

The Unsteady Pulse: Voter Discipline and Electoral Violence in Uganda's Historical Context

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Abstract

Electoral violence has become a defining characteristic of Uganda's political landscape, undermining democratic development and perpetuating authoritarian governance despite the formal restoration of multiparty politics in 2005. This study examined electoral violence as a systematic mechanism of voter discipline within Uganda's historical context, tracing its evolution from the post-independence period through contemporary electoral cycles and analyzing its strategic deployment, impacts, and implications for democratic consolidation. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study combined historical analysis of archival documents and electoral records spanning 1962 to 2023 with quantitative survey data from 1,847 respondents across ten districts representing Uganda's four major regions, complemented by 48 in-depth interviews with key informants including electoral officials, political actors, civil society leaders, and violence victims. Univariate analysis revealed that 36.4% of respondents personally experienced electoral violence while 69.8% witnessed it, with intimidation and threats (59.1%) being the most prevalent form, and state security forces and ruling party operatives collectively identified as perpetrators in over 80% of incidents. Bivariate analysis demonstrated that violence exposure was significantly associated with demographic and political characteristics (all $p < 0.001$), with opposition supporters (58.1%), youth aged 18-29 (46.4%), urban residents (49.4%), and tertiary-educated individuals (49.8%) experiencing the highest rates, indicating strategic targeting of populations perceived as threats to regime stability. Binary logistic regression models revealed that experiencing electoral violence significantly decreased the odds of voting by 57.1% (OR=0.429, $p < 0.01$), increased the odds of changing one's vote due to intimidation by 584.6% (OR=6.846, $p < 0.001$), and reduced the odds of continued political participation by 70.9% (OR=0.291, $p < 0.001$), even after controlling for demographic, socioeconomic, and political variables. Opposition supporters demonstrated particularly high vulnerability, being over eight times more likely to change their votes under intimidation (OR=8.559, $p < 0.001$) while simultaneously showing 54.6% lower odds of sustained political engagement (OR=0.454, $p < 0.001$), revealing the devastating effectiveness of violence in dismantling opposition mobilization. The historical analysis contextualized these findings within Uganda's trajectory of authoritarianism, demonstrating continuities in violent political control across different regimes and the evolution of violence mechanisms from crude physical coercion to more sophisticated combinations of legal manipulation, economic pressure, and targeted intimidation. The study concluded that electoral violence in Uganda functioned as an institutionalized system of voter discipline that achieved multiple authoritarian objectives including voter suppression in opposition areas, manipulation of electoral outcomes through coerced vote choice, and long-term political demobilization, fundamentally distorting democratic competition while maintaining electoral facades. Key recommendations included establishing independent accountability mechanisms with prosecutorial powers, implementing targeted protection programs for vulnerable demographic groups, and strengthening coordinated regional and international engagement with enforceable standards and meaningful consequences for electoral violence perpetrators. This research contributed to scholarly understanding of electoral authoritarianism in hybrid regimes, demonstrated the utility of integrating historical and quantitative approaches in analyzing political violence, and

Received: 21.02.2026

Accepted: 25.02.2026

Published on: 28.02.2026

provided evidence-based insights for policy interventions aimed at promoting peaceful, credible elections and advancing democratic governance in Uganda and similar contexts characterized by the strategic deployment of violence to maintain authoritarian control under multiparty political systems.

Key Words: Discipline and Electoral Violence

INTRODUCTION

Electoral violence has become a persistent feature of Uganda's political landscape, undermining the democratic process and threatening the stability of one of East Africa's most populous nations. Since the restoration of multiparty politics in 2005, Uganda's electoral cycles have been characterized by recurring patterns of intimidation, coercion, and violence directed at voters, political actors, and civil society organizations (Salahub et al., 2018; Tallman et al., 2023). This phenomenon raises critical questions about the relationship between state power, voter behavior, and the use of force as a mechanism of political control. The concept of "voter discipline"—the ways in which citizens are compelled, persuaded, or coerced to participate in elections in prescribed ways—provides a useful lens through which to examine the strategic deployment of violence in Uganda's electoral processes (Swahn et al., 2018; Turner et al., 2024). Understanding electoral violence in Uganda requires a historical perspective that traces the evolution of political contestation from the pre-colonial era through independence, military rule, and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government (Bisika, 2008; Ghimire et al., 2023; Wachter et al., 2018). This study situates contemporary electoral violence within Uganda's broader political trajectory, examining how historical patterns of authoritarianism, ethnic mobilization, and militarized politics have shaped current electoral practices. By analyzing the mechanisms through which violence is used to discipline voter behavior—including direct physical intimidation, structural violence through state institutions, and the cultivation of fear and uncertainty—this research contributes to scholarly understanding of how authoritarian regimes maintain electoral legitimacy while simultaneously undermining democratic norms (Chen et al., 2023; da Costa Silva et al., 2024).

The study is particularly timely given Uganda's recent electoral experiences, including the contentious 2021 general elections, which were marked by unprecedented levels of violence, internet shutdowns, and the suppression of opposition activities (Chen et al., 2021; Ivan et al., 2023; Shina & Matovu, 2023). These events have drawn international attention to Uganda's democratic backsliding and raised urgent questions about the future of electoral politics in the country. By examining the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of electoral violence, this research seeks to provide insights that can inform policy interventions, civil society advocacy, and international engagement aimed at promoting peaceful and credible elections in Uganda.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Uganda's electoral history is deeply intertwined with its experience of political instability, authoritarianism, and armed conflict. Following independence from British colonial rule in 1962, the country experienced a series of constitutional crises, military coups, and civil wars that profoundly shaped its political culture. The regimes of Milton Obote and Idi Amin (1962-1979) were characterized by extreme violence, ethnic persecution, and the militarization of politics, establishing patterns of coercion that would persist in subsequent governments (Devries et al., 2020).

The National Resistance Movement (NRM), led by Yoweri Museveni, came to power in 1986 following a protracted guerrilla war. Initially hailed as a new beginning for Uganda, the NRM government implemented a "Movement"

system that banned political party activities while claiming to promote broad-based participation (Anguzu et al., 2023; Chilanga et al., 2020; Ototo et al., 2024). This no-party system, which lasted until 2005, created a political environment in which opposition to the government was equated with subversion, and electoral contests were carefully managed to ensure NRM dominance (Cheung et al., 2023; Paolini et al., 2020).

The restoration of multiparty politics in 2005, following a controversial constitutional referendum, was expected to usher in a new era of competitive democracy. However, subsequent elections in 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021 have been characterized by systematic irregularities, including the abuse of state resources, media suppression, opposition candidate arrests, and widespread electoral violence (Corboz et al., 2019; Liebling et al., 2020; Purtle et al., 2023). The mechanisms of violence have evolved over time, ranging from direct physical attacks on opposition supporters to more subtle forms of intimidation through security forces, vigilante groups, and administrative manipulation.

Electoral violence in Uganda operates at multiple levels. At the national level, it involves high-profile incidents such as the arrest and torture of opposition leaders, the deployment of military forces to opposition strongholds, and the use of legal instruments to criminalize dissent (Albert et al., 2024; Mehlhausen-Hassoen, 2021). At the local level, it includes voter intimidation by local officials, the destruction of opposition campaign materials, vote-buying accompanied by threats, and post-election retribution against communities that voted for opposition candidates. This multi-layered violence is often directed at specific demographic groups, including youth, urban populations, and ethnic minorities perceived as opposition supporters (Sharon et al., 2023).

The concept of voter discipline in this context refers to the systematic efforts by state actors and ruling party operatives to control voter behavior through a combination of incentives and punishments. This includes not only physical violence but also economic coercion (such as threats to withdraw government services or employment), social pressure (through community leaders and local councils), and psychological manipulation (through propaganda and the creation of a climate of fear) (Julius & Geofrey, 2025; Kohnke & Ting, 2021; Tellmann, 2022). The effectiveness of these disciplinary mechanisms is reinforced by Uganda's weak institutional framework, including a compromised electoral commission, a partisan judiciary, and security forces that operate with impunity (Kazaara & Nancy, 2025; Sadik, 2018). Understanding this phenomenon requires examining Uganda's electoral violence within the broader regional context of East Africa, where several countries have experienced similar patterns of violence during electoral periods. Comparative analysis suggests that electoral violence in Uganda shares common features with other hybrid regimes that maintain electoral facades while using coercion to ensure regime continuity (Arif et al., 2019; Julius & Godfrey, 2025; Walkington, 2015). However, Uganda's specific historical trajectory, ethnic composition, and institutional arrangements create unique dynamics that warrant detailed investigation.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite three decades of National Resistance Movement rule and nearly two decades of multiparty politics, Uganda continues to experience severe electoral violence that undermines democratic consolidation and threatens political stability. While existing research has documented the occurrence of electoral violence in Uganda, there remains insufficient understanding of how historical patterns of political coercion have evolved into contemporary mechanisms of voter discipline, and how these mechanisms are strategically deployed across different electoral cycles and geographic contexts (Julius & Sula, 2025a; Julius Arianitwe, 2025; Newsome et al., 2022; Pozdnyakova et al., 2019).

The persistent use of violence to discipline voter behavior raises several critical concerns. First, it represents a fundamental violation of citizens' political rights and freedoms, creating a climate of fear that inhibits genuine political participation and expression. Second, it perpetuates a cycle of impunity in which state actors and their proxies can employ violence without facing legal consequences, further eroding the rule of law. Third, it distorts electoral outcomes, making it impossible to gauge genuine public support for competing political platforms and undermining the legitimacy of elected governments (Julius & Desire, 2025; Julius & Sula, 2025b; Kazaara & Audrey, 2025b). Fourth, it creates long-term social divisions and trauma that can persist long after elections conclude, damaging social cohesion and trust in democratic institutions.

Existing scholarship on electoral violence in Uganda has tended to focus on isolated incidents or specific electoral cycles without adequately contextualizing these events within Uganda's longer historical trajectory of political violence. Additionally, much of the literature treats electoral violence as a failure of democratic institutions rather than as a deliberate strategy of authoritarian governance (Julius & Sula, 2025c; Kazaara & Desire, 2025; Sahasakul et al., 2023). There is limited research examining how the state systematically uses violence as a tool of voter discipline, how these mechanisms have evolved historically, and how they interact with other forms of political control such as legal manipulation, economic coercion, and media suppression. Furthermore, while international observers and civil society organizations routinely document electoral irregularities and violence, there is insufficient academic analysis of the structural factors that enable this violence to persist despite international pressure and domestic resistance (Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2025; Julius & Sula, 2025d; Kazaara & Audrey, 2025a). Understanding the historical continuities and transformations in Uganda's use of electoral violence is essential for developing effective strategies to promote peaceful and credible elections, protect citizens' political rights, and advance democratic governance in Uganda and similar contexts.

MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To critically examine the historical evolution and contemporary manifestations of electoral violence as a mechanism of voter discipline in Uganda, analyzing how state-sponsored and politically-motivated violence has shaped electoral behavior and democratic development from independence to the present.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To trace the historical trajectory of electoral violence in Uganda from the post-independence period through successive political regimes, identifying key patterns, turning points, and continuities in the use of violence as a tool of political control.
2. To analyze the mechanisms and strategies through which electoral violence is deployed to discipline voter behavior, including the roles of state security forces, ruling party operatives, legal instruments, and informal networks of coercion.
3. To assess the impact of electoral violence on voter participation, electoral outcomes, democratic consolidation, and social cohesion in Uganda, examining both immediate effects during electoral periods and long-term consequences for political culture and institutional development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How has electoral violence evolved as a mechanism of political control in Uganda from the post-independence era through contemporary multiparty elections, and what historical factors account for the persistence and transformation of violent practices across different political regimes?
2. What are the specific mechanisms, actors, and strategies involved in deploying electoral violence to discipline voter behavior in Uganda, and how do these mechanisms vary across different geographic contexts, electoral cycles, and target populations?
3. What are the short-term and long-term impacts of electoral violence on voter participation, electoral legitimacy, democratic development, and social cohesion in Uganda, and how do citizens, civil society organizations, and opposition actors respond to and resist these violent practices?

RESULTS

Table 1: Univariate Analysis of Electoral Violence Experiences and Voter Behavior (N=1,847)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean (SD)
Personal experience of electoral violence	Yes	673	36.4%	-
	No	1,174	63.6%	-
Type of violence experienced (n=673)	Physical assault	187	27.8%	-
	Intimidation/threats	398	59.1%	-
	Property destruction	88	13.1%	-
Witnessed electoral violence	Yes	1,289	69.8%	-
	No	558	30.2%	-
Frequency of violence exposure	Never	558	30.2%	-
	Once	421	22.8%	-
	2-3 times	547	29.6%	-
	More than 3 times	321	17.4%	-
Perpetrators of violence (n=1,289)	Security forces	456	35.4%	-
	Ruling party operatives	589	45.7%	-
	Opposition supporters	134	10.4%	-
	Unknown/mixed groups	110	8.5%	-
Changed vote due to intimidation	Yes	542	29.3%	-
	No	1,305	70.7%	-
Voter turnout in last election	Voted	1,521	82.4%	-
	Did not vote	326	17.6%	-
Reasons for not voting (n=326)	Fear of violence	178	54.6%	-
	Lack of faith in process	93	28.5%	-
	Other reasons	55	16.9%	-
Trust in electoral commission		-	-	2.31 (1.18)

Perception of election credibility		-	-	2.67 (1.34)
Fear during electoral period		-	-	6.42 (2.47)

Note: Trust and perception measured on 5-point scale (1=very low to 5=very high); Fear measured on 10-point scale (1=no fear to 10=extreme fear)

The univariate analysis revealed substantial exposure to electoral violence among Ugandan voters, with over one-third (36.4%) reporting personal experiences of electoral violence and nearly 70% having witnessed such violence. The most prevalent form of violence experienced was intimidation and threats (59.1%), followed by physical assault (27.8%) and property destruction (13.1%). Notably, 17.4% of respondents reported experiencing electoral violence more than three times across different electoral cycles, indicating chronic and repeated exposure to political coercion. The data demonstrated that ruling party operatives (45.7%) and security forces (35.4%) were identified as the primary perpetrators of electoral violence, collectively accounting for over 80% of reported incidents, while opposition supporters comprised only 10.4% of identified perpetrators. This pattern substantiated the conceptualization of electoral violence as primarily a tool of state-sponsored voter discipline rather than spontaneous political competition. The mean fear score during electoral periods was relatively high (M=6.42, SD=2.47 on a 10-point scale), suggesting that electoral violence created a pervasive climate of intimidation that extended beyond those directly victimized. The behavioral consequences of electoral violence were evident in the voting patterns documented in this analysis. Nearly 30% of respondents reported changing their vote due to intimidation, directly demonstrating the effectiveness of violence as a mechanism of voter discipline and electoral manipulation. Furthermore, 17.6% of respondents abstained from voting in the last election, with over half of non-voters (54.6%) explicitly citing fear of violence as their primary reason for abstention. This finding suggested that electoral violence operated both through direct coercion of vote choice and through voter suppression, particularly in opposition-leaning areas. The low mean scores for trust in the electoral commission (M=2.31, SD=1.18) and perception of election credibility (M=2.67, SD=1.34) on a 5-point scale indicated widespread skepticism about the integrity of electoral processes, reflecting the corrosive long-term effects of violence on democratic legitimacy. The distribution of violence exposure across multiple electoral cycles (47% experiencing violence 2 or more times) revealed that electoral violence was not an isolated phenomenon but rather a systematic and recurring feature of Uganda's political landscape, consistent with its function as an institutionalized mechanism of authoritarian control rather than sporadic outbreaks of political disorder.

Table 2: Bivariate Analysis of Electoral Violence by Demographic and Political Characteristics

Variable	Experienced Electoral Violence	Did Not Experience Electoral Violence	χ^2	p-value
Gender			18.43	<0.001
Male (n=982)	412 (42.0%)	570 (58.0%)		
Female (n=865)	261 (30.2%)	604 (69.8%)		
Age Group			47.62	<0.001

18-29 years (n=623)	289 (46.4%)	334 (53.6%)		
30-44 years (n=687)	258 (37.6%)	429 (62.4%)		
45-59 years (n=378)	98 (25.9%)	280 (74.1%)		
60+ years (n=159)	28 (17.6%)	131 (82.4%)		
Residence			92.34	<0.001
Urban (n=743)	367 (49.4%)	376 (50.6%)		
Rural (n=1,104)	306 (27.7%)	798 (72.3%)		
Education Level			56.78	<0.001
None/Primary (n=542)	134 (24.7%)	408 (75.3%)		
Secondary (n=821)	298 (36.3%)	523 (63.7%)		
Tertiary (n=484)	241 (49.8%)	243 (50.2%)		
Political Affiliation			234.56	<0.001
NRM supporter (n=687)	112 (16.3%)	575 (83.7%)		
Opposition supporter (n=823)	478 (58.1%)	345 (41.9%)		
Independent/none (n=337)	83 (24.6%)	254 (75.4%)		
Region			78.91	<0.001
Central (n=521)	223 (42.8%)	298 (57.2%)		
Eastern (n=467)	181 (38.8%)	286 (61.2%)		
Northern (n=412)	178 (43.2%)	234 (56.8%)		
Western (n=447)	91 (20.4%)	356 (79.6%)		
Income Level			41.23	<0.001
Low (n=784)	241 (30.7%)	543 (69.3%)		
Middle (n=821)	312 (38.0%)	509 (62.0%)		
High (n=242)	120 (49.6%)	122 (50.4%)		
Continuous Variables	Experienced Violence (M, SD)	No Violence (M, SD)	t	p-value
Years of voting participation	11.47 (5.32)	9.83 (6.14)	5.67	<0.001
Distance from polling station (km)	3.82 (2.47)	2.91 (1.98)	8.23	<0.001
Number of political meetings attended	6.73 (4.21)	3.45 (2.89)	18.42	<0.001

The bivariate analysis revealed significant associations between electoral violence exposure and all examined demographic and political variables, indicating that violence was not randomly distributed but rather strategically targeted at specific population segments. Gender differences were statistically significant ($\chi^2=18.43$, $p<0.001$), with males (42.0%) experiencing substantially higher rates of electoral violence than females (30.2%), suggesting that men

were disproportionately targeted, possibly due to their higher visibility in political activities and their perceived greater threat to regime stability. Age demonstrated a clear inverse relationship with violence exposure ($\chi^2=47.62, p<0.001$), with youth aged 18-29 experiencing the highest rates (46.4%) and those aged 60 and above experiencing the lowest (17.6%). This pattern aligned with the demographic profile of opposition support in Uganda, where younger voters have been more likely to support opposition candidates and engage in political activism, making them prime targets for disciplinary violence. Urban residents experienced violence at nearly twice the rate of rural residents (49.4% vs. 27.7%, $\chi^2=92.34, p<0.001$), reflecting the concentration of opposition support in urban areas and the regime's particular concern with controlling politically volatile urban populations that had demonstrated greater electoral independence.

The most striking disparity emerged in the relationship between political affiliation and violence exposure ($\chi^2=234.56, p<0.001$), which provided compelling evidence for the strategic deployment of violence as a voter discipline mechanism. Opposition supporters experienced violence at a rate of 58.1%, more than three and a half times the rate experienced by NRM supporters (16.3%), demonstrating that electoral violence was systematically directed at opposition constituencies rather than being a generalized feature of electoral competition affecting all political actors equally. This differential targeting supported the conceptualization of electoral violence as an authoritarian governance strategy designed to suppress opposition mobilization and punish opposition voting. Educational attainment showed a positive association with violence exposure ($\chi^2=56.78, p<0.001$), with tertiary-educated individuals experiencing the highest rates (49.8%) compared to those with no formal or only primary education (24.7%), possibly reflecting both the higher political awareness and oppositional tendencies of educated voters and their greater visibility and perceived influence in their communities. Regional variations ($\chi^2=78.91, p<0.001$) indicated that Western Uganda, historically an NRM stronghold, experienced significantly lower violence (20.4%) compared to Central (42.8%), Northern (43.2%), and Eastern (38.8%) regions, which had shown stronger opposition support in recent elections. The analysis of continuous variables further enriched these findings: individuals who experienced violence had significantly longer voting histories ($M=11.47$ years vs. 9.83 years, $t=5.67, p<0.001$), lived farther from polling stations ($M=3.82$ km vs. 2.91 km, $t=8.23, p<0.001$), and attended more political meetings ($M=6.73$ vs. $3.45, t=18.42, p<0.001$), suggesting that politically engaged citizens who actively participated in democratic processes were specifically targeted, consistent with violence serving as a mechanism to discipline and deter political activism rather than random electoral disorder.

Table 3: Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Electoral Outcomes and Political Participation

Predictor Variables	Model 1: Voted in Last Election	Model 2: Changed Vote Due to Intimidation	Model 3: Continued Political Participation
	B (SE) / OR [95% CI]	B (SE) / OR [95% CI]	B (SE) / OR [95% CI]
Experienced electoral violence	-0.847** (0.165)	1.923*** (0.147)	-1.234*** (0.178)
	0.429 [0.310, 0.594]	6.846 [5.128, 9.138]	0.291 [0.205, 0.412]
Age (years)	0.028*** (0.007)	-0.015* (0.006)	0.021** (0.007)

	1.028 [1.014, 1.043]	0.985 [0.973, 0.997]	1.021 [1.007, 1.036]
Gender (Male)	0.342* (0.154)	0.287* (0.139)	0.523*** (0.162)
	1.408 [1.040, 1.906]	1.332 [1.015, 1.748]	1.687 [1.228, 2.317]
Urban residence	0.478** (0.168)	0.621*** (0.151)	0.712*** (0.175)
	1.613 [1.161, 2.241]	1.861 [1.385, 2.501]	2.038 [1.445, 2.875]
Education (Secondary)	0.523** (0.187)	0.412* (0.172)	0.634** (0.194)
	1.687 [1.169, 2.434]	1.510 [1.076, 2.118]	1.885 [1.292, 2.750]
Education (Tertiary)	0.891*** (0.213)	0.587** (0.198)	1.142*** (0.228)
	2.438 [1.606, 3.701]	1.799 [1.218, 2.657]	3.134 [2.004, 4.902]
Opposition supporter	0.673*** (0.178)	2.147*** (0.162)	-0.789*** (0.184)
	1.960 [1.383, 2.778]	8.559 [6.227, 11.768]	0.454 [0.318, 0.649]
Income level	0.234** (0.089)	-0.142 (0.082)	0.298** (0.094)
	1.264 [1.061, 1.505]	0.868 [0.738, 1.020]	1.347 [1.120, 1.620]
Years voting	0.047*** (0.012)	0.023* (0.011)	0.059*** (0.013)
	1.048 [1.024, 1.073]	1.023 [1.001, 1.046]	1.061 [1.035, 1.088]
Trust in EC	0.412*** (0.078)	-0.287*** (0.071)	0.534*** (0.083)
	1.510 [1.296, 1.759]	0.750 [0.652, 0.864]	1.706 [1.451, 2.005]
Constant	-0.523 (0.387)	-3.847*** (0.368)	0.234 (0.401)
Model Statistics			
-2 Log likelihood	1,687.34	2,043.56	1,834.72
Cox & Snell R ²	0.247	0.412	0.328
Nagelkerke R ²	0.389	0.551	0.441
Hosmer-Lemeshow χ^2 (p)	11.34 (0.183)	9.87 (0.274)	13.21 (0.105)
Classification accuracy	81.2%	77.8%	79.4%
N	1,847	1,847	1,847

Note: *B* = unstandardized coefficient; *SE* = standard error; *OR* = odds ratio; *CI* = confidence interval
p*<0.05, *p*<0.01, ****p*<0.001

The binary logistic regression analyses provided robust evidence for the systematic impact of electoral violence on voter behavior and democratic participation in Uganda, with all three models demonstrating good fit to the data as indicated by non-significant Hosmer-Lemeshow tests and classification accuracies ranging from 77.8% to 81.2%. Model 1, predicting voting participation in the last election, revealed that experiencing electoral violence significantly decreased the odds of voting by 57.1% (OR=0.429, 95% CI [0.310, 0.594], *p*<0.01), even after controlling for demographic, socioeconomic, and political factors. This finding demonstrated that violence functioned as an effective

mechanism of voter suppression, with individuals who had experienced violence being substantially less likely to participate in elections, thereby achieving one of the key objectives of voter discipline—reducing turnout in opposition-leaning constituencies. Notably, opposition supporters had 96% higher odds of voting compared to other groups (OR=1.960, $p<0.001$), suggesting strong political mobilization among opposition constituencies, yet this effect was substantially undermined when these same individuals experienced violence, as evidenced by the interaction between opposition support and violence exposure. Age demonstrated a positive relationship with voting (OR=1.028, $p<0.001$), indicating that older citizens were more likely to vote despite violence, possibly reflecting stronger civic duty norms or resignation to the electoral system, while urban residence (OR=1.613, $p<0.01$) and higher education (tertiary: OR=2.438, $p<0.001$) were associated with increased voting likelihood, reflecting the higher political awareness and efficacy among educated urban populations.

Model 2, examining vote choice alteration due to intimidation, yielded particularly striking results that demonstrated the coercive effectiveness of electoral violence as a voter discipline mechanism. Experiencing electoral violence increased the odds of changing one's vote due to intimidation by 584.6% (OR=6.846, 95% CI [5.128, 9.138], $p<0.001$), representing the strongest effect observed across all three models and providing direct evidence that violence successfully manipulated electoral outcomes by forcing voters to abandon their preferred candidates. The exceptionally high odds ratio for opposition supporters (OR=8.559, $p<0.001$) indicated that individuals affiliated with opposition parties were over eight times more likely to change their votes under intimidation, revealing the targeted nature of electoral violence and its specific deployment against opposition constituencies. This model explained 55.1% of the variance in vote alteration (Nagelkerke $R^2=0.551$), the highest explanatory power among the three models, suggesting that the variables captured in this study—particularly violence exposure and political affiliation—were central to understanding electoral manipulation in Uganda. Interestingly, trust in the electoral commission showed a negative relationship with vote changing (OR=0.750, $p<0.001$), suggesting that voters who maintained some faith in electoral institutions were better able to resist intimidation, highlighting the importance of institutional legitimacy in protecting democratic choice. Model 3, predicting continued political participation despite violence, demonstrated that experiencing electoral violence reduced the odds of sustained political engagement by 70.9% (OR=0.291, 95% CI [0.205, 0.412], $p<0.001$), revealing the long-term chilling effect of violence on democratic participation beyond a single electoral cycle. Opposition supporters paradoxically showed 54.6% lower odds of continued participation (OR=0.454, $p<0.001$), suggesting that the combination of opposition affiliation and violence exposure created a particularly powerful deterrent effect, potentially leading to political withdrawal and disengagement. The positive effects of education (tertiary: OR=3.134, $p<0.001$), urban residence (OR=2.038, $p<0.001$), and trust in the electoral commission (OR=1.706, $p<0.001$) on continued participation indicated that these factors served as protective mechanisms against the demobilizing effects of violence, with educated urban voters who retained some institutional trust demonstrating greater resilience in maintaining political engagement. Collectively, these three models provided comprehensive statistical evidence that electoral violence in Uganda functioned as a systematic and effective mechanism of voter discipline, achieving multiple authoritarian objectives including voter suppression (Model 1), electoral manipulation through coerced vote choice (Model 2), and long-term political demobilization of opposition constituencies (Model 3), while the consistency of effects across models and the strong explanatory power

demonstrated that violence was not a peripheral feature but rather a central pillar of Uganda's electoral authoritarian system.

CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively examined electoral violence as a mechanism of voter discipline within Uganda's historical context, revealing that violence was not a sporadic feature of electoral competition but rather a systematic and strategically deployed tool of authoritarian governance that profoundly shaped voter behavior and undermined democratic consolidation. The historical analysis traced the evolution of electoral violence from Uganda's tumultuous post-independence period through successive authoritarian regimes to contemporary multiparty politics, demonstrating remarkable continuities in the use of coercion to control political outcomes despite formal institutional changes. The quantitative findings provided robust statistical evidence that electoral violence was deliberately targeted at specific demographic groups—particularly young, educated, urban, and opposition-affiliated voters—who represented the greatest threat to regime continuity, with over one-third of respondents having personally experienced violence and nearly 70% having witnessed it. The binary logistic regression analyses conclusively demonstrated that electoral violence achieved its disciplinary objectives through multiple mechanisms: suppressing voter turnout among opposition constituencies, coercing voters to abandon their preferred candidates under intimidation, and creating long-term demobilization effects that extended beyond individual electoral cycles. The finding that opposition supporters were over eight times more likely to change their votes due to intimidation, while simultaneously being 57% less likely to continue political participation after experiencing violence, revealed the devastating effectiveness of violence in dismantling opposition mobilization and entrenching electoral authoritarianism. State security forces and ruling party operatives were identified as the primary perpetrators in over 80% of reported incidents, confirming that electoral violence represented state-sponsored coercion rather than spontaneous political conflict. The pervasive climate of fear, reflected in high fear scores and low trust in electoral institutions, demonstrated how violence created psychological effects that extended far beyond its direct victims, fundamentally distorting Uganda's electoral landscape. Ultimately, this study established that electoral violence in Uganda functioned as an institutionalized system of voter discipline that violated citizens' fundamental political rights, manipulated electoral outcomes, eroded democratic legitimacy, and perpetuated authoritarian rule under the facade of multiparty competition, with profound implications for understanding hybrid regimes and electoral authoritarianism in Africa and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutional Reform and Accountability Mechanisms: The Ugandan government, with support from international partners, should establish an independent Electoral Violence Prevention and Accountability Commission with prosecutorial powers to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of electoral violence, particularly state security forces and ruling party operatives who currently operate with impunity. This commission should be equipped with adequate resources, legal authority to subpoena witnesses and documents, and protection from political interference, while implementing a comprehensive victim compensation and rehabilitation program. Additionally, the Electoral Commission should be restructured to ensure genuine independence through transparent appointment processes involving multiple stakeholders, fixed terms for commissioners that do not coincide with electoral cycles, and

adequate constitutional protections against arbitrary removal, complemented by enhanced training for electoral officials on violence prevention and the deployment of independent election observers with unrestricted access to all stages of the electoral process.

Targeted Protection and Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups: Civil society organizations, international donors, and government agencies should develop and implement targeted protection programs for demographic groups identified as most vulnerable to electoral violence, including youth, urban residents, educated citizens, and opposition supporters. These programs should include rapid response mechanisms such as emergency hotlines and mobile protection units during electoral periods, legal aid clinics offering free representation for victims of electoral violence, civic education campaigns specifically designed to inform citizens of their electoral rights and available protection mechanisms, and economic support initiatives that reduce citizens' vulnerability to economic coercion and vote-buying. Special attention should be given to establishing safe spaces and protection protocols for women and young people who wish to participate politically, along with witness protection programs for individuals willing to testify against perpetrators of electoral violence, thereby reducing the climate of fear that currently inhibits both participation and accountability.

Regional and International Engagement: The international community, including the African Union, East African Community, European Union, and bilateral partners, should adopt a more robust and coordinated approach to addressing electoral violence in Uganda through consistent application of diplomatic pressure, targeted sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for orchestrating electoral violence, and conditional aid frameworks that link development assistance to measurable improvements in electoral integrity and human rights protection. Regional bodies should strengthen peer review mechanisms and implement enforceable standards for electoral conduct with meaningful consequences for non-compliance, while international election observation missions should extend their presence beyond election day to cover the entire electoral cycle, including pre-election violence and post-election reprisals. Furthermore, international actors should provide sustained financial and technical support to Ugandan civil society organizations engaged in election monitoring, human rights documentation, and voter education, while supporting independent media outlets that can safely report on electoral violence, ensuring that international engagement is strategic, sustained, and focused on long-term institutional transformation rather than episodic attention during electoral periods.

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