

Correlation Between Food Crisis and The Electoral Process: Obio/Akpor as Case Study

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DOI: 10.56201/rjfsqc.v10.no5.2024.pg71.80

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between food crisis and the electoral process in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State as case study, it focused on 1) examining public perceptions on food crisis in Obio/Akpor, and determined the relationship between food crisis and elections. One null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted the correlational design. The population for the study included all eligible voters of the area who reside in Obio/Akpor. The purposive sampling technique was adopted to select 100 eligible voters (50 males and 50 females) for the study. The instrument for data collection for this study was a questionnaire titled 'Food Crisis and Elections' which was designed on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA - 4), Agree A- 3), Disagree (D - 2) and Strongly Disagree (SD - 1) respectively. The data generated from the research questions were analyzed using mean standard deviation values to answer the research questions on a 4-point scale. The hypothesis tested using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation analyses at a significant level of p-value less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). From the findings, the perceptions of the public on food crisis were as follows: there is hunger in the land ($M = 2.65$); many families cannot access three square meals a day ($m = 3.02$); food prices are beyond the reach of many families ($MU = 2.94$); many persons fight over food ($M = 3.21$). The study findings also revealed that many hungry persons may not vote ($M = 0.52$); voters will want to vote against current crop of politicians ($M = 2.67$); violence may erupt during elections due to hunger ($M = 2.61$) and hunger will increase the cases of vote buying ($M = 2.82$). Among the recommendations of the study is that the government is advised to declare a state of emergency in the food sector to address the insufficient supply of foodstuffs.

Keywords: Food crisis, elections, hunger, relationship

Introduction

A food crisis occurs when rates of hunger and malnutrition rise sharply at local, national, or global levels (Alexander, 2022). This definition distinguishes a food crisis from chronic hunger, although food crises are far more likely among populations already suffering from prolonged hunger and malnutrition. The world is facing a food crisis of unprecedented proportions, the largest in modern history (Adjetej, 2021). Millions are at risk of worsening hunger unless action is taken now to respond at scale to the drivers of this crisis: conflict, climate shocks and the threat of global recession. The interplay of these drivers is making life harder each day for the world's most

vulnerable and reversing recent development gains.

As many as 828 million people go to bed hungry every night. The number of those facing acute food insecurity has soared - from 135 million to 345 million - since 2019 (Amosa, 2016). A total of 49 million people in 49 countries are teetering on the edge of famine. In countries like Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen, World Food Programme (WFP) is already faced with hard decisions, including cutting rations to be able to reach more people. This is tantamount to taking from the hungry to feed the starving. The consequences of not investing in resilience activities will reverberate across borders. If communities are not empowered to withstand the shocks and stresses they are exposed to, this could result in increased migration and possible destabilization and conflict (Jagtap, 2022).

The Nigerian experience of food crisis

The year 2022 has seen a rapid increase in food prices and shortages of food supplies around the country. The compounding crises in distinct parts of the country were caused by compounding geopolitical and economic crisis. The crises followed food security and economic crises during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the inflation rates as well as the unemployment

challenges, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), as well as other observers of the food commodities markets, warned of a collapse in food supply and price increases (Adjetej, 2021). With flood in many parts of the country, the crisis has created real fears as to the implications on the masses.

Much of the concern is related to supply shortages of key staple foodstuffs such as rice, yams, wheat, corn, beans, vegetable oil, poultry and other cooking ingredients which have witnessed discomfoting price increases (Amosa, 2016). The invasion also led to fuel and associated fertilizer price increases, causing further food shortfalls and price increases (FAO, 2018).

The story of the food crisis/food insufficiency being experienced in many parts of the world calls for concern by both leaders and followers of the world. The fact that the so-called advanced countries are relatively comfortable does not mean it will be so for eternity (FAO, 2015). Nigeria is well positioned to avert the gloomy food crisis if all her resources are well utilized and properly directed. Across Africa's most populous country, communities and crops of sorghum, maize, rice and vegetables are under water, with farmers and aid workers warning of a possible food crisis.

The country, home to more than 200 million people, was already grappling with high inflation and worrying levels of food insecurity. The World Food Programme (WFP, 2018) estimates the total area of flooded cropland could be almost seven times higher. Flooding is still ongoing but we can

safely say that between 60 to 75 percent of the yield we expected is going to be loss (Alexander, 2022).

Hunger-frustration theory: This theory states that feeling hungry is associated with anger and irritability. According to the theory, negative emotions - irritability, anger and unpleasantness - also appear to be caused by both day-to-day fluctuations in hunger as well as continuing levels of hunger. This theory could be relevant in this steady because the electorate may influenced negatively by the extent of anger about hunger orchestrated by the rising food crisis.

Effects of food crisis on elections in Nigeria

Food insecurity means there is a shortage of food commodities, making the available food expensive to purchase (World Bank, 2018). This means the prices will go up and will result in related items being more expensive. Nigeria's weak economy has thrown millions into abject poverty and hunger while life is becoming a living hell as people struggle to make ends meet (Adjetey, 2021). Prices of food and essential items are on the increase, adding that the reality on the ground is evident for all to see. Poverty and hunger affect all spheres of life. It fuels criminality and crime; it affects education; it affects quality healthcare (Shaibu et al., 2017). Hunger affects citizens' political choices (Alexander, 2022). Already those who mismanaged the economy are using hunger as a weapon as the 2023 general election approaches (Amosa, 2016; Jagtap, 2022). The ultimate objective of food security should be to ensure that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to food they need. Food Security has three basic aims: ensuring production of adequate food supplies, maximizing stability in the flow of supplies, and ensuring access to available supplies on the part of those who need them (Adjetey, 2021). Food is one of the basic necessities for human existence. Food security, as defined by the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security, means that all people, at all times, have unrestricted (physical, social and economic) access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life. The importance of food security in all nations of the world cannot be underestimated.

Over the years, different events such as the ever dynamic climatic conditions, incessant growth of the population, increase in the prices of foods and other environmental factors have taken their toll on food security. There is need for coping strategies and policy responses to global change such as alternatives for handling water allocation, land use patterns, food trade, food processing, post-harvest food storage, food safety and regulation of food prices. There is also need for analysis of cash transfers, promotion of sustainable agricultural technologies, building resilience to disasters and management of trade-offs in food security which includes balancing nutritional benefits of food against the cost of production (Alexander, 2022). We all need food to survive. And in recent times like during the Coronavirus pandemic where people are encouraged to stay at home, there is need to have enough for oneself and family. Food security means everyone can get good food in time of need. The fact that someone cannot pay for his or her food doesn't mean the person should go hungry. Everyone should at least have access to nutritious food.

As the popular saying goes, health is wealth and the basic nutrients needed for good health is mostly found in food. With food security, everyone has access to the daily nutrient requirements and can therefore live a healthy and productive life (Amosa, 2016). With good health comes

increase in productivity which subsequently causes the growth of the economy of a nation. It also helps to alleviate poverty and create jobs for people.

A country that ensures food is available to all its citizens is a strong and stable one and vice versa. However, if there is too much food insecurity in a nation, such a nation becomes vulnerable and overly dependent on other countries for aids. The jurisdiction that cannot feed its people is at the mercy of whoever can. It is not a good option and can be used as a weapon against such country in time of need. In Nigeria, achieving food security has been threatened by the unrest in the northern part of the country which is the major food-producing part of the country.

Statement of the Problem: Traditionally, the electorate is expected to use non-evaluative rationales, like patronage, religion and ethnicity when casting their votes. However, the 2023 elections are confronted with serious issues with go beyond religious and ethnic undertones. With the vicious rises in inflations, unemployment, under-employment, natural and man-made disasters and high food costs, the country has witnessed unprecedented food crisis. There seems to be little _ attention on how the food crisis can impact on the elections, hence it becomes worthwhile to investigate how a salient an issue like food crisis influences voters' decisions.

Aim and objectives of the study: The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between food crisis and the electoral process, using Obio/Akpor in Rivers State as case study. Specifically, the focused on the following objectives:

1. Examined public perceptions on food crisis in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State, and
2. Determined the relationship between food crisis and elections.

Research Questions: The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the perceptions of the public on food crisis in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between food crisis and elections in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State?

Hypothesis: The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

HOi: There is no significant relationship between food crisis and elections in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State.

Methodology: This study adopted the correlational design.

Area of the study: The area of the study was Obio/Akpor local government area of Rivers State. The area has an estimated population of 700,000 and is populated by a mixture of low, middle and high income earners and families. The cost of living in the area is generally high, and the national food crisis imposes serious implications for low income earners especially. There is also marked serious and active political consciousness over the years. Hence, these socio-political realities justify the choice of the area for this study.

Population for the study: The population for the study included all eligible voters of the area who reside in Obio/Akpor.

Sample and sampling technique: The sample for the study was 100 eligible voters (50 males and 50 females) in in Obio/Akpor. The purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the sample. Instruments for data collection: The instrument for delta collection for this study was a questionnaire titled 'Food Crisis and Elections' which was designed on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA - 4), Agree A- 3), Disagree (D - 2) and Strongly Disagree (SD - 1) respectively. The questionnaire contained statements on the research questions.

Reliability of the Instrument: The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach Alpha. A trial test was carried out using 30 eligible voters in Port Harcourt local government area. The respondents were not involved in the main study. A reliability index obtained was .890 showing high degree of reliability.

Method of Data Analysis: The data generated from the research questions were analyzed using mean standard deviation values to answer the research questions on a 4-point scale. The decision rule was set up based on the cut-off mark of 2.5 mean score. The implication was that any item with mean score lower than 2.5 was disagreed with (D), while items with mean scores of 2.5 and higher were agreed with (A). In testing the hypothesis, the data were subjected to Spearman's Rank Order Correlation analyses at a significant level of p-value less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$).

Results: The presentation of the data and result of each research questions and its corresponding hypotheses were done in the tables below.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of the public on food crisis in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State?

Table 1: Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation on the perceptions of the public on food crisis

S/n	Perceptions	n-50 (females)			n-50 (males)		Rink	TM	TSDRmk	
		M	SD	Remark	M	SD				
1.	There is hunger in the land	2.71	0.71	A	2.60	0.68	A	2.65	0.699	A
2.	Many families cannot access three square meals a day	3.02	0.737	A	3.03	0.750	A	3.02	0.747	A
3.	Food prices are beyond the reach of many families	2.96	0.940	A	2.92	0.901	A	2.94	0.920	A
4.	Many persons fight over	3.24	0.80	A	3.18	0.70	A	3.21	0.758	A
5.	Poor food access causes	3.24	0.77	A	3.22	0.75	A	3.23	0.765	A
6.	The government is responsible for food crisis	3.05	0.903	A	3.22	0.881	A	3.14	0.895	A
7.	Many parents are angry at the Government	3.34	0.740	A	3.20	0.859	A	3.27	0.804	A

Key: M¹ Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; Rtnk=Remark; TM=Total Mean; TSD=Total Standard Deviation; A=Agree

Table 1 revealed that mean and standard deviation on the perceptions of the public on food crisis. The results indicated that the respondents agreed with all the perceptions because the mean scores were 2.5 and above which was the cut-off mark. The results are as follows: there is hunger in the land (M=2.65); many families cannot access three square meals a day (m=3.02); food prices are beyond the reach of many families (M =2.94); many persons fight over food (M=3.21); poor food access causes frustration (M 3.23); the government is responsible for food crisis (M=3.14); many parents are angry at the Government (M=3.27).

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between food crisis and elections in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State?

Table 2: Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation on the relationship between food crisis and elections

S/n Relationship between food crisis and elections	n=50 (females)			n=50 (males)			TSD	
	M	SD	Rmk	M	SD	Rmk	TM	Rmk
1. Many hungry persons may not Vote	3.59	0.55 8	A	3.45	0.64 0	A	3.52	0.604 A
2. Voters will want to vote against current crop of	2.71	0.67 0	A	2.62	0.672	A	2.67	0.676 A
3. Violence may erupt during elections due to hunger	2.61	0.64	A	2.63	0.65	A	2.61	0.648 A
4. Hunger will increase the cases of vote buying	2.69	0.73 1	A	2.95	0.88 1	A	2.82	0.648 A
5. The unemployed youths may be influenced easily	2.87	0.90	A	2.64	0.74	A	2.76	0.833 A
6. Decision to will depend on the reduction of prices of food	2.72	0.81	A	2.70	0.81	A	2.71	0.813 A
7. Politicians will use to bribe	2.81	0.78	A	2.91	0.87	A	2.80	0.860 A

Key: M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; Rmk=Remark; TM=Total Mean; TSD=Total Standard Deviation; A=Agree

Table 2 revealed the mean and standard deviation on the relationship between food crisis and elections, the results indicated that respondents agreed with all items because the mean scores were 2.5 and above which was the cut-off mark. The results are as follows: many hungry persons may not vote (M 3.52); voters will want to vote against current crop of politicians (MAh67); violence may erupt during elections due to hunger (M=2.61); hunger will increase the cases of vote buying (M 2.82); the unemployed youths may be influenced easily (M==2.76); decision will depend on the reduction of prices of food (M=2.71); politicians will use to bribe voters (M=2.89)

Test of Hypotheses: The following hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance using the Spearman’s rank-order correlation analytical tool.

Test of Hypothesis: The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between food crisis and elections in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State.

Table 3: Relationship between food crisis (FC) and elections (E)

Variable	Correlation	FC	E
	Correlation	1.000	0.848**
FC	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
Spearman's rho	N	289	289
	Correlation	.848**	1.000
E	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	289	289

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **Source:** field data November 2022, computation from SPSS v. 20 Analysis.

The data in Table 3 is the outcome of Spearman rank-order correlation analysis on the relationship between food crisis (FC) and elections. The result indicated that there exist a strong and significant ($r_s = .848$; $p < 0.05$). Subsequently, the HO₁ was rejected.

Discussion of the findings

Table 1 revealed that mean and standard deviation on the perceptions of the public on food crisis. The results indicated that the respondents agreed with all the perceptions because the mean

scores were 2.5 and above which was the cut-off mark. The results are as follows: there is hunger in the land (M 2.65); many families cannot access three square meals a day (m o.02); food prices are beyond the reach of many families (M=2.94); many persons fight over food (M o.21); poor food access causes frustration (M 3.23); the government is responsible for food crisis (M=3.14); many parents are angry at the Government (M=3.27).

These findings are supported by Ladele (2015) and Jibowo (2020) who opined that hunger and food insecurity are major causes of frustration in Nigeria. These findings are also in line with the Hunger-frustration theory which states that feeling hungry is associated with anger and irritability. Porter (2021) opined that Nigeria has witnessed serious economic downturns over the past decade which has cause problems such as food insecurity. The prices of foodstuffs and crops, especially locally produced food crops have skyrocketed over this period, with highest witnessed in 2022. These economic realities have imposed serious social impediments on the masses.

Table 2 revealed the mean and standard deviation on the relationship between food crisis and elections. The results indicated that respondents agreed with all items because the mean scores were 2.5 and above which was the cut-off mark. The results are as follows: many hungry persons may not vote (M=3.52); voters will want to vote against current crop of politicians (M=2.67); violence may erupt during elections due to hunger (M—2.61); hunger will increase the cases of vote buying (M=2.82); the unemployed youths may be influenced easily (M 2.76); decision to will depend on the reduction of prices of food (MN2.71); politicians will use to bribe voters (M 2.89). The result of the hypothesis revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected indicating that there is relationship between food crisis and election participation.

The findings are in agreement with Lagtap (2022) who noted that food crisis is a precursor to violence especially in societies hit famine. The loss of credibility in a regime which permits food crisis to happen has longer-term political implications. Food is the basic element of community self-reliance. It provides jobs, enhances culture, enables community and supports public health. Because of its essential nature, agriculture and food keeps going when other industries fail

(Adjetey, 2021). For every farmer there are many related jobs in processing, distribution, sales, and food preparation.

Food has become both a pivotal topic in development and a lens through which to integrate and address a range of contemporary global challenges. Food implicates matters of production, reproduction, distribution, consumption - and the interlinkages between these, across global, national and local scales. Food also incorporates questions of economy, state-society relations, and environment, as well as intimate issues of personal, social, cultural and bodily status and identity. Because of this capaciousness, food provides a vital lens through which to integrate and address a range of contemporary development challenges. Yet food is also a political matter, with questions of how food systems are constituted, how they change (or do not change.), and who gains or loses implicating power relations of many kinds, between diverse actors. As modern food systems prove

themselves neither sustainable nor equitable, with profound and intergenerational consequences for human wellbeing, health and prosperity, these politics have become highly charged. An intense politics of food is unfolding across the world, albeit in diverse ways. When people are not food secure, or suffer food insecurity, they are most likely to lose interest in politics, and can even become objects for manipulation by the political class.

Conclusion: The findings of this study revealed that there is a significant relationship between food crisis and election participation. The responses imply that the continued food crisis could influence the outcome of the 2023 elections. There is need to introduce policies that can help combat food crisis in the country.

Recommendations

Among the recommendations of the study are as follows:

1. The government is advised to declare a state of emergency in the food sector to address the insufficient supply of foodstuffs.
2. An immediate regulation of food prices and supply should be embarked upon and implemented to avoid the negative implications on the elections.
3. The masses should be enlightened to need to avoid being bought over by politicians who have impoverished them over the years.

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