

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND VOTER PARTICIPATION IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS (1999–2019)

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Abstract

Elections are mechanisms for change of power but its practice has suffered substantial setback due to the absence of free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria. Electoral violence is prevalent in North-Eastern Nigeria, and its prevalence has affected voter participation, disrupted democratic processes and destroyed lives and properties of citizens. This paper examines the consequences of electoral violence on voter participation in North-Eastern Nigeria with specific reference to Adamawa, Gombe, and Taraba states. The study is delimited to 1999 – 2019 electoral timeframe. A mixed method research design was adopted for the study to achieve the objectives of the study. The instruments used for data collection are questionnaire and Key Informant Interviews (KII). The study sample comprised 546 respondents representing the total registered voters in the region. The Elite theory propounded by Pareto (1935) was used as the theoretical framework for the study. The theory argues that the interest of few elite's matters in politics and that the elites oppressed the unorganized masses. The results of the analysis revealed that electoral violence leads to voter apathy, assassination, arson, riots, and break down of law and order. The paper recommends that free, fair and credible elections should be held in the region, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be restructured, adequate security measures should be provided during elections, electoral offenders should be penalised, and that government should create awareness on the importance of electoral participation.

Key words: Election, Violence, Electoral Violence, Elite theory

Introduction

Electoral violence and voters' participation are issues and challenges that characterized elections worldwide, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. In developing democracies hardly can election be conducted without violent conflict (Collier, 2010). The North East region of Nigeria has experienced several electoral violence from 1999 – 2019. The quality, integrity and measures of trust in electoral system are determined, where the electoral umpire can perform its duties and responsibilities without interference by government (Sesan, 2012). However, elections that are marred by violent conflicts are bound to have negative outcome, which will lead people to lose confidence in the electoral system. Electoral violence refers to all forms of violence associated with power struggles within the context of organized election in a state. Therefore, electoral violence is perpetuated in the course of political activities that involved thugs, militancy and use of force to disrupt electoral processes before, during and after elections when election results are announced. The erosion of democratic values has far – reaching consequences that extend beyond the immediate and aftermath of an election. The dimension of electoral violence in Nigeria has been that politician are more attached to primordial sentiments that reflect tribal, ethnic, regional and religious bigotry than projecting national interest. These are the reasons for rising tension whenever election season is approaching leading to several citizen relocating to their state of origin or ancestral homes, for fear of harassment, intimidation and security to their lives and properties. This development goes a long way to naturally disenfranchise citizen because they are not registered in the new location. Elections are important determinant of democracy and ingredient for transition of power from one government to another and a mechanism for change by the people on who rules over them or represent them in government. Yet, electoral violence has become one of the major hindrances to democratic growth and sustainability. The main agents of electoral violence are the youths who are mostly unemployed, drug addicts and ignorant of civics.

According to Albert (2007), electoral violence resulting from imposition, lopsided representation, intimidating campaign slurs, ballot and result snatching, false result compilation have been Nigeria's problem since 1960. The weak state institutions, corruption, government interference of electoral processes, security and judicial compromise have prevented the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria. Furthermore, electoral violence perpetrators are hardly penalised by the state, while victims are denied justice. The outcomes of judicial adjudication are not encouraging as some judges regularly pronounced conflicting judgments on electoral cases, thus inciting more confusion and tension in the polity. In spite of several review of the electoral process, system, laws and regulations. These amendments have not produced positive outcomes. Despite the application of electronic device in previous election process, violence still persisted, because electoral violence has defied all measures and has been on increase. Electoral violence has also impacted negatively on voters' participation because of wanton destruction of lives and properties of citizen.

Against this background, the study focuses on the effects of failing to address electoral violence during the 1999–2019 general elections. The findings of the study have significant benefits to theory and practice. The benefit for the government is the new insights it can provide on how to regulate elections. The populace and politicians will have a nuanced perspective on the effects of electoral violence. The findings of the study will be beneficial to researchers and political scientists. The study confined its scope to three states in the North East, Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba. The timeframe is delimited to 1999 – 2019 general elections

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Elitist theory developed by Pareto (1935). The theory argues that the world is divided and classified along class between elites and mass, rich and the poor, have and have nots, rulers and the ruled, the oppressed and oppressors, the minority and majority. The minority elite are organized while majority masses are not organized. In principle, the elite-mass dichotomy fosters the domination of the masses who are the majority but divided. Michael (1911) describes how Iron Law of oligarchy were used to oppress the bulk of people the masses. In politics, the elite ruled while the masses are governed and oppressed. During voting the masses are many while the few elites are the beneficiary after election through appointment contracts etc. Mosca (1930) opines that the relationship between the minority elites and the majority masses is oppressive because the masses are dominated by the elite and masses are instrument of electoral violence. The masses due to poverty, ignorance and hunger are used to perpetuate most electoral crimes and violence.

Conceptual clarifications

Elections

According to Ebenezer (2017), elections are organized in a systematic manner to enable the generality of the people to choose those that will rule them in most public offices. Elections provide the populace the chance to vote out an unsatisfactory government and to re-elect politicians with good tract records. According to Olowojolu et al., (2019) the foundation of a true democratic government is election and that an electoral system of universal adult suffrage, which allowed voters of legal voting age to cast ballots and be elected, is very popular around the world. Matanock (2017) further opines that the tenets of democracy demand for free, fair, credible and periodic elections for legitimate government of the people to be put in place in any country.

Elections are crucial for democratic stability, political socialization, political power and renewal of popular mandate (Lindbery, 2006). Elections therefore is the mechanism and basis for selecting leaders in every democratic government worldwide.

Violence

Violence occurs when an unjust or illegal force is used to enforce judgments that go against the wishes of the electorate. It includes the use of powers that aim to apprehend, hurt, desecrate, or even kill. Violence also includes the disruption of law and order for one's own benefit, which resulted in the loss of lives and properties (Agbibo, 2018). Violence is defined as any action meant to harm, kill, or destruction of properties an act that impact negatively on another person's, Ojetunde (2019). Where there is violence there is rampant breakdown of law and order and a threat to democracy that can impose unpopular politicians and party into public offices. Whence therefore unlawful use of force to compel performance of an action against the will of other party or person.

Electoral violence

Electoral violence according to Fischer (2002) is an act of threat, coercion, intimidation, blackmail, physical harm including assassination, killing directed against electoral actors, events and materials. In other words, any violence that is related or associated with electoral process, to hinder the free, fair conduct of elections amounted to electoral violence. Hoglund (2009) distinguishes election related violence from other forms of political violence, because it is coined out during the election period. Therefore, all process that intended to undermine election amounted to electoral violence. The stages of electoral violence are in categories into periods, before, during and after elections. Electoral violence has been in existence since the first, second and third republic in Nigeria. Electoral violence manifests during party primaries as intra party conflicts and it can aggravate to full-blown violence if not check. Inter party conflicts is another forms of electoral violence when opposition political party attacked by the ruling party. Politicians used state or non-state actors to achieve desired ends, goals and ambitions. Also, politicians orchestrate and finance electoral violence against rivals in an effort to rig the results of elections. Political thugs have always turned campaigning into gorilla operations; where looting, thuggery, arson and kidnapping are frequently seen. According to Haruna and Ahmadu (2011) activities of thugs in the North East geopolitical zone have become worrisome since the return to democracy in 1999. The target of electoral violence are usually voters, candidates, the media, election officials and ad hoc staff, when violence escalate it can spread to citizen, security agents and election observers. The concept of electoral violence encompasses a variety of different manifestations and outcomes linked to coercive element of hatred and aggression throughout the election season or time (Igbuzor,

2009). Politicians use tribal, ethnic, religious, regional and sectionalism to cause electoral violence. Many infrastructures were destroyed by thugs as a result of politically sponsored violence. Due to abuse of incumbent authority against opponents, the transmission of power from one civilian government to another is very tense. Electoral violence refers to deliberate actions taken by politicians to win or keep power at all costs.

Consequences of Electoral Violence on voter's participation

Elections held without established principles of democracy are frequently marred by severe violence. Electoral violence become inevitable when the expectation of a free, fair and credible election failed. Electoral violence undermines the democratic process, endanger citizen lives and properties and put the state security in jeopardy. Electoral violence precede instability, breakdown of laws and order, acrimony and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The government will need a lot of finance to fix the damaged infrastructure in both private and public sector (Kalu, et al., 2018). People will end up without goods and services that have been destroyed by electoral violence. The negative impact of these will affect economic and social life, as several investors will relocate to new locations. After electoral violence, there will be increase in crime, unemployment and poverty. The international community will also place economic sanctions on country where electoral violence has taken place. It will be extremely difficult for the local economy to expand and satisfy public demand (Ani, 2014).

Electoral violence may escalate and spark ethnic unrest through reprisal attacks aimed at exacting revenge for harm done to a particular community. Electoral violence can lead to military coup as in the case of first and second republic in Nigeria. Electoral violence and voter apathy go hand in hand as voters that have witnessed violence will not take part in election again (Bratton 2013). Electoral violence is invitation to anarchy and state of emergency situations in every country. Electoral violence often destroyed the image and reputation of a country in the international community. Electoral violence allowed unpopular candidate to win election and the government will lack acceptability and legitimacy. This unpleasant situation has significant effects on Nigeria developing democracy and political instability (Nwolise, 2007; Umar, 2003).

Electoral violence is responsible for poor institutional organizational arrangements, weak institution of state apparatus and corruptions. Elections determines democracy and legitimate government, but when voters' turnout is below 40% of registered electorates it undermines the credibility of government and unpopular candidate and government will be the outcome (Oguchi, 2020). Voter apathy constitutes another consequence of electoral violence; voters will lose confidence in the system of our election.

Some Selected Cases of Electoral Violence in the North East Nigeria 1999 – 2019

Electoral Violence has been very rampant in the North East region of Nigeria, since 1999 – 2019 especially violence that erupts after result of elections are announced. The inability of government to punish perpetrators through the courts has made the situation worst. The Maiduguri bomb explosions in few days to 2011 general elections is a threat to democracy (Bekoe, 2011). In Taraba State Joshua Kalla was assassinated on 11th June 2002 in Jalingo by political thugs. Adamu Waziri was killed during interparty conflict between ANPP and PDP Militant groups in Damaturu Yobe State Capital. Moses Audu Balanga was murdered and burnt by political thugs beyond recognition on 18th April, 2011, along bank road in Jimeta Yola. Khamis Mohammed was kill by Militant Youths at his residence in Gombe, capital of Gombe state. Mr. Jack Gynako Gumpy and his entire family members were murdered by militias after invasion of his home at Checheniya quarters adjacent to police barrack in Gombe state. During 2007 elections in Bauchi state, political thugs murdered Aliyu S. Bello during a crisis between PDP and ANPP supporters. It is estimated that between 16th April, 2011 to 17th April, 2011 that 32 persons lost their lives in political crisis and over 72 churches were burnt down in Bauchi State. Among the deceased included 11 National Youth Service Corps recruited as INEC ad hoc staff. Furthermore, Mohammed Isa Kambari was killed along Karim-Lamido to Jalingo after the 2011 general election result was announced. In Adamawa during January 2012 re-run Governorship election Michika market was burnt down and some private homes belonging to innocent citizens were also torched. In Borno state, the Speaker Borno State House of Assembly Hon. Inuwa Kolo narrowly escaped assassination on 23rd February, 2003. Meanwhile, Modu Fannami Gubio was unlucky as he was murdered alongside 6 other political associates by political thugs immediately after Jumma'at prayers. He was the ANPP 2003 gubernatorial candidate in Borno State. According to Yahaya and Bello (2019), the North East geopolitical zone witnessed and experienced several cases of electoral related violence between 1999 – 2019. The total political and electoral fatalities in this region is estimated to be about 319 with Borno state recording the highest number 84, followed by Bauchi 63, Taraba 61, Adamawa 49, Gombe and Yobe 29 respectively. This electoral violence has contributed to low voters turnout and participation in elections in the North East (Field Survey, 20220).

Methodology

A mixed method design which combines quantitative and qualitative techniques was used to analyse the data. 600 questionnaires were distributed out of which five hundred and forty-six (546) were returned. The population of the total registered voters from Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba State for the 2019 general elections. The choice of 2019 registered voters was arrived at been the highest between 1999 – 2019 and to prevent duplication of figures. Therefore, Adamawa has 1,973,083, Gombe 1,394,393 and Taraba 1,777,105 totaling 5,144,581 (INEC, 2019). Nwana (2005) formula was used to determine the sample size of 600. The proportional distribution of sample size of Bourley (1964) was used to allocate the 600 sample size in the three (3) states.

$$\frac{Nb - n(n)}{N}$$

Adamawa	$\frac{1,973,083 \times 600}{5,144,581}$	= 230
1,973,083		
Gombe	$\frac{1,394,393 \times 600}{5,144,581}$	= 163
1,394,393		
Taraba	$\frac{1,777,105 \times 600}{5,144,581}$	= 207
1,777,105		
Total:		= 600

Proportional allocation of sample size 600 in each state, enable an unbiased-estimated population. Sampling units in the stratum, Quantitative key informant interviews were conducted among 20 participants that have experienced electoral violence in the North East. The Likert 4 scale comprising Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree (SD) was used because the study limits qualifications to participants, and registered voters that have experienced electoral violence. Therefore, undecided is not included it will never add value to this research.

Voters Participation for 3 States during 1999 – 2019 general Elections in the North East.

Year		Adamawa	Gombe	Taraba
1999	Reg. Voters	1,260,956	1,106,171	983,227
	Turn out	848,979	855,636	876,908
	Percentages	67.32%	77.35%	89.87%
2003	Reg. Voters	1,280,204	1,263,287	1,026,950
	Turnout	994,033	1,010,175	923,603
	Percentages	77.64%	79.96%	89.93%
2007	Reg. Voters	1,350,950	1,410,234	1,173,514
	Turnout	802,729	733,321	575,021
	Percentages	61%	52%	49%
2011	Reg. Voters	1,816,094	1,318,377	1,336,221
	Turnout	950,936	798,683	770,690
	Percentages	52.36%	60.58%	57.67%
2015	Reg. Voters	1,559,021	1,120,023	1,340,652
	Turnout	661,210	473,444	602,716
	Percentages	42.41%	42.72%	44.95%
2019	Reg. Voters	1,973,083	1,394,393	1,777,105
	Turnout	860,756	580,649	741,564
	Percentages	43.62%	41.64%	41.72%

Source: INEC 2020

Table 1 indicates how Adamawa voter participation declined 67.32% in 1999, 77.64% in 2003, 61% in 2007, 52.36% in 2011, 42.41% in 2015, and 43.62% in 2019. Gombe: 77.35% in 1999, 79.96% in 2003, 52% in 2007, 60.58% in 2011, 42.22% in 2015 and 41.64% in 2019. Taraba 89.18% in 1999 89.93% in 2003, 49% in 2007 57.67% in 2011, 44.95% in 2015 and 41.72% in 2019. Table 1 established decline in voters' turnout in these three (3) states from 2007 election to 2019.

Results and Discussion

Background information of respondents

Table 2: Gender distribution of respondents per 3 states

Gender	Adamawa	Gombe	Taraba	Frequency	percentage
Female	63	44	49	156	35%
Male	156	109	125	390	65%
Total	219	153	174	546	100%

Source: Field work 2024

Table 2 shows that 156 females representing 35% respondent participated, while 390 males participated representing 65% out of the total 546 questionnaire distributed to the three states. The breakdown established that Adamawa has 63 female and 156 male respondents, Gombe with 44 female and 109 male respondents, while Taraba has 49 female and 125 male respondents.

What are the consequences of electoral violence in localities in the Northeast region?

Table 3: respondent view on consequences of electoral violence in the Northeast, Nigeria. 1999-2019

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	SD	D	\bar{x}	STD
1.	Electoral violence leads to voter's apathy and non-participation	229 (41.94)	186 (34.06)	60 (10.98)	71 (13.00)	3.06	0.99
2.	Demonstration and assassination characterize the electioneering process	158 (28.93)	148 (27.10)	87 (15.93)	153 (28.02)	2.69	1.05
3.	Electoral violence has entrenched the culture of violence and impunity among political actor in the political parties	175 (32.05)	158 (28.93)	120 (21.97)	93 (17.03)	2.71	1.13
4.	Electoral violence negatively affects the prospects for democracy consolidation	246 (45.05)	180 (32.96)	60 (10.98)	60 (10.98)	3.12	0.99
5.	It leads to loss of lives and properties of citizen, INEC staff and security personnel	208 (38.09)	191 (34.98)	65 (11.95)	82 (15.01)	2.99	1.00
6.	It leads to the manipulation of the electoral process	257 (47.06)	180 (32.96)	82 (15.01)	27 (04.94)	3.12	1.05
7.	It affects the legitimacy/integrity of the electoral process/outcomes of the election	202 (36.99)	164 (30.03)	104 (19.04)	76 (13.91)	2.84	1.11
8.	It erodes the principle and ideals of democratic governance	147 (26.92)	224 (41.02)	76 (13.91)	99 (18.13)	2.80	0.98
9.	It leads to disruption of the electoral process	213 (39.01)	191 (34.98)	82 (15.01)	60 (10.98)	2.97	1.04

Source: Field Work 2024

Table 3 shows the respondents view on the consequences of electoral violence in North-Eastern Nigeria. The statements showed that the consequences of electoral violence are as follows: Electoral violence leads to voter apathy and non-participation with mean score (\bar{x} =3.06). While demonstrations and assassinations characterized the electioneering process frequently witnessed score (\bar{x} =2.69). That electoral violence has entrenched the culture of violence and impunity among political actors in the political process score (\bar{x} =2.71) that electoral violence negatively affects the prospects for democracy consolidation score (\bar{x} =3.12) that it leads to loss of lives and properties has mean score of (\bar{x} =2.99). Similarly, it leads to the manipulation of the electoral process score (\bar{x} =3.12) that it affects the legitimacy/integrity of the electoral process and outcome of election score (\bar{x} =2.84) Electoral violence erodes the principles and ideals of democratic governance score (\bar{x} =2.80). That electoral violence leads to disruption of the electoral process score (\bar{x} =2.97). the result as recorded by responses from participant revealed that electoral violence consequences has leads to loss of likes, destruction of properties, leads to voter apathy and negatively affects the prospects for democratic consolidation.

Discussion of Findings

Electoral violence has consequences on voter participation and these consequences adversely affect democracy. The items presented in Table 3 imply that the consequences of electoral violence include voter apathy, which reduces the interest and passion of citizen in participating in politics and voting at elections. Another consequence is the issue of assassinations after election result is announced. Political thugs and party supporters sometimes go on rampage and demonstration, which can lead to break down of law and order. The loss of lives and properties, both private and publicly owned, discourages electorates from participating in future elections. The outcome and consequences of electoral violence bring unpopular candidate and party into power as low voter's turnout brings unacceptable government. The legitimacy of elections is negatively affected, because it negates the principles of democracy. Furthermore, the impunity at which politicians and their supporters commit electoral crimes and are never punished undermines democracy. The submissions of several scholars corroborate the above consequences outlined. Obakhedo (2011) claims that rigging and manipulation of electoral results occur during in the absence of free and fair elections and can lead to voter apathy. Fowler (2003) study reports that electoral violence can lead to the emergence of unpopular candidates and electoral outcomes that do not represent the will of the people. The

findings of the study by Albert (2007) revealed that electoral violence create problems during result compilation and announcement. These findings contradict the results of other studies where other consequences of electoral violence were identified to include series of post-election litigations (Okoye, 2019) and obstacle to establishment of sustained democratic system.

Responses from the Key Informant Interviews (K11) indicate declined in voter participation, voter apathy, and loss of lives and properties. Many respondents considered the situation as hazardous and abuse of rights of innocent citizen. A participant identifies how kidnaping, assassination, arson and threat to life have fostered voter apathy in his constituency. The findings reported in Fowler (2013) corroborate these assertions arguing that the emerging of unpopular candidate can lead to electoral violence and voter apathy. From the foregoing, it can be seen that results of both the quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that electoral violence has negative consequences on voter participation in elections in North-Eastern Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper empirically determined how electoral violence and its attendance consequences has affected voter participation in the North East between 1999 to 2019 general elections. Results of the analysis show sufficient evidence that electoral violence manifested Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba and that while election is the mechanism for change of government in every country, electoral violence undermines the tenet of democracy that demands for popular participation of voters to elect responsive representatives. Based on these findings, the paper recommends that government should ensure that free, fair and credible elections are organized, based on rules and regulations guiding our electoral process. INEC should be restructured and empowered to perform its responsibilities and function independently without interference. The government should ensure that offenders and violators of electoral act should be punished in accordance with the law. There should be adequate security before, during and after elections to prevent break down of laws and order. The government should also restore people's confidence in the electoral process. Political parties must develop internal democratic mechanisms for resolving inter-party and inter party conflicts.

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