voters' awareness and psyche sensitization by INEC and security agencies.



1.0 Introduction

In many countries under democratic system of government, including the United States of America (USA), Britain, France and India, election symbolizes popular expression of people's preference for a particular government or candidates, which are then aggregated and transformed into a collective decision about who will govern and who will not (Raji, 2016). Thus, the freedom to choose leaders in open, free, fair and secured elections is what essentially distinguishes democracy from undemocratic governments (Williams, 1999, as cited in Raji, 2016).

In spite of the centrality of elections to sustainable democracy and avenue for acquiring political legitimacy, electoral process in particular and democratic sustainability in general are been regularly threatened by insurgency in many parts of the world (Badero, 2016). For instance, in Algeria, insurgency broke out in 1992 after the country's military-backed government cancelled parliamentary elections, which the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was anticipated to win. The FIS had a religious agenda, including the imposition of Islamic law (*Sharia'h*), which was opposed by the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN); a government that also won national freedom from France in a brutal insurgency campaign.

In Indian, the Maoist insurgents disrupted the local start-up elections on 17th November 2008 as it triggered land mine blasts to scare away voters in a Central Indian State of Madhya Pradesh, killing two people while votes in some rural areas came to a halt as the rebels blocked roads, snatched and smashed electronic voting machine in Gua district of Chhattisgarh State. In Afghanistan, 15 people were injured in Kabul in a blast as Taliban insurgents' disrupted Afghan Presidential election on 28 September 2019 while 15 people were wounded in the Southern city of Kandahar when a bomb was detonated by the Taliban at a polling station two



hours after voting began (Badero, 2016:5).

In Colombia, the onslaught by the M-19 guerrilla sect disrupted the Presidential election in 1982 before President Betancur offered them a general amnesty. The President's negotiations with the insurgents culminated in the formation of a political party by the insurgents called *Union Patriótica* (UP), which whittled down insurgent activities and the eventual disarmament of FARC on 27th June 2017. In Kenya, the Al-Shabaab and its Kenya affiliates; Al-Hijrah attacked the voters in Nairobi in the October 2017 Presidential election. The above instances clearly indicate that the scuttling of electoral process by insurgent groups is a global phenomenon.

In Nigeria, the advent of Boko Haram insurgency since 2009 in Borno State has created multiple challenges, ranging from loss of lives, properties and humanitarian crisis, among others. Available statistics have shown that the insurgents have killed close to 80,000 people with over two million persons displaced, and properties worth \$5.9 billion lost (Borno State Government Report, 2021). Specifically, the insurgency sect has been waging war against the electoral process after exiting Sheriff's government for allegedly reneging in the implementation of the Shari'ah law in the State as promised before the elections.

In Borno State democracy and electoral process are seriously disrupted by the Boko Haram insurgents, which castigate the process as the basis of societal evils (Raji, 2016). For instance, insurgents' stiff opposition to liberal democracy has scuttled the electoral process in Nigeria, which led to the postponement of the general elections from the 9th to 16th of April 2011 while many prospective voters could not register due to state of insecurity at the registration centres in Borno State and other parts of North-eastern Nigeria. There were many bomb blasts during political campaigns in many states in 2011, including Niger, Plateau,



Bauchi, Kaduna and Abuja; all linked to the Boko Haram attacks. Elections could not take place in many local communities, especially in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States in the North-eastern Nigeria due to security lapses during the 2019 elections. This challenge presents itself differently from the 2015 elections, where Boko Haram was occupying an area almost the size of Belgium across the three states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (Charles, 2018). This study examines the effects of Boko Haram insurgency on voters' participation in the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State, Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Borno State, which has enjoyed relative peace before 2009 when the Boko Haram insurgency started, has witnessed sporadic attacks by the insurgents, which has continued to scuttle elections in the State, especially the conduct of the 2019 elections, which held amidst tight security due to destructive activities of the insurgents (Adelodun, 2021). Similarly, many eligible voters could not vote in 2019 due to insurgents' attacks on the electoral facilities, men and materials. Despite the gradual return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to their localities and efforts by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure that eligible voters participate adequately in the 2019 Governorship elections, there was still disruption by the insurgents. Though the conduct of elections in Borno State poses serious security challenges, there is dearth of studies on the effects of insurgency on the electoral process, especially as it relates to the conduct of the 2019 Governorship election. This study, therefore, examines the effects of Boko Haram insurgency on voters' participation in the 2019 governorship election in Borno State. There are many studies on the effects of insurgency on diverse socio-economic sectors in Borno State, including agriculture, transportation and the market (Bali (2007), Lauren (2015); Raji and Adewoyin, (2016); Deniz (2017); Condra,



(2018); Katrin (2020); but none on the electoral process to the best knowledge of the researcher, an academic gap this study intends to fill.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of Boko Haram insurgency on voters' participation in the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to:

- i. examine the level of voters' turnout for the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State, and
- ii. identify the challenges of voters in the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State

1.3 Research Questions

This study answers the following research questions:

- i. What is the level of voters' turnout for the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State?
- ii. What are the challenges of voters in the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State?

1.4 Literature Review

This study is reviewed under different sub-themes, which includes Elections and Voters Participation in Nigeria, Challenges of Insurgency on Voters' Participation in Elections in Nigeria, and Theoretical Framework.

Elections and Voters Participation in Nigeria



Mohammed and Adamu (2022) undertook a review on the 2019 general election in Nigeria in relation to voter's turnout and revealed that there was a decline in the level of turnout by voters which was attributed to certain socio-economic factors like poverty, unemployment and voter's apathy across Nigeria. Consequently, the study concludes that credibility and capacity to provide electoral security serve as major indicators of strong political leadership in Nigeria.

Study was also carried out by Isiaka, Ibrahim and Kolawole (2021) on the nexus between election and voters turn out in Nigeria with specific focus on the reasons for voter apathy in the 2019 general elections in Oyo State. Consequently, findings revealed that voters lack confidence and trust in the electoral umpire (INEC) especially with regards to the voting procedures. However, other factors such as the extension of election date, technical issues on the card reader, political violence, pre-voting campaign of calumny, prioritization of election, inadequate political education among others were the critical factors that affected voter's apathy in Oyo State.

The authors specifically found that voter's turnout during the 2011 general election in Oyo State was 52 percent; which implies that out of the 73,528,400 million registered voters, only 38,199,219 million voted. Meanwhile at the 2007 gubernatorial election, the total vote cast stood at 1,113,117 as against 2,236,159 registered voters. The low turnout was attributed to attack by unknown gun men leading to loss of lives within Oyo State. Amdi (2014) carried out a study on the nexus between democracy, security and election in Nigeria in the fourth republic with emphasis on 2011 election in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC). Findings from the study revealed that voter's turnout were on the decline owing to lack trust in the



electoral system, dissatisfaction with government policies, violence and insecurity. More so, socio economic factors like low educational level, religious intolerance, bitter ethnicity rivalry, and income, among others, were influential factor that led to low voters' turnout, among others. In a different study on the level of electorate participation in the political process in Nigeria, Falade (2014) found that there was low level of voters' participation in political activities as a result of political apathy due to the manipulation of the political processes by many aspiring politicians.

On the trends of voters' turnout in 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections, Jegede (2020) posits that many election outcomes witnessed low turnout due to loss of confidence on the electoral process by the voters due to outright corruption, political manipulation, monetization of the electoral process and internal security challenges. As noted by the author, the South-south geo-political zone records a significant decline in voters' turnout while same scenario applied to the South-eastern States with deep decline of voters' turnout in states like Abia and Imo States. In spite of the availability of useful and insightful information from the above studies, none of them was focused on the nexus between insurgency and electoral process in Borno State.

1.5 Challenges of Insurgency on Voters' Participation in Elections in Nigeria

In his study, Bratton (2008) found that voters living within insurgency or unsecured environment have shown electoral apathy than those not affected by insecurity. More so, Collier and Vicente (2008) conducted research across Nigeria based on field experiment; and found that voter' intimidations increased their abstention from the electoral process. In similar studies, Ezendu & Akparandu (2010) affirmed that party conflicts and struggles for elective offices have resulted in lawlessness and indiscipline while fierce competition for nomination



into political offices have turned rancorous in many instances, thus leading to electoral insecurity while also undermining free and fair electoral processes. According to the author, political opponents sometimes hire insurgents to eliminate their political rivals.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Theory of Electoral Security as its frameworks of analysis.

Theory of Electoral Security

The theory of electoral security, which was developed by Busan Barry, Ole Waever and Jaapde Wilde (1998) assumes that every electoral contest portent rivalry, discordant and rancorous competition, which leads to electoral insecurity if not well managed, and that unsecured electoral space creates political apathy and weak participation in the electoral process by the electorates. The authors posit further that elections are challenged by many security breaches ranging from inter and intra party confrontation and stage-managed elections. Other security challenges of elections according to Jeffrey (2009) include politically motivated assassination, disruption of polling process, and kidnapping of political opponents.

The central intention of electoral violence according to the author is to perpetrate electoral insecurity through intimidation or actual elimination of political rivals, suppression of voter turnout, coercion of voters and electoral officers. Omitola (2012) contends that electoral events are victimized by insecurity in different stages of the electoral processes, especially at the stage of voter registration exercise, campaign rallies, electoral debates among contestants, voting and results coalition stages while both the voter registration exercise and campaign rallies are multi-day events that require sustained security over a period of time.



Busan, et'al (1998) identifies five risk factors that generate electoral insecurity. First is the political risk factor which borders on multi-party politics that are partial, unconsolidated and façade with dwindling democratic gains and manipulated or fragile electoral transition outcome. Electoral insecurity is equally caused by economic risk factors, in which political violence is influenced by poverty-stricken citizens due to series of socio-economic denials. The theory of election security as postulated by Busan, et'al (1998:6) posits further that election security is largely undermined by social risk factors, including antagonistic social cleavages arising from ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional divides. Such social cleavages open vulnerability to political conflict through manipulative identity politics and exclusion of other contending parties from optimal socio-political benefits.

The primary criticism against the theory of electoral security borders on the argument that it harps more on physical security without taking into cognizance the roles of psychological insecurity in electoral management, which discourages people from participating in the electoral process (Khomani, 2017). In spite of this lapses, the theory is still relevant in the sense that it identifies the targets to be protected from threats whether from within and outside the political settings or space.

1.7 Research Methodology

This section explains the methods of investigation in this study, including the research design, study and sample populations and sampling technique, data presentation and analysis.

Research Design

This study used a mixed research design that combined the use of Survey and Key Informant Interview (KII) to gather the required data. Using the survey method, 350 copies of



questionnaire were administered on purposively selected respondents from the target population to gather the quantitative data, out of which the 338 returned copies were analysed. More so, eight KII was conducted for relevant stakeholders based on their strong knowledge of the subject matter and high level of involvement in the electoral process in Borno State.

Source of Data

Data was obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained from questionnaire administered to respondents in the study area while secondary data was gathered from textbook, journal articles, dissertations, magazines, newspaper, online materials, lecture notes, and seminar reports, among others.

Study and Sample Population

The study population comprises of 2,300,000 registered voters in Borno State in 2019 (INEC, 2019), out of which 350 respondents, representing over 15 percent of the registered voters were randomly selected as sampled population. The questionnaire was distributed to relevant stakeholders as follows: Voters; 70, INEC officials; 70, Repentant ex-Boko Haram Commanders (KII), Community leaders; 50, Civil Society Organizations; 30 Journalists; 30, Transporters of electoral materials; 30, Aids workers; 20, Security personnel; 50 out of which the 338 retrieved questionnaire was analysed, using descriptive statistics that include the simple tables, frequency, percentages among others.

Table 1: Distribution of Response rate through Questionnaires

Questionnaires	Frequency	Percentage
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Returned questionnaire	338	97%
Unreturned questionnaire	12	3%
Total	350	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 1 shows the number of questionnaires administered in the study area, which was 350 out of which 338 (97%) of the questionnaires were retrieved while 12 (3%) were not returned. Thus, the study has a data retrieval rate of 97 per cent.

Data Collection and Analysis Technique

Questionnaire was administered on the respondents by the researcher and his research assistants. A total of six (6) Research Assistants were appointed and their selection was based on sufficient knowledge of the subject matter and the study area. They were adequately trained on how to properly administer and retrieve questionnaire. Moreover, the presence of the researcher on the field offered the required opportunity for proper explanation on those variables that seemed ambiguous to some research assistants and respondents. The data collected through the administration of questionnaire was analysed using figures, tables, simple percentages, frequency distributions and charts. In addition, data obtained from the KII was analysed using content and deductive analyses.

1.9 Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section presents and analyses the data gathered from the field of study. The section is divided into two sub-sections. Sub-section 1 relates to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents while sub-section 2 presents the results gathered from the field on each of the research objectives and questions.



Section 1: Socio-Demographic Information of Respondents

Table 1.1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	288	74%
Female	58	36%
Total	388	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1.1 depicts the distribution of respondents according to gender which further revealed that 288 (74%) of the respondents were males while 58 (36%) are females. Therefore, the findings of this study revealed that most of the respondents 288 (74%) were male. This implies that more males participated in the 2019 governorship election compared to the females.

Table 1.2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Respondents age	Frequency	Percentage
18– 30	163	48%
31 – 40	99	29%
41 – 50	54	16%
51and above	22	7%
Total	338	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

As shown in the Table 1.2 revealed that 163 (48%) of the respondents were between 18 and 30 years. Likewise, 99 (29%) of the respondents were between 31-40 years. Meanwhile 54 (16%) were of the respondents were 41-51years. Also, 22 (7%) of the respondents were



between 51 and above. Therefore, the findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents 163 (48%) were between 18-30 years. This finding shows that majority of the respondents are active youth and are qualified as voters that have participated in the 2019 governorship election in the study area.

Table 1.3: Distribution of Respondents' by Marital Status

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Single	165	48%
Married	166	49%
Widow	2	1%
Divorced	5	2%
Total	338	100%

Sources: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1.3 shows that 165 (48%) were single, while 166 (49%) of the respondents were married. Meanwhile, 2 (1%) of the respondents were widow, while 5 (2%) of the respondents divorced. Therefore, the findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents 166 (49%) were married. This signifies that the most of the voters that participated in the governorship election within the study area were married and matured.

Table 1.4: Distribution of Respondents' by Educational Qualification

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
No Education	2	1%
Primary/Arabic	1	0%
Secondary	5	2%



Tertiary	330	97%
Total	338	100%

Sources: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1.4 shows that 2 (1%) had no level of education, while 1 (0%) of the respondents were primary/Arabic school certificate holders. Meanwhile, 5 (2%) of the respondents were secondary school certificate holders, while 330 (97%) of the respondents are higher certificate holders. Therefore, the findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents 330 (97%) are higher certificate holders. This signifies that the most of the respondents are literate with adequate competency to provide relevant information regarding the subject matter of this study.

Table 1.5: Distribution of Respondents' Occupational Background

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Civil Servants	122	36%
Self Employed	98	29%
Security Agent	28	8%
Student	90	26%
Total	338	100%

Sources: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1.5 shows that 122 (36%) were civil servants, while 98 (29%) of the respondents were self-employed. Meanwhile, 28 (8%) of the respondents were security agents, while 90 (26%) of the respondents were students. Therefore, the findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents 122 (36%) were civil servants. This signifies that diverse



occupational background participated in the electoral process but the civil servants participated in greater number in Borno State.

Table 2.1: Distribution of Respondents on the level of voters' turnout in the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Low	168	50%
High	133	39%
Very High	37	11%
Total	338	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2.1 shows that 168 (50%) of the respondents are of the view that voters' turnout during the 2019 gubernatorial election was low, while 133 (39%) of the respondents are of the view that the turnout for the election was high. Meanwhile, 37 (11%) of the respondents were of the view that the turnout was very high. Therefore, the findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that the level of voters' turnout during the governorship elections was low. This implies that majority of eligible voters were disenfranchised and denied the right to choose a leader of their choice due to sustained security threats caused by insurgency.

Table 2.2: Challenges of voters' participation in the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State under insurgency

S/N	Challenges of voters' participation in the 2019 Governorship election in Borno State under insurgency	Frequency (%)
1	Logistics Challenges	20 (6)
2	Inadequate access of voters to polling units	14 (4)



3	Disruption of the electoral process by the insurgents	120 (36)
4	Inadequate security protection for voters'	90 (27)
5	Faking of insurgency attacks against political opponents	19 (6)
6	Hasty and early closure of voting centres for security exigencies	23 (6)
7	Fear and intimidation from Boko Haram insurgents' activities	24 (7)
8	Inability to vote due to PVC collection challenges	18 (5)
9	Credibility of the electoral process	10 (3)
Total		338 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2.2 shows various challenges of voter's participation in election under Boko-Haram insurgency in Borno State. One of the challenges with highest percentage frequency from the respondents is fear and intimidation from Boko Haram insurgents, which has 36% respondents. Secondly, inadequate security protection for voters has the next challenges with highest percentage frequency from the respondents having 27%. The remaining challenges have less than ten percentages.

Discussion of Major Findings

Findings on objective one revealed that the level of voters' turnout during the governorship elections was low due to insurgency threat, meaning that many eligible voters were disenfranchised and denied the right to choose leaders of their choice by the insurgents. This finding clearly showed that Boko Haram insurgency significantly affected the participation of eligible voters during the 2019 governorship elections.

Findings on objective two revealed that the challenges of conducting election within



the confines of Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State revolves around fear and intimidation from the insurgents, inadequate security protection for electoral stakeholders, and logistic challenges. This finding is in consonance with the works of Bergman (2006), Bratton (2008), and Fernandez & Kuenzi, (2010), which revealed that insecurity is a critical challenge to credible election anywhere in the world.

1.10 Conclusion

This study concluded that the Boko Haram insurgency undermined the 2019 governorship election in Borno State. Interestingly, it is pertinent to note that despite the spate of insurgents' activities in certain areas of Borno State during the election, voters' turnout in some local government areas, including Maduguri and the IDPs camps was quite impressive due to very tight electoral security in the areas. Therefore, there is the need for government to beef up security in all the local government areas to secure the electoral process in Borno State.

1.11 Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the study recommended that:

- i. The Federal Government should provide adequate security for voters to encourage them to participate fully in future elections.
- ii. There should be proper voters' awareness and psyche sensitization by INEC and security agencies respectively to enable voters overcome fear and intimidation from Boko Haram insurgents.
- iii. More voting centres should be established in the resettled communities with adequate security to allow more voters participate in future elections in Borno State.



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