

ADDRESSING ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA: ANALYZING CAUSES AND PROPOSING SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Elections conducted in many developing democracies, including those in Africa and Nigeria, face serious challenges. Elections, as a mechanism for the regular and periodic change of government are often accompanied by substantial violence. This poses a hindrance to the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. This paper examines the causes of electoral violence in North East Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design and employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Nwana (2005) formula was used to determine the sample size as well as Bourley (1964) proportional distribution formula to allocate samples among the participants in the 3 states under Study, Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba. Frustration and Aggression theory was used to explain the causes of violence. The results revealed that violence has been significant in Nigerian elections. Politicians rig, manipulate and falsify election results, which trigger electoral violence. Unsettled ethnic, tribal, religious conflicts, poverty, ignorance and unemployment cause electoral violence. The unchecked proliferation of arms also contributes to election related violence. This paper recommends that free fair and credible elections, increase security, punishment for perpetrators of electoral violence, and increase INEC capacity as means of preventing violence in future elections. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Judiciary must strictly apply the rule of law in adjudication of election related cases. The government on the other hand should provide jobs and employments to the youths. Increase political orientation among the citizens should also be prioritised. The government should also address the issues of money politics and thuggery during elections and ban politicians involved in political violence.

Keywords: Electoral Violence, Elections, Violence, Frustration and Aggression Theory.

Introduction

Electoral violence is an issue that characterized elections worldwide, especially in developing African countries, and in North East Nigeria. Where election is marred by violent conflicts, the integrity and quality of election, will be of negative outcome. This may cause the citizen to lose confidence in the electoral system. (Grey, 2003). Electoral Violence is a premeditated act, which includes but not limited to intimidation, harassment, discrimination and other forms of irregularities deployed with the aim of truncating electoral process or swaying electoral outcomes (Daxecker, 2020). Where electoral violence is prevalent there can be no democracy consolidation, growth and sustainability. The tenet of democracy demands free, fair, credible and acceptable elections with popular people participation. Therefore, democracy can hardly survive in a country where citizens cannot exercise their franchise, which are rights guaranteed by the constitution of most states (Ibeanu, 2007). Alkasum (2008) argues that, electoral violence is perpetuated in the course of political activities and that it involves thuggery, use of force and militants to disrupt electoral process before, during and after voting when results are announced. The electoral violence is mostly sponsored by political elites, using youths unemployed and ignorance people to persecute violence. Drug addict youths were induced with intoxicant or drugs to enable them perpetrate violence. Severally, politician capitalized on poverty in the land to pay political thugs engaged in violence. The money bag politicians often collude with electoral officers in a way to circumvent electoral regulations and guidelines to suit their purposes, in a dangerous and toxic political environment like ours (Meyler, 2007). Electoral violence is politically motivated violence that is related to struggle for power by Politician at all cost. All elections held in the fourth republic starting from 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 have witnessed one form of violence in Nigeria, the growth in population and the complexity surrounding the modern state has immensely contributed to the manifestations of electoral violence. Anarchy and chaos reign supreme due to political rivalry, which can either manifest as intra-party or inter-party conflict. Intra-party are caused by struggle for party executive offices or during primaries to elect candidates among many aspirants. While inter-party conflict is rivalry between one party and another during general elections (Seeberget *et al.*,) 2018) both intra-party and inter-party elections attracted fierce competition for the executive and candidacy positions. Elections should be able to produce leaders that will be accountable or work for the interest of the people and not personal interest. Where the godfathers, ensure imposition of Candidate the consequences will be violence.

The usage of hate speech, abusive and provocative words during campaign, inflammatory language instead of issues and policy statement usually aggravated violence. Where elections were marred by fraud, rigging, manipulations, malpractices and result falsification in favour of one political party or candidate, it will ignite violence that if not control will lead to electoral violence.

Electoral violence is mostly caused by desire for resources allocation, values, benefits attached to political offices, jumbo salaries and control of power. The political culture of the winner takes it all which led to the ends justifies the means. The weak institution of state and the impunity that electoral perpetrators enjoyed without prosecution for crime committed. Accordingly, Albert (2007) opined that electoral violence resulting from representational campaign, balloting and result compilation have been Nigeria's problem since 1960. These has been responsible for the fall of first and second republic in Nigeria. The Judiciary also contributed to spread of electoral violence because of judgments and not justice they delivered on electoral petitions and litigations. And in some instances court of same jurisdiction will deliver contradictory judgments thereby escalating violence (Okoye, 2013).

The judiciary's role has not been justified in promoting the sustainability of democracy Several electoral petitions were decided on technicality rather than the position of law. Electoral violence had resulted to jettison of national interest to embrace primordial regional, ethnic, tribal sentiments. INEC the electoral umpire is not free from causing conflicts, because they are biased and therefore jeopardized their independence. INEC independence are severely compromised which led to interference by government and loss of integrity by the body. Security inadequacy, bias and lack of adequate training contributed to election violence. Persistence of tribal, communal conflict, existence of terrorists and militants alongside proliferation of arms contributed to electoral violence escalation. In the North East during the past elections from 1999 – 2019 several electoral violence has been witnessed that resulted in the destruction of lives and properties by political hoodlums and thugs (Krause, 2020). Causes of electoral violence depends on the location and prevailing circumstance in that area. This paper investigates the causes of electoral violence in localities of North East, Nigeria. Three states Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba states are our focus.

Conceptual Clarifications

Elections

Elections are described as “the act or process of holding systematic elections facilitating mass participation and means of selecting a person or persons by vote for a public official post in which government authority is exercised (Webster's Encyclopedic dictionary, 2006). This explained the process that committed in electoral process which included mass participation to elect leaders or representatives into government in democratic society. There must be the universal adult suffrage system prescribing age or qualification.

Election is a mechanism of change by people, to determine who rules them at a particular time or period. The foundation of a true democracy government is election (Olowojolu et al., 2019). Election are organized nowadays specifically to allow the people change or maintain good government. In most democracy nations, voters select freely their leaders based on the stated ideas, policy, programs and expectations.

Elections that are peaceful are the democracy hub and spokes (Nwolise, 2007). Election that allowed competition between candidates and parties are multi-party system as against one party state. Political parties provide a convenient setting for people to run for office (Ajayi, 2007). The role of political party therefore is to narrow down numbers of aspirants to a minimal number to enable it easy for electoral body to conduct elections. Election distinguish appointee from elected official because election has tenure. Regular and periodical elections are necessary to sustain and maintain representative democracy. Elections are crucial for the will of the people, ultimate legitimacy, good governance, political stability and the renewal of popular mandate (Lindbery, 2006). Election at all level validate government legitimacy in democracy worldwide.

Violence

Violence means any action meant to harm, kill or otherwise that has negative impact on another person. The use of force to attack, causes bodily harm and the infliction of pain in order to denigrate, dehumanize and belittle individuals and social structure (Tickett et al., 2003). Violence occurs when an unjust or illegal force is used to enforce judgments that goes against the wishes of others. In underdeveloped nations, violence is a component of a larger matrix of socio – political power struggles. When there is contest between two or more people, the weaker contender typically resorts to violence (Harish and Little, 2017). The use of force against items, such as the destruction of another persons' properties or public infrastructure is another way that violence can expand. Violence is defined as the unlawful use of force to compel the performance of an action against the will of the other party through threat or harassment. Violence involves the disruption of law and order for one's own benefit, which results in the loss of life and property (Agbibo, 2018). Violence typically begins with a small number of people, grows through time, and spreads beyond the immediate area. Violence is also when someone uses coercion for individual or group gain. Violence can be physical assault, direct or indirect, hates speech, economic exploitation, deprivation, political repression denial of rights, justice, harassment, instills fear, intimidation or take unfair advantages of another person for a specific benefit, objective or goal. Any act that involve illegal or unlawful act against another person is violence.

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence is election related actions that prevent free fair and credible elections to take place. One of the biggest threat to democracy is electoral violence because of its attendance consequences, which make it difficult for people to participate at elections. In a nation where electoral violence is rampant, transfer of power peacefully from civilian to civilian will be very difficult (Ojetunde, 2019). Electoral violence are the harm or injury directed at any person or properties involved in the electoral process. These attack has to do with injury inflicted towards another person (s) in an election period or year. Hoglund (2009). Distinguished election – related violence from other forms of political violence because it is coined out during the election period. Election violence includes rigging, manipulation and falsification of result by electoral officers. Any act, directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly employed by electoral official to unduly influence the electoral process to favour other rivals or opponents constituted electoral violence. Majority of elections held in Nigeria since independence has witnessed several forms of electoral violence. The foundation of electoral violence is laid before elections during campaign with inflammatory speech or character assassination. Instead of issue or policy based campaign.

Electoral violence can be intra-party violence occurs when party primary or congress are conducted by parties without free fair and credible means. The aggrieved persons may result to violence; these form of violence can start where there is imposition of candidate through godfatherism or manipulation. Where such conflict is not settled or managed its may escalate to a free for all violence. Imposition of candidate as against the wishes of the populace is a source of violence during primaries. (Momodu and Gambo, 2013).

Inter-party conflict is between rivalry political party, during elections when the process is rigged and there is no transparency or where polling place and collation centers has been skewed to favour one party. When election result is tampered and the people rebels against the outcome, the election result announced may spark violence (Kunle, 2019). Inter-Party conflict usually occurs where the incumbent political party interfered in the process or election to manipulate its way to win election at all cost, the opposition party will react through violence to demonstrate their disapproval. Any act of violence committed during political activities, before, during and after election, in order to sabotage elections, using of thuggery at polling places or use of force and gun shoots to sway or alter the will of the people in election by inflicting bodily harm, injury or riots on general public constituted electoral violence (Igbuzor, 2009). Electoral violence is targeted at voters, candidates, media, observers, electoral officials, ad hoc staff, party agents and security agents. Therefore, the concept of electoral violence encompasses a variety of different manifestations and outcomes, but it is connected by the coercive element of hatred and aggression though-out the election season or time (Igbuzor, 2009). Electoral violence refers to deliberate actions taken by politician unlawful and illegal to win or keep power at all cost.

Form and Nature of Electoral Violence

In Nigeria manipulation, rigging and falsification of electoral process are common features since 1999-2019, which has affected democracy consolidation and voters' participation adversely. Election Day fraud includes snatching of electoral materials, sporadic shootings to scar voters away. Although electoral violence varied from one locality to another, depending on the situation and environment. Electoral violence can be before, during or after election. The basic fact is that it involves assassination, kidnapping, arson, hates-speech destruction of lives and properties (Emiri, 2010). Voters intimidation and harassment by political thugs to prevent opposition party supporters to vote during elections. After the declaration of election result in 2011 Presidential election residents in some area were forced to flee their homes because of violence (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Violence during elections frequently overlaps with criminal violence because perpetrators usually lost or plundering both private and public properties by converting these goods illegally to themselves. Gang related violence, inter communal conflicts and riots are order of the day.

Causes of Electoral Violence in North East 1999-2019

In Nigeria, elections have often been marred by violent crises of varying degrees. Most elections in Africa are typically characterized by unrest or violence related to the electoral process. The same trends of violence and intimidation from past elections were seen in all later elections (Snyder, 2000). Election related violence instigated by politician financial motivations, the end justifies the means to win at all cost, benefits attached to holding political office, jumbo pay per political office holder. When elected or appointed politicians receive astronomical salaries, the aims justify the means (Olowojolu, et al, 2019).

Politicians enjoy first-class citizenship and undue favoritism either elected or appointed corruption, bribery misappropriation and illegitimate power are causes of electoral violence (Ani, 2014). Poverty, unemployed and ignorance among the people made it easier to instigate violence by politician, (Ukwu, 2016). Unresolved communal and ethnic disputes in many communities contributed to electoral violence (Anifowose 1982) The Ife-Modakeke, Tiv-Jukun, Offa-Erinle and Agunleri-Umuleri communal conflicts and many others. Election rigging manipulation and falsification of result are drivers of electoral violence in the region. Hate-speech and campaign

inflammatory message that is directed at character assassinations of opponent are remote causes of violence. Lack of information, Illiteracy and infractions in electoral process or inadequate knowledge of electoral regulations and guidelines causes electoral violence. The majority of eligible voters are unaware of the rules of the game, allowing them to violate electoral laws which led to violence (Ukwu, 2016) Discontent with intertwined social and economic issues, including rivalry for resources, mistrust between groups causes electoral violence. Proliferation of small arms in wrong hands are factors that contributed to electoral violence (Alimba, 2014). The impunity at which the perpetrators of electoral violence goes unpunished increases electoral violence in the region. Opponents may seek retribution from the perpetrator or embark on revenge mission, thereby escalate electoral violence in the region.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted frustration and Aggression theory developed by Dollard et al., (1939), the theory posited that aggression is the ultimate result of blocking or frustrating a person (s) effort to attain a goal. The consequences according to Dollart et al., (1939) frustration always precede aggression when someone's aim and goal has been blocked, the respond or outcome will be violence; the theory was employed to conduct research on human aggression, causes and consequences. Frustration is an external occurrence that prevent goal-response and expectations, though blockage of opportunities or instigated blockage. Frustration assumed to be implicit impediment to goal getting, achievement and attainment of objectives. Dollard et al., explain further that causes of violence arose when through interferences or illegal means goal attainment had been frustrated. Frustration prompt aggressive behaviors when source of frustration cannot be challenged or confronted. Aggression, then target at innocent citizen. When parties or candidates are quite of certain loss or exclusion from political power during election process, they result to violence.

Aggressive behaviour refers to actions intended to harm or injure another person or to destroy private or public property. The frustrated electorate due to fraud, absence of free fair and credible elections will rather ventilate their anger or result to violence to prevent denial of goals attainment. Conventional wisdom implied that when people are pushed to the wall through frustration they will resort to aggression then violence.

Frustration and aggressive theory explain the rationale behind electoral related violence during elections. The theory justifies how rigging manipulations and falsification of election results can generate anger that will lead to frustration aggression and subsequent violence – when and where the electoral system has been corrupted. Violence is inevitable, because citizen will become agitated and aggressive. The loss of confidence in the electoral process has pushed citizens toward violence. Therefore, the frustration-aggression theoretical perspective provides a vivid explanation of why citizens resort to violence when their goals are unlawfully blocked.

Methodology

This paper adopted survey research design with qualitative and quantitative mixed research method to obtain data from the population. Questionnaire and key informant interview. (KII) are used, to enable the study obtain required answers and control the variants, then arrived at reasonable conclusion. The areas of study are Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba states in the North East region, Nigeria. The population is targeted at total registered voters from these three (3) States for 2019 elections which is Adamawa 1,973,083, Gombe 1,394,393 and Taraba 1,777,105 totaling 5,144,581 (INEC, 2019). Because the population is too large, Nwana (2005) formula was used to determine the sample size and it produced 600 quantitative participants and 20 qualitative respondents. The Bourley (1964) proportional allocation formula was used to distribute the sample of 600 respondents among the three states:

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

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

A multi-stage sampling procedure which involved stratified sampling, random sampling, and purposive sampling technique were used in stages according to requirement without bias to obtain necessary information from the participants. It should be noted that voters of 30years of age that have voted or participated in 2 elections were selected as respondents for this paper while they must have experienced violence during elections in their areas. A4 Likert point scale were used among the strict qualified voters and there is no need for undecided. Instrument for data analysis were simple percentages, frequency count, mean, standard deviation and in-depth analysis of key informant interview (KII).

Results and Discussion

A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed throughout the three (3) States under study, while 546 questionnaires were returned through field work.

Background Information of Respondents

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents per 3 States

Variables	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 1: indicated that 156 females representing 35% participants participated, while 390 males representing 65% participated. Adamawa 63 females, 156 males, Gombe 44 females, 109 males, while Taraba has 49 females, 125 male respondents.

Table 2: Respondents view on Causes of electoral violence in the North-east Nigeria 1999-2019

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	STD
1.	Desperation of politician to win elections regularly leads to electoral violence	213 (39.01)	153 (28.02)	98 (17.94)	82 (15.01)	2.88	1.11
2.	Religious\ethnics rivalries causes electoral violence	175 (32.05)	224 (41.02)	87 (15.93)	60 (10.98)	2.89	1.02
3.	Partiality of security forces cause electoral violence	202 (36.99)	169 (30.95)	76 (13.91)	99 (18.13)	2.91	1.04
4.	Election rigging/manipulation of result cause electoral violence	235 (43.04)	213 (39.01)	44 (08.05)	54 (09.89)	3.17	0.90
5.	Lack of trust in the electoral process often leads to electoral violence	218 (39.92)	208 (38.09)	54 (09.89)	66 (12.08)	3.08	0.95
6.	Intolerance opposition sometimes leads to electoral violence.	257 (47.06)	174 (31.86)	76 (13.91)	39 (07.14)	3.12	1.04
7.	Lack of internal party democracy in political parties often do leads to conflict violence.	147 (26.92)	229 (41.94)	104 (19.04)	66 (12.08)	2.76	1.04
8.	Money politics sometimes cause electoral violence.	207 (37.91)	197 (36.08)	60 (10.98)	82 (15.01)	3.00	0.98
9.	High level of illiteracy among electorates sometimes results into electoral violence.	256 (46.88)	202 (36.99)	28 (05.12)	60 (10.98)	3.25	0.84
10.	Doubt over integrity of elections, the spread of rumors and inflammatory messages are immediate causes of electoral violence.	180 (32.96)	158 (28.93)	88 (16.11)	120 (21.97)	2.78	1.07

Source: Field Work 2024

Table 2, Signified the respondents view of electoral violence in the north east, Nigeria. the mean score (\bar{x} =2.88) represented the result of the participated participant on desperation of politicians to win elections regularly that leads to electoral violence. Religious/ethnic rivalries cause have mean score (2.89). While partiality of security forces causes electoral violence score (\bar{x} =2.91). Election rigging and manipulations of result caused electoral violence score (\bar{x} = 3.17). lack of internal party democracy within political parties often do lead to conflict/violence score (\bar{x} =2.76). That money politics sometimes causes electoral violence score (\bar{x} =3.00). High level of illiteracy among electorate sometimes results into electoral violence score (\bar{x} =3.25). Doubts over integrity of elections, the spread of rumors and inflammatory messages are immediate causes of electoral violence, score (\bar{x} =2.78) the study confirmed that many variables cause electoral violence in the north-east, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The result established that desperation of politicians to win elections at all cost are responsible and causes of electoral violence. Election rigging, manipulation and falsification of result cause violence after declaration. Lack of trust in the electoral system, ethnic, tribal and religious bigotry cause electoral violence. Lack of internal democracy among parties led to electoral violence during party primaries and congress. High level of illiteracy, poverty, ignorance and unemployment are drivers of electoral violence. The use of money during elections to buy votes or pay thugs causes violence. Hate speech during campaign, instead of issue based led to violence. Partiality and inadequate security caused violence while intolerance of opposition by incumbent government led to electoral violence. Unhealthy power struggle among politician is a source of violence. The proliferation of small arms in wrong or illegal hand caused electoral violence. The key informant interview (K11) result from interviewees

proved that electoral violence is rampant in the North East caused and sponsored by politician. Some interviewees submitted that vote buying and paid thugs regularly disrupt elections, hence violence that lead to destruction of lives and properties. Election is a do or die affair among communities in the North East. There is always tense competition among politician which always caused violence.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper through an empirical validation has discovered that electoral violence persists in the North East region. The study further revealed that electoral violence has been an obstacle and hindrance to free fair and credible elections. Elections in the region have been fraught with rigging, manipulation, and thuggery; therefore, violence has become inevitable. The weak institution of states and politician disobedience to rule of law, regulations and electoral guidelines are causes of electoral violence. If the situation continuous unabated, democracy survival will be jeopardized. Democracy tenet forbids violence or acts of aggression intimidation, harassment, assassination or arson. The paper recommends that government should increase security personnel during elections to prevent violence. Government should punish all electoral violence perpetrators to serve as deterrence to others. Government should increase INEC capacity to conduct free, fair and credible elections devoid of rigging and manipulations. The people should be properly protected during elections. Political parties should develop an internal democracy and mechanism for intra party conflicts before it escalates to violence. Government should make a law against money politics, ban politician engaging or sponsoring violence. The government should regulate or ban the proliferation of small arms and monitor political campaign speeches Government should create employment to eradicate poverty and ignorance among the people. All stakeholders in the electoral process should be trained to be able to conduct elections acceptable to the people. The Judiciary arms of government should be able to dispense electoral cases without bias based on rule of law. On a final note, government should put an end to all ethnic, tribal and religious conflicts in the North East Nigeria.

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