

**ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN UGANDA: AN
ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE 2021 GENERAL ELECTIONS ON
UGANDA'S DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL
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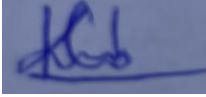
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DECLARATION

I, Kembabazi Shanice Irene, do hereby declare that this research report has not been submitted for any academic award to any institution.

Signed



Date: 07/05/2026

APPROVAL

This dissertation has been developed under my guidance. It is hereby presented for submission for examination.

Signed 

Date: 07/05/2026

Mr. Tabalanga Jonathan

Academic Supervisor

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family members who supported me emotionally, financially and physically throughout the entire process of conducting this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I do express my acknowledgement and gratitude to a number of people who have in different ways contributed to the completion of this work. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Tabalanga Jonathan, my supervisor for their unwavering guidance, constructive commitment and generally for successfully seeing through this work. Accordingly, I feel indebted to all the various groups of people who provided me with support, proof read and edited this dissertation as well as providing constructive comments which immensely improved the dissertation. Thanks to all my friends at Uganda Christian University who have been more than a friend to me. Their company at UCU and during the time of doing Bachelors together has been immense. Lastly, I ask for forgiveness of all those who have been with me over the course of the years and whose names I may not have mentioned.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

COVID 19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
EC	Electoral Commission
NRM	National Resistance Movement
NUP	National Unity Platform
UCU	Uganda Christian University
UN	United Nations

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between elections and democratic governance in Uganda, with a specific focus on assessing the impact of the 2021 Uganda General Elections on democratic governance. The objectives of the study were; to identify the forms and patterns of electoral violence experienced during the 2021 elections, to analyze the key drivers of electoral violence during the 2021 elections and to assess the role of political actors, security agencies, and institutions in either escalating or mitigating electoral violence. The study used descriptive cross-sectional design and quantitative approach was adopted. The study employed a qualitative epistemology and a phenomenological design and 10 documents were reviewed in connection to the study problem. Data was analyzed using document review analysis. The study result indicated that physical violence, arbitrary arrests and detentions particularly targeting opposition politicians, their supporters, and political activists, voter intimidation and systematic disruption of opposition campaign activities were the forms and patterns of electoral violence experienced during the 2021 elections. The study also showed that political competition and struggle for power, state repression and use of security forces, weak electoral institutions and lack of trust, youth unemployment and social discontent, and poor voter education and misinformation as the major cause of electoral violence in 2021 general elections in Uganda. The study finding further indicated that the security agencies, including the police and military, are critical in managing electoral processes and maintaining public order. The study concluded that; electoral violence is driven by institutional weaknesses and deliberate political actions, is driven by a complex interaction of political, institutional, and socio-economic factors, with intense political competition at its core and is significantly shaped by the actions and interactions of key institutional and political actors, particularly political elites, security agencies, and electoral institutions. The study recommends that; promoting rule of law and due process, strengthening voter protection and electoral management bodies, addressing high rate of youth unemployment and promoting responsible political leadership will help to reduce on the electoral violence.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In Uganda's political history, electoral violence has been a continues issue associated with serious struggles for political power and governance since independence in 1962. The post-independence period was marked by political instability like; contested elections and violent regime changes. Notably, 1980 Uganda general elections triggered disputes that contributed to bush war, eventually leading to the rise of NRM in 1986 (Carbone, 2003; Golooba-Mutebi, 2008; Kanyogonya & Makara, 2019).

Although Uganda institutionalized regular elections, particularly after the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 2005, electoral processes have continued to experience violence and irregularities. Successive elections (2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021) were associated with clashes between supporters of rival political groups, heavy deployment of security forces, and allegations of intimidation. The 2021 Uganda general elections were especially notable frequent arrests, blocking of opposition campaigns, and violent voters' confrontations countrywide (Garbe, 2024).

Electoral violence is any form of coercion, intimidation and physical harm that occur before, during or after elections, aimed at influencing election outcomes. This includes acts like; harassment of candidates and their supporters, clashes between rival political supporters, voter intimidation, destruction of campaign materials, arrests of oppositions and disruption of campaign rallies (Momen & Markony, 2023). Electoral violence is closely connected to democracy, governance, and political participation. Free and fair elections are pillars of democracy; however, presence of violence undermines their credibility and legitimacy (Oladele & Adelekan, 2025). Electoral violence is also associated with as political competition, state power, and citizen rights, as it often emerges when actors attempt to gain or retain power through non-democratic means (Momen & Markony, 2023).

This study was grounded in three different but related theories that explain the occurrence of electoral violence. Relative Deprivation Theory developed by Samuel A. Stouffer (1949) and modified by Ted Robert Gurr (1970) indicates that individuals are involved in violence when access to political or economic resources are not even. Escalating unemployment rate and socio-economic inequality among youths in Uganda leads to their vulnerability to manipulative political acts (Macdonald et al., 2023). The Political Competition Theory developed by John E. Roemer (2001), explained that rival political actors with strong support from the area they contested from are more likely to engage in violent acts during the electoral periods because tension will arise from the both sides, this has been experienced in various parts of Uganda during the election period. In addition, the Institutional Weakness Theory states that weak electoral institutions are perpetrators of violence because they do not manage the electoral processes well. Thus, institutions like the Uganda Police and the Electoral Commission (EC) either prevent or exacerbate electoral violence (Namagembe, 2025).

Electoral violence in Uganda is mainly caused by racism, unrest, and socio-economic factors. Conflicts, disputes, and struggles for flag bearer within a single political party have been historically associated with violent confrontations during the campaigning and election periods, making violent reactions to appear as a normal act during the electoral processes. For instance, ever since the by-election violence of 2018 in Arua district, it has remained politically sensitive with increased tensions between political actors and security agencies (Karyeija et al., 2025).

Although the 2021 Uganda's general elections were conducted in a unique way like; using digital campaigning strategies due to COVID 19 effects and restrictions put in place to curb down the pandemic, still there was increased political division why by the supporters of one party say the ruling party (NRM) were not in good terms with the highly competitive opposition party (NUP). There was exchange of rude words spread of propaganda which result into tensions and violence countrywide (Nanfuka, 2021). The situation was worsened when the security forces got involved causing a lot of clashes between the opposition youth groups and

political actors. Therefore, understanding these contextual realities is essential for designing effective interventions to promote peaceful elections.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Different elections have been held in Uganda since the introduction of multiparty politics in 2005. However, in all the elections held violent acts like; arrests of opposition, intimidation and human rights abuse excess use of force by security personnel. The 2021 general elections were marked by several arrests of opposition supporters, excessive use of force by security agencies, and clashes between political groups (Arinaitwe & Ahumuza, 2026).

Historically exhibited increased political tensions, often resulting in violent electoral episodes. Despite efforts by the government and electoral bodies like the Uganda's EC of to ensure free and fair elections, incidents of violence still persist. This raises critical concerns about the credibility of elections, citizen participation, and the consolidation of democracy in Uganda. This study therefore filled this gap by providing a detailed examination of the 2021 election cycle in these areas.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study examined the relationship between elections and democratic governance in Uganda, with a specific focus on assessing the impact of the 2021 Uganda General Elections on democratic governance. The study generated a comprehensive understanding of how electoral processes, particularly the occurrence of electoral violence, influence the quality of democracy in the country.

1.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To identify the forms and patterns of electoral violence experienced during the 2021 elections.
- ii. To analyze the key drivers of electoral violence during the 2021 elections.
- iii. To assess the role of political actors, security agencies, and institutions in either escalating or mitigating electoral violence.

1.5 Research Questions

- i. What forms of electoral violence were experienced during the 2021 elections?
- ii. What factors contributed to the occurrence of electoral violence in these districts?
- iii. What role did institutions such as the Electoral Commission of Uganda and security agencies play in influencing electoral violence?

1.6 Scope of the Study

1.6.1 Geographical scope

Geographically, the study covered the whole country. During 2021 general elections there was high record of election violence.

1.6.2 Content scope

This study focused on the elections and democratic governance in Uganda: an assessment of the impact of the 2021 general elections on Uganda democratic governance. The study specifically focused on: forms and patterns of electoral violence experienced during the 2021 elections, the key drivers of electoral violence during the 2021 elections and the role of political actors, security agencies, and institutions in either escalating or mitigating electoral violence.

1.6.3 Time scope

The study was carried out within 2 months, that was from March to April. This time period was enough for proposal writing, data collection and report writing.

1.7 Justification of the study

This study is important because electoral violence continues to undermine democratic processes in Uganda, especially during elections such as the 2021 general elections. This study will provide localized insights into the causes, patterns, and effects of electoral violence, which are often overlooked in national-level studies. It will also help assess the effectiveness of key institutions like the Electoral Commission of Uganda in managing electoral conflicts.

The study is crucial for informing policymakers, electoral bodies, and other stakeholders in designing strategies to prevent electoral violence, improve election management, and promote peaceful political participation. Additionally, it

contributes to academic knowledge and supports efforts toward strengthening democracy and political stability in Uganda. If this study is not carried out, important district-specific drivers of electoral violence may remain unidentified, leading to continued cycles of conflict during elections. This could further weaken public trust in electoral processes, reduce voter participation, and hinder effective policy interventions aimed at ensuring free and fair elections.

1.8 Significance of the study

The findings of this study may be valuable to different stakeholders and for several reasons:

Academic Contribution: The study may contribute to the growing body of literature on electoral violence and democratic governance in Africa, particularly within the context of Uganda's electoral processes.

Policy Makers: The findings may provide insights for policymakers on the causes and consequences of electoral violence and inform policies aimed at strengthening electoral management and democratic institutions.

Electoral Management Bodies: Institutions such as the Electoral Commission of Uganda may use the findings to improve strategies for managing elections and preventing violence.

Civil Society Organizations: Civil society organizations involved in election monitoring and civic education might benefit from understanding the factors that trigger electoral violence and how they can promote peaceful participation.

Future Researchers: The study may serve as a reference point for scholars interested in studying elections, democracy, and political conflict in Uganda and other emerging democracies.

1.9 Conceptual Framework

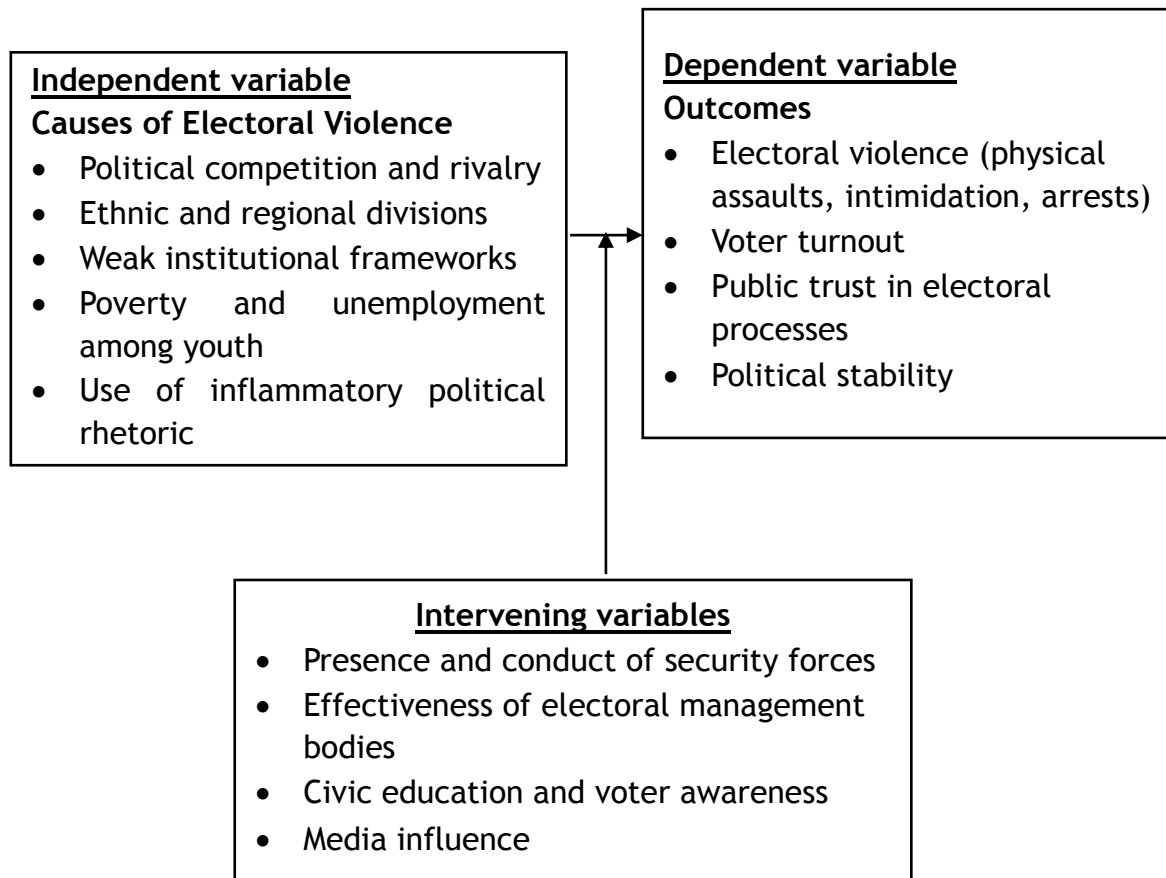


Figure 1. 1: Conceptual framework showing the link between causes of electoral violence of 2021 cycle and the outcomes

The conceptual framework for this study illustrated the relationship between the factors that cause electoral violence, the conditions that influence its occurrence, and the outcomes it produces during the 2021 elections. These are the key factors that trigger or increase the likelihood of electoral violence. In this study, they include: political competition and rivalry, ethnic and regional divisions, poverty and unemployment and weak institutional frameworks. These leads to electoral violence: manifested in forms such as physical clashes, intimidation, arrests, and harassment. Also, violence may discourage citizens from participating in elections and reduces confidence in democratic institutions. Agencies such as the Uganda Police Force can either deter violence through professionalism or escalate it through excessive force. As well media can either calm tensions through responsible reporting or inflame them through biased coverage.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is linked to the elections and democratic governance in Uganda: an assessment of the impact of the 2021 general elections on Uganda democratic governance. Therefore, the literature was reviewed based on study purpose. The literature was got from books, periodicals, journals, newspapers, websites, dissertations, articles, and reports.

2.2 Forms and patterns of electoral violence experienced during the 2021 elections

The use of physical force like; beating, shooting, arresting of civilians, candidates, supporters by the security agencies were among the major violence recorded in 2021 general elections of Uganda. There were several reports of arrests, beating, tear gas as well as shooting by the security agencies, the crowds were also dispersed from the campaign rallies. Also, the clashes between the supporters of different political parties caused several injuries and even loss of lives (Thaler, 2021).

The rampant arrests and detentions of opposition political activists, supporters and prominent political figures like Robert Kyagulanyi triggered protest from the public leading to violence. The harassment, detention and intimidation of voters limit their ability to participate politically to the political parties they are attached to (UN, 2026). Different individuals were threatened and intimidated repeatedly because of supporting a particular candidate. These was caused by state and non-state actors, causing fear and discouraged freedom of open expression of political side and opinions (Arinaitwe & Ahumuza, 2026).

Serious deployment of security personnel in the campaign venues, polling station as well as the communities created fear among people and some of them perceived that was away, they were being suppressed not to fully support their political party other than security. The political candidates' movement were restricted; venues were denied to opposition candidates and different opposition

rallies were disrupted or blocked. This resulted to an environment full of confrontation and tension politically (Kagoro, 2023).

Media and communication platforms were restricted during the 2021 Uganda's general elections. Journalists faced different assaults; harassment and their gadgets were confiscated during event coverages. The transparency and public engagement in the election process was worsened by the total shut down of internet few days to the elections, during elections and some days after election, this left the public unaware on how the elections were going far beyond their place of residence. To make matters worse the effect of COVID 19 was still on where people were not able to move freely from one place to another due to fear of contracting the virus and the only reliance was internet which was also blocked (Kagoro, 2023). After elections different opposition supporters were reportedly arrested, harassed, abducted. This led to mistrust on the electoral process causing tension and political disputes (Kagoro, 2023).

In urban areas and where the opposition candidates had strongholds mostly in regions with strongly political competition like the case of central region of Uganda electoral violences were very common. These violences happen in different phases of the elections; with highest during campaigning periods, nomination and after the arrest of key opposition candidate or leaders as well as some well-known key party supporters (Kanyogonya & Makara, 2019b).

2.3 Key drivers of electoral violence during the 2021 elections

In 2021 general elections of Uganda, there was stiff competition across all the electoral positions, this made some the long serving incumbent leaders who were not sure of retaining back their positions to use force which sparked violence among the voters, this was experienced throughout the country (Travesí-Sanz, 2021). Popularity of the opposition leaders majorly in the urban areas among the youths led to confrontations between the youths and the security personnels, this highly intensified violence during the election periods (Thaler, 2021).

Hayden (2021) reported that the opposition parties experienced different suppression by the security agencies under the state orders; continuous arrest of opposition candidates and supporter, disruption of rallies in different venues country wide, use of excessive force on simple issues. In relation, Kanyogonya and Makara (2019), lamented that the killings, beatings and arbitrary detentions of the opposition leaders and their supporters were state sponsored. This led to high tension, deaths and widespread unrest.

Most of the voters and political leaders majorly those in opposition side viewed the electoral process as manipulative or unfair forcing them to resort to violence, caused by different allegations of ballot paper smuggling, less transparency of electoral process, electoral fraud these all escalated into serious tensions during and after the general elections of 2021. All these are caused by inefficient management of electoral institution, to worsen is not an independent body (Kagoro, 2023).

The avenue for peaceful political participation was reduced in 2021 general elections due to intimidation of journalists, ban of political rallies and restricting the civil society. People become so suspicious when the internet was shut down prior to the election period, they were not able to communicate through internet and to know what is happening this increased unrest among the citizens (Arinaitwe & Ahumuza, 2026; Kagoro, 2023).

In Uganda, the highest percentage of the population are youths whom more than half are unemployed, due to economic hardship forces them to engaged into elections activities like mobilisation of supporters, political violence and protests with the hope that their life will be changed when the regime changes but in the due process of this clashes and confrontations are experienced which in some cases severe injuries and even deaths were experienced (Kagoro, 2023).

In Uganda, electoral violence is recurring due to the grief from some of the candidates and supporters who felt suppressed and maltreated in the previous elections as such they wait and prepare for confrontation in the next elections. Historically electoral violence is seen as a normal thing in Uganda because in

almost all the elections be held at least violence have been experienced in any stage of the electoral process (Arinaitwe & Ahumuza, 2026).

Moffat and Bennett (2021), indicated that inadequate education of voters and civic engagement restrictions led to violence in 2021 general elections. The civic society organisations were unable to freely operate in promoting awareness, this led to high misinformation. The misinformation and propaganda fuelled tensions and violent reactions among supporters from different political parties.

According to Kagoro (2023), the regional and demographic dynamics play a role in electoral violence, in most of the urban areas in Uganda electoral violence is high due to strong opposition hold. This is experienced due to high mobilisation level from densely populated areas. Rapid urbanisation and demographic pressures are also partly response for electoral conflicts.

2.4 The role of political actors, security agencies, and institutions in either escalating or mitigating electoral violence

Political actors; candidates and political parties play a major role in electoral conflicts. The way they mobilise and the information they pass to their supporters can result into confrontations and violence, majorly where the race is tight. These actors directly fuel violence by indirectly using aggressive mobilization tricks (Kagoro, 2023).

In Uganda different political parties have a hand in encouraging electoral violence although others are just being accused of it. However, simultaneously political parties also know their role in promoting peace during the election periods by strengthening their internal conflict resolution mechanisms and adhering to codes of conduct (Arinaitwe & Ahumuza, 2026). In an act where political actors perceive as a “winner-takes-all” contest, they can’t fail to engage in violent acts like; intimidation, arrests and threats to gain victory. Thus, political actors either escalate violence or moderate it thorough peaceful campaigns, dialogue, and adherence to democratic norms (Kagoro, 2023).

Travesí-Sanz (2021), argued that security agencies; police and military, are crucial in the management of the election processes and maintaining law and order. They

are supposed to protect the citizens irrespective of their political affiliation and they should be neutral in all situations. However, in 2021 general elections of Uganda, security personnels got involved in acts that intensified violence. Excessive forces like arrests, beatings as well as disruption of rallies were used by security agencies against; journalists, civilians, opposition leaders and supporters, (Nanfuka, 2021).

According to Arinaitwe and Ahumuza (2026), security agencies during the electoral periods, their actions in different occasions were causing to fear, intimidation, and denying free political participation. The security agencies were directly involved in causing violence during the election periods despite the role to maintain law and order during the period such that there are peaceful and fair elections. These agencies have the ability to reduce electoral violence if their operations are professional, fair enforcement of law and ensuring that the candidates, voters and electoral materials are protected. Effectively this depends on their neutrality, training and the way they are accountable (Kagoro, 2023).

The electoral institution like; electoral commissions, courts, and regulatory bodies, are very important in ensuring free, fair, and trustworthy elections. When the citizens perceive these institutions as independent and transparent, tension and violence is controllable, however if these institutions are weak or compromised contributes to increased electoral disputes and violence (Hayden, 2021). In relation, Kagoro (2023) argues that mistrust on the electoral institutions increases violence as citizens means use other means such as violence to expresses the disappointments and grieves. Low or no transparency, biased decision-making processes, allegations of electoral irregularities in different areas have contributed to serious violence during elections.

Nanfuka (2021) recommends that voter education programs, better conflict resolution mechanisms, adhering to electoral laws and codes of conduct are very instrumental in reducing electoral violence. If these measures are effectively implemented improves credibility and freely encourages participation in the election processes. However, Kagoro (2023) points out that electoral violence is as a result of the inter play between political actors, security agencies, and

institutions other than a single group action. For instance, political actors might cause violence and the security agencies respond with excessive force, but due to weak institutions the disputes may fail to be resolved, worsening the conflict. In the context of Uganda, this interaction has been observed in the form of opposition mobilization, state repression, and institutional challenges, all of which contributed to the escalation of violence during the electoral period (Hayden, 2021).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methods that were followed in conducting the study. It gives details regarding the research design, source of data under study and data analysis technique that was used.

3.2 Research design

This study employed a qualitative epistemology and a phenomenological design. Qualitative research methodology is an approach to research that increasingly tap the deeper meanings of particular human experiences thereby generating theoretically richer observations (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). A qualitative methodology was appropriate because it typically starts with a more flexible plan and thereby allowing the study process to evolve as more data is gathered.

3.3 Source of data

In this study one type of data was used by the researcher, document review. Document review is a way of collecting data by reviewing existing documents. In recognition to this, the researcher reviewed documents that had information that was relevant to the research problem from journals, articles and research publications.

3.4 Data analysis

The study used document analysis. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment point (Bowen, 2009). The findings were corroborated by examining information collected through different methods and from multiple studies.

3.4 Ethical consideration

The researcher did not take the study as a personal gain with negative effects on others. This study took account the following ethical issues; plagiarism and fraud; to avoid this, the researcher acknowledged all the work of others which have been consulted or reviewed in relation to this study.

3.5 Methodological constraint

Only considering one research approach (qualitative approach) may not be robust enough in gathering information that can be adequate for generalization of the impact of the 2021 general elections on Uganda democratic governance.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter covered: presentation, analysis and interpretation of results. Data was presented and interpreted objective by objective.

4.2 Forms and patterns of electoral violence experienced during the 2021 elections

The reviewed documents indicate that physical violence during elections operates at both institutional and grassroots levels. Security agencies getting involved in the electoral violence makes the public to distrust state institutions, however, inter-party conflicts lead to political divisions. These negatively affect the integrity of the electoral processes posing a great danger on peaceful democratic transitions. This was confirmed by Kijja, Okuda and Musasizi (2021) on the *Learning and Forgetting Nothing from The Past? A Reflective Study on Violence and Human Rights Abuses in Uganda's 2021 General Elections*. That indicated that the government officials were not consistent with the statements they issued out during the election process it was more less of confusion or diversion. During the election period they were very many opposition supporters who were arrested but their arrests were not recorded anywhere, during their release they were dropped to unknown location from that they were arrested from. For example, some victims were arrested in Kampala but during release they were dropped in Mubende many others were just dropped in the bush place unknown to them. This was an indication that the electoral process was full of threats that compromised transparency, free and fair participation in the process.

The study finding showed that the continuous arrests and detentions was very common during the electoral periods, the opposition leaders plus their supporters as well as political activists were the major targets. These actions were majorly focused to suppress and limit opposition mobilization and participation in the electoral process. The frequent arrests were regularly conducted without clear legal justification. This raise concerns about the abuse of state power and wrong application of the law. This was evidenced by Ssenkumba (2025) on *Ugandans fear*

electoral violence, say election officials and security agents should be liable for offences on their watch that stated that: Robert Kyagulanyi's arrests during campaign and public engagements made his supporters to protest which they were aggressively attacked by security agencies. This contributed to high tension and violence during the electoral period.

The study result also indicated that the voters were also intimidated during the electoral periods, there was several evidence of citizens be threatened and coerced to divert them from supporting their favourite candidates or political parties. This was done to particular candidates to discourage support from their voters. This was confirmed by Policy Brief (2023) report on *addressing violence against women during elections in Uganda. Addressing violence against women during elections in Uganda* that indicated that: the use of both physical and psychological violence such as; disruption of rallies, assaults, killings, threats, intimidations and harassments is mainly aimed to influence the election outcomes

The study finding indicated that in 2021 general elections of Uganda, the security agencies frustrated the efforts of the opposition in mobilisation by frequently blocking their activities, disrupting their rallies and even denying them to access the venue they had been granted permission to use. These actions raised much concerns about fair and free electoral processes.

4.3 Key drivers of electoral violence during the 2021 elections

The study finding indicated that stiff political competition majorly led to electoral violence specially where the incumbent does want any challenge. This was confirmed by Kijja, Okuda and Musasizi (2021) on *the learning and forgetting nothing from the past? a reflective study on violence and human rights abuses in Uganda's 2021 general elections* indicated that increase violence was experienced where the incumbent assumes is the only one fit to hold the political position is holding yet the opposition candidate is seriously pushing for a change. This results into violence from both sides since they all mobilize their supporters of which they clash and confront each other. The competitive contributed environment forces candidates to adopt aggressive or coercive strategies to secure advantage.

The study indicated that the killings, beating and unnecessary detentions of opposition supporters and their leaders by the security agencies led to high electoral violence. Although the security agencies claim that was a way to maintain peace and order but instead worsen the situation and completely made the public to loss trust on the security agencies and the state as well.

The result also shows that fear due to threats and insecurity among the citizens brought about by state-sponsored violence resulted into tension and panic among public. This was evidenced by Kakande et al. (2021) on *amplified abuse: report on online violence against women in the 2021 Uganda general election* argued that supporters, specifically affiliated to opposition parties, were from frequently deterred political activities participations due to risk of violence or detention. This led to mistrust of state institutions and constrained civic space.

The study result further showed that weak electoral management and lack of institutional independence make the system prone to violence. There have been different reports on bias, irregularities, inadequate transparency in the electoral process. This raises concern about the credibility and neutrality of electoral institutions.

The reviewed documents show that high rate of unemployment among the youths and socio-economic inequality intensified electoral violence. unemployment accompanied with socio-economic inequality increased the youths' vulnerability making them susceptible to political mobilization and due to limited livelihood opportunities, they see it as an opportunity that can improve their lives from socio-economic exclusion and frustrations.

The study finding also show that economic grievances worsen political tensions as confirmed by Tumushabe and Kijja (2021) on *Uganda's Political Transition Scenarios to 2026 and Beyond the Crested Crane, the Storm in the Teacup or the Warrior Mad King?* Who indicated that frustrated youths see that their engagement in politics will enable them to express their dissatisfactions or get short term gain that can help improve their lives. The situation is worsened where some candidates use these vulnerable youths to achieve their interests by misinforming them or giving them false information.

Lastly, the study showed that inadequate voter education and restriction of civic society engagement was among the contributors of electoral violence in 2021 general elections. As confirmed by Arinaitwe and Ahumuza (2026) on *the unsteady pulse: voter discipline and electoral violence in Uganda's historical context*, indicated that very many voters do not understand well the electoral processes, their rights, and the appropriate channels to follow for proper political participation due to lack of access of information and education about the election process. This means that they can be manipulated by candidates who have ill intentions to cause violent act during the electoral periods since they are ignorant about the real electoral processes.

4.4 The role of political actors, security agencies, and institutions in either escalating or mitigating electoral violence

The study result showed that political actors; candidates and political parties are responsible for resolving or escalating electoral violence. Since they are the ones responsible for mobilising supporters and informing them on what is right and not right for them to do during the election processes. This is evidenced by Macdonald, Owor and Tapscott (2023) on *explaining youth political mobilization and its absence: the case of Bobi Wine and Uganda's 2021 election* who stated that in a competitive environment, voters' mobilisation creates division among people and sometimes results into confrontation between rival supporters.

The study result also showed that security agencies; police and military manage electoral processes and maintain public order. As confirmed by Netherlands institute of multiparty democracy (2025) on *a participatory self-assessment of political parties in Uganda on their experiences with and role in electoral violence study report* that indicated that the security agencies should operate professionally and neutrally to protect all the citizens from any form of abuse irrespective of the political affiliation. This secures credibility on the electoral environment as well as process.

However, in the review of documented information, it was found that the security agencies had a hand in escalating electoral violence other than containing. Instead of being to all sides, they get involve in coercive practices, this intensified

tensions, provoked public unrest, and also triggered different protest and suppression. This undermined their legitimacy and weakened public trust on their ability to manage electoral security well.

The study found that electoral institutions such as; electoral commissions, courts, and other regulatory bodies are responsible for conducting free, fair, and credible elections. The reviewed documents indicated that these institutions are very important in ensuring integrity during elections through; administering transparent procedures, proper resolution of disputes and enforcing electoral laws.

Lastly the study result shows that weakness of electoral institutions and these institutions being compromised, or politically influenced leads to electoral disputes and conflict. This is evidenced by Macdonald, Owor and Tapscott (2023) on *explaining youth political mobilization and its absence: the case of Bobi Wine and Uganda's 2021 election* who argued that feeling of the electoral institutions being bias, inefficient and not transparent undermine public trust in the electoral process and increase the likelihood of disceptation. In such situations, aggrieved political actors might be forced to resort to protests or other confrontational methods, including violence, to express dissatisfaction with perceived irregularities.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, discussion, conclusions and recommendations were derived from the study results presented in chapter four.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The discussions of results were based on the study findings presented in chapter four and it was backed by the empirical evidence from chapter two. The discussions of results were done objective by objective as follows;

5.2.1 Forms and patterns of electoral violence experienced during the 2021 elections

The study finding indicated that physical violence during elections were prevalent at both institutional and grassroots levels. Security agencies being involved in the violence raised serious doubt about the independence of state institutions; however, inter-party clashes led to serious political divisions. This implies that security agencies involvement in electoral violence erodes the perceived neutrality and legitimacy of state institutions, makes the public to develop a mistrust in government and democratic processes. The study finding is supported by Thaler (2021) who reported that during 2021 Uganda general elections, security agencies used aggressive force on the public like; beatings, shootings, and dispersing crowds during campaign rallies and protests using tear gas and live bullets which resulted into injuries and loss of lives. This was also worsened by supporters clashing.

The study results show that there were frequent arrests and detentions that specifically targeted the opposition leaders and their supporters as well as the political activists during electoral periods. This means that the fundamental democratic principles were ignored during the electoral periods specifically protection of civil liberties such as freedom of expression, assembly, and political participation. In support to the study finding, UN (2026) states that prominent political actors like Robert Kyagulanyi was repeated arrests as well as harassment, intimidation and detention of his supporters to limit their participation caused serious protests and violence.

The findings of the study revealed that there was frequent voter intimidation during the electoral periods. Political supporters were frequently threatened by violence, coerced and other forms of retaliation from their political affiliations. This indicates that principles of free and fair elections were compromised because citizens were limited to freely make independent political decisions. This finding aligns with Arinaitwe and Ahumuza (2026), who reported that during the 2021 general elections, opposition supporters were intimidated and threatened due to their support to specific political candidates. The threats came from both state and non-state actors, instilling fear among supporters and discouraging their free political expression.

The findings of the study indicated that disruptions of the opposition campaigns caused electoral violence. This means that the fundamental principle of political equality, vital in promoting free and fair elections was altered. This observation aligns with Kagoro (2023), who noted that conspicuous deployment of armed forces at campaign venues, polling locations, and within communities. This was perceived as a tactic to manage and suppress oppositions other than security reasons.

5.2.2 Key drivers of electoral violence during the 2021 elections

The study revealed that intense political competition where the incumbents have a strong hold on power increases chances of electoral violence by fostering a high-stakes, winner-takes-all political climate. In such a setting, political actors view elections not just as a democratic process but as a battle for control over state authority and resources, thus making them employ coercive or violent tactics. This finding concurs with Travesí-Sanz (2021), who noted that the 2021 elections were fiercely contested, with a long serving incumbent facing a formidable opposition, which escalated tensions nationwide. In these circumstances, political actors resort to violence with the hope of gaining or maintaining power.

The results revealed that violence aided by the state plays a crucial role in increasing electoral tensions. state-sponsored violence creates an atmosphere full of fear and insecurity among citizens. The state officials' involvement in violent acts undermines the public's trust in the state's independence and the integrity of elections by lowering political legitimacy and voter turnout. The ensuing

environment of fear and insecurity hinders civic participation, suppresses opposing voices, and restricts open political competition. This finding is in agreement with Hayden (2021), who noted that security forces were fully engaged in distorting opposition activities through arrests, excessive force, and the disruption of rallies.

The findings showed inefficiency in electoral management and lack of institutional autonomy as the major cause of electoral violence. This means that inadequate institutional independence encourages political actors to contest outcomes through undemocratic methods, thereby creating tensions. The study finding is in line with Kagoro (2023), who noted that weaknesses in electoral management and lack of independence of institutions like the electoral body are the major driving force to violence.

Additionally, the results indicate that socio-economic inequality, specifically high rate of unemployment among the youths, highly contributed to electoral violence. This implies that the unemployed youths feel dissatisfied with political systems and institutions, intensifying social tensions during elections. Supporting this finding, Kagoro (2023) pointed out that in Uganda, high youth population are unemployed, they became actively engaged in political mobilization, occasionally with a hope of improving their lives leading to violent clashes with their other rivals.

The study finding indicated that limited voter education and restriction of civic society engagement contributed to electoral violence. This means that when voters had no adequate knowledge about the ongoing processes, making them to fall trap of rumours or inciting messages, which can escalate conflicts and trigger violence. Also, civic society's engagement being restricted reduced opportunities for dialogue, peaceful participation, and accountability leading to frustration and mistrust in the electoral system. This finding is supported by Moffat and Bennett (2021) who indicated that misinformation and propaganda cause tensions and trigger violent reactions among supporters of different political parties due to reduced voter awareness.

5.2.3 The role of political actors, security agencies, and institutions in either escalating or mitigating electoral violence

The study finding revealed that political actors are crucial in rallying their supporters and guiding them how to behave. This means that these actors have ability to influence their supporters' behaviors and attitudes. Political actors' actions can either increase or reduce electoral violence. When political actors rally supporters along strong biased side creates divisions and raises the chance of conflict and violence during elections. Kagoro (2023) supported this finding, by highlighting those political actors; parties and candidates, are pivotal in shaping electoral violence. Their frequently mobilize supporters in opposing sides leads to confrontations and violence, particularly in a competitive contested election.

The study indicated security forces; police and military are very important in overseeing electoral activities and ensuring public safety. Meaning that these agencies either stabilize or destabilize the electoral environment during their duties. Their presence and behaviours promote public trust and prevents violence if is professional, neutral, and legally compliant. Conversely, if they are seen as using excess force, or in support of specific political party, they increase tensions and fuel electoral violence. This finding is contrary to Travesí-Sanz (2021), who noted that, security agencies should act without bias and are supposed to protect all citizens regardless of their political affiliations.

The study indicated that electoral institutions are very important in upholding electoral integrity by managing transparent processes, resolving disputes well, and enforcing electoral laws. This means that the efficiency and trustworthiness of these institutions are beneficial in achieving peaceful and legitimate election results. When elections are transparently, disputes are settled fairly, and electoral laws are consistently applied, public confidence is strengthened, and the chances of conflict and violence are reduced. However, any perceived bias, inefficiency, or lack of transparency might compromise electoral integrity, provoke disputes, and increase tensions. This finding is in agreement with Nanfuka (2021), who found that institutional measures such as electoral laws, codes of conduct, conflict resolution mechanisms, and voter education programs help in reducing violence.

The study reveals that electoral institutions that are weak, compromised, or subject to political influence leads to electoral violence. This means that when electoral institutions are perceived as biased or ineffective, they are unable to offer credible oversight, fair judgment, and enforcement of electoral regulations, potentially resulting in disputes and conflict. Kagoro (2023) supports this finding, noting that a lack of trust in electoral institutions increases the chances of violence, as voters might turn to alternative methods, including violence, to voice grievances or contest outcomes.

5.3 Conclusion

The study concluded that;

Electoral violence is mainly from institutional weaknesses and intentional political desires. Electoral violence is evident in frequent arrests, detentions, and disruption of opposition election activities. This undermines opposition forces, and causes frequent protest. Intimidation of voters through physical or psychological means was a tactic used to limit their participation in their political party.

Electoral violence is also fuelled by the complicated interplay of political, institutional, and socio-economic elements, with fierce political rivalry. In situations where incumbency is deeply rooted, elections are often seen as struggle for victory in all cost. This perception greatly increases chance of conflict, as political actors may use aggressive and coercive tactics to gain or maintain power.

Electoral violence is controlled by the actions and interactions of key institutional and political actors, specifically political actors, security agencies, and electoral institutions. Political actors play a major role in mobilizing supporters which in some case creates division when not done well. In highly competitive electoral contexts, such mobilization increases chance of confrontation and violence among rival groups.

5.4 Recommendations

The study recommends that;

The government should ensure that arrests and detentions of oppositions during elections are legal and justifiable. Unnecessary arrests must be stopped, and judicial systems must be strengthened to provide timely redress for victims of abuse.

Protective measures must be implemented to reduce voter intimidation like; establishment of secure reporting systems, protection for whistleblowers, and strict penalties for perpetrators of electoral violence.

Electoral institutions should be reformed to make them independent, transparent so as to operate efficiently. This includes improving electoral procedures, ensuring openness in result management, and building public trust.

Long-term strategies should be implemented to create employment opportunities for youth and this will help to reduce inequality among youths. Economic empowerment reduces vulnerability to political manipulation and violence.

Political parties and candidates should be encouraged to adopt peaceful, issue-based campaigning and to avoid misinforming the voters. Electoral codes of conduct should be strengthened to hold political actors accountable for any unlawful act that can lead to tension and violence.

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APPENDIX: LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

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