



DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

There were high aspirations for an improved and more flourishing Nigeria once the country returned to civil government in 1999. These expectations stem from the belief that Nigeria's democracy will strengthen as a result of increased protections for citizens' lives and possessions, as well as greater freedom, equality, and liberty. Unfortunately, political and electoral violence in Nigeria have become obstacles to democratic sustainability, making this hope seem more like a phantom than a reality. Due to the country's previous exceptional degree of insecurity, most of which has culminated from political volatility during electioneering, this menace keeps getting worse and pose hazards to Nigerian democracy. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore how election violence has impacted Nigeria's progress and maintenance of a stable democracy. The study's thesis is grounded in frustration aggression theory, and it makes use of secondary data collected from thematically examined textbook, journal/article, newspaper/magazine, and internet sources. The study establishes that democracy in Nigeria is in jeopardy due to the pervasiveness, severity, and regularity of electoral violence and rigging. It is argued that the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria will be slowed until the causes of ongoing electoral violence are addressed.

Keywords: Electoral Violence, Insecurity, Democracy, Democratic Sustenance, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Nigeria celebrated 24 years of democracy on May 29th, 2023. The year 2023 also marks the 23rd years since her return to the fourth republic in 1999. This period of civilian rule has lasted longer than any of the three prior republics since 62 years after gaining independence, The First Republic was in power for six years, the Second Republic for four years and three months, and the Third Republic for only twelve days when the military delayed the presidential election scheduled for June 12th, 1993. Over the past 23 years, democracy has been put to the test, with mixed results. Elections in countries in transition or with fundamentally divided cultures, such as Nigeria, are

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frequently marred by hostility and violence and therefore fail to pass the legitimacy test. Nigeria has successfully held six national elections since returning to civilian rule in 1999: in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023.

Complex research into the relationship between democracy and electoral or political violence, and more specifically how electoral/political violence inhibits democratisation, calls for a critical evaluation. However, new research shows that democracies are equally as likely to experience violence as other types of administration (Igwe & Amadi, 2021). It is the belief of proponents of democracy that all organisations and individuals should be able to express their opinions and interests through a process of rational discussion, thus making violence unnecessary. However, it is clear that this is not always the situation" (Schwarzmantel 2010:1).

Malpractice, rigging, ballot box stuffing, vote buying, injuries, and deaths were commonplace in several of these elections (Shehu 2019). In order to win in the polls, it is necessary to cripple and disrupt the opposing party, as well as to vitiate the election by undermining the integrity of the results and threatening and intimidating voters (Albert, 2011). Pervasive violence is not unique to Nigeria's contemporary democratic dispensation. From the country's independence till today, violence and deaths at elections have been a consistent feature of Nigeria's history.

Electoral violence, including looting, rioting, and homicide, contributed to the downfall of the First and Second Republics and ultimately led to the intervention of the military (Ashindorbe, 2018). Even while free and fair elections should help keep the peace, they often instead spark violence. Every election in Nigeria tends to complicate national cohesiveness and threatens the very life of the state due to the zero-sum disposition of major actors and the weaponization of ethnic and religious divisions (Osaghae, 2020). This is why voting in elections is much more than just a formality, as is often assumed in free democracies. Strangely, residents have not been deterred from actively pursuing involvement in the democratic process despite the pervasiveness of election violence, the threat to life, and enormous malpractices. Voting remains an important symbol of their conviction in this system (Mattes 2019).

It is well established that electoral violence prevents a peaceful, secure, transparent, credible, free, and fair transition of power by reducing voter turnout and facilitating the imposition of candidates, policies, and programmes that in turn provoke violent reactions from the dissatisfied electorates and losers. Thus, violence is the primary threat to democracy, as Kean (2004) pointed out. However, as Segun (2013) points out, elections are crucial to the functioning of a nation because they allow the populace to select its leaders and, in doing so, provide a significant contribution to the recognition of the type of growth they would like to see. Elections in Nigeria have been marked by a lot of violence, despite the fact that they play a vital role in democracies and that peaceful, credible, transparent, and free and fair elections are necessary for a stable society and a sustained democracy.

This paper's overarching goal is to provide such a critical evaluation of the connections between democracy and electoral violence from the commencement of the fourth republic in 1999 to the present day in 2019. The purpose of this study is to analyse the threats of violence in Nigeria and how they have weakened the country's democratic foundations after the return of democracy there. The paper is broken up into five parts that each focus on one of these goals. The first part of the paper is dedicated to an introduction, the second to a discussion of the theoretical and conceptual

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foundations, and the third to a detailed analysis of the research strategy. The findings are reported in Section 4, while a summary, final analysis, and suggestions are presented in Section 5.

1. Conceptual Clarifications and Theoretical Framework

The Concept of Democracy

Despite substantial regions of accord among the researchers on the notion, an exact and generally accepted explanation for democracy is lacking. Although different academics have different takes on the notion, this can be due to regional and cultural differences. For example, Elaigwu, referenced by Linus (2015), claims that democracy is foreign to Africa and must be adapted to its specific circumstances in order to address the continent's unique challenges. It is thus undeniable that the concept had genuinely evolved from the Ancient Greek City of Athens in the 5th century, however scholars have evaluated the significance of the concept variously.

'Democracy' comes from the Greek terms 'Demos' (people) and 'Kratia' (rule), therefore its literal meaning is 'rule of the people' (Johari, 2013). At this point in time, involvement directly in the Gatherings of an Ancient Greek city is synonymous with democracy, with the exception of women. Later on, though, the system continued to advance, albeit with adjustments as the complexity of human society increased. Appadorai (2004) defines democracy as a form of government in which the people, either individually or through their representatives they elect on a regular basis, wield sovereignty. He went on to say that the people will on fundamental matters of social orientation and policy can only be expressed and deemed supreme in a democratic state, which requires specific institutional arrangements. Therefore, a state can be considered democratic in form if its citizens have the chance to participate in politics, enjoy political equality, and have the option of electing a different government. Similarly, Schumpeter, as cited in Johari (2013), defined democracy as "a political approach or a system of institutions for reaching at political, legislative, and administrative decisions by entrusting in a selected group the power to make decisions on every issue as an outcome of their effective quest of the the votes of the people." Rule of law, periodic or regular free, fair, and credible elections, separation of powers, constitutional principles, autonomy of the judiciary, liberty for the press, essential human rights, equal representation for adults, political parties, and host of others are just some of the basic features of democracy that can be gleaned from the literature.

Election

Voting in elections is the most public and representation of political engagement, therefore it stands to reason that a well-functioning democracy requires regular elections that are free, open trustworthy, and fair. It is the will of the people, as expressed in elections that are free, open credible, fair, and transparency, that gives the government its legitimacy. Abah and Nwokwu (2015) argue that elections are a defining element of representative democracies because they allow citizens of voting age to exercise their right to vote for their leaders. Democracy relies heavily on periodic elections in which citizens cast ballots for candidates they support and the winners take office and make political choices which impact their economic, political, and social lives. Nwolise (2007) defines election as "the procedure by which eligible members of an organisation or group choose its officers or representation." According to Dye (2001), elections are the primary means through which political leadership in a democratic society is selected and placed in office. To attach a person to an office with full involvement of the people who will be subject to that person's power is the purpose of an election. This democratic principle, which

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distinguishes election from being appointed, is based on the social aspect of elections, which is what gives rise to the idea of ruling a country with the agreement of the people. Thus, elections are the vehicle through which the vast majority of residents can participate directly in the political process, and citizens do participate in this way and elect their representatives to public posts. (Dye, 2005). Heywood (2000) defines election as a method for selecting candidates for public office based on the votes of certain groups of citizens known as electorates.

Violence.

Violence

It's possible that people will resort to violence in order to get what they want. To gain power, maintain power, or both, several factions have resorted to violence. The powerful have resorted to violence to maintain order, the powerless to seek justice, and the vulnerable to prevent relocation. According to Nwolise (2007), aggression is the use of force, either physical or verbal, against another person or their property. To achieve one's own or another's goals, Hook (1934) defines violence as the unauthorised use of physical coercion. According to Wolff (1969), violence is "the use of force to impose one's will or goals on another person without their consent." But when violence becomes chronic and out of control, it can impede political order and economic development.

Violence During Elections

Electoral Violence

Because academics employ varying definitions, it is impossible to agree on a single definition of electoral violence. To hurt or threaten to harm any person or property associated with the electoral process or the election itself during the election period constitutes electoral violence (Adesanya, 2002). Before, during, and after an election, people involved in the process, those who support them and sympathisers, and even security agents and election management body staff may turn to various forms of assault against one another. This is what is meant by "electoral violence," which is defined by the work of Balogun (2003). Political thugs, stolen ballot boxes, gunfire, arson, mass killing of voters, kidnapping of party officials, murderous acts of powerful politicians and those who support them, vote rigging, and other irregularities have all been linked to deaths on both sides of the political spectrum (Onimisi & Tinuola, 2019). Before, during, and after an election, any organised act or threat—physical, psychological, or structural—intended to intimidate, harm, or blackmail a political stakeholder in order to determine, delay, or otherwise influence the electoral process is considered electoral violence (Albert, 2007). Assaulting rivals of their paymasters, shooting at them, kidnapping them, stealing their ballot boxes, killing them, setting them on fire, rioting, beating up election administrators and the police, setting them on fire, etc. are all examples of violence during elections.

Theoretical Framework

The frustration-aggression hypothesis proposed by Sigmund Freud (1939) and popularised by Hollard, Doob, Miller, et al. (1939) serves as the theoretical foundation for this investigation. According to this theory, anger is an inevitable consequence of feeling powerless. Some of the key problems with electoral violence in the context of contemporary democratic government in Nigeria are reflected in this theory, along with a contextual evaluation and links between these problems. According to the frustration-aggression theory, an individual is more likely to act aggressively when there is a discrepancy between his wants and needs. Thus, anger stems from

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feeling powerless, as stated by Amenta (2005). When a person's wants aren't met, or when a fundamental goal is unfulfilled because of obstacles, he or she may become hostile and act out violently against those they believe to be in authority over them.

This discontent has been reflected in the Nigerian situation ever since the fourth republic began in 1999, when promises were made and then never fulfilled by the ruling elites. In 1993, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida annulled the results of a presidential election that was widely regarded as the freest and fairest in Nigeria's political history, but which was widely believed to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola. Because election violence in Nigeria can be linked to unfulfilled promises in Nigerian politics, this theory has application and could be used to explain this phenomenon.

3. Methodology

Documentary and observational methods were used to compile the data for this investigation. Using these methods, researchers easily compiled data and information from already published sources to better understand the dynamics of elections in Nigeria. The Federal Government of Nigeria, non-governmental groups, and political parties all released official publications. Therefore, we relied heavily on pieces from journals and the Nigerian media. The use of these methods is defended on the grounds that they are well suited for contextual analysis and are helpful when trying to clarify, analyse, and extract pertinent information from data.

A qualitative descriptive method based on inference was used to assess the data collected for this study. It's a technique for gaining insight into a message through methodical, dispassionate examination (Stone, 1966). Documents are analysed in this way to draw conclusions or gather evidence in accordance with the rules of scientific process. Justification for using content analysis in political research comes from the fact that it enables the identification and quantification of textual structure, ideas, and concepts (White 1983). Content analysis can also be used to describe the setting in which a message was delivered, the factors that led up to it, and the effect it had on the intended audience.

4. Findings

Causes of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Questions arise about the causes of electoral violence in Nigeria, and a critical examination of the literature suggests a number of them, including: the mass poverty of the people caused by the socio-economic crisis of underdevelopment; electoral abuses; the misuse of political power; lust; manipulating of elections; corruption; the politics of exclusion; poor governance; the fear of losing power; and anxiety about losing power.

Second, election rigging contributes to voter intimidation in Nigeria because, as history has shown, it is a major factor that undermines the credibility and legitimacy of elections and has had a devastating impact on the country's efforts to consolidate its democracy.

Third, members of the political elite in Nigeria are accountable for inciting the sequence of electoral violence, as do those who back them and subvert the election process by committing the assault and fail to be brought to justice. (Otoghile, 2009).

Electoral violence undermines democratic stability, which is why the fourth factor is political intolerance and the mindset that elections are a matter of life and death. Even in elections that are widely regarded as free, fair, credible, and transparent, election losers in Nigeria almost never accept loss.

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In addition to the first four causes, the absence of a real and digitally produced voters registry is a major contributor to electoral violence.

Last but not least, political struggle for the control of the state and its political authority has become a violent battle due to the fact that the state is the key to prosperity. This explains the prevalence of violence during elections, the mechanism by which political power is acquired in Nigeria's democratic system of government (Abbass, 2008, cited in Segun, 2013).

The Impact of Election Violence on Nigeria's Progress Towards Full Democracy

Democratic consolidation in Nigeria has been severely harmed by electoral violence, which, if left unchecked, might lead to the collapse of the country's democratic system.

Two, minorities who fear for their safety and possessions may choose to stay out from the electoral process, resulting in leaders being elected by the majority (Amaka, 2005).

Third, some political thugs and miscreants were able to gain access to sensitive electoral positions, allowing incompetent people to take them. This means that the people who were elected into office will not be able to deliver the benefits of democracy to the people who put them there.

Fourth, political violence has kept some of the country's brightest minds from the halls of power, where they could do the most good for the country's political and economic administration.

Fifth, electoral violence undermines democratic consolidation by undermining the central value of elections as a popular base for government.

Lastly, a government that rises to power by electoral violence and stays in office against the will of the majority of its inhabitants loses the trustworthiness and ethical standards that a popular mandate provides (Ezeani, 2005).

Effects of Electoral Violence on Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Election violence, whether physical, emotional, psychological, or otherwise, has always accompanied Nigerian elections since independence, with the express purpose of intimidating and harassing electorates into changing their mind before, during, and after voting. This indicates that electoral violence occurs at all phases of voting, from voter registration to counting votes. According to Alanamu (2005), violence in Nigerian politics can be traced back to the colonial era, as elections in the country resembled a struggle over "who get what, when, and how" beginning in the 1950s.

Violence, intimidation, fraud, and complaints were commonplace in the first three elections held after independence (1962 western election, 1964 federal election, and 1965 western election) that were organised by the government led by Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and President Nnamdi Azikwe in the 1960s (HRW, 2007).

Election fraud in the 1964 federal election and the 1965 western election sparked a crisis that led to Nigeria's first military coup on 15 January 1966. This event is remembered as the "most bloody coup" in the country's political history, with many high-profile figures, including former Prime Minister Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Northern Premier Sir Ahmadu Bello, and Western Premier Chief S.L. Akintola among those who lost their lives. From 1966 until 1979, Nigeria was ruled by the military. At that point, power was transferred to a democratically elected government led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari. However, the Shagari administration, like its first republic predecessor, followed a familiar pattern and massively rigged the 1983 general elections using very violent means with the support of the then Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) and security agents. After numerous failed attempts at democratisation, the military stayed in control

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until May 29, 1999 (Amadi & Anokwuru, 2017). Since then, there has been a succession of military governments.

There have been general elections in Nigeria's fourth republic in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019. Before, during, and after these elections, there has been a string of violent incidents. Due in significant part to the military's oversight, the general elections in 1999 that ultimately brought Chief Olusegun Obasanjo to office on May 29th, 1999 were relatively peaceful. In the 2003 general election, overseen by the Obasanjo administration, electoral violence once again reappeared, taking the form of political assassinations and election tampering with the INEC's complicity. The country had hoped for a better general election in 2007, but as election time approached, President Olusegun Obasanjo told Nigerians, other Africans, and the World in general that the elections will be a 'do or die' affair. This statement from the number one citizen of Nigeria set the stage for the electoral violence that made the 2007 election the worst in Nigeria's electoral history, and the nature of the violence had changed. From the 2003 election onward, especially in 2007, godfathers, governors, local government chairmen, and candidates for legislative houses recruited followers, thugs, and assassins equipped with sophisticated weapons, and unleashed them on their opponents and on society at large (Hoelscher, 2015; Egbokare, 2007). Poor organisation, a lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural irregularities, significant evidence of fraud especially during the result collation process, voter disenfranchisement at various stages of the process, a lack of equal conditions for candidates, and a variety of incidents of violence meant that the 2007 elections did not live up to the hopes and expectations of Nigerian citizens. On the day of his inauguration as president, Yar'Adua admitted openly and publicly that the elections that put him in office were gravely flawed. European Union Report (2011) in Alfa & Otaida (2012). Animashaun (2008) claimed that the 2007 general election was plagued by enormous anomalies, including inflated voting counts, the proclamation of results in areas where elections were never held or were indecisive, voter intimidation, and the manipulation of security services.

After President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was declared the winner of the 2011 presidential election, there were violent demonstrations in some Northern states of Nigeria. People who were thought to support the opposition Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) erupted into a violent uprising that unleashed terror, destroying people's properties worth millions of naira and killing a number of members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Over eight hundred people were victims of electoral violence emanating from the 2011 presidential elections alone in the North, with over sixty-five people displaced, as reported by Human Right Watch (2011) in Segun (2013). These numbers include at least one hundred people killed in federal and state elections in 2003, three hundred killed in violence associated with the 2007 elections, and one hundred and sixty-five displaced. Slightly fewer people were displaced by the violence in twelve states, according to data given by the Nigerian Red Cross Society (Omenazu & Paschal, 2011).

In an effort to end electoral malpractices and electoral violence in the 2015 general elections, additional procedures were proposed. Under the direction of Prof. Attahiru Jega, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) implemented the usage of Card Readers and the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) in the 2015 general election. Rivers State had the most violent incidents (16), followed by Akwa Ibom (5), Ondo (8), Ebonyi (6), Cross Rivers (6), Bayelsa (4), Kaduna (3), Lagos (3), Ekiti (2), Enugu (2), Jigawa (2), Ogun (1), Kane (0), Katsina (0), Imo (0),

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Kogi (0), Abia (0), and Plateau (0). About thirty persons were killed on election day, April 11th, 2015, due to inter-party conflicts and attacks on election sites, according to the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM, 2015).

Political thugs and hoodlums in Oriade Local Government Area, Osun State, set fire to the Independent National Electoral Commission's office, ballot papers, and vote boxes during the 2019 general elections in the South-West geo-political zone (Adeniyi, 2019). A serving member of the House of Representatives from Lagelu/Akinyele of Oyo State was murdered by political thugs on the same day as the Gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections (Oladele et al, 2019). Two people were killed and several others were critically injured during the House of Assembly elections in the Oba Akoko region of the Akoko South West Local Government region of Ondo State, and three vehicles were also vandalised (Sowole, 2019).

One suspected ballot snatcher was shot dead in a polling unit in Ikot Udo Ossiom village, Ukanafun Council of Akwa Ibom State (Ajayi, 2019) and one ad hoc staff member of INEC was killed by political thugs in Rivers States (Ajayi, 2019). These deaths occurred in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. In addition, five individuals were killed in a conflict between supporters of major political parties in Delta State a few days before the general elections (Oladele et al, 2019).

Five individuals were killed by political thugs in Taraba State the day after the Presidential and National Assembly elections in Nigeria's North Eastern geo-political zone (Alhassan, 2019). During a political event in Kumin Gwari, Kaduna State a few days before the Governorship and State House of Assembly election, there was an inter-clash between two key political parties (Busari, 2019). Several persons were hurt. In the Gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections in Katsina State, three ad hoc staff members of the electoral commission went missing, voting was disrupted in the Danmusa Local Government Area of the State due to the activities of political thugs, and a Police Corpora was killed (Oyelude, 2019).

A sitting senator and the chairman of the Senate Committee on Information for the Nassarawa South Senatorial Zone in Nigeria's North Central geopolitical zone was attacked by political thugs and hoodlums in Lafia the day after the election, but he managed to escape unharmed. On the day of the presidential and national assembly elections in Kogi State, three persons were killed, including an inspector in the police force (Sha'ban, 2019).

Two people were killed and forty-seven others were arrested in the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria on March 9th, 2019 during the State House of Assembly election, when political thugs tried to steal and hijack electoral results from the Obosi Area. During the governorship and house of assembly elections in Enugu State, a stray bullet killed an electoral observer in the Umuida Community (Oladele, et al 2019). One hundred and five suspected political thugs were arrested in Imo State for electoral offences including impersonating police officers, harassing INEC officials, disrupting elections, and stealing ballot boxes during the governorship and house of assembly elections (Adepegba, 2019).

The Nexus between Electoral Violence and Democratic Consolidation

Academics are increasingly debating whether or not electoral violence threatens democracies' long-term viability. Democracy is seen as a solution to electoral violence by many. Since all elections held in Nigeria since the country's independence in 1960 have been marked by violence, thuggery, hooliganism, intimidation of voters, arson, etc., Keane (2010) in Segun (2013) argued

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that democracy in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general is a major factor of electoral violence. The intense competition for political power in countries like Nigeria, which is currently undergoing a period of democratisation, has made violence synonymous with the country's democratic process. This is because, as time has progressed, Nigerian politicians have become more desperate in taking and retaining power at all costs and by any means necessary, and thus more intolerant of opposition, criticism, and attempts to replace them. "Politicians fight and sometimes shed blood to achieve and attain political power because for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for too long being the gate way to economic kingdom" (Obasanjo, 2002, cited in Ikyase & Egberi, 2015). Political battle for control of the state and its political power is a brutal warfare in Nigeria, as the state holds the key to riches, as mentioned by Abbass (2008) in Ikyase and Egberi, (2015). Relatedly, Omoweh and Okanya (2005) in Ikyase and Egberi (2015) support this view by describing the election season in Nigeria as warfare. The foregoing change explains the prevalence of violence in Nigeria's elections, the way by which political power is acquired.

5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

The reasons for election violence in Nigeria, from before independence to the present day, are not hard to fathom in light of the facts on the ground and the recorded incidents. Democracy in Nigeria is in jeopardy due to the pervasiveness, severity, and regularity of electoral violence and rigging. The study's authors argue that the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria will be slowed until the causes of ongoing electoral violence are addressed.

The study concludes that good governance structures, in which the state is decided contrary to all odds to safeguard and preserve the best interests and well-being of its citizens in all consequences, must be institutionalised to ensure the consolidation of democracy and that conscious and strategic efforts must be made to avoid violence.

Finally, if those contesting for one position or another remember that every competition requires two or more parties which must be won by one person, then electoral violence can be reduced if the laws guiding election are complied with.

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