

ELECTION VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA AND THE WAY FORWARD: 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN PERSPECTIVE.

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Abstract

Election violence can be defined as those illegitimate, obscured means and instrumentality employed by the major actors in electoral process in order to achieve victory at the expense of others. The resultant effect of election violence is illegitimacy of government and loss of confidence in the electoral process from the comity of nations. Overtime elections in Nigeria have metamorphosed to an alarming violent situation. This assertion came to its climax during 2019 General election, which played out between February and March 2019. The study undertakes a critical review of 2019 elections in Nigeria from Presidential to Governorship Elections. Empirical evidences from the field, comprising the licensed election observers, those who played direct or indirect roles during the 2019 elections, such as electoral workers, government agencies or representatives of the political parties, the media, and the security agencies were also examined. Data gathered from the field during the elections as well as other secondary sources were critically examined using the exploratory and descriptive analytical method. The thrust of this analysis is enshrined in the various themes and sub themes selected. In analyzing the data all the factors responsible for various forms of malpractices observed during the elections were unmasked. The game theory is deployed in this analysis for a comprehensive grasp of the subject matter. Conclusively, from the observations made, solutions were proffered to drastically reduce or completely eliminate election violence in Nigeria and make the process truly free, fair and credible. This will enhance its acceptability at the global stage.

Keywords: Election, Violence, Rigging, Money Politics, Political parties, Way Forward.

Introduction

Election originated with Greek civilization in 508BC, hence election franchise were domiciled to male property owners (land lords) invariably it was not meant for the proletarians, as only the male bourgeois were appropriated with election right (Plano & Riggs, 1973). During the period, elections were conducted every ten years and were conducted with 'broken pieces of pots'. The person that garnered the highest number of votes casted would win. The significance of conducting elections with minimal national endowment cannot be overemphasized, thereby saving significant portion of the national

treasury for developmental agenda for the elected officials, rather than national profligacy on elections. Furthermore, the elongation of the election timetable strengthened the assertion that national wealth should not be sacrificed at the altar of frequent periodic elections.

From Greeks, other parts of the world followed suit, hence the regular modification of electoral patterns, practice and procedure to suit the global developmental challenge. Interestingly, every developed world takes a critical review of the challenges of the past elections to ensure its reformation to eliminate a repeat of such unwanted trend. At this juncture, it is very pertinent to note that many developed world have transformed their electoral system to ensure that none of its citizens is denied electoral franchise irrespective of their country of abode. Hence the emergence of ‘E’ voting, which enable nationals of a country to vote from their country of residence.

A free, fair and credible election is synonymous to good governance when every negativity that surrounds it is eliminated. This enables every candidate to do a critical self-appraisal devoid of any sentiment before signifying interest to contest any national elective position. When election is devoid of being free and fair as well as being credible it is regarded as a manipulated election and this could give credence to many negative variables during the period of governance. Elections could be manipulated through rigging, systemic manipulations as well as several other forms of electoral violence. The consequence of these is post electoral violence.

There is a similitude of history between election and election violence in Nigeria, as both moved in ‘paripasu’ (Osaghae 2011). The nexus between both is traced to the colonial era, noted from the flaws in Clifford’s constitution of 1922 which provided an ‘in way’ to electoral violence in Nigeria (Egobueze & Ojirika, 2017). However, both manifested in the first republic and Odusote (2014) notes that since independence, Nigeria has not experienced a good governance because its elected leaders emerged through a flawed electoral system devoid of any form of credibility which reflects in their style of undemocratic governance. The poor system of governance styled from these leaders elected from questionable electoral processes has led to series of military intervention in Nigerian politics, hence leaving the polity more ‘injured’ compared to the existing status quo they met. According to Egobueze and Ojirika (2017), the first recorded electoral violence in Nigeria, was in 1964 which was tagged the ‘western region violent political conflict’ popularly referred to as ‘operation wet e’. This took place between 1964 – 1965 during both federal and regional elections, majorly caused by the rift between Awolowo and Akintola (Egobueze & Ojirika, 2017).

From first the republic to date, Nigeria has witnessed series of electoral violence which worsens by each passing election year instead of getting abated. This ugly trend has seen the assassination of the perceived fine products during varying electoral year, such as Bola Ige, Harry Marshall, Alfred Dikibo, Andrew Agom, Funsho Williams among others (Durutoye, 2014). We shall discuss this in details as we progress. During the period under review, every political leader fight with every weapon within his reach to ensure the retention of state power for himself or successors alike. This is otherwise referred as the power of incumbency.

For instance, the former president Olusegun Obasanjo in order to ensure his successor is in the same political lining with him, affirmed that “it is a do or die affair” (Obasanjo, 2007).

Political violence has marred the credibility of our elections from inception to the current democratic dispensation. Unarguably Nigeria made some significance progress in the conduct of the general elections during the period of 2011 – 2015 when former President Goodluck Jonathan held sway. This is boosted in Jonathan’s popular assertion that ‘nobody’s political ambition worth the blood of any Nigerian’ (Vanguard, 2014). Jonathan made this statement as a self-exoneration from election violence, as well as to encourage his teaming supporters to avoid politics of bitterness devoid of rancor and series of political violence during elections. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to note the downward trajectory of election violence in Nigeria since 2015 till 2019 general election. Moreover, the electoral flaws of 2019 cut across all the elective positions; from presidency to national assembly, from gubernatorial to state houses of assembly.

Methodology

Several sources were employed to obtain information on election violence in Nigeria. Firstly, we gathered information from on the spot independent election observers. Secondly, relevant literatures which included books, journals, articles, newspapers and other online and electronics publications that dealt with the subject matter were reviewed. Oyewole and Omotola (2021) noted that in as much as media contents are common source for literature in election violence in Nigeria and that “self-compiled data from media reports can be verified, they are often less exhaustive or comprehensive and can be influenced by researcher’s bias and error, with negative implications for the final analysis”. Nevertheless, many data bases ensure they provide a considerably verified data on the subject matter (Oyewole & Omotola, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

For a better analysis of this subject matter, Game Theory is best suited as a handy tool to do justice to the election violence in Nigeria. Games theory was a product of mathematical research of relationship among independent and self-interested agents. The complexity of game theory has extended to other fields of human endeavor, such as Biology, Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, Economics, Linguistics and Computer Science (Brachman & Dietterich, 2007).

Game theory is a rational way of studying co-operations as well as conflicts. The interdependence of various apostles led to the application of game theory. These apostles can be in form of individuals, group, firms or even their combinations (Turocy & Stengel, 2001). It is also an approach for the study of decision making in politics. This is because in Politics we have the option of conflict or cooperation. Hence, game theory is a veritable tool. Game theory is a quantitative theory used nationally and in international relations, where the common assumption is who gains or who wins (Onah, 2010). The major assumption of this

theory is that players and actors would optimize their maximum gains and benefits and minimize their losses (Plano & Riggs, 1973). The juxtaposition of the two strategies deployed by the two opposing parties always proves one as a better strategist and that ultimately determines the resultant effect of the game and it is accompanied by variety of pay-offs. There are three types of games: namely; two-person zero sum game, two-person non – constant sum game and n-person non-constant sum game (where n is greater than 2). In most cases, the activities of political parties in power to retain power at all cost further add to this menace.

In politics, especially in pre-election year and during elections various actors both protagonists and antagonists alike strategize to ensure that they or their parties come out victorious during the elections. To actualize this, they adopt various strategies and plans, both legitimate and illegitimate, to maneuver their opponents. Hence, the desire to win at all cost gives way to election violence. On the other hand, the opposition adopts various campaigns of calumny, blackmail and propaganda to get the sentiments of the populace to their side. These are various strategies of games adopted to ensure a positive outcome and eliminate a negative result. Even after the elections results must have been released by the electoral umpire (INEC), games theory is heavily deployed in the process of election petition tribunals. From the tribunal, the dissatisfied party goes to the appellate court and the gerrymandering continues to the Supreme Court.

Literature Review

Contrary to perceived common notion that political violence, specifically election violence, is a creation of underdeveloped world, the history of election violence is elusive without the mention of violence and insecurity in the Central American region in the medieval period which is ascribed as the originating destination (Huhn & Warnecke-Berger, 2016). Nevertheless, to proactively and effectively nip it at the bud, the United States of America (USA) established the US Institute of Peace (USIP) Academy where research is conducted on how to eliminate both election violence and post-election violence. Their task involves research, training and field work to improve knowledge and develop code of conduct for participants in election, both direct participants (contestants) and indirect participants (electoral workers). This is aimed at averting any form of violence (Worden & Cookman, 2017). They later extended this to Africa as a way of reforming electoral practice in Africa.

In other parts of the world, there were instances of election and post-election violence such as in Afghanistan in 2001, Nepal 2008, Pakistan 2018 and Colombia 2019. Politics itself is said to have inherent mechanism of brewing, nurturing, escalating, taming and resolving conflict, (Abdul-Wasi, 2010). Furthermore, Abdul-Wasi (2010) asserts that ironically, politics in most parts of the developing world tends towards conflict escalation than resolution, to the extent that one can conveniently say that politics in the developing world is inseparable from violence because the latter has often been employed as a viable and valuable tool to attaining political power. Hence, Abdul-Wasi (2010), viewed politics as ‘polling tricks’ where violence is part of the tricks employed. Therefore, political violence which is part and parcel

of election violence is seen as encompassing all acts of violence, that is, politically motivated or with political undertones (Abdul-Wasi, 2010).

Furthermore, Election violence in Africa has been the bane of underdevelopment that has marred the continent's quest in its ascendancy to the developed world status. The colossal consequences include but not limited to undermining the legitimacy of the democratic process, plunging the country into civil war as the case may be, as well as giving birth to dictatorship. Examples include but not limited to Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire and Uganda (Kovacs & Bjarnesen, 2018).

Umana (2018), described election violence as election motivated crisis, employed to alter, change or influence by force or coercion, the electoral behavior of voters, or voting patterns, or possibly reverse electoral decision to favour a particular individual, groups or political party. He further asserts that election violence can be pre-election action, thus involving all such activities that inflict any form of injury to the democratic system and its constituent, and it could be during voters' registrations, campaigns and actual voting (Umana, 2018). Such violence according to him could also be a post-election phenomenon, which comes with consequent of the manipulation of election results, rejection of results among others (Umana, 2018). He further listed the following as causes of election violence in Nigeria; hate campaign, rigging of election, thuggery, abuse of power, electoral corruption and fraud.

Lack of internal democracy within political parties, inefficiency of electoral commissions, inadequate security personnel, inadequate voter education, voters' bribery, rumours of rigging among others were some of the identified causes of election violence in 2011 and 2015 in Lagos, Nigeria (Kalu & Gberevbie, 2015). They argued that Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should institutionalize a strong electoral mechanism embedded with quality to conduct a free, fair and credible election, based on one man, one vote.

According to International Crisis Group (ICG, 2018), recent Nigerian elections have all been violent, especially the 2011 polls. More than 800 people were killed as post-election protest climaxed to mob attacks on minorities in twelve northern states. In the same vein, as peaceful as 2015 general election may be seen, yet there was couple of violence which metamorphosed to killings during campaigns and after voting (ICG, 2018). ICG further asserts that risk of election violence appears to be at its highest clime in six states of Rivers, AkwaIbom, Kaduna, Kano, Plateau and Adamawa. However, there are differentials between the dynamics in each of the states mentioned. Nevertheless, all the six states feature two or four major triggers; which are intense struggles between APC and PDP for control over states with large voting populace, huge public revenues or symbolic electoral value, as well as local rivalry between the former and incumbent governors. Also, tension resulting from ethno-religious or herder-farmer conflict and the presence of criminal groups or thugs handy for politicians to recruit and arm to attack rivals and their constituents (ICG,2018).

Obakhedo (2011), opine that election violence is the greatest obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Thus, this is as a result of the rascal politics that the political elites engage. According to him, often times it is intra party or in most occasions inter party

characterized. Apart from the resultant effect of lack of credibility for electoral system, the democratic system and the rule of law, the nature, extent and magnitude of violence and rigging associated with elections in Nigeria had assumed alarming proportion that necessitates intellectual excursion to the realm of possible solution (Obakhedo, 2011).

Factors that Fueled violence in 2019 general election

When we talk of factors that fueled violence in 2019 general election, we refer to both immediate and remote causes of the violence. Some were pre-election determined, while others were post-election determined, as well as those recoded during the election days. These factors include but not limited to political parties, money politics, religious politics, thuggery and Social miscreants, incumbency factor, desperation, electoral umpire factor, law enforcement agents, media coverage and social media, murder/assassination, card reader challenge, ethnic/regional factor/sentiments. We will discuss some of these factors to see how they contribute to election violence in Nigeria.

1. Political parties

It is no longer news that most political cum election violence are hinged on the activities of Political parties, such as blackmailing rival or opposition parties and candidates. The so called mega rallies that political parties organize so as to intimidate the opponents and falsely make them believe they have majority of masses to their side is just mere part of the election trick, whereas these crowds were rented to attend such mega rallies, and use them as means of violent intimidation to opposition. Ahere (2018), posits that as political parties are important part of political processes, and has roles they play in escalating or de-escalating political violence. Going further, prominent anarchist theorist like George Woodcock would question the efficacy of political parties, given that political parties themselves imbued with the aim to seize the state machine that seek to concentrate power, monopolize violence and perpetuate hierarchy (Woodcock 1962, cited in Ahere, 2018).

During the 2019 general election in Nigeria, the independent observers noted that in Rivers, Oyo, Ebonyi, Lagos, Imo and AkwaIbom in particular, Political parties armed their thugs with various types of ammunitions to attack their opponents, to snatch ballot boxes and intimidate voters. Hence, there were violence clashes in places like Etche, Ahoada and Obiakpo in Rivers state. In AkwaIbom, pockets of violence were noted in places like Ikot-Ekpen and Ikot-Abasi. These violent clashes left many people dead and others injured including electoral workers themselves. For instance, a sitting member of House of Assembly was murdered in AkwaIbom. In Oyo, a sitting member House of Representatives member also lost his life. In Ebonyi, a party chairman was killed, while two lives were lost on the presidential Election Day at Ikwo local government (CNBC Africa, 2019).

In Ago-Palace Way, Okota, Lagos state, agents of All Progressive Congress (APC) were seen burning people's vote in an Igbo dominated environment, with premonition that the Igbos will swing their votes to the People Democratic Party (PDP) because of the contesting Vice Presidential candidate Mr. Peter Obi who is of the Igbo extraction (This

Day Newspaper, 2019). These and many more were some of the activities of the political parties that led to violence during the 2019 general election in Nigeria.

2. Money Politics

There were instances of vote buying in almost all the states of federation where elections were conducted. These were premeditated before, during and even in some case after the conduct of elections. Hence, party agents were paying eligible electorates to submit their voters' cards for monetary inducements, which were majorly seen in places like Lagos and Kano among others. Voters cards were swapped with monetary inducements and the cards were surrendered to the political parties' agents. These led to protests from rival political parties, which often times cause some violence in a bid that the more cards you acquire the money vote you swing to your side. Voters collected N5,000, N3,000 and even N7,000 as the case may be to surrender their voters cards to various political parties(The Guardian Newspaper, 2019). These money politics often times cause frictions between rival political parties culminating to political/election violence.

3. Religious Politics

The relationship between politics and religion is intimate because there is always a point of convergence. More so, the relationship is complex because of the intricacies inherent in the politicization of religion (Oshewolo & Maren, 2015). In Anambra, Lagos and Kaduna, some religious leaders' support some particular political parties out of bias, probably the contestant(s) are their members, hence in their homilies they preach to worshippers of the need to vote a particular political party and demonized the rival.

In some instances, they were also monetarily induced to do so. Hence the religion with more populace ensures their members win election in most cases, except otherwise determined by state 'god fathers'. At this juncture, Afolabi (2015), opines that religion has taken a position of importance in Nigerian politics, going by its populous nature in West Africa and vested with religious diversity, these religions are intertwined with political activities in the country. He further asserts that political office holders are misusing religion as a tool to get to power while religious leaders are mishandling it to get personal gain from those who hold public office (Afolabi, 2015).

4. 'Thuggery' and Miscreants

Thugs of Political parties are major cause of election violence in Nigeria. Hence, Umar (2018), asserts that political thuggery is an aspect of social violence, which is devastating in Nigerian democracy. He further posits that the menace has become detrimental to democratic sustainability in Nigerian politics in which thugs move mostly in groups victimizing, terrorizing, intimidating and injuring innocent individuals and politicians (Umar, 2018).

Greater percentage of these thugs is drawn from social miscreants popularly known as 'touts'. Every ill, negativity, or social vices associated with election are mainly carried out by this category of people. It starts from ballot box snatching, stuffing of ballot papers

into ballot boxes, coercing and intimidating electorates to vote particular candidates rather than their preferred candidates, murder and assassination, as well as violent fights during election. They are simply known as chief violent causers in every election, which 2019 is one of them. Thus, Samuel (2017), posits that among other things that democracy is still battling with political violence, which derives its energy and dominance force from the army of young men and women of the African population.

Other menace of political thugs are intimidating electoral workers with dangerous weapons, as well as forcing them to change election results where it did not favour their candidates or even outright destruction of same and replacing them with their own manipulated results. They are active participants and major actors in post-election violence, engaging in wanton destruction of public and private properties in the event their party or candidate loses election.

5. Incumbency Factor

Incumbency factor or otherwise referred as ‘power of incumbency’ means the ability of the government in power to use its power as an advantage to ensure their party or that particular candidate retains power at all cost. This power cannot be overemphasized, as it played a great deal during 2019 general election.

In governorship election, the election in states like Kano, Sokoto, Plateau, Akwa-Ibom and Rivers were inconclusive according to the electoral umpire. However, incumbency factor necessitated that the sitting governors in the above mentioned states emerged victorious to retain power in their various States irrespective of high voracious opposition capacity, which is capable of swinging the results and eventually victory the other way round.

Most times the party in power has funds available to spend more than the opposition, as they turned government revenues and spending towards funding election. Thus, the synonym of the ‘highest bidder’ takes it all. Therefore, they have more funds to compromise other stakeholders, such as electoral staff, security agencies, the media, even in some cases the observers, during the election, which the opposition cannot match. In some of the states, while the opposition was sharing N3,000 per electorate, the government in power was sharing N7,000 per electorate, hence the confirmation that the ‘highest bidder’ takes it all.

In the presidential election, all the security agencies who are beneficiaries of federal governments as well as federal government owned media companies worked for their benefactor, thereby undermining the chances of the opposition. Some of the security agents were agents of rigging and manipulation of results. A major testament was the shooting of an opposition agent in Rivers state by the police (Human Rights Watch, 2019). It was also noted that some government owned media agencies such Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Voice of Nigeria (VON) and Radio Nigeria (RN) were highly biased in their reportage, as they tend to cover the areas where government agents

were involved in the manipulation of elections and the result and focused their attention where opposition agents were caught in illegalities (HRW, 2019).

Many examples which are not exhaustive abound to the suspicious actions taken in pre-election period, during the election and in post-election days by both the government and opposition alike were viewed as acts of desperation by the populace.

6. Murder/Assassination

Individuals' have lost their lives to murder and assassination as a result of election violence. For instance, a candidate of House of the Representatives was murdered in Oyo State (Channels TV, 2020). Prior to the general election, some party chairmen in some local government in Imo State, including the Ideator North local government APC chairman was murdered (The Cable, 2018). On the Election Day, many lives were lost. For instance in Ikwo Local Government of Ebonyi State two lives were lost on the presidential Election Day. Many people were also killed in Rivers and Akwa-Ibom states, as well as other states of the federation (HRW, 2019).

7. Card Reader Issue

The failure of card reader in many polling units resulted to the use of temporary voter's cards by the electorates to vote in some areas, which led to invalid votes and when the INEC Adhoc staff posted in those areas cancelled the affected results, it erupted to violence and attack of the INEC Adhoc staff in those areas. The glasses of vehicles conveying the Adhoc staff to those locations in Ikwo local government of Ebonyi State were smashed by the infuriated mobs (HRW, 2019).

Consequently, all these activities has left electoral process unfree, unfair and incredible, failing to meet international standard and expectation, hence making the outcome of the election not to be acceptable and finally making the government an illegitimate government. In addition, these activities which breed violence during elections have sent many good Nigerians to great beyond, while other are maimed for life.

Conclusion

Election violence in any society does more harm than good. This is a sensitive factor that contributes to underdevelopment and tension within a society. According to Aloysius and Nkwede (2015), they note that “any polity, society, environment or economy threatened with crime, insecurity, insurgency, kidnapping and violence is usually accompanied with tensions and anxiety”. Therefore, it is imperative for the government to place priority in building and maintaining a better electoral process devoid of violence. This will contribute positively to the growth of the country especially in areas of human and infrastructural development, international recognition and commendation, security and peace. Moreover, the citizens in all cadre should be committed to play their role for a better society free from violence and crime. To drive home these points, we will give some recommendations as a way forward.

Way Forward

The government through a legislative backing to ensure they control the excesses of the politicians and the political parties must strengthen the various institutions from anti-corruption, to law enforcement agencies and the electoral body. This will ensure that future elections credible, free and fair.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be made to be truly independent. Hence, the electoral body's chairman both national and at the states should be made to have their separate budgets, not manipulated by the presidency or the states governors. Secondly, their appointments should be subjected to applications by eminently qualified Nigerians and be subjected to voting by the media; both foreign and local, the observers; both foreign and local, as well as the national assembly. While the states chairmen should be voted by the local media, as well as the state assemblies.

The anti-corruption agencies should investigate sources of campaign funds both from those in governments and from the opposition.

Also, the law enforcement agencies should ensure that political parties and politicians sign code of conduct against violence, murder/assassination, rigging, vote buying among others. These are solutions that will make election credible, free and fair.

Furthermore, the electoral body should modify the 'option A4' system to ensure people are physically counted to reduce incidence of ballot snatching, stuffing and wastages of the national treasury on elections.

After every election, the reports of the independent observers should be taken seriously. If the electoral body's chairman or their staff is found culpable, they should be prosecuted and imprisoned for not less than 10 years. Furthermore, they should forfeit every corrupt enrichment to the government.

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