

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: 2019 GENERAL ELECTION IN EBONYI STATE IN FOCUS.

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Abstract

The quest to conduct free and fair election over the years appears to be impossible in Nigeria. Election period has become an opportunity for political thugs to unleash different kinds of mayhem upon their opponents and unsuspecting innocent citizens of Nigerian. The magnitude of violence during election period in Nigeria is actually worrisome, as it has greatly engendered apathy among the citizens especially in electing the right people into leadership positions in the country and by extension constituted a bane towards democratic consolidation. In view of this trend, this paper examines electoral violence, political participation and democratic consolidation in Nigeria with special focus on 2019 general election in Ebonyi State. Frustration aggression theory as propounded by Dollard in 1939 and expanded by Berkowitz in 1969, was adopted as a theoretical guide while content analysis design was extensively used to elicit relevant information necessary for the study through textbooks, online journals, Newspapers, magazines etc. Findings of the paper reveal; that electoral violence has significantly hindered political participation in Ebonyi State; that electoral violence has impacted negatively on good governance, that electoral violence has also hindered several efforts towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It was recommended among other things; that law should be enacted to criminalize acts of electoral violence in Ebonyi State; that voter education should be extensively conducted by stakeholders on the implications of electoral violence in democratic consolidation in Ebonyi State, neutrality of the security agencies in the period of elections in Ebonyi State among others.

Keywords: *Electoral violence, Political participation and Democratic consolidation.*

Introduction

One of the critical aspects of democracy is election, which must be conducted in line with the acceptable norms set by the national laws of a given state to enable a peaceful transfer of power from one legitimate government to another, (Sule & Tal, 2018). Election according to Rogers, (1980), in Abah & Nwokwu, (2015), refers to the process by which electorates choose by voting officers either to act on their behalf or to represent them in an assembly with a view to governing or making administration. The efficacy of election is indispensable in democracy since it gives the citizens more opportunity to participate in governance by choosing those who steer the affairs of leadership in the state, (Nnoli, 2006). However, in Nigeria, the quest to conduct an election that can be widely adjudged as peaceful in order to promote greater political participation among the citizens and to further consolidate her nascent democracy appears to be impossible. Over the years, elections in Nigeria have been associated with violence even at a slightest provocation. Worst still, it has gone beyond exercising legitimate political rights. Currently it has metamorphosed into a period of acrimony where families and friends are turned apart on the ground of party sentiments.

Ever since Nigeria's independence in 1960 and her return to democratic rule which led to the conduct of her general elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and recently 2019, none of her elections was free from violence. This to a great extent seems to hamper the citizens' spirit of participation in the politics of the country. Adoke, (2011), noted that electoral violence has become a reinforcing phenomenon in Nigeria's post-independence history. According to him, successive elections depicted chaos, violence, and confusion. As such, its attendant consequences have significantly constituted a fraction of the several remote and immediate factors that had threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria especially in her quest to achieve democratic consolidation. Sincerely speaking, elections in Nigeria is wrongly perceived by many politicians as do or die affair, that is why they do all manner of things to maneuver their rivals either by hook or crook means. Furthermore, desperate politicians have unleashed different kinds of Mayhem upon their opponents and unsuspecting innocent citizens in the country at the same time through their sponsored political thugs during election period in Nigeria. It is a period where Politicians who have no plan to deliver good governance to the people flout with impunity laid down electoral laws and other enshrined codes of conduct to ensure that they are declared winner, (Abah & Nwokwu, 2015). Obviously, the preponderance of these violence have seriously affected the turnout of many citizens in participating to elect those who steer the affairs of leadership in the country as they are constantly in fear of who becomes the next victim. It is based on the background that this paper becomes imperative to investigate the electoral

violence, political participation and democratic consolidation in Nigeria with special focus on 2019 general election in Ebonyi State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that democracy is the system of government that is widely accepted by all as the best all over the world, its practice and ways of its consolidation in developing countries like Nigeria and other parts of Africa has remained a serious challenge. It is obvious that one of the ways to achieve democratic consolidation is to sustain the tenets of democracy of which free and fair election condition is inclusive. Unfortunately several efforts to achieve peaceful, free and fair election in Nigeria over the years has been seriously marred by varying degrees of violence ranging from arson, destruction of properties to kidnapping, assassination of political opponents and killing of innocent citizens. It is based on the backdrop that this paper investigates electoral violence, political participation and democratic consolidation in Nigeria with special focus on 2019 general election in Ebonyi State.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to investigate electoral violence, political participation and democratic consolidation in Nigeria with special focus on 2019 general election in Ebonyi State, specifically, the paper sought;

- a. To determine the effects of electoral violence on political participation in Ebonyi State
- b. To examine the effects of electoral violence on good governance in Ebonyi State
- c. To ascertain the effects of electoral violence on democratic consolidation in Ebonyi State

Methodology

The study adopts content analysis as a design to analyze data obtained from secondary sources through the instrumentality of textbooks, journals, newspapers, periodicals etc, while the other source which has to do with observation method includes an eye witness account of events while they happen and media reports of violence as it happened in in Ebonyi State and other parts of Nigeria especially in the 2019 general election.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on frustration aggression theory as developed by renowned psychologists John Dollard in 1939 but expanded and modified by Yate in 1962 and Berkowitz in 1963, (Ogege, 2015). The assumption of the theory is that violent behaviours displayed by individuals in the society are caused by the inability to fulfill their set goals or achieve their human wants. According to the theory, the inability to fulfill these goals brings about frustration within the individuals which results into aggressive behaviours they could transfer to the nearest person(s) or object around them. In other words, when someone or group of people perceive that they can be prevented from achieving a particular goal in life they get frustrated which in most cases resort violence behaviours.

In line with this paper, the theory is considered relevant because it explains the causes of violent actions displayed by politicians through their sponsored thugs. Specifically, it goes to explain that politicians often get frustrated when they feel that they may not win in an election possibly because their opponents have more supporters than them. It is the act of frustration that propels them to sponsor violent attacks on their opponent and the innocent citizens or properties around. In Ebonyi State, several violent attacks have been launched on political opponents and innocent citizens including their properties during period of election simply because such politicians think that their opponents have more supporters than they do and may possibly win them. They therefore see their opponents as obstacle to their progress as such, who must be visited with violent attacks.

Conceptual Framework

An intellectual exercise of this magnitude requires clarification of some concepts in order to create a roadmap and point of departure for readers in understanding the theme of the paper. Some of the concepts to be reviewed include; election, Electoral violence, political participation, democracy and democratic consolidation.

Election

Election like every other concept in the field of social sciences has no single acceptable definition as such; several efforts have been made by scholars to give meaning to it through their individual definitional views. According to Dahiru, Ibrahim & Mustapha, (2017), Election is defined as the systematic way of allowing the citizens to choose leaders into public office, through the use of electoral process which is guided, organized, conducted and monitored by the authorized electoral body. To Kwagha, (2013), Election

is defined as a process by which citizens of a given democratic entity elect representative to handle their machinery of government through vote casting. In a similar way, Scruton, (1983), in Kwagha, (2013), see election as the process whereby electorates choose by voting officers either to act on their behalf or represent it in an assembly with a view to governing or administering them. According to Ali, Dalarama & Dauda, (2018), the process in which people follow to elect or choose their representative in federal, state and local government is called election. Gwinn, Norton & Oddih, (1992), in Zainawa, (2014), describe election as the formal process of selecting persons for public office or a political proposition through voting. Omodia, (2009), equally defined election as a systematic process of choosing representatives in any political setting to hold positions of authority. Realizing the indispensable role of election in democracy, Luqman, (2009), opined that, election is very important in democratization. According to him, it is only through election that people can participate more in contributing their quota by choosing those to represent them at all level. Ekundayo, (2015), on his own maintains that election process is very significant in democratic government because it is the procedure for choosing representatives, and the means of expressing people's views in democratic settings. He further noted that election is one of the devices for changing the government, as it helps people to decide who should rule them at all level. Arising from these views, it is believable that election is one of the important aspect of democracy since it gives the citizens the necessary opportunity to participate in the government of their country. However, achieving greater participation can only be feasible when elections are conducted in a peaceful manner.

Electoral Violence

From the understanding of what election is all about above, its linkage with violence gives us the meaning of what electoral violence is. To that effect, different authors at different point in time have made enough attempts to give a working definition. For instance, Fischer, (2002), conceives electoral violence as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced “protection”, blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination. Olayinka, (2009), in his own view defines electoral violence as disorderly conducts targeted at frustrating, eliminating and humiliating political machineries and opponents to get rid of the unwanted others. He went further to state that some of the ways in which electoral violence perpetuated in Nigeria include arson, assassination, riot, confusion, inducement and manipulation of votes, ballot box stuffing,

threatening, blood-letting, assaults, hooliganism, vandalism and many others. In the view of Igbuzor, (2010), electoral violence refers to any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities including, pre, during and post-election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes. Albert, (2007), noted that electoral violence involves all forms of organized acts of threats aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder or opponent before, during and after an election with an intention to determine, delay or influence a political process. Ogundiya & Baba, (2005), categorized electoral violence to include all sorts of riots, demonstrations, party clashes, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping spontaneous or not, which occur before, during and after elections. From the definitions so far, it can be accepted that electoral violence involves any action or in action capable of disrupting arrangements or processes of choosing leaders into positions of authority.

Historical Account of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

The origin of electoral violence in Nigeria could be traced to the colonial period. Scholars have argued that some colonial settings laid the foundation for future electoral violence in Nigerian government, (Ebenyi, 2018). This argument was hinged on a number of British political experiments in West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular which include among other things, the introduction of the elective principle of Clifford constitution in 1922. The elective principle though, a welcome development in the political system but the idea of limiting the criteria to contest in an election to income and residential qualifications in Lagos and Calabar made a potential basis for violence in the electoral system, (Omotola, 2007). This argument could be corroborated with the events that took place when elections were held in the regional Houses of Assembly in 1951 across the country. The elections, which were held based on the then electoral system introduced by the 1922 constitution led to widespread dissatisfaction among majority of Nigerians which triggered some violent protests across the streets in 1952. Thus, in 1953, there was increase in the intensity of political agitation, (Falola, 1991, in Ebenyi, 2018). Sequel to that, the 1946 constitution that paved way for the division of the country into three regions also contributed to the electoral violence in Nigeria. This was because each of the regions were dominated by a major ethnic group. For instance, the Hausa-Fulani dominated the Northern

region, while the Yoruba and the Igbo dominated the Western and Eastern regions respectively. Thus, within each region, there were numerous other minorities groups which were at a considerable disadvantage as far as political power was concerned, (Olatunji, 2013). The emergence of these political developments obviously marked the genesis of electoral violence in Nigeria as it brought about tribal support for political candidates. Furthermore, Isichei, (1984), in Okafor & Okafor, (2018), is of the view that the political tussle between Akintola and Awolowo during the first republic, which witnessed an unprecedented violence, was one of the earliest crises recorded in postcolonial era. According to him, the unpopular minority government of Akintola as at then used violence and coercion to survive the venoms of the opposition political parties and the electorates in the western region of Nigeria. The worst still is the fact that Nigeria is yet to recover from the violence and chaos that greeted the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, which was widely accepted by Nigerians as the best elections, adjudged to be free, fair, peaceful, and orderly in spite of all machinations and against all odds, (Eze & Agena, 2016). Hence, the annulment was understandably visited with nationwide outrage and violent protests.

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 and engaged with other democratic processes, about six (6) general elections have been conducted. These ranged from the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and recently 2019. However, it can be safely argued that none of these elections was free from violence as the contestants wanted to win at all cost either by hook or crook means (Ogoyi & Obukeni, 2019). This to a great extent has hampered the citizens' interest to participate in the politics of the country. According to Obakhedo, (2011), the 1999 general election that brought President Olusegun Obasanjo was marred by such widespread violence and fraud as it was massively rigged in favour of People's Democratic Party. This must have accounted for the reason why the US-based foreign observers from Jimmy Carter Centre for Democracy which monitored the 1999 election concluded in their report that "it is not possible for them to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election", (Human Right Watch, 2007). In 2003 general elections, violence was part of political competition in different parts of Nigeria. According to Human Rights Watch, (2003), the April and May 2003, witnessed the killing of about one hundred people and many more injured during federal and state elections in Nigeria. According to the report, members or supporters of the ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), perpetrated majority of serious violence. In a number of locations, elections simply did not take place as groups of armed thugs linked to political parties and candidates intimidated and threatened voters in order to falsify results. The violence and climate of intimidation facilitated widespread fraud, invalidating the results of the elections in many areas, (Human Rights Watch, 2003). The 2007 was equally not something to write home about, off

as it was greeted with several violence. According to International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) reports, (2007), there were about 967 incidents of electoral violence in the 2007 elections. Cases of abduction and kidnapping, murder and killing protest, disruption, intimidation and physical attack as well as poster defacing all featured in the incidents. In all the foundation noted that about of 300 people were killed on issues relating to 2007 elections.

The 2011 general election was equally among the worst of violence driven election since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. The violence began some days before the election but the most obvious was the series of killings of innocent Nigerians including corps members with bomb blast on the day of the presidential election,(Bamgbose, 2011). As though such was not enough, the violence continued with widespread protests by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim from the Congress for Progressive (CPC) Change, following the re-election of incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta in the south, who was the candidate for the ruling People's Democratic Party(PDP). The protests degenerated into violent riots and killings in the northern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara. Relief officials estimate that more than 65,000 people were displaced, (Human Right Watch, 2011).

The 2015 general election which was widely acknowledged by both foreign and local observers as the most free and fair election since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 was not free from violence. The election on the other hand, could have been the mostly deadly but the orderliness, statesmanship and maturity demonstrated by the then incumbent president – Goodluck Jonathan and the presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party helped to save blood of many innocent souls. According to Najib, (2015), traces of violent cases started prior to the Election Day. The violence kick-started when some disgruntled political thugs allegedly to be APC members began to stone sachets of water on the campaign train of President Jonathan of the PDP in Bauchi State. This was in addition to the burning of campaign buses, and cases of bomb blast near a campaign ground in Potiskum, Gombe State. Sporadic gunshots at APC members in Rivers State were also allegedly reported to have been carried out by PDP thugs, (Human Right watch, 2015). Preliminary reports of electoral observers also revealed that the elections were peaceful and orderly in many parts of the country but some states, nevertheless, recorded significant number of violent incidents, the most affected being Rivers, AkwaIbom, Cross River, Ebonyi and Ondo States. INEC's records show that there were about 66 reports of violent incidents targeted at polling units, the Commission's officials, voters and election materials. These were in Rivers State (16 incidents), Ondo (8), Cross River

and Ebonyi (6 each), Akwalbom (5) Bayelsa (4), Lagos and Kaduna (3 each), Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti and Osun (2 each), Katsina, Plateau, Kogi, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun one each (INEC, 2015). From this historical account, it can be seen that electoral violence is part and parcel of Nigerian election.

Political Participation

Political participation like every other concept in the field of social sciences has not gained a universally accepted definition. This is because, Political participation, though central to democracy, the meaning of the term “participation” appears to be vague, complex and somewhat ambiguous, (Bruce, 2004). This accounts for the reason why many scholars have viewed the concept in different ways. According to Anifowose, (2004), political participation is defined as those voluntary activities such as holding public and party office, being a candidate for office, attending election campaigns, voting and exposing oneself to political stimuli. In a similar way, Maclosky, (1968), in Oni & Agbude, (2011), sees political participation as a series of voluntary activities through which members of a society share in the direct or indirect selection of rulers and formation of public policy. Sanghera, (2005), on the other hand, defines political participation as the active engagement by individuals and groups with the governmental processes that affect their lives. This encompasses both involvements in decision-making and acts of opposition. Lewu, (2005), however, defines political participation as a variety of ways in which people try to exercise influence over the political process. For Lawson & Wasburn, (1969), in Oni & Agbude, (2011), Political participation is the process by which individuals acting singly or through group organization attempt to influence decision-making or alter the manner in which power may be distributed and the principles by which it may be exercised in a particular society.

Political participation according to Barrett & Brunton-Smitt, (2014), takes a number of different forms, including both conventional forms which involves electoral processes (like voting, election campaigning etc.) and non-conventional forms which occur outside electoral processes (for instance, signing petitions, participating in political demonstrations, among others). Dimitrova, Shehata, Stromback, & Nord, (2011), argued along the same line when they state that political participation is categorized into two types, conventional and unconventional political participation. According to them conventional participation refers to a behaviour of being a responsible citizen by attending and participating in a regular election exercise, while unconventional participation simply means any legal activity that sometime shows a sign of inappropriate manner such as signing petition, organizing and supporting boycotts and staging demonstration or protests in public places. Arising from the above, it can be understood that political participation

involves different dimensions but it is obviously noticed more during election period.

Democracy

Democracy as a system of government that is widely cherished has attracted different definitions from scholars. No wonder Abraham Lincoln in 1858 aptly referred to democracy, as the government of the people by the people and for the people, (Ebegbule, 2011). According to Almond, Powell, Strom & Dalton, (2004), democracy is a political system in which citizens enjoy a number of basic civil and political rights and in which most important political leaders are elected in free and fair elections and accountable under the rule of law. For Lipset, (2003), in Adeosun,(2014), democracy is a political system, which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials and a social mechanism, which permits the larger possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office. In same vein Schumpeter, (1962), in Dada, (2013), sees democracy as a political method or type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions. According to him, it is a method by means of competitive struggle for the peoples' vote and this competition for votes is the distinguishing character of the democratic method. Appadorai, (1974), in Egbebulem, (2011), defined democracy as the system, either of government under which the people exercise power directly or through representatives periodically elected by them. According to Huntington, (1970), in Oni, (2014), democracy exists in states where the principal leaders of a political system are selected by a competitive election in which the bulk of the population has the opportunity to participate. Democracy is the system of government that is widely accepted as the best in the world. Democracy is widely cherished basically because it is such a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials and a social mechanism which permits the larger possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office, (Lipset, 2003, in Adeosun, 2014).

Democratic Consolidation

According to Oni, (2014), democratic consolidation is defined as an identifiable phase in the transition from authoritarian rule to civil rule and by extension, democratic systems that are germane and fundamental to the establishment and enthronelement of a stable, institutional and enduring democracy. According to him, achieving democratic consolidation calls for the enthronelement of democracy as a system of organizing both the society and government and thereafter creates concomitant institutions, culture, ethics,

support system and the will that are crucial in making it stable, efficient and responsive. According to Diamond, (1997), in Oni, (2014), democratic consolidation represents a state whereby institutions, rules and constraints of democracy becomes the sole legitimate means for the acquisition and exercise of political power. For Jega, (2006), in Erunke, (2012), democratic consolidation is a term, which describes the vital political goal for a transiting democracy with intermittent flop by authoritarian rule. It consists of overlapping, behavioural, attitudinal and constitutional dimensions through which democracy becomes reutilized and deeply internalized in social, institutional and even psychological life as well as political calculation for achieving success. Similarly, Beetham, (1994), in Mohammed, (2013), sees democratic consolidation as the challenge of making new democracies secure and extending their life expectancy beyond the short term of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian repression and of building dams against eventual reverse waves. For Frimpong-Mansoh, (2012), democratic consolidation refers to a firm establishment and successful completion of the process of political democratization. According to Ogundiya, (2009), democratic consolidation is about regime maintenance and about regarding the key political institution as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game. In the same vein, Mainwaring, (1992), in Adamu & Ocheni, (2018), defined democratic consolidation as the acceptance by all political actors that democratic procedure dictate government renewal. Put differently, democratic consolidation entails widespread acceptance of rules that generate political participation and competition.

Akinsanya, (2000), in Egbebullem, (2011), asserts that a consolidated democracy is measured by the extent to which a country has regular free and fair elections, genuine contestation over selection among others. He further stated that democratic consolidation requires stability. And to him, a high degree of stability brings about accountability, transparency, responsiveness and competitiveness. Adebaniwi & Obadare, (2011), arriving at a consolidated democracy requires nurturing democratic values and ethos, principles and institutions in a matured sense that prevents a reversal to a hitherto authoritarian regime. Diamond, (1994), in Oni, (2014), maintains that democratic consolidation rests upon a strong and dynamic civil society whose responsibility it is to check repeated abuses of power, to hold public officials accountable for their actions and inactions in the management of public resources and also serves to mitigate political conflicts. From the above submissions, it is clear that democratic consolidation can be achieved in Nigeria when the democratic ethics and ethos such as free and fair elections, rule of law, popular participation, effective representation, respect for the fundamental human rights among others are observed.

Incidence of Electoral Violence in 2019 General Election in Nigeria

The 2019 general elections appears to be second most keenly contested election after the 2015 election considering the level of confidence of some opposition parties especially the People's Democratic Party (PDP) with its flag bearer –Alhaji Atuku Abubakar who came with full force to defeat the ruling party-All progressive Congress (APC) having noticed some public outcry from different quarters of the country on the ground of inability of the incumbent president and the presidential candidate of the APC to tackle some issues of national concern such as the herdsmen/farmer crisis, the Boko Haram and other economic related challenges, (Vanguard, 2019).

All things been equal, it was a two horse race where no one was ready to let go for the other. It can as well be described as a scene where two elephants fought and the grasses suffered the outcome. According to Human Rights Watch (2019), the general election, which brought President Muhammadu Buhari back into office for a second term was marred by varying degrees of violence. However, while some were perpetrated by political thugs, others were aided by soldiers and police officers. The eve of the election period heralded persistent attacks by factions of the insurgent group Boko Haram in the northeast; increased communal violence between nomadic herdsmen and farmers spreading southward from north-central states; and a dramatic uptick in banditry, kidnapping, and killings by political thugs in the northwestern states of Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara,(Olu, 2019). The Human Rights Watch, (2019), equally noted that the national and state elections in February, March, and April 2019 witnessed a general insecurity across the country. Vanguard Newspaper,(2019), reported that the politically related violence reported in many states was in contrast to the relatively peaceful 2015 elections that brought Buhari into his first term in office. According to a report by SBM Intelligence, which monitors sociopolitical and economic developments in Nigeria, 626 people were killed during the 2019 election cycle, starting with campaigns in 2018.

According to Nigerian Bar Association election working group report, (2019), there were several reports and live feeds of electoral violence from all over the country. Party thugs and hoodlums had a field day invading voting centers to snatch polling materials, destroy voting materials, harass, molest and intimidate voters and, in some instances, INEC officials. Suspected political thugs, accompanied by security operatives particularly persons in uniforms of officers and men of the Nigerian Army, hijacked and destroyed materials, interfered with the voting processes, hindered voting and or prevented the counting of votes at some voting centers, chased away some party agents and observers from polling units and collation centers. The report, observed that Akwa-Ibom, Niger, Lagos, Imo, Ebonyi, Rivers, Kogi,

Kano and Benue States rank high as examples of places where these unconscionable and loathsome acts of voter intimidation and suppression took place. In Polling Units 5, 6 and 7, of Ward 4 in Ogbomosho South Local Government Area of Oyo State, for instance, political thugs forced voters to show the thugs their ballot papers after voting but before depositing same in the ballot boxes. In some places, such as Lagos, Kano and Edo States, amongst others, voters who wanted to vote for certain candidates were threatened with violence, suffered violence and/or were prevented from voting. Cases of supervised or guided voting were also reported in parts of Kano State, (NBA, 2019). In Abia State, it was gathered that armed thugs invaded and unleashed violence at EkiriElu Central School, Aram Umuahia, forcing the INEC ad-hoc staff to abandon the election and run into private residences for safety. In Ganaga/Township, polling unit 09, Ajaokuta LGA, Kogi State, persons believed to be political thugs, aided by some security operatives, disrupted the counting process at the polling unit and destroyed the ballot boxes and papers. In polling units 04 and 07, Kuchi Ward, Kebbe LGA of Sokoto State, voting was disrupted by thugs who attacked the polling unit and beat up both INEC and police officers. In Kaura Namoda, Kyam Baruwa Ward, violent scuffle among party agents led to the destruction of election materials and an attempt on the lives of some security personnel. In Ile Ife East and Ife Central of Osun State, there was intimidation of voters by thugs and security agents. Voters were also compelled to vote for a particular political party and those who refused were prevented from voting. The outbreak of violence in Oba Akoko in Akoko South West Local Government Area of Ondo State forced the State Government to impose curfew on the community. It was reported that no fewer than two persons lost their lives when security agents and some political thugs engaged in a shootout consequent upon the attempt by the security agents to prevent the thugs from gaining entrance into the collation centre in the town. In Rivers State in particular, a policeman and three other persons were reportedly killed by gunmen while a chieftain of a political party, Mrs. Emilia Nte, was reportedly kidnapped. In polling unit 006, Ward 12, Ogba/Egbema Ndoni in Rivers State, it was reported that a policeman with Force number 442884 was seen compromising the voting process by telling people which party to vote for. Five (5) cartons of ballot papers meant for governorship elections were intercepted by security agents on election duty at Giginyu Ward of Kano state. A female NYSC member and some other persons were reportedly arrested (Leadership Newspaper, February 29, 2019). These reported cases shows the great extent to which violence has eaten deep in the fabrics of Nigeria electoral processes.

Incidence of Electoral Violence in 2019 General Election in Ebonyi State

Ebonyi State, which was formerly known for peace and good brotherliness over the years, suddenly becomes one among the top ranking political violent states in Nigeria especially during elections. The most notable among appears to be the 2019 general elections. The general election which took place on 23rd February and 9th march 2019 became a thug of war as the two leading political parties in the State, the All Progressive Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) were battle ready to ensure victory at all costs in the polls. The mere political trading of words between the two giant political parties eventually metamorphosed into attack, intimidation, harassment, destruction of properties, killings of supporters of both parties. During the election, political atmosphere in the state was so tensed that residents of the area became jittery to come out to on an election day to carry out their civic responsibilities of voting for a candidate of their choice, (Leadership Newspaper, 6th march 2019).

Despite the fact that electoral violence existed in the past elections in Ebonyi State but the dimension of its occurrence in the 2019 general election became worrisome both for resident communities. Premium Times, February, 23rd (2019), for instance reported that as months before the electioneering campaign commenced, the APC and PDP both parties had accused each other of recruiting political thugs from within and outside the state to cause mayhem and disrupt the peaceful conduct of the elections in the state with aim of rigging the election and securing victory. Thus while the eve of the election approached, there were identified flash points of violence in areas like; Ikwo, Izzi, Ishielu, Ohaukwu, Ohaozara, Afikpo south local government areas. These local government areas were prone to political crisis with attendant death records. Before the proper day of the election, there have been a number of deaths recorded, destruction of bill boards and burning of houses among others in the above local areas, (Premium Times Newspaper, February, 23, 2019). While the security agencies assured and reassure residents of security of lives and properties before, during and after the elections, the leading PDP campaign organization led by the former minister for state Health, chief Fidelis Nwankwo had in a press conference accused the police of shielding political thugs of the opposition party who allegedly went round the town allegedly using acidic contents to destroy the bill boards of the candidates of the PDP in the state capital city.

Barely few days after that, Leadership newspaper reported that the Vice Chairman of Ikwo local government area of Ebonyi State, Hon. (Mrs.) Iteshi Regina of Amagu community, Ikwo was allegedly attacked and brutalized. It was gathered that the suspected thugs invaded the residence of the Vice Chairman, beat her, molested her and left her almost half-dead. It

was also gathered that when some supporters of PDP one Monday Eden and Nweke Ifeanyi rushed to the scene to save the woman from further attack were also mercilessly beaten by the suspected thugs, (Sun Newspaper, March 5th, 2019).

Hell was also let loose in Izzi Local Government Area as about 30 Houses allegedly belonging to the supporters of the All People's Progressive Congress (APC) were burnt on the pre-election violence in some communities of the area and the killing of some PDP supporters in the area. However, while the burning of houses attack was alleged to have been perpetrated by the thugs of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the PDP on the other hand, accuses the APC of Killing some of their supporters. According to Leadership Newspaper, March 6th (2019), none of the political parties accepted the responsibility for such attacks. One of the victims Mr. Donatus Nwofe who is the chairman of the national union of Pensioners Ebonyi State chapter narrated that the suspected hoodlums invaded the compound and started shooting sporadically before setting the Houses ablaze, (Leadership Newspaper march, 6th 2019). Other cases of political violence in Ebonyi State was also noticed in Onitcha LGA and Ohaozara Local Government Areas respectively where it was gathered that APC campaign rally was disrupted and properties belonging to the party destroyed by alleged thugs of the Peoples Democratic Party. In Ekoli-Edda of Afikpo South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, it was also reported that party members of the APC were attacked leaving many varying degrees of injuries on the victims.

In Ezza North Local Government Area, the Resident Electoral Commissioner, Ebonyi State - Prof. God's will Obioma reported that some heavily armed suspected political thugs invaded three Registration Area Camps (RACs) setting ablaze the Commission's sensitive materials in the early hours of Saturday March 9th, 2019. According to the Commissioner, who made an assessment visit to the areas, the affected wards and polling units include Ekka with code number 02, having 16 voting points with 137 polling units and Oriuzor with code number 09 with 32 voting points and Okposi Umuohara being one of the registration Area Center with a total of 75 voting points and the total number of registered voters affected is 36,392, (Punch Newspaper, march 9th, 2019).

Causes of Electoral Violence in Ebonyi State

An in-depth investigation on the occurrence of electoral violence in Nigeria showed that a lot of factors are responsible. Some of which include;

Poverty and Unemployment: According to Jonathan (2016), majority of Youths in Nigeria are jobless with no means of livelihood, they are highly impoverished. As such, they have no other option than to do anything possible to earn their daily bread. The politicians capitalize on this to offer paltry sum of

money to the youths who not only constitute the pillar of society but also the most vulnerable to the self-inflicted poverty and get them recruited as their thugs and touts to perpetrate violence especially during elections.

Hate Speech (Inflammatory Messages): Hate speech is another factor that triggers electoral violence. Segun, (2015), explained hate speeches as “communication that denigrates a particular person or a group on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation nationality, religion, or other characteristics. It can be in the form of speech, gesture, conduct, writing, or display and usually marks incitement, violence, or prejudice against an individual or a group”, (Akubor, 2015). The after effects of these hate speeches sometimes, result in violence. Adding to this point, Jega, (2007), in Akubor, (2015), while considering the Nigerian situation, said that, “there is a strong relationship between campaign of calumny (hate speech) and electoral violence and that is as far as history is concerned. Hate speeches in Nigeria have brought about incitements that resulted in the killings of innocent citizens, assassination of top politicians and destruction of many properties.

Tribal, ethnic and religious inclinations: According to Okafor & Okafor, (2018), about 75% of electoral crisis in the history of Nigeria are associated with tribal, ethnic and religious inclination. Expounding on this, Olatunji, (2013), the 1946 constitution paved the way for the division of the country into three regions in which a major ethnic group dominated each region. For instance, the Hausa-Fulani dominated the Northern region, while the Yoruba and the Igbo dominated the Western and Eastern regions respectively. Thus, within each region, there were numerous other so-called minorities, which were at a considerable disadvantage as far as political power was concerned. It was the emergence of these political developments marked the genesis of electoral violence in Nigeria as it brought about tribal support for political candidates, (Olatunji, 2013).

Ineffective security structure: Adeleke, (2012), noted that ineffective security structure is another factor that has enabled electoral violence to creep into the Nigerian political system. Instances of this can be either seen from the fact that most of the political violence perpetrated especially during elections are carried out by or flagrantly allowed to manifest by some security officers. One can recall that before every general election, the top security institutions in Nigeria often assure Nigerians of peaceful atmosphere during and after elections at the end of the day, the reverse becomes the case.

Lack of Internal Democracy within Political Parties: When there are no level playing ground or internal democracy within and among political parties, especially when the party leaders are not carrying out their responsibilities and duties during elections, aggrieved political contestants use this platform as

a way of orchestrating violence by sponsoring thugs and hooligans who end up disrupting the peaceful conduct of a particular election. This was observed between the two major parties of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) as a result of level playing ground with political parties. According to Ogheneakoke, (2014), lack of internal democracy, irregularities in registration and technical challenges during elections are responsible for election violence.

Inefficiency of the Electoral Commissions: Adeniyi, (2018), stated that the inefficiency of the electoral commissions in conducting its duties and responsibilities also contribute to incidence of violence during the 2011 and 2015 general elections in Lagos State. As a way of curbing this problem in subsequent elections, the Lagos State Independent Electoral Commission (LASIEC) through the Inter Party Advisory Council (IPAC) engages all political parties in Lagos State via their stakeholders in discussions on rules guiding the conduct of free and fair elections as a means to achieve a peaceful and credible election outcome. However, in situations where the commission fails to call all political parties together in a meeting, there is likely to be violence because political parties will not be able to inform them.

Inordinate Political Ambition: Abah & Nwoku, (2015), noted that Politics in Nigeria has been perceived as a gold mine where any aspiring billionaire should venture to satisfy his quest for wealth. According to them, such is unarguably responsible for the huge number of persons who go into politics in the country. That is why majority of them, go extra miles to achieve their ambitions without considering whose ox is gourd. To that effect, they truncate the rules of the game so as to succeed at all cost. This explains why politicians keep and maintain armed thugs who are deployed as ready instruments to wreck havoc on perceived political opponents before, during and after elections.

Effects of Electoral Violence on Political Participation Ebony State

Electoral violence over the years is known to be detrimental to national development in which the results show that thuggery created fear among the candidates, hindrance of the electorates, killing innocent people, violation of human rights, destruction of properties and insecurity during and after the election.

Killing of Innocent People: One of the serious effects of electoral violence on political participation is the killing of innocent people in the society. According to Abubakar, (2015), political thugs often attack innocent people, whenever they are unable to lay hands on their target victims. They attempted to attack everybody they come across. This trend is affecting democratic and social

activities negatively, especially in the Third World Countries, where democracy not allowed to be played in accordance with its guiding principles. In Ebonyi state many innocents citizens have lost their lives due to electoral violence.

Creating Fear among Political Candidates and Electorates: According to Razak & Garuba, (2017), violent activities especially during elections creates fear among party candidates which often prevent electorates from going out to cast out their voted during elections. An instance of this can be seen from the violent activities which took place in the early hours of the day of election on 9th march, 2019 in Okposi Umuohara, Oriuzor and Ekka of Ezza North LGA where all the electoral materials meant to be used for the election were burnt were completely by unknown political thugs. Thugs burnt valuable materials including vehicles, houses, and offices of officials of PDP in different states. Similarly, innocent individuals lost their lives and valuable properties during and after the 2011 General Elections. The resultant effect of these violent cases was that many citizens were unable to turn in their polling units as they were afraid of being injured. Therefore, thuggery affects political participation specifically in the conduct of free and fair elections in Ebonyi State politics by creating fear among candidates and hindrance of the electorate during and after elections.

Violation of Fundamental Human Rights: This is also another effect of electoral violence on political participation in Nigerian. According to chapter the 1999 constitution as amended 2011, one of the fundamental rights of a Nigeria citizens is the right to vote and be voted for during elections. Unfortunately, the incidences of electoral violence have obviously denied many citizens the right to voluntarily vote for their candidates of choice in Ebonyi State. This is because during the days of election, many electorates are either coerced by political thugs to vote for their sponsored candidate or denied the right to vote due to destruction of the election materials. In some areas, ballot boxes are snatched or were not provided for the electorates to vote the prepared candidates.

Insecurity in the State: According to Okafor & Okafor, (2018), electoral violence is one of the factors that have worsened the insecurity state of the country. It is a clear fact that most of ethno-religious crises and communal conflicts which have degenerated into a large form of violence in many parts of the country have their genesis from political violence that usually occur during and after elections. This situation has led to the poor political participation and more often than not affects democratic sustainability in Nigerian politics.

Effects of Electoral Violence on Democratic Consolidation in Ebonyi State

Democratic consolidation refers to the process of sustaining the ethics and ethos of democracy in governance such that all the citizens and significant political actors are acclimatized to democratic governance as the best for the society than any other alternative, (Muhammad, 2013). Arriving at a consolidated democracy involves nurturing democratic values and ethos, principles and institutions in a matured sense that prevents a reversal to an authoritarian regime, (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011). For a government to be considered a democratic one, it must exhibit legitimacy, periodic, free, and fair elections, rule of law, popular participation, effective representation, and respect for the fundamental human rights among others. According to Akinsanya, (2000), in Egbeblem, (2011), democratic consolidation is a measure of the extent to which a country has regular free and fair elections, genuine contestation over selection among others. From these submissions, it is glaring that democratic consolidation requires that election must be conducted in peaceful atmosphere in such a way that every citizen can participate. The election should equally be carried out in line with the stipulations of the law. In Nigeria in general and Ebonyi State in particular, electoral violence has significantly affected democratic consolidation. This is because the way in which violence cases are reported and observed has not in any way showed Nigeria's readiness to consolidate her democracy. Elections in Ebonyi State have recorded variants in degrees of violence which to great extent appears to have rendered electoral law impotent despite the imperative of democratic consolidation. For instance, the acceptance of the result of the 1999 election was purely on the basis of having no further options having lived under oppressive military regime for over 30 years. According to Aniekwe & Kushie, (2011), the level of acceptance was not based on its freeness but one of choosing from bad and worse. Also in 2003, Nigerian witnessed an unprecedented electoral violence as a result of electoral fraud ranging from intimidation of voters majorly opponents in order to force them not to dare open and free expression of their choices of candidates, killing and stuffing of ballot boxes, and announcement of already decided winners by elites and caucuses, (Chiroro 2005).

Ebonyi State is such a state where politicians through their sponsored thugs adopt different violent strategies to ensure that they are declared winner. Jega, (2007), concludes that the political elites in Nigeria's nascent democracy are the cogs in the wheel of democratic progress. According to him, they sponsor all sorts of violence for the upkeep of their personal gain and political advancement. It is for these reasons that they cherished the ideals of democracy in as much as it facilitates and creates opportunities for blunder and plunder of public treasury and the people at their mercy. Democracy to these groups is only a desirable and a defensible venture if it is a means not an end; a means to power at the detriment of the common good of the majority of the

population whereas the end being the lofty ideals of good governance and personal liberty. The Political parties, which by all standards supposed to be one of outstanding elements of modern government, have not helped matters in the quest for achieving democratic consolidation, (Omotola 2013). The nonexistence of viable political parties will not only make democracy inconceivable but also lead to political instability and formidable democratization will be a mirage. Therefore, viable political parties can only perform political socialization of electorates, facilitate recruitment of political leadership and serve as a unifying force in a fragile polity. By promoting these roles, political parties can contribute tremendously to democratic consolidation through successful conduct of elections. Largely, election can contribute to democratic consolidation when the processes are followed and all stakeholders, political parties inclusive.

Effects of Electoral Violence on Good Governance in Ebonyi State

Governance entails the delivery of the dividends of democracy in terms of empowerment to the people, providing infrastructural projects such as good road network, electricity, creating employment and employment opportunities among others, (Ovuwasa, 2013). It entails the distribution of power, and managing resources as well as the problems of the state. Good governance provides a platform for rapid changes in the socio-economic and political status of nations and their citizenry. Good governance lays emphasis on efficient and effective government to enhance speedy development of a nation and its citizens. It ensures maximum participation of the citizenry, transparency, accountability and the rule of law. According to Abubakar, (2010), the idea of good governance is rooted in transparency which is openness and adherence to due process by the leaders and the governed. He further stated that transparency ensures that information is readily available that can be used to measure the authorities performance, and guide against any possible misuse of power. Election is very crucial in achieving good governance, (Adebanwi & Adebare, 2011). This is because the kind of people elected goes a long way to determine the level good governance that will be delivered to the people. In ideal democracies, the ability to conduct an election devoid of violence leads to electing the right caliber of people who in turn bring good governance. When election is very peaceful, the citizens have the opportunity to vote to the candidates based on how they have touched the lives of citizens. These set of people elected through this peaceful means ensure that the public resources and problems are managed effectively, efficiently and in response to critical needs of the society, (Oni, 2015).

In Ebonyi State, electoral violence has hindered good governance. Electoral violence is a strategy that is usually applied by politicians who have the intention to loot the public resources to scare the masses away in order to have their way at the pooling units. These set of politicians believe that election is a do or die affair, thus victory can be achieved at all cost. Babawale, (2012), rightly observed that the political class normally apply different dimensions of violence to wine political power and gain unfair access to the control of state resources. According to him, the state in the process loses its relative autonomy and while the masses get alienated from their elected representatives who see their position as an institution to cheat, exploit and abused the state resources at will. Judging from reasonable observations from ideal democratic countries of the world shows that politicians who have the mandate to deliver good governance to the people are not prone to violence. Instead, they get attracted to the masses through their persuasive political manifestoes but in Nigeria and Ebonyi State in Particular, the revise is the case.

Findings of the Study

Analysis of the study reveals the following:

That electoral violence negatively affects political participation in Ebonyi State

That electoral violence negatively affects good governance in Ebonyi State

That electoral violence negatively affects democratic consolidation in Ebonyi State

Conclusion

The paper has established that election is indispensable in any democracy since it gives the citizens the opportunity to take part in governance by choosing those who steer the affairs of leadership in the state. However, such election becomes relevant when it is conducted in line with the acceptable norms set by the national laws of a given state that operates such system to enable a peaceful transfer of power. In Nigeria and Ebonyi state in Particular, several attempts to conduct peaceful election appears to be challenging, hence this study. Going by the findings of the study, it can be concluded that electoral violence has significantly hindered political participation among the citizens and has constituted a serious challenge towards achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In view of the findings made, the paper recommends as follows;

1. That stakeholders such as the National orientation Agency and Civil Society Groups should as a matter of urgency embark on rapid mass voter education for Ebonyians in order to enable them understand the implications of electoral violence on democratic consolidation in the State.
2. That Ebonyi State government should do everything within her capacity to create employment and employment opportunities for the teeming youths as it will go a long way to change their attitudes and divert their attention from being used by politicians to perpetuate political violence in the State.
3. That security Agencies should at all-time maintains neutrality while handling violent cases during election periods in Ebonyi State.

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