



The Relationship between Literacy and Violence: Evidence from Selected Political Areas in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The youth in Zimbabwe post-independence have never engaged in large-scale political violence as a response to poor governance and other social and economic ills as would happen in other countries. Various implicit theories and qualitative studies attribute this to literacy and economic empowerment. The study therefore sought to validate the assumptions and possibly establish the relationship between literacy and the youths' propensity to engage in political violence. The research adopted a survey approach using 200 questionnaires. Participants were drawn from Mashonaland East province, Mashonaland Central province and Harare. The study focused on the Zimbabwe 2013 General election era. Analysis of data was conducted using 'Framework' approach. The study could not qualitatively establish any direct relationship between literacy and political violence especially on the sample in Zimbabwe. There were other factors that contributed to violence.

Keywords: literacy; political violence; youth; poor governance; empowerment; grievances

1. Introduction

There is often talk over the relationship between literacy and violence with different arguments flying around; the most prominent being that illiteracy influences and drives violence and that an educated community rarely engages in violence for it has values and reputation to protect. Most of the studies around this area unfortunately remain qualitative and fail to substantiate their arguments. This is the main argument that is used to explain the passivity and docility of Zimbabweans in times of crises. Gudrun and Urdal (2010) ^[12] argue that from the available quantitative data, there seems to be a developing consensus that education has a general pacifying effect on conflict. Zimbabwe has been through various pressing situations that to some extent, demanded action on the part of the citizens. Similar situations in other countries have invited violence and serious insurgency. Zimbabwe has also experienced fraudulent elections especially in 2002 and 2008 and yet citizens have remained quiet. Zimbabweans have engaged in protests and demonstrations and yet have never resorted to violence and vandalism of comparative levels in the region. Typical cases were recorded during the 1995 Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) organized general shut down, 1998 October food riots, 2000 farm workers' protests (Dodo, 2010) ^[9] and 2006 MDC organised protests dubbed 'Final Push' (IRIN, 2003) ^[15].

It is often argued that Zimbabweans generally do not engage in violence because; they are educated and that they have been empowered enough so much so that if they engage in vandalism, it is their properties that will be destroyed. Apparently, enumerative literacy rate in Zimbabwe is over 92% (Africaland, 2015) and the environment is tranquil enough to allow people to attend school.

It is therefore against this background that this study was

conducted to explore the influence of education and literacy on the people's propensity to engage in political violence. The study was conducted in Zimbabwe where for over three decades, people have never engaged in any meaningful form of violence despite situations that could have invited bloody violence in other countries like South Africa, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya among others. In this study, political violence in the context of Zimbabwe and its related dynamics refers to civil violence; inter-political party clashes, community violence; instilling fear and terror on citizens and interference in individual's privacy, riots, protests and other related vandalism; arson and destruction of political material; all deriving from incompatibility of political views. It is also the form of violence measured by the levels of casualties and infrastructural destruction.

2. Methodology

The research adopted a survey approach using questionnaires that were personally administered to 200 participants. The 200 sampled participants were drawn from Chitungwiza's Unit F in Seke, Mashonaland East province, Chipadze in Bindura, Tsungubvi in Glendale; all in Mashonaland Central province and Old bricks section in Mufakose, Harare. All the four selected areas are traditionally known as political hot-spots during political election periods. Each area contributed 50 participants aged between 18 and 35, which is Zimbabwe's age range for youth (GoZ, 2017) ^[10]. Specifically, of the 50, 25 were male while the other 25 were females to ensure gender balance. The study focused on the Zimbabwe 2013 ^[15] General election era which for the purpose of the study was delimited from March 2013 when the official election dates were pronounced paving way for campaigns and September 2013 when the official post-election phase was declared over.

Therefore, the study period was six months long. The researchers followed up on questionnaires to ensure total accountability of the questionnaires.

Participants were purposively sampled to ensure the inclusion of the most appropriate respondents. The purposive nature of the sample selection made sure the sampling conditions were satisfied across all variables and that youths from varying situations and backgrounds were incorporated into the study. The basis for sample selection was not to pick a statistically representative sample of all youth, but to guarantee variety of coverage in all crucial variables. However, statistically, there was a balance between males and females. The questionnaire sought to collect data on the following issues;

- Level of educational attainment.
- Definition of political violence.
- Frequency of political violence in each category of education level.
- The education level which had the highest cases of political violence.
- The nature of political violence in respective categories.
- The level of propensity to engage in political violence across gender.
- How political violence was driven by the level of literacy in individuals.

After data were collected, set of verbatim transcripts were created complementing completed questionnaires. Analysis of data was conducted using 'Framework'. This is a qualitative analytic method developed at the National Centre for Social Research (Ritchie, Spencer, 1994) ^[21] and it allows a comparison of all the gathered data against a Framework template to identify areas of similarities and differences. It also identified completely new areas that needed particular analysis. Framework helped understand the inner meanings of the participants' responses in the questionnaires and presenting them descriptively. The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- Establish the relationship between low levels of education in youths and their propensity for political violence.
- Establish if there were cases of political violence owing to illiteracy.
- Explore if literacy in youths helped reduce political violence.

All the data were presented according to themes created from the Framework analysis taking into cognizance qualitative and quantitative aspects of the findings.

3. Conceptual Explanation

Governance is about proper administration of resources that determine a people's livelihood. The failure to ensure equitable allocation and appropriate availability and usage of same may also ensure the creation of social, political and economic challenges in society. Therefore, the concept of governance viewed from its improper administration was used to direct the main arguments of the study. Precisely, the concept was anchored on Gurr (1970) ^[13] argument that relative deprivation of the required resources worsens the gap between people's expectations and their actual situations. The argument is that when youths are deprived of the most

appropriate education, they get exposed to sinister and immoral activities. According to Collier and Hoeffler (2004) ^[7], youth recruitment for such sinister and immoral acts is more costly and rebellion less likely the higher the level of education in a society because better levels of educational accomplishment increase the opportunity cost of youths joining violent options.

According to the governance concept, deprivation of appropriate educational opportunities explains why people in countries with low average education levels may be more likely to join insurgencies than people in countries with higher education levels. However, this position has been contested in other quantitative studies. The concept however allows an appreciation of the factors that play a role in the behaviour modification of youths in most of the developing societies. It helps to delineate factors that influence positive youth conduct from negative especially with regards to the commonly held beliefs around education, literacy and the youths' propensity to engage in violence.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Education

Education, especially the formal type has been instrumental in the development of humanity the world over. Its dissemination has been standardised as a way of churning out uniform products capable of leading a progressive developmental agenda. It has also been categorised as a basic fundamental human right as a way of ensuring that all people have access for civilised development. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 28, established education for children as a right (World Bank, 2011). The Convention states that State Parties are expected to make sure that primary education is free and obligatory and promote different forms of secondary education to be within reach (WB, 2011; Coomaraswamy, 2015) ^[8]. As noted in the CRC, secondary education is not an educational priority, which gravely limits educational opportunities for youths.

However, governments' investment in education is a way by which they can make a direct and long-term positive impact on people's lives, which may directly lessen the intensity of grievances in society (Gudrun, Urdal, 2010) ^[12]. From a government perspective, education is an ideal, through which beneficiaries are supposed to use it to access livelihoods and prosperity in life. It is also used to screen and profile societal classes thus seeing more people pursuing it as they seek to secure better societal levels. Because education gives integrity and creates classes, insurgent and terrorist recruitment becomes costly and insurgence less likely the higher the level of education in a society. Education has also been seen to encourage social cohesion, such as learning how to work together peacefully and to relate well in society (Collier, Hoeffler, 2004; Hanf, Bauerle, 2009; Gudrun, Urdal, 2010) ^[7, 14, 12].

4.2 Lack of Education and the Risk of Violence

Like it has been noted by Gudrun and Urdal (2010) ^[12] that education brings civilisation, lack of it is a danger to society. Some of the developing economies have no capacity to avail the form of education that is ideal for development and civilisation. Therefore, in the absence of the most ideal

education, most youth end up deprived of the necessary skills and opportunities. In many cases, the youth end up redundant, and are consequently at risk of different forms of sexual and economic exploitation and misuse, criminality and indoctrination (Bayley, 2008; Barakat, Urdal, 2009)^[4, 2]. The same youth who miss chances to acquire education also miss chances for personal growth and have opportunities for economic sustenance and contribution to their communities diminished. Griffin (2015)^[11] also shows a direct correlation between poverty and the level of education citing experiences in Nepal where loss of education opportunities due to war further exacerbated poverty and subsequently violence. In the same vein, Bayley (2008)^[4] argues that youth crime including violence is directly related to illiteracy and truancy.

Education is a crucial way to psychological healing, training for employment, skills-building, good health practices, social reintegration, peacemaking and protection (Gudrun, Urdal, 2010)^[12]. It avails a chance to put together self-confidence and to regain a sense of hope about the future; without it, youths may see limited chances and, faced with few openings for evading potential poverty, may be pushed to become a destabilizing force, perpetuating cycles of violence and susceptibility (Lai, Thyne, 2007)^[16]. Unfortunately, in some of the political situations in Africa in general where economies are poor and in Zimbabwe in particular where there is serious polarization and joblessness, education has not been able to serve as motivation to seek more of it in order to secure the best professional skills and the best paying job. As a result, the failure to motivate youths to secure good jobs and acquire the best vocational skills (Stromquist, 2008)^[22] has also influenced conflicts and violence as the most educated often find themselves having to be sustained by the least educated. Apparently the Zimbabwean economy is tilted towards the informal sector which uses formal skills and education less thus seeing the educated languishing in poverty and toiling to survive.

4.3 Cases of Violence

Violence has existed in most societies the world over. However, concern is not laid on its existence but its implications in society especially on the youth constituency that is vulnerable to abuse and forced conscription into immoral and sinister activities like prostitution and insurgency among others. Violence is caused by various factors depending on the structure of the economy, how resources are administered and how policies are interpreted among others.

In 2016 Gujarat area in India witnessed unparalleled protests by Dalit people against their systematic prejudice in social, economic and political circles (Pollmann, 2016)^[9]. These protests were almost similar in nature and intensity to the February 2017, Guinea political protests which turned violent leaving some people dead and infrastructure destroyed (Wigmore-Shepherd, 2017)^[23]. It is evident in the two situations that violence was caused by different factors and yet the implications were almost the same. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), there have been protests and riots

since 2016 over the presidential election delays (Batten-Carew, 2016)^[3]. The protests and riots have over the period seen hundreds of people dying and getting displaced. Almost during the same period, Kenyans were involved in serious protests over alleged electoral fraud demanding some electoral reforms. During the same period, South Africa was also dogged by student protests over tuition fees that they felt was too high (Wigmore-Shepherd, 2017)^[23]. The protests dubbed 'Fees Must Fall' left a trail of destruction and impacted on the quality of the education system. Besides these cases, there have been several other conflicts emanating from other issues around poor governance (Mapuva, Muyengwa-Mapuva, 2014; Nathan, 2016)^[17, 18].

Zimbabwe has over the years experienced pressing situations whereby the generality of the masses have been expected to respond. All the forms of responses that Zimbabweans have proffered have been positive; listening to the leadership directives for peace and order. However, there have been isolated incidences of violence where people have engaged in violence as a response to some governance-related crises. In the 1980s, there was a crisis in the Matebeland and Midlands provinces which left thousands of people dead (CCJP, 1997)^[5]. Some of the victims of the crisis responded by joining the conflict thus further fuelling the challenge. In 1998, following a food crisis in Zimbabwe, there was a mass riot where thousands of people looted food from the shops (IRIN, 2003; Dodo, 2010)^[15, 9]. The crisis was only stopped following an intervention by the military. Similarly, hundreds of residents of Beitbridge border town in Zimbabwe torched a Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (Zimra) warehouse containing seized goods and over 40 vehicles worth hundreds of thousands of dollars as demonstrations against the implementation of Statutory Instrument No. 64 of 2016 (Chikwanha, 2016)^[6]. The statutory instrument meant that traders could no longer import goods from South Africa for resale in Zimbabwe.

In 2017, following a deep leadership crisis in the ruling regime in Zimbabwe, there was a coup by the military which they dubbed 'strategic military intervention' to restore revolutionary legacy. Pursuant to the crisis and the expected fall of the then president Robert Mugabe, celebrating Zimbabweans began marching towards Mugabe's residence in Harare (Reuters, 2017)^[12]. This was a clear response to a delayed governance crisis as was also noted in the DRC (Batten-Carew, 2016)^[3]. Generally, political conflicts and violence are caused by various factors but chief among them being poor governance issues as evidenced by cases cited above.

5. Results

Following a meticulous analysis of all the data from the 200 questionnaires, data were presented according to themes created. All the administered questionnaires were accounted for giving a 100% response rate. This was achieved as the response time was limited and the researchers immediately followed up on the responses for total accountability.

Table 1: Legend

Acronym	Full	Acronym	Full
Pry	Primary	Ttl	Total
O'L	Ordinary Level	Fem	Female
A'L	Advanced Level	IY	Inter-youth Violence
Tert	Tertiary	Rts	Rights
Univ	University	Pvy	Privacy
Stg	Stigmatisation	PA	Physical Assault
Fr	Fear	SA	Sexual Assault
Prt	Protest	CV	Community Violence
Van	Vandalism	Ars	Arson
Empl	Employed	Unempl	Unemployed

Table 2: Participants' Demographics

	Pry	Secondary		Tert	Univers	Employ	Unempl	Involved in Violence	Never Involved	Ttl
		O'L	A'L							
Male	6	48	22	19	5	11	89	91	9	100
Fem	13	54	16	14	3	6	94	87	13	100
Total	19	102	38	33	8	17	183	178	22	200

There were a total of 200 participants (100 males and 100 females). From the figure above, 19 (9.5%) had attended Primary education while of the 140 who had attended Secondary education, 38 (27%) had gone as far as Advanced Level. 33 (16.5%) and eight (4%) had attended tertiary and university education respectively. It also established that 17 (8.5%) were employed while 183 (92%) were unemployed. 178 participants (89%) had been involved in some form of

political violence while 22 (11%) had never participated in political violence. The statistics on the employed/unemployed youths show the level of frustration that may be in the youths especially after failing to fulfil their economic aspirations.

5.1 Establish the relationship between low levels of education in youths and their propensity for political violence.

Table 3: Involvement in Violence

	Pry		Secondary		Tertiary		University		Total
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Male	1	5	0	70	4	15	4	1	100
Female	2	11	7	63	3	11	1	2	100
Total	3	16	7	133	7	26	5	3	200

The study established that youths who had been involved in political violence varied across education levels in the studied communities. It is shown that 16 participants of the 19 youths who had gone as far as Primary education had been involved in some form of political violence as shown in the figure below while 133 of the 140 in the Secondary education level

had participated in violence. It also shows that 26 of the 33 youths in the tertiary education category had participated in violence while in the university education level; three youths of the five had participated in violence. This gives a total of 178 youths (89%) having participated in some form of political violence.

5.2 Establish if there were cases of political violence owing to illiteracy.

Table 4: Types of Violence

	IY	Rts	Pvy	PA	SA	CV	Stg	Fr	Prt	Van	Ars	Ttl
Male	66	13	22	41	10	31	73	41	16	21	3	337
Female	61	10	19	38	1	41	62	24	85	9	0	350
Total	127	23	41	79	11	72	135	65	101	30	3	687

The study established that both females and males had been involved in political violence in their respective areas. It was noted that the cumulative figures for political violence were as follows; 337 (49%) and 350 (51%) for males and females respectively. The form of violence that had recorded the highest frequency were stigmatisation of political beliefs, inter-youth clashes, interference in individuals' privacy and physical assault with 135 (20%), 127 (18.4%), 101 (15%) and

79 (11.4%) cases respectively. The least recorded cases were arson, sexual assault and deprivation of human rights with three, 11 (2%) and 23 (3%) cases respectively.

Participant questionnaires showed that illiteracy was to a large extent defined by the following forms of violence; stigmatisation of political beliefs, deprivation of political rights and interference in individuals' privacy which had 135, 23 and 41 cases recorded. These cases were prominent in the

low education levels like Primary and Secondary showing the existence of political violence owing to illiteracy levels.

5.3 Explore if literacy in youths helped reduce political violence.

The study established that political violence maybe defined differently and, in this study, it was generally defined as; *'Inconveniences to people over ideological differences' 'unnecessary fear and pain on people for political cause' and 'persecution, terror and pain that may be inflicted on others to achieve a political goal'.*

The participants' definitions meant the following among others; inter-youth clashes, deprivation of people's rights, interference in individuals' privacy during election campaign periods, physical assault, sexual assault, community violence and stigmatisation of some political beliefs, protests undermining other residents' welfare, instilling fear and terror in others, vandalism and arson.

The study also established that there are various forms of violence depending on one's literacy level, cultural beliefs and social upbringing. The statistics from the study show that education attainment to a large extent influenced the frequency of violence. 16 (84%) out of 19 participants who are educated up to primary level and 133 (95%) of the 140 secondary educated youths were involved in violence. 26 (79%) of the 33 tertiary educated and three (38%) of the eight university educated level youths were also involved in violence. From the study findings above, it is evident that education attainment has no direct influence on the youths' engagement in political violence. If anything, there may be other factors driving political violence.

6. Discussion

It is noted from the study that 19 (9.5%) youths had attended Primary education implying that over 90% had gone beyond Secondary education and were thus literate and yet 178 participants (89%) had been involved in some form of political violence despite the high levels of literacy as shown in Africa Post (2015). It therefore gave no direct relationship between illiteracy and the propensity to engage in violence by youths in politics. What was however deductible from the statistics is a relationship between unemployment and violence which explains relative deprivation argument by Gurr (1970)^[13]. The study showed that 183 participants (92%) were unemployed in the same environments where 89% had been involved in violence. This finding is in line with Barakat and Urdal (2009)^[2] but in contrast with Gudrun and Urdal (2010)^[12]. The study argued that high unemployment among educated youths was one of the most destabilizing and potentially violent socio-political phenomena in any regime. However, more quantitative studies need to be conducted to bring out a closer and direct analysis of the relationships mentioned above.

The study statistics show that 84% of the youths who were educated up to Primary level, which is the most basic level in Zimbabwe were at some point involved in political violence while 95% of those in the Secondary education level also participated. Secondary education level in Zimbabwe is equipped enough to allow an individual to work productively in an industry. It also allows one to enter into university of any

standard in the world. 79% and 60% of the youths who had attained Tertiary education and university education had also participated in political violence respectively. It is evident from the statistics that despite having attained some level of literacy, 80% of the youths had been involved in some form of political violence in their areas of residence. This to some extent dispels the argument that literacy may reduce youths' propensity to engage in political violence as argued by Bayley (2008)^[4]; Barakat and Urdal, (2009)^[2]; Gudrun and Urdal (2010)^[12] and Griffin (2015)^[11]. This study argues against Aristotle's contention that education promotes a culture of peace. Rather, it is the study's realisation that it was in some instances the attainment of education that drove youths to engage in violence especially when their dreams had not been adequately met. Youths often engage in violence when there is strong labour market competition, slow economic growth, and distortions due to corrupt institutions and youth bulges. It is usually under such situations that education may assist recruitment by amplifying feelings of disappointment and disenfranchisement that crop up from unaddressed economic and political grievances.

That has failed to prove in the Zimbabwean case where over 80% of the studied youths were involved in violence despite their high levels of literacy. What some of the studies around this argument (Collier, Hoeffler, 2004; Hanf, Bauerle, 2009; Gudrun, Urdal, 2010)^[7, 14, 12] do not explain are other socio-economic factors' influences to the youths' involvement in political violence. It is Stromquist (2008)^[22] and Griffin (2015)^[11] and a few others whose studies show a direct correlation between poverty, level of education and violence.

The study findings show that youth political violence is not about gender; statistics from the study show that females may also be leading in violence if only the issues at stake concern them and if only the form of violence allows them to be active. The total number of violence cases recorded was 337 and 350 for males and females respectively over a six month political period. Some of the most prominent forms of violence; stigmatisation of political beliefs, protests undermining other residents' welfare, and community violence were characterised by female dominance. This was mainly because they are of a lighter nature which females can easily undertake.

From the study findings, illiteracy was measured by the youths' appreciation of the socio-political fundamentals like human rights, freedoms and tolerance and acknowledgement of basic political ideological differences. The existence of such forms of violence; stigmatisation of political beliefs, deprivation of political rights and interference in individuals' privacy especially in the Primary and Secondary education level categories showed that there was some shallow appreciation of fundamental political and social issues.

7. Recommendations

The study may have established that there is a thin relationship between literacy and political violence; it has also established that the thin line is dependent on various factors like cultural and social backgrounds, local economies and how they absorb labour and the nature of politics vis-à-vis the level of political tolerance in the people. Therefore, the study recommends that, in view of the findings above, there is need

for governments to align their economies to the prevailing political situations to allow congruency between youths' growth and their absorption into the mainstream economy. Generally, youths' inclusion into economics and positive politics addresses their propensity to engage in political violence.

The study also recommends that governments could generally infuse into their school curricula, aspects of political education so that youths develop a spirit of tolerance and engagement. This also helps school drop-outs to have at least grasped something on political tolerance, engagement and peace by the time they leave school. It is also recommended that more qualitative studies be conducted to establish the real situation that could be generalisable in most developing countries. This follows a realisation that there are few current studies to prove the existence of illiteracy influence on youth political violence especially in the Zimbabwean case.

8. References

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