

THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND THE CHALLENGE OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The 2023 Nigerian general election was marred by a disturbing rise in electoral violence, casting a shadow over the country's democratic progress. It poses a significant threat to the integrity of the electoral process and undermines public trust. This violence undermines the integrity of the electoral process, erodes public trust, and hampers citizen participation. Understanding the root causes and implications of electoral violence is crucial for developing effective strategies to mitigate its occurrence and ensure free, fair, and peaceful elections in Nigeria. Findings from the Nigerian 2023 electoral violence include, Intense political competition fueled violence between supporters and mobilized militant groups, Politicians exploiting ethnoreligious divisions, deepening societal fractures and contributing to violence, Weak institutional frameworks allowing for electoral malpractices, eroding trust in the process, Electoral violence undermined public confidence, leading to voter apathy and reduced participation, Socioeconomic development suffered due to instability and reduced investments. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive interventions to strengthen institutions, address divisions, promote transparency, and restore trust for peaceful and inclusive elections in Nigeria. The research questions on Nigerian 2023 electoral violence will be addressed through qualitative methods. This includes a literature review, interviews and the development of policy recommendations. The research on Nigerian 2023 electoral violence is expected to have significant impacts, including informing policy interventions, improving electoral processes, strengthening democracy, enhancing social cohesion, contributing to academic knowledge, and raising public awareness and engagement. It will foster a more peaceful, inclusive, and democratic electoral environment in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Electoral violence, Political competition, Institutional weaknesses, Socioeconomic implications.*

Introduction

All over the world, elections are the cornerstone of democratic governance that involves the participation of citizens to elect the people who will rule over the affairs of the nation., thus Nigeria is not an exception. Elections empower citizens to be involved in decision-making, accountability and transparency, which contributes to peaceful and prosperous national growth. The significance of these elections lies in their ability to shape the political landscape, uphold democratic values, and foster inclusivity. The 2023 general election in Nigeria was a complex scenario marred by electoral violence. This paper brings to the fore the issues and violence that accompany the elections, exploring their implications for Nigeria's democracy and the urgent need for a new narrative.

On 25th February 2023, the Nigerian populace went to the polls to elect their next president. Securing 36% of the votes, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the candidate of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party, emerged as the winner. His victory marked the end of a highly competitive election, defeating two main rivals, Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi, who received 6.98 million and 6.1 million votes, respectively (Burke, 2023).

The Independent Nigerian Election Commission (INEC) declared the final results on March 1, after nearly four days of chaotic vote counting. Tinubu's victory was deemed irrefutable with a significant margin, and for the first time, none of the candidates were former military officers, who were viewed as a positive sign for democratic progress. However, a concerning aspect was the low representation of women among the candidates, accounting for less than 10% (Burke, 2023). Furthermore, provisional data indicated a historically low voter turnout of only 27%, primarily attributed to the growing insecurity that had plagued the pre-election period (Gavin, 2023).

The pre-election phase leading up to the 2023 presidential election was marred by instances of electoral violence. A year before the election, political campaign activities commenced fully where political parties, their members and supporters were engaged in politicking leading to almost 100 fatalities being reported. This pattern was consistent with the run-ups to the previous two election years, with similar levels of violence in 2018-2019 and 2014-2015 (Serwatand Carboni, 2023) states that the Niger Delta and the South East regions had the largest violence against INEC offices and staff in the run-up to the 2023 elections.

Despite the challenges and violence, a substantial number of voters were registered on the Nigerian electoral roll, exceeding 93.4 million, a significant increase from the previous election. The incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari, unable to stand for re-election due to term limits, had ruled the country as a retired General of the Nigerian army and a candidate from the North West. According to opinion polls, the three candidates Bola Tinubu of All Progressive Congress (APC), Peter Obi of the Labour Party and Atiku Abubakar of People's Democratic Party (PDP) had chances of winning, but Tinubu eventually emerged victorious (Macaulay, 2023).

The election took place amid the backdrop of Nigeria facing numerous socio-economic and security challenges. The country, with its immense population projected to reach over 400 million by 2050, grappled with a recession triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. According to the World Bank (2023), declining macroeconomic stability, falling oil production, and a persistent

petrol subsidy further exacerbated the economic situation, pushing millions of Nigerians into poverty.

The new president faces an array of daunting tasks, including combating corruption, diversifying the economy away from oil dependence, revitalizing key sectors, addressing regional inequalities, and tackling the menace of Boko Haram and other criminal groups. Achieving these ambitious goals is crucial for the country's stability and development, as Nigeria remains a significant sub-regional power (Vigneron, 2018).

The aftermath of the 2023 election holds valuable lessons, particularly regarding electoral campaigns and the potential for outside interference. In the past, the leaking of messages exposed attempts to discredit candidates, with the possible involvement of organizations like Cambridge Analytica and private intelligence operators (Kirchgaessner et al., 2023). This paper aims to analyze the 2023 Nigerian General election and the challenges of electoral violence in Nigeria. It will provide an overview of possible post-election scenarios and their implications for Nigerian domestic politics, foreign relations, regional integration (with a focus on West Africa and the ECOWAS), and the country's economic and social fabric. The study seeks to shed light on the significance of the election in shaping Nigeria's trajectory as a critical player on the African continent.

Literature Review

Electoral Violence

In modern democracies, elections are conducted after a specific period in time in order to initiate a peaceful and successful exchange of powers. However, in some countries, these elections are accompanied by significant cruelty. Birch et al. (2020) in their study outlined how electoral brutality differs from other types of planned violence, though qualitatively differs from non-violence electoral manoeuvres (Birch et al., 2020). Election violence usually entails cruelty against voters and political contestants, influencing their turnout and overall election credibility.

Electoral Conflicts and Violence

Although Birch et al. (2020) perceived the election process as a peaceful strategy for transferring authority in democratic countries, Fischer (2002) highlights the electoral process as a substitute for cruelty. Nonetheless, when an electoral process is seen as unfair, its political legality is undermined. The election process can be conducted fairly and honestly, but contestants can

perceive it as unfair, leading to political violence (Fischer, 2002). To provide insights into election conflict and violence, the author used qualitative and quantitative research methods to classify electoral conflicts in several forms. These include identifying conflict during registration, campaign conflicts, balloting violence, election outcome conflicts, and representation conflicts that result from inadequate resolution of election disputes.

Election Violence and Conflict Prevention

These authors (Birch et al. (2020), Fischer, 2002 & Sisk 2009) posited that electoral violence and significant conflict result before, during, and after the election process. Sisk (2009), in his research article on preventing election violence and conflict, states that violence emanating from elevations can be prevented through effective planning of the election process, including the guiding laws. Thus, the election violence prevention approach should integrate the identification of perpetrators, and victims, methods used, mapping of risk location, and examining the motives of election violence (Sisk, 2009). In addition, violence location mapping can assist in marking high-risk areas and perpetrators of violence and enforce laws to regulate the election process, including the appropriate channel for addressing election conflicts.

Theoretical Foundation

This work is based on the Frustration Aggression Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory. The human capacity for violence originates primarily from Frustration Aggression Theory. It holds that men are predisposed to aggression regardless of how it manifests itself, primarily as a result of frustration-induced rage. Theorists of frustration-aggression also maintain that aggression is either highly likely to occur or will manifest quickly if frustration is felt intensely or for a long enough period. Angry people are naturally inclined to act violently or to bring about a crisis in proportion to how angry they are (Johannes and Malte, 2017) [17]. Even though the Frustration Aggression Theory seems like a good fit for this study, it is not entirely appropriate because the majority of the people who directly commit acts of electoral violence are not candidates for public office; rather, they are hired by the political gladiators to perform their dirty work. Therefore, there is no connection between the Frustration Aggression Theory and the perpetrators of electoral violence, who are primarily political thugs.

The theory known as relative deprivation explains why one person may feel subjectively dissatisfied with their situation or status about another. People are encouraged to get involved in

politics and the economy by the pressures of the society they live in. If this isn't feasible, people start contrasting their circumstances or circumstances with those of other people. Relative deprivation, to many, refers to not having enough time or money to maintain the amenities, activities, and lifestyles to which people have grown accustomed, either individually or in groups. The theory of relative deprivation is linked to characteristics such as poverty and social exclusion. In the social sciences, the phrase is used to describe emotions or manifestations of social, political, or economic deprivation. Relative deprivation theory is frequently invoked as the primary cause of social movements, which in severe circumstances result in politics, riots, revolution, and war. (Smith et al., 2012; Janse, 2020; Johannes and Malte, 2017) [38, 17, 21]. In retrospect, two American sociologists, Ted Robert Gurr and Garry Runciman, are credited with the development of Relative Deprivation Theory (1934). To explain the Relative Deprivation Theory, both emphasized the mechanisms of frustration-aggression, selfish deprivation, and fraternal deprivation. They continued by saying that people will experience relative deprivation if something is put in the path that prevents them from accomplishing their demands and objectives. They maintain that in this case, people who are impeded or hindered naturally want to harm the source of the barrier.

To reinforce what has already been said, Ted Robert Gurr's book "Why Men Rebel" highlighted the connection between RDT and political (electoral) violence. In the book, Gurr provides a clear explanation of the connection between political violence and relative deprivation. He also covers the motivations behind political violence and the responses of regimes to violence. Gurr, who does not support frustration-aggression as the primary cause of electoral violence, further investigates in the book whether the Frustration Aggression Theory—which holds that frustration is the primary cause of human violence—is the primary source of human capacity for violence. He concluded that while anger and violence do not always follow frustration, they frequently do if an individual or group experiences it over an extended period (Gurr, 1970) [18]. While this research supports Gurr's theories regarding the connection between electoral violence and deprivation as a release of pent-up energy, it should be noted that very little political violence results from responding to or removing obstacles brought about by protracted deprivation. Still, the theory makes sense as a theoretical framework for analyzing the few instances of electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Methodology

The paper adopted a qualitative research method, which allows for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of electoral violence in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The approach is appropriate as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the scope and nature of electoral violence. Data collection primarily involved examining reports from international and national observers, such as SMB intel, the European Union (EU), and the African Union (AU). These reports are valuable sources of information as they provide impartial accounts of electoral events, including incidents of violence, voter intimidation, and disruptions.

Additionally, reports of media agencies were reviewed to gather relevant information on electoral violence incidents and their impact on the democratic process. Newspaper articles offer insights from journalists and on-the-ground reporters who cover the election process, and shed light on the underlying causes and consequences of electoral violence. Also, scholarly works about electoral violence and democracy in Nigeria were reviewed. The academic literature provides theoretical frameworks, historical context, and empirical studies that can offer valuable insights into the factors contributing to electoral violence and its implications for the country's democratic development.

By combining data from multiple sources and employing a qualitative descriptive research approach, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the challenges posed by electoral violence during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The findings will contribute to the existing literature on electoral violence, resource mobilization theory, and democracy in Nigeria, and may inform policy recommendations aimed at mitigating electoral violence and strengthening democratic processes in the country.

Concept of Electoral Violence

Electoral violence is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that occurs during the context of electoral contests around the world. It encompasses a range of coercive and aggressive tactics used by various political actors to further their interests or manipulate electoral processes. This paper aims to provide an overview of the concept of electoral violence as defined by scholars from different perspectives and shed light on the diverse manifestations and implications of this phenomenon.

Scholars have provided various definitions of electoral violence, but they all converge on the idea that it involves acts of coercion and intimidation related to electoral processes. Eldridge, Mimmi, Nyström and Utas (2012) describe electoral violence as the deliberate and coercive strategies employed by political actors to advance their interests during electoral contests. It can occur at different stages of the electoral cycle, including the run-up to elections, election day itself, and the immediate post-election period. This definition acknowledges that electoral violence goes beyond physical aggression and encompasses other forms of coercion such as threats, intimidation, and harassment. Albert (2007) expands on this definition by considering electoral violence as encompassing all organized acts of threats aimed at intimidating, harming, or blackmailing political stakeholders or opponents before, during, and after an election. The objective of such acts is to influence or manipulate the political process, potentially leading to the determination or delay of the electoral outcome.

Electoral violence is not confined to a single form; rather, it manifests in diverse ways. Balogun (2003) emphasizes that it includes various types of violence, such as physical, psychological, administrative, legal, and structural violence, perpetuated by participants, their supporters, and sympathizers within the electoral process. Riots, party clashes, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping, and other forms of violent actions are all examples of manifestations of electoral violence (Ogundiya and Baba, 2005). Fischer (2002) adds to this understanding by stating that, electoral violence encompasses both random and organized acts to determine, delay, or influence electoral processes. The tactics employed range from verbal intimidation, hate speech, and disinformation to physical assault, forced "protection," blackmail, destruction of property, and even assassination.

The consequences of electoral violence can be far-reaching and damaging to the democratic fabric of society. Atuobi (2011) highlights that these violent actions target not only individuals and their property but also the electoral process itself. Such violence undermines the legitimacy of elections, erodes public trust in institutions, and creates an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. Otoghile (2009) suggests that electoral violence often arises from underlying structural and attitudinal dislocations within society, affecting the level of political participation by citizens. Factors such as social inequality, political exclusion, ethnic or religious tensions, and weak institutions can contribute to the escalation of electoral violence.

Violence Before Elections

Violence before elections happens during the pre-election procedures that lead up to the election, including voter registration, campaigning, party primary elections, and the transportation of electoral materials and supplies to polling places by electoral officials. At this point, hired political goons can commit acts of electoral violence by terrorizing, bombing, and attacking areas where the party of their bosses has little support or followers. It is done to violently upset the balance of power in the general election and to terrorize, intimidate, and instil psychological fear in opponents, their supporters, and the electorate. Additionally, well in advance of election day, it is meant to intimidate and persuade the supporters of their rivals to defect from their original political parties and candidates (Bekoe and Burchard, 2017) [12].

Voting Violence

Voting violence that occurs on polling day (election day, or the day of voting and collation) is referred to as polling violence. Electoral violence encompasses various acts such as bombing election material stores or warehouses, destroying election materials while in transit or at polling places, and destroying electoral vehicles and offices. Snatching ballot boxes or papers, shooting at polling places and collation centres, shoving pre-thumbed ballots into ballot boxes, setting fire to them, causing injuries, murders, assassinations, and manipulating election results are some other forms of electoral violence that occur on polling day (Azuka, 2021).

Post-Election Violence

Voter violence that occurs after results are announced and winners are declared in a highly contentious manner is referred to as post-election violence. Following the results and winners' announcement, it may occur almost instantly, or it may take hours, days, or even months following unsuccessful formal settlements or legal actions. There are usually severe repercussions for both the people and the country from the most widespread and impulsive post-election violence. When it takes on racial, religious, and ethnic dimensions—as it typically does in Nigeria—it can become even more threatening and deadly. The national economy is always choked off, and large-scale arson and human deaths are always part of it. If things get really bad, it can cause a regime change and a violent shaking of the nation's foundation of sovereignty (Alao, 2021; Ani and Ajakorotu, 2022) [5, 8].

Causes of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Electoral violence has been a recurring issue in Nigeria, posing a threat to the nation's democratic process and stability. This paper delves into the multifaceted causes of electoral violence in Nigeria, highlighting factors such as religious tensions, inadequate security measures, mismanagement of election processes, inflammatory political campaigns, high rate of unemployment, increased poverty rates and ethnicity, lack of democracy as well as negative thought concerning the electoral system among several other factors.

Religion-Factor

Religious sentiments and cleavages have played a significant role in instigating electoral violence in Nigeria. In past elections, politicians have exploited religious identities to garner support and mobilize followers against opponents from different religious backgrounds. This tactic has been particularly evident in Nigeria's general elections, as observed during the 2011 elections (Ogbu, 2020). Rather than focusing on constructive policies and governance, politicians resort to divisive tactics, endangering the nation's stability.

Lack of Security

The lack of adequate security personnel during and after elections is a major contributing factor to electoral violence in Nigeria. The country's security apparatus is often perceived as weak, with insufficiently trained and poorly remunerated officers (Zubairu, 2020). This lack of capacity and resources has hindered the effective tackling of electoral violence and other crimes, leading to increased unrest and instability. There were instances that security personnel were partisan, helping some candidates to rig elections or even inflict violent attacks on the electorate.

Poor Management of Election Processes

Inadequate management of electoral processes by government agencies, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), has also contributed to electoral violence. When institutions responsible for conducting elections are compromised, it erodes public trust and creates a fertile ground for political crises. Weaknesses in the electoral system and the lack of

independence in election management bodies have been cited as contributing factors to electoral violence (Ogbu, 2020; Aniekwe and Kushie, 2011).

Politician Utterances

The inflammatory language used by politicians before, during, and after elections has been a significant driver of electoral violence. Politicians often incite their followers to engage in violence to secure electoral victory. Instances of political leaders making violent threats or endorsing aggressive actions against opponents have resulted in widespread unrest and loss of lives (Harry and Kalagbor, 2021).

High Rate of Unemployment and Poverty

High unemployment rates and pervasive poverty in Nigeria have also contributed to electoral violence. Graduates entering a bleak job market often become disillusioned and may resort to criminal acts, including participating in political thuggery and violence. The frustration arising from the lack of economic opportunities can fuel unrest and instability during elections (Musa, 2021; Baba, 2020).

Ethnicity and Sectional Politics

Nigeria's political landscape is significantly influenced by ethnicity and regional affiliations. Candidates and political parties are often perceived as representing specific ethnic or regional interests. The exploitation of ethnic and sectional sentiments by the political class during elections can lead to violence, as observed during the 2019 general elections (Orji and Uzodi, 2012; Agbalajobi and Agunbiade, 2016).

In-depth Ignorance

The growing level of ignorance, often caused by poverty, unemployment, and lack of education, contributes to electoral violence. Illiterate and financially disadvantaged individuals are vulnerable to manipulation by political elites, who use them as political thugs to perpetrate violence during elections (Orji and Uzodi, 2012; Meadow, 2009).

Political Impunity

The culture of political impunity in Nigeria, where electoral offenders are rarely held accountable, fosters an environment conducive to electoral violence. The lack of consequences for violent acts during elections has encouraged their perpetration, leading to a cycle of violence and instability (Orji and Uzodi, 2012; Harry and Kalagbor, 2021).

Lack of Internal Democracy

The absence of internal democracy within political parties is the leading one, it has also contributed to electoral violence. Disputes over primary elections and lack of transparency have resulted in pre-election cases, exacerbating political tensions and violence (Timothy and Omolegbe, 2019).

Negative Perception

The low level of trust and negative perceptions regarding the electoral umpire, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), have also played a role in instigating violence. Doubts about the integrity of the electoral process and the belief that elections can be rigged have led to violent outbursts in certain regions (Orji and Uzodi, 2012).

Inflammatory Campaigns

The heavy use of inflammatory language and campaigns by political elites, party loyalists, and political thugs has been a significant catalyst for electoral violence. The divisive and aggressive rhetoric during election campaigns polarizes the electorate and fuels violence (Ehinmoreand Ehiabhi, 2013; Angerbrandt, 2018).

Manifestations of Electoral Violence in the 2023 General Elections

In the 12 months preceding the 2023 election, ACLED records over 200 violent events involving party members and supporters, resulting in nearly 100 reported fatalities. This is similar to the numbers observed before the 2019 and 2015 elections. The South East and South West regions registered the highest number of violent events involving party supporters before the 2023 election, followed by the South-South and North-Central areas (Serwatand Carboni, 2023).

Unarmed civilians were the targets of violence in about 80% of the recorded events,

accounting for around 75 of the reported fatalities between February 2022 and February 2023. Attacks against prospective candidates, party supporters, and local apparatchiks were common during this period, particularly in areas affected by Nigeria's overlapping security crises. Certain states, especially Osun, witnessed allegations from both the PDP and APC about inciting violence against their rivals. Candidates of major political parties, including the APC and PDP, were among the most frequent targets of violence. In some cases, women politicians were also victims of electoral violence.

The North West region, particularly Kano state, has experienced a surge in violence by armed groups engaging in kidnappings, cattle rustling, and retaliatory killings. Kano, a key electoral battleground, has witnessed clashes between supporters of rival candidates. Similarly, states in the South East have seen a significant rise in election-related violence, particularly those states with a history of separatist insurgencies, such as Imo.

Delayed Voting Commencement

On election day, YIAGA Africa (2023), a reputable organization promoting democratic values, estimated that only 41% of the designated polling units had commenced the voting process by 9:30 a.m., an hour after the scheduled start time. This revelation sparked outrage and raised questions about the efficiency and preparedness of the electoral system. Voters faced unforeseen obstacles that hindered their ability to cast their ballots promptly, leading to widespread frustration and disillusionment. SBM (2023) Intelligence's report provided further alarming statistics, revealing that a mere 41.3% of polling units opened on time. Data collected by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room indicated that less than 30% of units had commenced operations by 8:30 a.m. The currency crisis in the country was identified as a critical factor contributing to the delays, as it affected the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) logistical preparations, causing certain drivers to refuse transportation of INEC materials and personnel.

Pre-Election Violence and Tensions

The escalation of violence did not occur solely on election day but was a culmination of mounting tensions in the days leading up to the election. Rival political factions engaged in heated confrontations, ranging from verbal altercations to physical skirmishes and targeted acts of intimidation. Media platforms became battlegrounds for divisive rhetoric, further exacerbating the

divisions within the populace. Pervasive rumours and misinformation fueled animosity, and political rallies devolved into chaotic spectacles of clashes between opposing factions.

Incidents of Election Violence

SMB (2023) reported several incidences of violence before, during, and after the election:

1. On February 23, the Imo Commissioner for Trade and Investment and two APC leaders were ambushed by gunmen in Umuawuchi village. On the same day, the Managing Director of Imo State Waste Management Agency and a representative from Okigwe South had a near-death encounter in a remote village near Okata Community.
2. On February 25, ballot boxes and voting materials were snatched by political thugs at a polling unit in Oredo, Edo State. Disturbances were also recorded in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, due to a ballot paper shortage. The INEC office in Takai LGA, Kano State, was burned by suspected thugs. Additionally, incidents of violence occurred in Idanre, Ondo State, where a person was shot dead, and in Etim Ekpo LGA, Akwa Ibom State, where two persons were shot dead.
3. On February 25, a female voter was stabbed by political thugs in Edo State. In Okene, a PDP agent was put to death by thugs believed to be members of APC. In Kano, more than two individuals were burned leading to their death in addition to the campaign office which was also burned down. In Rivers State, a pregnant woman and a vigilante service member were killed, and houses were burned in Ubimini Community. Hoodlums also caused unrest in various polling units in Lagos State, particularly Aguda, Surulere, Awoyaya, Ibeju Lekki; and Amuwo and Oshodi.
4. On February 27, the traditional ruler of the Umuezeokaoha Community in Ebonyi State was shot and killed by political thugs. Thugs also disrupted the result collation process at the Plateau North Senatorial District's collation centre.
5. On February 28, there were reports of hoodlums attacking Igbo traders in Lagos, although the police denied the news. Additionally, a lady was shot in Agege LGA in celebration of the victory of a political party.

Electoral Staff Under Attack

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Electoral Management Body (EMB) responsible for organizing and overseeing elections, faced a lot of challenges during the elections due to widespread insecurity. For example, INEC offices and staff were targeted for

looting, arson attacks, shootings, abductions, and assassinations. The frequency of these incidents in the 12 months before the 2023 election is higher than in the period preceding the 2019 elections, indicating potential risks of violence following the 2023 elections.

The South East had the largest share of violence against INEC offices and staff, with Nigerian Police blaming attacks on the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its militant wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). INEC offices in other regions were also attacked amid security crises, such as jihadist insurgency in the North East and militia violence in the North West.

Criminal Gangs and Security Outfits

Apart from political parties and non-state armed groups, regional security outfits, and criminal gangs were also in action to influence the electoral process. The Amotekun in the South West and the Ebubeagu in the South East are notable regional security outfits established by State governors to address local security challenges. However, during the election, these outfits were misused for political purposes. In addition, local elites might hire criminal gangs and militias to carry out violence against political opponents. Cult groups and student confraternities, often based on university campuses, have been involved in criminal activities, including electoral violence.

Effects of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country with a long history of electoral violence starting with the **operation** in the then Western region of the First Republic from 1960 to 1966. This impacted negatively on its socioeconomic and national development. Amongst the identified impacts include disfranchisement of citizens, reduction in foreign investment, destruction of lives and properties, tarnished international image, promotion of electoral malpractices, displacement of people, disorganization of electoral processes, disruption of economic development, and interference with school administration.

Disfranchisement of Citizens

Electoral violence in Nigeria creates an atmosphere of fear among voters, discouraging them from participating in the electoral process. This results in a violation of the principle of "one man, one vote" and undermines political equality (Alao, 2021). The prevalence of violence orchestrated by politicians' thugs also hinders free and fair elections and manipulates election results. Consequently, the principle of majority rule and the protection of minority interests are denied to the people through violence (Musa, 2018). This disfranchisement extends to civil and political rights, leading to human suffering, especially among specific groups, such as women,

with both short-term and long-term consequences (Harry and Kalagbor, 2021). Hence this has caused low voter turnout in Nigeria's election since this political dispensation. In the 2023 General Elections, only 24,965,218 people voted about 28.71% of the total registered voters of 93,469,008 in Nigeria; only 24,025, 940 were valid while 939,278 were invalid. (INEC, 2023).

Reduction in Foreign Investment

The occurrence of electoral violence in Nigeria adversely impacts the country's foreign investment climate. Investors become hesitant to invest in the nation due to concerns about political instability and uncertainty (Guardian, 2019). The stock market suffers losses during periods of heightened political intrigues and violence. Foreign investors, who play a significant role in Nigeria's economy, may withdraw their investments, leading to a decrease in economic growth and development (Omodion, 2019).

Bad International Image

Electoral violence causes considerable damage to Nigeria's international image, leading to negative perceptions from the global community. Countries experiencing such violence are often viewed as uncivilized, unruly, and lacking respect for human life (ERN, 2007; CDD, 2007). Such negative perceptions can harm diplomatic relations, discourage foreign aid, and negatively impact foreign trade and investment.

Promotes Electoral Malpractices

Electoral violence in Nigeria fosters an environment conducive to electoral malpractices and rigging. Politicians, motivated by the desire for power and material gains, resort to violence to manipulate the electoral system (Alao, 2021). Thugs hired by politicians engage in voter intimidation, electoral officials' harassment, and the snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes. This hampers smooth succession into political offices and erodes public trust in democratic processes (Albin-Lackey, 2007; Ibrahim, 2015). Electoral violence establishes a detrimental atmosphere that encourages electoral malpractices, posing a significant threat to the essence of democracy. Through its disruption of free and fair elections, suppression of opposition, and perpetuation of a cycle of violence, electoral violence erodes citizens' confidence in the electoral process and undermines the strength of democratic institutions. Tackling this pressing concern necessitates

collaborative endeavours from all stakeholders, aimed at cultivating an electoral environment that promotes peaceful and credible democratic practices.

Displacement of People

Electoral violence in Nigeria has led to the displacement of people in various states, resulting in internally displaced persons (IDPs). Such violence can spill over into neighbouring regions, creating humanitarian crises, instability, and potential armed conflicts (Musa, 2018; Eldridge et al., 2012). The presence of IDPs has the potential to further strain social services and disrupt community cohesion, impeding socio-economic development. The consequences include disrupted livelihoods, strained resources, and prolonged displacement. Addressing this issue entails prevention strategies, conflict resolution, and assistance for those displaced.

Disorganization of Electoral Processes

Electoral violence disrupts the electoral process, particularly during party primaries and campaigns (Alao, 2021). Acts of violence during these crucial stages hinder fair competition and participation, and in some cases, candidates' campaign teams may be attacked and dispersed (Albin-Lackey, 2007). Consequently, electoral violence fosters a lack of trust in democratic processes and institutions, undermining the quality of democracy and perceptions of legitimacy (Ogbu, 2020). Electoral violence disrupts electoral processes, leading to chaos and disorganization. It intimidates voters, destroys election materials, and disrupts polling stations. This results in delayed results, diminished legitimacy, and voter disenfranchisement.

Disruption of Economic Activities

Economic development in Nigeria is hampered by electoral violence, leading to curfews and other disruptions of economic activities. The associated costs of elections and the destruction of communities and infrastructure during violence place a significant financial burden on the government and international electoral assistance (ACE Project, n.d.). According to (the Association of Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, n.d.), investor confidence decreases, resulting in a negative impact on the economy. Electoral violence disrupts economic activities, causing business closures, loss of livelihoods, and reduced investment. Damage to infrastructure and diminished investor confidence further hinder economic growth.

Disruption of School Administration

Electoral violence has direct consequences on educational institutions in Nigeria. Mostly because the majority of the polling areas and booths are in schools. Invariably academic calendars are always disrupted due to the closure of schools and imposition of curfews during electoral violence or its aftermath. Tertiary institutions, in particular, suffer more from disruptions in teaching, research, and community service programs (Ogunode and Audu, 2022). Furthermore, electoral violence can lead to the loss of lives among academic and non-academic staff and students, adversely affecting the educational sector.

Conclusion

The 2023 Nigerian General Elections was a watershed in the country's political history. For the first time, the election was a three-horse battle between three distinguished personalities. They are Senator Bola Tinubu of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) from the South West region, Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) from North East region and Peter Obi of The Labour Party (LP) from South East Region. At the end of the election, Bola Tinubu emerged as the President. However, the electoral process was marred by a spate of violence which brought to the fore the explosive issue of Nigeria's corporate existence and unity. This paper analyzed the causes, manifestations, and implications of electoral violence in Nigeria, highlighting its devastating effects on various aspects of the nation's socio-economic and political fabric. The study revealed that electoral violence in Nigeria is fueled by a combination of factors, including religious tensions, inadequate security measures, inflammatory political campaigns, high unemployment and poverty rates, ethnic distrust and sectional politics, political impunity, lack of internal democracy, and negative perceptions of the electoral system. The resource mobilization theory provided a framework to understand how money, human, informational, and political resources contribute to instigating and perpetuating electoral violence.

The manifestations of electoral violence in the 2023 elections were alarming, with over 200 violence spouting all over Nigeria causing over 100 fatalities all through the electoral circle. These attacks including attacks on INEC offices and staff delayed voting commencement, and incidents of violence targeting candidates and supporters. The impact of electoral violence in Nigeria is far-reaching leading to disfranchisement of citizens, reduced foreign investment, tarnished international image, promotion of electoral malpractices, displacement of people, disorganization

of electoral processes, disruption of economic development, and interference with school administration.

Recommendations

To mitigate electoral violence in Nigeria and strengthen democratic processes, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Improve Security Measures:** The Nigerian government must prioritize the enhancement of security measures during the electoral process. Adequate training, equipping, and remuneration of security personnel should be ensured to enable them to effectively prevent and respond to electoral violence.
2. **Enhance INEC Independence:** To boost public trust in the electoral process, the independence and integrity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be safeguarded. Measures to improve transparency, efficiency, and accountability in the conduct of elections are essential.
3. **Political Education and Awareness:** Civic education campaigns should be intensified to educate citizens about the importance of peaceful and democratic participation in the electoral process. Awareness programs can help dispel negative perceptions and discourage the use of violence as a means to achieve political ends.
4. **Prosecution of Electoral Offenders:** Political actors involved in instigating or perpetrating electoral violence must be held accountable through swift and impartial prosecution. This will serve as a deterrent and discourage the recurrence of violence in future elections.
5. **Address Socio-Economic Issues:** To tackle underlying causes of electoral violence, the government should prioritize policies that address unemployment, poverty, and socio-economic inequalities. Investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure can create opportunities and reduce vulnerability to manipulation by political elites.
6. **Media Responsibility:** Media outlets should uphold professional ethics and promote balanced and objective reporting during electoral periods. Sensational and inflammatory language should be avoided to prevent further polarization and incitement of violence.
7. **Inter-Agency Collaboration:** Effective inter-agency collaboration among security agencies, electoral bodies, and civil society organizations is vital to tackle electoral

violence comprehensively. Coordination efforts can ensure a united front against violence and promote peace during elections.

8. **Regional Collaboration:** Nigeria should collaborate with neighbouring countries and regional bodies like ECOWAS to share best practices, intelligence, and strategies to combat cross-border security threats and electoral violence.
9. **Disarmament and Demobilization:** To curb the use of armed groups and political thugs in electoral violence, the government should prioritize disarmament and demobilization efforts. Gun control measures can significantly reduce the scale of violence during elections.
10. **Gender Inclusivity:** Efforts should be made to increase the representation and participation of women in politics to foster a more inclusive and peaceful political environment. Women's involvement can contribute to conflict resolution and reduce violence.

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