

Politics and Criminalization of Electoral Process in Cross River South Senatorial District, Nigeria: A Cross-Sectional Study

Chukwudi Charles EZIKEUDU¹ and Ikechukwu Jonathan OPARA²

¹Department of Criminology and Security Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar NIGERIA

²Department of Public Administration, University of Calabar, Calabar NIGERIA

[0172] Abstract

This study was an assessment of politics and criminalization of electoral process in Cross River South Senatorial District, Nigeria: a cross-sectional study. The study examined the relationship between mass thumb printing and criminalization of politics. Cross-sectional survey study design, which comprised the use of qualitative and quantitative methods, was utilized. The study gathered data through questionnaire and interview instruments. Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized for data interpretation and hypothesis testing. This was realized through the utilization of simple percentage and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis. The study revealed that there is a significant association between the use of mass thumb printing in election and criminalization of politics in the study area. The study concluded that mass thumb printing in elections have led to all forms of criminalities in the study area and this trend has been growing unabated. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommended that Government and non-governmental organizations should create enabling environments for businesses to thrive, so as to create more employment opportunities for the youth. This will go a long way in reducing the number of youth that would be lured into electoral misconduct by the politicians.

Keywords: Criminalization of electoral process; Election impropriety; Mass thumb printing; Politics and criminalization; and Violence

1. Introduction

Nigeria's political and electoral experiences since 1999 to the most recent general election in 2023 have left miserable reminiscences of criminalization of politics. Truthfully, violence has inundated the political atmosphere in the country. For instance, the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and most recently the 2023 general elections were marred by pervasive fraud and by extension unequaled partisan violence. The election violence in 2007, 2011 and 2015 seriously damaged the political atmosphere in Nigeria, including loss of lives and properties worth billions of Naira (Abah and Nwokuwu, 2015). Equally, the frequent occurrence of electoral malpractices in Nigeria over the years have accelerated the level of voter apathy in the population. People refrain from voting in subsequent elections if previous or current polls are won through vile means like rigging, false declaration of losers as winners and bribing of electoral officials (Ukpong & Udoh, 2023).

Crime is a universal occurrence that is only slightly different in each nation. Crime in Nigerian politics is a multidimensional issue that has the potential to undermine both the corporate existence of the country, national security and efforts to achieve sustainable development. In recent years, security and crime have emerged as a key concept in Nigeria's struggle for effective governance, sustainable democracy, and development. Both issues are deep-rooted in the country's political history. In the light of the foregoing, whenever elections draw near in Nigeria, there are usually apparent fears engulfing the well-meaning citizens of the country over the serious insecurity that may trail the process. This

is because elections are always characterized by cases of high incidences of partisan thuggery and uncontrollable violence always resulting in wanton destruction of lives and properties, which in turn scare the people for the fear of loss of lives and properties. According to Gbrevbie (2014), electoral violence has really disheartened citizens' participation in the political process in many states in Nigeria, and this development portends serious danger to Nigeria's democracy because without sufficient turnout, elections would not reflect the people's preference.

Mass thumb printing is one of the two major electoral improprieties that characterized elections in Cross River State in particular and Nigeria in general. While in some areas elections tend to be peaceful, the malpractices of mass thumb printing are seen to be terrifying. As rightly noted by Robert (2020), the absent of physical violent in Nigeria electoral process means the irresistible present of mass thumb printing. This is because in polling units or areas where there is resistance to vote buying or mass thumb printing there is bound to be political thugs armed to intimidate voters. The criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District State is clearly reflected in the trending use of mass thumb printing which is quite unconstitutional and grossly defiles the essence of election in every democratic setting. These menace in recent times has been seen to be worsening despite the 2022 Electoral Act criminalizing it in Section 115(2c) rather than improving as often times those who win the election do not reflect the overall interest of the masses but rather few Godfather's whose interest is to use the office of imposed leaders to amass wealth for self- interest rather than the good of the citizenry. The crisis of criminalization of politics in every electoral process in Nigeria is gradually gaining global recognition considering its associated effects in the nascent democracy of the country. The fact that, Nigeria elections since independence has been characterized by the use of mass thumb printing is quite dreadful.

Arising from this debilitating crisis, this study sought to examine politics and criminalization of electoral process vis a vis mass thumb printing.

Recent studies such as Obaro, 2014; Nwocha and Igwe 2019; Ezeabasili, 2023; Minkaila and Akor, 2024; and Onwuhaaraonye, Ebere and Abaneme , 2024 on the subject matter debriefed on the sociological and legal issues in Nigeria's pervasive corruption and the criminalization of the State and the citizenry in Nigeria. Notwithstanding these studies, there is a cornucopia of evidence indicating a lack of clearly written work put forth in academic manner on politics and criminalization of electoral process in Cross River South Senatorial District of Nigeria. In addition, despite these scholarly works that attempted to proffer solutions to electoral malpractices, the menace of electoral irregularities are still unabated. It is imperative to ensure that scholarly works are targeted at offering workable solutions that will engender elections that are devoid of criminality and promote societal stability, democratic legitimacy and social cohesion. It is on this background that this study sought to examine the association between mass thumb printing and criminalization of politics in the study area. The question is, does the use mass thumb printing relate to criminalization of politics in the study area? The study conjectures that there is no significant relationship between the use of mass thumb printing and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District of Nigeria. This research report is systematically structured into five segments. The first section described the introductory part of the research. The next is the second section which encapsulated concept explication, literature review and theoretical framework. The methodology was carefully enunciated in the third section, while data presentation, analyses and discussion of the findings were captured at the fourth segment. The fifth section summarized the concluding remarks

2. Literature review

Political Violence and Criminalization of politics in Nigeria. According to Njoku (2012), political Violence could occur at any point during the electoral process—before, during, or after the election. It is the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral processes or to cause bodily harm or injury to anyone associated with electoral processes. It can also be used to disrupt political meetings or

voting at polling stations. Snatching ballots, stuffing ballots, eliminating political opponents, rioting, forcefully declaring fake results even when no election is held, refusing to swear in the winner of an election, or refusing to resign from office after losing an election are all examples of political violence. Later, Njoku (2012) identified the following as major causes of political violence in Nigeria: Failure of the judiciary system, corruption, unemployment, inadequate security, and a democratic culture

In light of the foregoing, Okolie (2004) is of the opinion that electoral rigging and irregularities do not qualify to be categorized as electoral fraud or political violence if they are not accompanied by criminal acts or are not explicitly associated with criminal acts. The author stated that, despite the fact that electoral fraud is a global phenomenon, it can be distinguished from irregularities caused by unconscious shortcomings in the electoral system. As a result, the actions that constitute electoral fraud are purposeful, illegal, and criminal, and they are intended to stifle democratic principles and popular will. The general elections in Nigeria, according to the author, were marked by violence, intimidation, coercive suppression, and the exclusion of eligible voters.

According to Chikendu (2003), the Nigerian elections were remarkable for a number of reasons, the most notable of which was that they revealed the extent of political violence. He also claimed that the manner in which elections were held demonstrated that neither the ruling class nor the political class has forgotten nor learned anything from the past. This is on the grounds that their overall conduct irritated the profound sensation of the genuine liberals. Every trick in the game of election rigging was used to its fullest extent. The game's rules were flagrantly ignored; In some primaries, party discipline was at risk because there were typically two or more candidates running for a single seat on the platform of the same party. He asserts that the level of political violence in Nigeria is extremely high, which has caused people to lose faith and hope in the country.

According to Takus (2010), political violence is defined as any act or threat of intimidation, physical harm, blackmail, or abuse directed at a political stakeholder with the intention of determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process. In a related development, Balogun (2011) proposed that all forms of violence—physical, psychological, administrative, legal, and structural—that participants, supporters, and sympathizers (including employees of the security and election management body) engage in during the electoral process encompass political violence. These acts of violence can take place within or between political parties as well as before, during, and after elections.

Overview of Electoral fraud and its effect on Criminalization of politics in Nigeria

Electoral fraud has created room for the emergency of incompetent persons who occupy vital electoral positions made possible by Political demagogues. The fact that such people are mediocre, they cannot deliver the dividends of democracy expected by the masses. It is also important to note that due to political fraud, some of the best brains in political and economic management are not in governance as a result of victimization, while others are even brutally eliminated as was the case of Chief Bola Ige. Without doubt, threat to national security, economic decay, terrorism, political upheavals and military confrontation could be the consequences of electoral fraud, which leads to violation of democratic process. Anything that can undermine the process and stability of a nation both socially, politically and economically is termed to be threat. The civil disturbances that occur as a result of electoral fraud and violence without doubt could undermine the process of the harmonious relationship of the various communities that make up the nation. Again where the political system is not conducive for business to thrive and for accommodation of investors as a result of pre and post electoral fraud, violence and grievances as a result of electoral outcomes, the economy is bound to decay leading to a decline of gross domestic product; increase unemployment and significantly reduced the amount of trade and commerce in the state (Esira, 2019).

Electoral fraud can negatively affect the political development of a country, where there is a tendency that oppositions of the ruling party could be instrumental in sponsoring or supporting

the activities of terrorist organizations using it as a means of protest or to disorganize constituted expression, which is most contrary to the values of democracy, civilization and humanity (Alada, 2018). Since Independence, Nigeria's democratization process had witnessed massive electoral fraud followed by violence which has compromised the very ethics of liberal democracy in spite of several electoral reforms. This predicament of democratization process in Nigeria has rather been on the increase and there is no evidence of any serious and sincere effort made to stop it from reaching an unwanted level. Virtually, these have been breeding all sorts of violence scenarios to a situation which some consider Nigeria moving towards a failed state (Elam, 2017).

In the past general elections in Nigeria, the European Union Observer Mission described the general elections to have fallen short of basic International and regional standards for democratic elections and that given the lack of transparency and evidence of fraud particularly in the result collation process, there can be no confidence in the results of the elections. Democracy which has the multiple definitions and meanings is believed to have a worldwide acceptance as the best form of government. In the case of Nigeria, the concept of democracy has become difficult to define and this is because the very factor which qualifies a democratic government has been difficult to achieve in Nigeria (Alison, 2019).

According to Nweke (2005) he agrees that the government through its agencies rather encouraged the supporters of the ruling party to violate the laws. This can be attributed to the fact that the Nigerian state has been turned into an instrument for the satisfaction of unbridled desires by the political elites who wish to remain in power against popular will. The state therefore mobilized all instruments of oppression, exploitation and subjugation at its disposal to guarantee victory at the polls. Hence the game assumed an inter-party level hitches where the leading party got armed to fight opposition parties.

Mass thumb printing and criminalization of politics in Nigeria. This also characterized the conduct of elections in Nigeria since independence in 1960. This occurs when ballot papers are added to ballot boxes at the polling units whose results were in the process of being counted so as to favour one candidate. Also, result sheets are being tampered with in collaboration with INEC officials to always favour the ruling political party either at the federal or state level. In the just concluded general election in Nigeria for instance the case of Rivers state where the military were involved in collating election results with the intention of tampering with the figures but this later led to the suspension of the collation of the results by INEC.

Sometimes, INEC Adhoc staff are being used to perpetuate this fraud. This act therefore leads to the case of over voting where the total number of votes cast is higher than the registered voters all in a bid to favour a particular candidate in an election. To eliminate this type of situation, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria, introduced the use of card readers for purposes of accreditation to ensure that only those who were accredited are allowed to vote. All these therefore undermine the basic attributes of good governance such as transparency in the conduct of election and strict observance of the rule of law.

Also, electoral fraud takes the form of impersonation, diversion of electoral materials from collation centers to unknown destinations where ballot papers will be massively thumb printed and hence stuffed into ballot boxes to favour a particular candidate. This is done mostly with the connivance of the security agencies deployed to help ensure that the conduct of elections are free and transparent. The voters are sometimes scared away by armed thugs to ensure that electoral materials are diverted.

David (2015) noted that Nigeria elections have been characterized by mass thumb printing. This has been made possible through hijacking of ballots boxes during election for mass thumb printing. Most election results announced in Nigeria is a product of mass thumb printing which is a strategic means of ensuring that a particular candidate of interest is declared the winner. Mass thumb printing according to

Ulayi (2015) is an electoral fraud process that enables a particular candidate to win an election. Its occurrence in recent time is degenerating despite various mechanisms that have been put in place by various administrations to ensure free and fair elections. The prevalence of mass thumb printing is mainly responsible for the cancellation of elections in some polling units during elections in Nigeria. Its occurrence has gained global recognition.

Robert K. Merton's Anomie theory was used as theoretical anchorage. This theory asserts that when an individual has internalized a certain goal, and when the legitimate means for achieving that goal are blocked, the individual is under pressure to resort to illegitimate means to achieve the goal. The politicians in the context of Nigeria can achieve their desire in elections through means that are against the generally acceptable principles of electoral process in Nigeria vis-à-vis mass thumb printing.

3. Design and Scope

This research work put to use the survey research design. This survey expressly put to use cross-sectional survey research design. The cross-sectional design was applied to this study due to its viability in using a sample drawn to represent the different elements within the population under study. Thus, this survey research design was suitable in this study of politico-social activities and criminalization of politics in the study area.

The study area for this study is Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. The choice of this area is as a result of the terrible and exacerbating state of election improprieties vis-à-vis criminalization of politics in the area and the researcher's familiarity and proximity to the area.

Cross River state has three (3) Senatorial Zones / Districts. They are Cross River Central Senatorial Zone / District, Cross River North Senatorial Zone / District and Cross River South Senatorial Zone / District. The study is mainly centered on Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State which is a political creation that has been in existence in Cross River State Nigeria for years. The district comprises seven local government areas otherwise referred to as greater Calabar; namely Akamkpa, Akpabuyo, Biase, Bakassi Calabar Municipality, Calabar South and Odukpani all the LGAs are electrified but study is limited to the local government headquarters already listed. The district has three Federal constituencies and 200 council wards (Ogban-Iyam (2014).

The study is fundamentally concerned with politico-social activity and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District of State. The study is centered on the effect of mass thumb printing and criminalization of politics in the study area. The study covers from 2007 to 2023.

Population of the study

The population of the study comprised of all the adult indigenes in seven (7) Local Government Areas in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. The populations of this research consist of persons from 18 years and over dwelling in Cross River South Senatorial District. The research centered on comprehensible men and women, the married, unmarried, widow and widower. This category of the respondents included the knowledgeable and the working class and are considered to be educated enough to provide valid and reliable answers relating to politico-social activity and criminalization of politics in the study area.

Using the 2019 projected population of Cross River State, the population of the six Local Government Areas that make up Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State is 1,270,420 the breakdown of the population is as shown below.

TABLE 1

LGA in Southern Senatorial District

LGA in Southern Senatorial District	Population size 2019 projection
Calabar Municipal	187,432
Calabar South	191,630
Akpabuyo	271,395
Bakassi	106,771
Odukpani	192,884
Akamkpa	151,125
Baise	169,183
Total	1,270,420

Source: Compiled from 2019 projected population of Cross River State, Nigeria

Sampling techniques

The study applied multi- stage probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The sampling technique adopted for this study is stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. From each of the different Local Government Area that was stratified, three wards in the various Local Government Areas were selected using hat and draw simple random sampling technique. Respondents were asked to pick and not return from the hat, three wards from each Local Government Area that make up Cross River South Senatorial District and the wards that were picked was used as the target area of the study. This is clearly shown in table 4 below. The sample size of 400 was ascertained using the Taro Yamane's (1967) sample size determinant with a confidence level of 95% and a maximum variability level $p=5$. Out of this sample, 380 survey participants were used for the analysis. This denotes a return rate of 95% which is regarded reasonable for carrying out data analysis.

Finally, the purposive sampling technique was exploited to administer the questionnaires to the respondents. The research adopts the purposive sampling technique because it gives the researcher the opportunity of interacting with the respondents in other to ensure that such respondents are intelligent enough to provide firsthand information which is required to boost the study.

Sampling techniques

The sampling procedure is multi- staged. The sampling technique adopted for this study is stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The stratified random sampling according to Nwoagu (2002) is where the population is first categorized into groups that are distinctly different from each other on relevant variables and which the elements are drawn at random within each stratum, is such that the relative proportion of the strata in the resultant sampling are the same as they exist in the present population. Stratified random sampling technique was chosen because of its capacity for the proportional representation of subjects from the different units or department of the population. From each of the different Local Government Area that was stratified, three wards in the various Local Government Areas were selected using hat and draw simple random sampling technique. Respondents were asked to pick and not return from the hat, three wards from each Local Government Area that make up Cross River South Senatorial District and the wards that were picked was used as the target area of the study. This is clearly shown in table 2 below.

Finally, the purposive sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaires to the respondents. The research adopts the purposive sampling technique because it gives the researcher the

opportunity of interacting with the respondents in other to ensure that such respondents are intelligent enough to provide firsthand information which is needed to enhance the study.

TABLE 2: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS IN SOUTHERN SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF CROSS RIVER STATE AND RANDOMLY SELECTED WARDS

Local Government Areas	Randomly selected wards
Calabar Municipal	Ward 3
	Ward 6
	Ward 10
Calabar South	Ward 7
	Ward 9
	Ward 11
Akpabuyo	Atimbo West
	Atimbo East
	Ikang North
Bakassi	Abana
	Atia Ema
	Amoto
Odukpani	Creek Town I
	Eki
	Ikoneto
Akamkpa	Awi
	Akamkpa urban
	Ojuk South
Baise	Adim
	Akpet/Abini
	Ehom

Source: Field survey 2024

Instrument of data collection

The tool for the gathering of data for this inquiry is primarily structured and unstructured questionnaire and unstructured oral interview guide. The rationale for this is that the research made use of mixed method, that is, the investigator Incorporated components of qualitative and quantitative perspective for the purpose of comprehensive discernment and authentication of the variables understudy. To supplement the primary sources of data, the researcher made use of secondary sources. These are existing information in the form of textbooks, journals, magazines, vital records, vital statistics, published and unpublished materials having relevance to the study.

Two sets of questions were used in the questionnaire. The first were questions on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, the second were questions that touched on the research objective. The instrument for data collection was pretested on randomly selected population outside the sample population in order to ensure clarity of contents and to ensure that respondents, research assistants and the researcher had the same understanding of the issue understudy. The questionnaire guide was self-administered. The researcher himself moderated the interview guide, while one of the research assistants took notes. Thereafter, the notes were categorized into themes. The conduct of the interview and the distribution and collection of the questionnaire were carried out on week days and it lasted for a period of five (5) weeks.

The data from the unstructured oral interview was arranged into topics in order to make meaning from the interview accomplished. In sum, the thematic method was used in analyzing the data gathered from the unstructured interview. In view of this, each of the themes was discussed and illustrative quote identified and pulled out to support and make clear the qualitative data. Data from the closed ended questions from the questionnaire were tabulated which gave the bases for the testing of the hypothesis set. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative analyses made use of enhanced one another.

The data from the unstructured oral interview was arranged into topics in order to make meaning from the interview accomplished. In sum, the thematic method was used in analyzing the data gathered from the unstructured interview. In view of this, each of the themes was discussed and illustrative quote identified and pulled out to support and make clear the qualitative data. Data from the closed ended questions from the questionnaire were tabulated which gave the bases for the testing of the hypothesis set. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative analyses made use of enhanced one another.

To address the ethical principle of thoroughness; the researcher defined all the key concepts around which the study is built, the selection of adequate samples for the study, as well as identification of the strengths and the limitations of the research design used in the study. Additionally all the results and findings of the study both the positive and negative aspect were thoroughly communicated. In terms of the principle of objectivity, the researcher remained objective and impartial in all aspects and phases of the study. The researcher did not introduce his subjective feelings and biases to bear into the research design, selection of respondents, communication of the results and findings, and writing and /or asking questions. The questions introduced in the research instruments are worded in such a way as to avoid leading questions (i.e. question leading the respondents to a predetermined answer). The questions are worded in such a way as to allow respondent's views determine the outcome of the results as against allowing the researcher's own values and thinking influence the findings of the research.

Method of data analysis

The simple percentage was used to analyze data gotten from the field relating to research questions using the simple percentage. Before the analysis of the hypothesis was carried out, the dependent and independent variable was identified as this enabled the researcher to ascertain the best possible statistical technique to use for the analysis. The statistical technique that was most suitable for analyzing the

hypothesis is the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis. This analysis was carried out at 0.05 level of significant and 98 degree of freedom.

4. Results and Discussion

TABLE 3: ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENT RESPONSES TO MASS THUMB PRINTING AND CRIMINALIZATION OF POLITICS IN NIGERIA

S/N	Questionnaire items	Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Commutative percentage
1	Mass thumb printing is a common practice during an election in my polling unit?	Strongly Agree	139	36%	36
		Agree	149	39%	75
		Disagree	32	8%	83
		Strongly Disagree	65	17%	100
2	Mass thumb printing is mostly the means through which election is rigged in my polling unit?	Strongly Agreed	109	28%	28
		Agree	127	33%	61
		Disagree	89	23%	84
		Strongly Disagree	60	16%	100
3	Through mass thumb printing, political aspirants who are not the people's choice emerge as winners in my polling unit?	Strongly Agreed	171	44%	44
		Agree	103	27%	71
		Disagree	69	18%	89
		Strongly Disagree	42	11%	100
4	Because of the trending mass thumb printing which often leads to the wrong candidate winning the election, most voters are no longer interested in going out to vote during election in my polling unit?	Strongly Agreed	162	42%	42
		Agree	129	24%	66
		Disagree	40	10%	86
		Strongly Disagree	55	14%	100
5	The practice of mass thumb printing in my polling unit is	Strongly Agreed	144	38%	38

carried out in collaboration with INEC?	Agree	106	28%	66
	Disagree	32	8%	74
	Strongly Disagree	100	26%	100

Source: Field survey, 2024

The distribution in table 11 shows that majority of the respondents agreed that mass thumb printing is a common practice during an election in their polling unit. This is based on the fact that 109 representing 28 percent strongly agreed, 127 representing 33 percent agreed, 89 representing 23 percent disagreed and 60 representing 16 strongly disagreed. The table also shows that majority of respondents strongly agreed that the mass thumb printing is mostly the means through which election is rigged in their polling unit. This is based on the fact that 171 representing 44 percent strongly agreed and 103 representing 27 percent agreed, 69 representing 18 disagreed and 42 representing 11 percent strongly disagreed.

The table equally reveals that majority of the respondents sampled for the study agreed to the fact that through mass thumb printing, political aspirants who are not the people's choice emerge as winners in their polling unit. This is based on the fact that 162 representing 42 percent strongly agreed, 129 representing 24 percent agreed, 40 representing 10 percent disagreed and 55 representing 14 percent strongly disagreed. Finally, the table shows that majority of the respondents sampled for the study strongly agreed to the fact that the practice of mass thumb printing in their polling unit is carried out in collaboration with INEC. This is as a result of the fact 144 representing 38 percent strongly agreed, 106 representing 28 percent agreed, 32 representing 8 percent disagreed while 100 representing 26 percent strongly disagreed.

Hypotheses testing

The hypotheses used in this study were stated in a null form showing the dependent and independent variable and the statistical tools used for data analysis. There is no significant relationship between the use of mass thumb printing and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District.

Dependent variable; Mass thumb printing

Independent variable; Criminalization of politics

Test statistic; Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis.

TABLE 4:TEST OF HYPOTHESIS THREE USING PEARSON PRODUCT MOMENT CORRELATION COEFFICIENT ANALYSIS (N=400)

Variable	Ex Ey	Ex2 Ey2	Exy	R-cal
Mass thumb printing	2117	6149		
Criminalization of politics	986	1974	7893	0.531

Level of significant= 0.05, DF=378, critical R-value=0.126

Table 14; shows that the calculated R-value of 0.298 is greater than the critical R-value of 0.126 at 0.05 level of significant and 98 degree of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. Thus, there is a significant relationship between mass thumb printing and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District.

Semi-structured interview analysis

The researcher identified major subthemes associated with the socio-political activities and criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State from the participants' narratives of their personal experiences in politics and elections in their area. These are;

(a) Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) approach and performs towards elections: This was discussed under the subtheme;

INEC Monetary Bribery as Widespread

The pervasiveness of INEC monetary bribery was the most dominant theme in the interview. The study participants echoed that INEC monetary bribery was widespread and prevalent in virtually all the elections that has been conducted in Nigeria since democracy. Describing the prevalent nature of INEC monetary bribery, one of the participants stated that seeing INEC officials collecting money from top political officials during election period is a frequent occurrence that is now seen as the norms and value of election process in Nigeria. So, it is very widespread

One of the participants described the pervasiveness of INEC monetary bribery from his experience and observation of others' experiences in Cross River State in his words bribery is pervasive during election in the Nigeria. For instance, I went for an election in my polling units and I was very shocked to see the Presiding Officer (PO) of the polling unit collecting huge amount of money from the chairman of my Local Government Council and the devastating aspect was that he boldly counted the money in front of the police and we that came out to vote to confirm if the money was one hundred thousand naira (100,000) as stated by the chairman.

The participants' overwhelming perception was that INEC monetary bribery was widely practiced by most INEC officers, making it almost impossible to differentiate the good and bad ones.

The prevalence of the problem was quantified by one of the participants who said that INEC monetary bribery during election is widespread in Cross River State. If he were to rate its occurrence on a scale of 100%, he would rate it 90%. One of the consequences of the prevalence of any negative behavior was that it becomes customary.

(b) The masses attitude towards INEC

Lack of Trust and Confidence in the INEC

Trust and confidence are essential for the public to work with INEC during an election to ensure a free and fair election. Another dimension to the poor relationship between the INEC and the public was the public's lack of trust and confidence in INEC during an election. The idea could be gleaned from these words by a participant the 'public relationship with the INEC is that of suspicion and skepticism'. Mutual suspicions and lack of trust because bribery makes people who have had a concern with INEC hopeless, and they are not having confidence in the INEC during an election period.

One of the participants was very clear in this when he noted that entrusting the forth coming election on INEC is like entrusting the election on the ruling class. The constitutional right given to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to appoint and remove the INEC chairman compels him to operate within the tentacles of the ruling class. Aside the fact that it is an easy way of making more money

for INEC officials it also provides an opportunity for them to secure their job and gain speedy promotion why in office.

Another participant was very clear in this when he noted that INEC officials see election as a means of creating connection with top political officials and as such are prone to protect the interest of this ruling class thus losing the trust of the people. The people now see INEC as the watch dogs that ensure their continuous ruling which is against the interest of the masses. This has grossly made the people loss interest the people have for INEC.

On a similar note, a participant noted that INEC is now owned by the ruling class and as such has very little interest in the wishes of the poor masses. Election period is now seen as a means for INEC to accumulate more wealth for themselves rather than ensuring a free and fair election. The participant further noted that once they are well paid, INEC easily manipulate election results to suit the interest of top political officials thereby losing the trust of the general public.

While pointing out the issue of lack of trust and confidence the INEC, another participant also stressed the negative consequences of the poor relationship with the public. He stressed that trust is earned but INEC attitude has created distrust resulting in a very poor relationship with the people. While reiterating the absence of public trust and confidence in INEC, one interviewee also asserted that most members of the public decide vehemently not to cast their vote because they don't have the trust that INEC will conduct a free and credible election that will truly reflect the interest of the masses.

Discussion of findings

The analysis of the hypothesis reveals that there is a significant relationship between the use of mass thumb printing and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District. This implies that the anti-democratic practices where ballot boxes are been hijacked for the sole aim of mass thumb printing in other to rig the election for a political candidate who most times are not the choice of the people has contributed to the criminalization of politics in Nigeria. For an election to be considered credible, such an election must be carried out in such a way that one vote cast should be for one electorate. This aberration where multiple votes are been cast by one individual with the sole aim of influencing the result of an election to the benefit of an individual political candidate is solely responsible for the poor state of Nigeria security and political system. Through this problem of mass thumb printing during election, candidates who are obviously not the choice of the people are given the mandate of representing the people. This often times leads to bad governance as well as leadership and internal security crisis.

This finding clearly support Ejishie (2018) assertion that until Nigeria electoral system is free from the menace of mass thumb printing and other forms of political violence, it can never attain representative governance and grassroots development. This is because through mass thumb printing, the electoral process will keep recycling failed leaders whose political drive is to allocate public resources for personal gain in Nigeria political system. This prevailing scenario is responsible for the collapsing state of Nigeria as the government of the country is under the insidious tentacles of certain group of political cabals who have been nefariously piloting the affairs of the state since independence.

Most devastating is the obvious fact that despite it associated consequences of imposing a wrong leader to govern the affairs of the people; mass thumb printing has not adequately been curbed as revealed by the study. Available statistics clearly shows that many efforts have been put in place by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) but on the other hand, empirical studies as well as previous elections clearly reveals that mass thumb printing has not been adequately curbed. In line with these findings, Umokeh (2019) clearly noted that mass thumb printing is a desperate measure carried out by some region of the country to govern the affairs of the country. While it has enabled their political candidate to win previous elections very little efforts have been made by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to tackle this appalling trend in Nigeria political system. In every

democratic setting, elections are a means through which the masses vote those to represent them thereby promoting representative leadership. Paradoxically, in Nigeria setting, mass thumb printing is among the obnoxious and strategic means through which most candidates win their election which in turn fueled the criminalization of politics in Nigeria.

The study also revealed that most treacherous practices of mass thumb printing is carried out in collaboration with INEC officials as they see the process as a means of making money during an election. The INEC who is constitutionally bound to conduct a free and fair election are now directly involved in electoral malpractices such as mass thumb printing. This finding clearly supports Ushana (2018) assertion that one of the basic reason why certain malpractices have not been adequately tackled by INEC in previous election is because they are known to profit from such electoral malpractices. The writer further noted that election period in Nigeria is seen as a moment to accumulate wealth and not necessarily to elect those who have the mandate of the masses. The desperation for money by most individual in the country helps to exacerbate all forms of electoral malpractices that have the potency to plunge the whole society into security crisis.

5 Conclusion

The study titled “politico-social activity and criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State” was carried out as a result of the worsening state of electoral process which is mostly associated with different forms of criminalities in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State in particular and Nigeria in general and the growing need to address this menace for true democracy that will not be a threat to national security to flourish. The study also concluded that mass thumb printing has led to all forms of criminalities in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State in particular and Nigeria in general. This trend is now exacerbating in recent time despite several efforts put in place by INEC as well as the government to curb this menace. This process has grossly defiled the essence of election as political aspirant who lack the political charisma and the support of the masses end up emerging as winners during election. Most devastating is the fact that the process of mass thumb printing is often enabled by INEC officials who are constitutional obligated to ensure a free and fair election. The findings of this study will be of great asset to the entire people of Cross River State, policy makers, INEC, the Federal Government and its agencies, criminology as well as other researchers. Basically, the study will go a long way to resolve the poor state of politics in Cross River State particularly and Nigeria in general which is grossly gaining global recognition as a result of various malpractices that characterized her electoral process through providing empirical findings relating to politico-social activity and criminalization of politics. Through the findings made, valid recommendations will be proffered which will help in revamping the trending malpractices of elections such as mass thumb printing which have grossly characterized Cross River State politics. The findings from the study will not only serve as a contribution to the already existing body of knowledge on politico-social activity and criminalization of politics in Nigeria but will also stimulate criminologists and other researches by supplying appropriate data for more comparative and theoretical formulation. The focal limitation of this study is that its scope is limited to politico-social and criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria, using mass thumb printing as a benchmark indicator from 2003-2023. Hence, data collected and analyzed in this study is focused totally on information secured from the study area. Accordingly, to support this research, secondary sources such as internet based materials, textbooks journal articles have exploited. On the other hand, due to the focus on a specific district, caution must be exercised when trying to extrapolate the findings of this study to other sections of the country and even farther away. Based on our findings and analyses, the following recommendations were proffered to help Nigeria address persistent issues affecting the electoral process *vis- a- vis* mass thumb printing. Political thuggery needs to be addressed through enhancing the security network of the country prior to election. Arrested political thugs should be adequately prosecuted as this will serve as deterrence to others. Consequently,

Governments at all levels should increase the activities of the informal sector of the economy by way of expanding their scopes and roles in economic development. This will increase employment opportunities for the ultimate benefits of a large number of unemployed youths and will be a stepping stone toward the reduction of in the number of youths who may become willing tool to engage in mass thumb printing.

References

- Abah, E. O. and Nwokwu, P. M. (2015). "Political Violence and Sustenance of Democracy in Nigeria. *IORES Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20(11), 33-44.
- Abang, K. B. (2019) "Gender, Money and Politics in Nigeria" In Adetula V.A.O (ed.) Money and Politics in Nigeria, Abuja International Foundation for Electoral System IFES Nigeria pp-60.
- Alison, K.K. (2019). *Development administration*. New Delhi; Sterling Publishers Private Limited.
- Aliyu, E. O (2020). *Electoral malpractices in Nigeria: The Case of 2003 General elections*. In Onuand Momoh (Eds.), Election and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria, Lagos; A Traid Associate.
- Balogun, O. (2011). Electoral Violence and Nigeria's 2007 Elections. *Journal of African Studies*, 6(2).
- Chikendu, P. N. (2003). *Nigerian Politics and Government*. Enugu: Academic Publishing Company.
- David, H. (2015). Income Inequality, Regime Repressiveness, and Political Violence. *American Sociological Review*, (Vol. 50).
- Ejishie, F. (2018). *The Nigeria Election and Its Consequences to the Nation*. Lagos: Longman Publishers Ltd.
- Elam, N.C. (2017). *Succinct approach to government: A comparative analysis*. Anambra, Rex Charles and Patrick publications.
- Ezeabasili, I. E.,(2023). Political thuggery and insecurity in Nigeria, 2015-2021. *ANSU Journal of Arts and Social Sciences (ANSUJASS)*, 10 (2): 39-47
- Esira, N. (2019). *Electoral processes, electoral malpractices and electoral violence*. Enugu, Sages publication, Nigeria Ltd.
- Gberevbie, D. E. (2014). Democracy, Democratic Institutions and Good Governance in Nigeria. *Eastern African Social Sciences Review*, 30(1), 133-152.
- Minkaila, E.I & Akor, L., (2024). Causes and Effects of political thuggery on the socio-economic and political development of Ofu Local Government Area, Kogi State, Nigeria. *GUSAU journal of sociology*, 4 (2), 35-47
- Njoku, E. (2012). *Political Conflicts in Nigeria*. In: S.I Odo & J. Onuoha (Eds) Peace and Conflict Studies in Africa. Enugu: Jones Communication Publishers.
- Nwocha, M. E., & Igwe, I. O. (2019). An Appraisal of Electoral Malpractice and Violence as an Albatross in Nigerian's Democratic Consolidation. *Beijing Law Review*, 10, 77-97. <https://doi.org/10.4236/blr.2019.101005>
- Nweke, E. N. (2005). *State, Youth and Election Violence*. In: Onu and Momoh (Eds.) Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. Lagos: A Traid Associates.
- Obaro, O. A., (2014). Sociological and Legal Issues in Nigeria's Pervasive Corruption: The Criminalization of the State and the Citizenry in Nigeria. *Mediterranean journal of social sciences* 5 (9), 573-577
- Onwuharaonye, S. C., Ebere, U., & Abaneme, A. O. (2024). Electoral Malpractice and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: An analytical approach. *Nnamdi Azikiwe journal of political science* 9 (3), 1-13
- Robert, I. M. (2020). Electoral violence in Nigeria and the Problem Democratic Policies. *A paper presented at the 271 Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association on Electoral Reform, Political Succession and Democratization in Africa*.
- Takus, W.J. (2010). *A Brief Illustration of Voting*. Retrieval February 20, 2013.
- Ukor C. (2019). *Government Instability*. Nigeria Forum, January-March, NIIA Publications, Lagos, Nigeria.
- Ulayi, I. (2019) Culture of vote buying and its implications: Range of incentives and conditions politicians offer to electorates. *European Centre for Research, Training and Development*, 6(12) 1-20.
- Ukpong, P. J., & Udoh, M. A. (2023). Voting System and Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Fourth Republic of Nigeria, 1-12.

- Umokeh, A. A. (2019). *Combating Violence in Nigeria: Issues, Prospects and Problems*. In Ajayi, K. (eds) Introduction to Peace and conflict studies, the Nigerian Perspectives. General Studies Unit, University of Ado Ekiti. Ikeja: Solar Flares.
- Ushana, M.S. (2018). Political Thuggery and Democratic Dividends in Nigeria: An Empirical Study. *Higher Education of Social Science. I* (1), 58-65

Biographical Note

Chukwudi Charles EZIKEUDU *PhD* is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Criminology and Security Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar NIGERIA. The author's research interest spawn; Policing, Victimology, Security Studies, and general Criminology. E-mail: ezikeuduchukwudi@gmail.com

Ikechukwu Jonathan OPARA *PhD* is a Lecturer 11 in the Department of Public Administration University of Calabar, Calabar Nigeria. The author's area of specialization is Development Administration. Email: oparajonathan45@yahoo.com