

IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON CITIZENS PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS: AN OPINION SURVEY OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The conduct of elections poses serious challenge to many developing democracies in Africa including Nigeria, in terms of attaining legitimacy through free, fair, credible and violence free elections. This scenario portends grave danger to Nigeria's democratic project as violence has become synonymous with democratic elections even though, in modern times, genuine democracy is associated with peaceful elections. Against this backdrop, this paper surveys opinion of Nigerians on the impact of electoral violence on voter participatory behaviour in the electoral process. The multi-stage sampling technique was used to select six thousand, two (6,000) respondents across the six geopolitical zones of the country. The data were analyzed with the aid of the Chi-Square and Yule's Q to test and determine the degree of association inherent in the stated hypotheses. The study discovered that voter participation in the electoral process is hampered by widespread violence and feeling of insecurity resulting in abstention and apathy. Consequently, some policy implications become imperative. For example, the government is advised to set in motion mechanism to forestall outbreaks of violence and ensure prompt prosecution of electoral offenders; The INEC should conduct transparent and credible elections; the political parties should conduct democratic campaigns, primaries and general elections; while the electorates are advised to choose candidates based on competence, and resist the temptation to sell votes. Succinctly, the realization of fairness, credibility, violence free elections, and effective voters' participation in the pursuit for democratic consolidation entails the collaboration of all stakeholders in the Nigerian democratic project.

Keywords: Elections, voter participation, Nigeria, violence.

Introduction

In the past two decades, there has been an increasing academic attention attached to political participation in the established and developing democracies. A great deal of this scholarly awareness seems to be vindicated by the concern regarding declining levels of civic engagement, low levels of electoral participation, waning public confidence in the institutions of representative democracy, doubt, and distrust of politicians and political parties. It has been observed that post-industrial societies have become progressively more detached from the conventional channels of political participation (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999, Dalton 1998, 2006; Norris 1999, 2010). In their contributions to this discourse, Pharr and Putnam (2000: 18) note that, 'it is an irony that just at the moment when liberal democracy has defeated all its

enemies on the battlefields of ideology and politics, many people in the established democracies believe that their own political institutions are not performing well.' Voter participatory behaviour (VPB), a subset of political behaviour, has thus emerged as a major challenge in developed and evolving democracies, established and capricious societies, large and prospering economies, as well as small and weak ones.

Nigeria, since 1999, began another face of the democratization process, attempting to entrench and consolidate the basic precepts of democracy. However, after fourteen (14) years of practice, democracy is still regarded as nascent in Nigeria; we are still at the beginning stages of learning. The foundation for virile, democratic and ideological based political parties are yet to be laid; genuine political participation derived from politically educated and enlightened public and objectivity driven civil society groups are still to be realized. Our political elites are still in the process of transition from autocratic realm or influence of leadership to the reality of democratic or people oriented form of leadership where governance or government actions are streamlined towards the interest of the people. However, I would like to admit that our nascent democratic experience has succeeded to the extent that the country has experienced fourteen (14) years of uninterrupted civil rule within which the political elites have had numerous experiences to learn from. Among these numerous experience, is the ugly incidences of electoral violence and political and religious bigotry. Since 1999, every elections held has had its own fair share of violence; the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections were all marked with one type of violence or another, either before, during or after. As noted by Ake (2001), and Adekanye (1989), the conduct of elections in Nigeria has always been characterized by pessimism, or uncertainty and fears for the safety of lives and property. Conflicting situations have historically featured in all elections conducted in Nigeria since 1964; hence, issues surrounding the electoral process potentially relate to violence and violations of the rights of individuals. Rather than serve as a means and a process of exercising legitimate political rights, elections in Nigeria since independence, have turned into a charade causing serious political turmoil and threatening the survival of not only democracy, but also Nigeria's corporate existence. Nigeria's democracy has witnessed unprecedented political disorders and uncontrolled violence, evidenced in the wanton destruction of lives and property; election period in Nigeria is usually full of apprehension and fear. Human Rights Watch reported that widespread protests in the 2011 Presidential election left over 800 people dead and more than 65,000 persons internally displaced in the Northern States of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara (*HRW, 2011*).

Though, democratic processes the world over do witness one form of electoral violence or another, the established democracies have put up mechanism that have reduced violence in the electoral process to a minimal level. In Africa, especially Nigeria, the political elites and governments (ruling/opposition) are busy scheming either to retain power, or to wrest it from the incumbent. The government and other relevant stakeholders have not taken a determined stance to confront head-

on the problems of electoral violence with a view not only to prevent future occurrences but also to punish offenders and therefore, deter would be perpetrators of violence. Hence, electoral violence has become a norm rather than otherwise, since perpetrators are not brought to book but the victims are made to suffer. Electoral violence is a crime and a violation of fairness, rights of the individual and threat to life which must not be tolerated in the quest for democratic consolidation. The conducts of elections in Nigeria have not provided opportunity for politics of rationality, which promotes productive negotiations and compromise. All intent designed to rebuild the state has failed because politics has become a game of violence, fierce confrontation, bitter competition and repression. This type of environment would obviously impact negatively on voter participatory behaviour in the political process. The objective of this study therefore, is to examine the position and extent of citizen's involvement in the electoral process, to investigate the degree to which violence brings about low participation or otherwise during elections in Nigeria, and to suggest apposite policy advice towards mitigating election related violent occurrences in Nigeria and ensure legitimacy of elections through popular participation.

Three hypotheses were proposed and tested for this study. These were:

- 1) There is no relationship between respondents' marital status and their opinion about the effects of electoral violence.
- 2) There is no relationship between perceived victims of electoral violence and their opinion about voter turnout in elections.
- 3) There is no relationship between voter participation and provision of adequate security by government.

Conceptual/Theoretical Analysis

Political science research on citizens' engagement in politics has conventionally focused on electoral participation (Braddy 1999, Van Deth 2001). Political participation refers to those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978, Verba and Nie 1972, Easton 1953). Political participation has also been viewed as actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics or as every voluntary activity by individual citizens intended to influence directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political arrangement (Milbrath and Goel 1979, Kaase and Marsh 1979). Political participation does not take place only at election time; for the individual or group, the most important political activities may be those in the between-elections period, when citizens try to influence government decisions in relation to specific problems that concern them (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978). This way of thinking about political participation at least implicitly opened up for analyses of activities that included not only voting behavior, but also e.g. demonstrations, strikes, boycotts and other forms of protest behavior (Barnes and Kaase et al 1979, Kaase and Marsh 1979, Verba and Nie 1972, Montero, Westholm and Van Deth 2007). Consequently, actions directed against all political, societal, media or economic

actors (or elites) could be grouped as political participation (Teorell, et al 2007, Norris 2002).

Globally, and especially in the African continent, violence has become a phenomena occurrence associated with the Electoral Process in democratic practices. Nigeria however has had its own fair share of incidence of Electoral related violence since Independence in 1960. From one election to the other, power hungry politicians have devised and instigated violence related activities in the electoral process to acquire political power at whatever cost possible. These phenomena events have hampered Nigeria's quest towards the achievement of a credible electoral process and democratic development.

Violence has been defined as the illegitimate or unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will or desires of others (Kolawole 1988, Høglund 2006, Keane 1996). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as the deliberate use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either leads to or has a high probability of leading to injury, death psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation (WHO 2002). Violence can be categorized into three-fold: physical, structural and psychological violence. Physical violence has to do with somatic injury inflicted on human beings such as the Killing of an individual. Structural violence is related to social injustice while psychological violence is concerned with injury or harm done to the human psyche which includes brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds and threats (Jinadu 1980, Galtung 1985 and 1991, Schröder and Schmidt 2001).

Fischer (2002) and Sisk (2009) describe electoral violence as acts of threat, coercion, intimidation, blackmail, physical harm including assassinations and killing directed against electoral actors, events and materials. Høglund (2009) distinguishes election-related violence from other forms of political violence because it is carried out during the election period with the objective to influence the process and its outcomes. Electoral violence represents all forms of organized acts or threats physical, psychological, and structural, aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process (Nwolise 2007). The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES (2005) also describes electoral violence as: any act or threat of physical or psychological harm to a person or damage to property, intended for anyone directly involved in an electoral process (voter, candidate, party officer, election worker, election monitor, journalist, etc.), which may disrupt or attempt to disrupt any aspect of the electoral process (campaign, registration, voting, counting, etc.). From the foregoing, election violence can therefore be seen as any act, directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly directed at persons' involved in the electoral process, with the aim of undermining the process. The objective of the perpetrators of electoral violence is to unduly influence the electoral process and its outcome to gain advantage over other rivals or opponents.

The theoretical explanation of electoral violence has two perspectives- the Structural-Functionalist and the Frustration-Aggression. As a framework for building

theories, Structural functionalism envisions society as a multifaceted system whose parts work collectively to promote cohesion and stability. The approach considers both social structure and social functions. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the functions of its constituent elements; that is, norms, customs, tradition and institutions. A common analogy popularized by Herbert Spencer presents these parts of society as organs that work towards the proper functioning of the body as a whole (Urry 2000) To this end societies are envision as coherent, bounded and basically relational constructs that function like organisms, with the various social institutions working collectively in an overall social balance.

The theory of institutional functionalism seems a plausible explanation for electoral violence in Nigeria. Biegon (2009) averred that institutional-functionalism explains fragility or instability by focusing on the interface between institutionalization and political participation. In which case, societies (like Nigeria) with a low or weak process of political institutions and high level of political participation are more likely to experience or witness a high level of political disorders. Biegon (2009) further states that, institutionalism-functionalism draws a direct relationship between fragile or weak states and the phenomenon of violence, violence is therefore likely to occur where the state fails to meet popular demands, leaving the mass of the people in grinding poverty. This theory emphasizes structuralism as linking social stratification and the configuration of power relations among social forces within and without the ambit of the state in explaining violence. The structural explanation of electoral violence suggest that the society and politics are organised in a manner that generates violence, in other words, the state is organised in such a way that significant elements of the population are excluded from meaningful participation in and benefiting from the state's economic and political life; such segments are bound at some point, to reverse the effects of the exclusion using violent means (Nathan 2000).

Frustration-Aggression theory is premised on the view that aggression is always the result of frustration. The theory developed by Dollard *et al* (1939) posits that frustration results in aggression and aggression is the consequence of inhibition or frustration of someone's effort, aim or ambition to achieve a certain goal. When the source of the aggression cannot be confronted, the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target. An alternative of this theory is the idea of relative deprivation, wherein an inconsistency exists between what is sought and what is actually attainable. The further the discrepancy, the more likely their anger and resort to violence. According to Sisk (2008):

When parties are quite certain of loss or exclusion in an election context, especially when they expect to be permanent minorities (to lose not just once, but again and again), the certainty of outcomes is also a strong causal driver of violence. When a strongly insecure party or faction expects to be systematically excluded from political power, they may well turn to violence to either prevent their exclusion or to prevent the election process (p.10).

The frustration aggression model is however criticized for laying too much emphasis on internal or individual mechanism. According to Lupsha (1969), political violence is a complex relative deprivations or reducible to rising expectations, relative deprivation or frustration aggression as the users of psychological explanation would lead us to believe. He says that, frustration can arise in that society without violence and credible elections resulting, and violence can occur in the society without requiring a frustrating precondition. This model discourages the systematic investigation of fundamental questions about the social context that shapes the situation of individual. The criticism notwithstanding, the model is useful since it seeks to explain the rationale behind violent related elections. Its benefits stem from the fact that every violent activity result from frustration or aggression. When people are pushed to the limit, they definitely would react in a violent manner to repel the aggression.

Deriving from the above analysis therefore, it can be contended that because of the weak structures of political institutions in Nigeria, the political elites explore these weaknesses to pervert the electoral process. The incapacity of perceived victims to change the status quo could ultimately lead to frustration and conflict which could lead to outbreak of violence as a last resort by the aggrieved party. The combination of the Structural Functionalist and Frustration-Aggression theoretical perspectives paints a vivid picture of the structure of political engagement and a logical rationalization for incidences of electoral violence in Nigeria.

Election, Participation and Violence

The relevance of an election in democratic settings cannot be overemphasized. Election makes a fundamental contribution to democratic governance given the inevitable phenomenon that democratic government must be conducted through representatives. A periodic election helps to solve the problem of succession in leadership and thus contributes to the continuation of democracy. Election therefore enables voters to select leaders and to hold them accountable for their performance in office. Participation in an election reinforces in the voter, a feeling of self-esteem, respect and a sense of belonging. Indeed with voting rights in an election, deliberate refusal to vote may at times also be an expression of dissatisfaction with the political or electoral process. Mackenzie (1967) identified four conditions for the conduct of a free and fair election- an independent judiciary to interpret the electoral laws; an honest, competent nonpartisan electoral body to manage the elections; a developed system of political parties; and a general acceptance by the political community of the rules of the game.

The electoral system is the institutionalized provision in which an election is conducted and the purpose of the election fulfilled the legal and practical realities of voter registration and election administration (Roberts 1971). The electoral system of any country plays an essential role in shaping and sustaining the political behavior of its citizens (Okolo 2002). The electoral process can be grouped into three main phases: Pre-election phase which includes, activities such as delimitation, voter registration, registration of political parties, nomination process, campaign process,

media, civic and voter education; Election phase such as, Election Day activities such as polling stations, secrecy of ballot, ballot papers, ballot boxes, election materials, counting, election monitoring and observation; and Post-election phase which include, announcement of results, post election review and post election disputes.

The conduct of an election determines to a large extent the level of political culture, political participation and good governance in the country. However, this depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of the electoral system practice. While the regularity and frequency of elections has generated a sense of demo-optimism, (Lindberg 2008) there has recently emerged a worrying trend of election related violent conflict that threatens democracy, peace, stability and sustainable human development. In recent times, scholars the world over have initiated studies to determine the nexus between violence and democratic engagement by appraising the influence of violence on individual attitudes. Bergman (2006) averred that, the rise of violent activities represents a formidable threat to the stability of democratic institutions around the world. Citizens exposed to violent activities tend to show signs of dissatisfaction with their country's democratic framework thereby displaying low level support for political institutions (Fernandez and Kuenzi 2010). Previous research has shown that citizens residing in violence affected areas are less likely to vote on Election Day. In his analysis of the 2007 general elections held in Nigeria, Bratton (2008) posited that violence has a negative effect on electoral participation, and that the experience of the menace of violence portends the most powerful effect on turnout. Adopting a probabilistic model, Bratton discovers that 'for an average Nigerian, with other variables held at their mean, a threat of violence reduces the odds of intending to vote by 52%' (Bratton 2008: 626). Collier and Vicente (2008) corroborate this view in his study of electoral participation in Nigeria. Based on a nationwide field experiment, they claim that voter intimidation is effective in reducing voter turnout. In his study of the effect of political violence in Colombia, García (2009) discover that voter turnout tends to be lower in violent area and that Low level of trust in political institutions and low level satisfaction with the operation of democracy may lead to low level of electoral participation. A number of scholars and political analyst argue that participation within conventional institutional channels may reduce when citizens become dissatisfied with political institutions and with democratic performance (Norris 2002b).

Studies from Bolivia (Smith 2009), Costa Rica (Seligson 2002) and Germany (Finkel 1987) have established that citizens with higher levels of support for the political system are more likely to vote and to participate in campaign activities. Also, Grönlund and Setälä (2007) explain that regime legitimacy is positively correlated with electoral participation in twenty two (22) European countries examined in the European Social Survey (from 2002 to 2003) and conclude that there is an apparent and linear association between trust in parliament and turnout as well as satisfaction with democracy and turnout. Cox (2003) arrives at an analogous conclusion in her study of the determinants of voter turnout in European Parliamentary elections.

The line of argument as regards the above topic is that violence or threat to violence has a negative effect on political participation since citizens exposed to

violent incidence display lack of confidence in the electoral system places less premium on the functioning of democracy in Nigeria. High rate of violence increases the level of perceived insecurity during the electoral process circle. Recurring incidence of violence intimidate the electorates, who may decide to abstain from partaking in the electoral process, especially, voting on Election Day. In violent prone communities, voters are likely to abandon polling centers where the anticipation of a violent attack is high. According to Cruz (2000), political and social engagement reduces as individuals retreat to their private spheres. The study conducted by García (2009) on political violence and electoral behavior in Colombia, reveal that the modification of campaign strategies by political parties in violent prone areas have two main consequences. The first is that it reduces political contest, thus giving advantage to the most formidable party in the area while the second is that it brings about a decrease in political mobilization as politicians and party militants choose to keep a low profile so as to preserve their wellbeing. An extensive body of literature, including, Caldeira and Patterson (1982), Cox and Munger (1989), and Norris (2002a, 2002b) demonstrates that competition and mobilization are closely linked with electoral participation. Therefore, it can be contended that there is the probability that violence result in low voter turnout since political parties may be forced to adopt campaign strategies that weaken competition and mobilization.

Causes of Electoral Violence

Election related violence denotes a particular form or sub-type of political violence which takes place within the milieu of democratic consolidation. This societal malady though prevalent in developing democracies, occurs within systems that are termed consolidated. Khadiagala (2009) and Baregu (2009) identified three main causal factors related to election violence which are: social and economic divisions, resulting from poor governance; regimes inimical to political change; and weak institutions and institutional rules guiding the electoral process. Observers have opined that electoral conflict and violence may take place at any of the three stages of the electoral cycle – preventing, voting and post-election. The character, intensity and resultant outcome of election related violence vary from time to time. The factors that drive such violence are multifaceted, ranging from inconsistent or unsuccessful elections to structural concerns such as poor governance and exclusionary political practices, amongst others. In many cases elections have either precipitated political differences of opinion or have heightened suppressed tension to an outburst of conflict (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Linz and Stephan 1996, Rakner, Menocal and Fritz 2007). Experience shows that violence tends to erupt over allegations of fraud or discontent with results after the conclusion of elections.

Identified challenges to the conduct of peaceful and fair democratic elections include: ***Absence of a tolerant political culture*** - The conduct of democratic and peaceful elections requires a tolerant political culture. In most illiberal democracies, political bigotry and domination are rife especially, when such government exhibits dictatorial posture. In such milieu, the deliberate intention and consequences of acts of violence

are premeditated in a number of ways either to vitiate the elections on the whole, or to manipulate voting behaviour through coercion.

Low level of internal party democracy - The incapacity of several political parties to function in a democratic manner introduces tension and hostility in the electoral process. In Nigeria, political elites termed godfathers control the parties at the local and national levels. They engage in the selection of delegates who elect party leaders and candidates at primaries. Through their control of these delegates, the godfathers decide who gets the party's nomination and leadership positions. The activities of political godfathers create so much discontent in the political process since they discount the formal procedures for party elections and nomination of candidates.

Protection of incumbency - Elections character wise portend uncertainty and competitive processes. In Africa and specifically Nigeria, elections are frequently linked with tension and the upsurge of social aggression over who controls the state apparatus. Violence arises in circumstances where there exists a strong likelihood of changing existing power configurations with the incumbents unwilling to concede power. This can be attributed to the dominance of one party and an intolerant political culture relating to the opposition.

The nature of the electoral and the party system - These are key factors that can exacerbate or moderate conflict in the electoral process as they have direct bearing on character and ideology. The level to which these systems are viewed as fair and inclusive, and democratic may determine the likelihood of eruption of violent conflict.

The management and administration of elections - The roles of election management bodies (EMBs) are vital during the electoral cycle. If the EMB is suspected of partiality, the credibility of the electoral process is reduced which may result in conflict when results are announced.

Lack of public confidence in the electoral machinery and government institutions - these may lead to lack of confidence and abstention from political participation by the citizenry. Though regulatory and legal provision exists at local and national levels, they are not always enforced. (Sisk and Reynolds 1998, Elklit 2007, Bjornlund et al 2007, Horowitz 2001, Reynolds 2002, Lijphart 2004, Reilly 2006, HRW 2007, Omobowale and Olutayo 2007).

The Role of Government through Its Various Security Agencies

Incidences of violence have pervaded electoral competition regardless of the threat it poses for Nigeria's democratic development. HRW (2007) discovered that over eleven thousand (11,000) Nigerians lost their lives in hundreds of separate occurrences of inter-communal and political violence in the Obasanjo administration and no one was held responsible for those carnages. Moreover, the politicization of

acts of electoral violence makes more difficult this societal problem to handle, particularly when the ruling parties and opposition members are both involved.

The continuing scenery of electoral violence may be credited to the very relaxed punishment for electoral crime and the non-enforcement of the provisions of the Electoral Act on prohibition of the use of violence. Section 98(2) of the 2006 Electoral Act specify a maximum fine of fifty thousand naira only (₦50,000.00) or imprisonment for a six month period for person found guilty for political violence. For a political party if found guilty, a fine of two hundred and fifty thousand naira only (₦250,000.00), for the first offence and five hundred thousand naira only (₦500,000.00), for any subsequent violation is required. Considering the immensity of the damage that violence can inflict on the electoral process, the prescribed sentence is too mild to serve as a serious disincentive to any person (Iriekpen 2009). Hence, the need to stipulate more punitive measures for electoral violence offences becomes necessary to mitigate occasion of violence and ensure democratic development of Nigeria.

Security agents of the State have the duty to guarantee protection of lives and property, forestall the outbreaks of violence and ensure peace and order in the society. The detailing of security officers to political engagements, conferences, primaries, general elections etc., assumes that this action would prevent the activities of agents or perpetrators of violence. But experiences of previous general elections conducted in Nigeria mainly the 2003 and 2007 general elections cast doubt to this assumption as instances reveal that security agents posted to election polling booths were engaged in acts other than to ensure a peaceful, free and fair election. Reports are replete both in the national dailies and reports of election observers concerning the role of security agents during the conduct of these elections. On the other hand, the police at other times are not able to respond to the issues of violence considering their ill-equipped nature.

Effects of Violence on the Citizenry and Political Development

In broad terms, the consequences of election-related violence may include the following:

Economic implications – the costs associated with the management of elections are usually huge which may represent a major financial burden. Election related violence would not only waste resources, but would also bring about destruction of communities and infrastructure with various negative economic and developmental consequences.

Lack of confidence in democratic processes and institutions – as a result of the endemic nature of election related conflicts and lack of perceived fairness in electoral engagements, trust in democratic processes and institutions by the citizenry has been adversely affected.

Human rights violations – The pervasive character of violence in Nigerian politics has demoralizing human rights impact on the electorates in Nigerians. These may include disfranchisement through deprivation of citizens' right to vote and engagement in electoral competition. Thousands of Nigerians have been subjected to

physical attack or even killed. Human Rights Watch estimates that a minimum of 300 Nigerians were killed in occurrence of violence during the April 2007 elections. Prior to the elections, political assassinations, bombings, and deadly clashes were recorded between rival gangs—organized by politicians and parties—that claimed at least one hundred lives. Voter turnout during the 2007 elections was very low across the country as fear of violence discouraged many Nigerians from coming out to vote. Human Rights Watch interviewed quite a number of eligible voters who indicated their intention not to vote. One retiree in the town of Oye Ekiti told Human Rights Watch that the elderly citizens (both men and women) were scared to participate in the election (HRW 2007, Asemota 2011, Binniyat 2011).

Politically motivated violence resulting in assassinations and other election related killings have been associated with the Nigerian democratic project since 1999 (Ladan and Kiru, 2005). A large number of Nigerians have lost their lives and many others displaced with property worth billions of naira destroyed. These have resulted to political climate of hostility, instability and uncertainty. Intra and inter party conflicts directly and indirectly related to power struggles have degenerated into party indiscipline, lawlessness with patron and client relationships dictating who stands for or wins elective position (Ezendu and Akparandu, 2010). Consequently this has led to violent contention between opposing parties thereby posing serious challenges to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Prescriptions on Management of Electoral Violence

Most studies on election related violence identify a range of causes and advocate a range of interventions to address these (Sisk 2008, Global Commission 2012). Causes of election related violence include structural conditions, electoral system choice, the competence of electoral administration and the nature and functioning of the security sector (Sisk, 2008). As a result, the literature generally suggests that electoral support interventions should address the whole electoral cycle and allow for specifically designed response measures to prevent, mitigate and/or resolve election-related violence. They include reviewing the legal framework, building the capacity of election administration bodies, improving planning and budgeting, civic and voter education, strengthening electoral dispute resolution mechanisms, violence monitoring, non-violence training and improving evaluation (Global Commission 2012). Other interventions such as providing incentives to promote cooperation between rival parties may also help to reduce the likelihood of electoral violence (Sisk 2008). Most studies acknowledge that transforming electoral systems can take time and fundamental transformation. The Global Commission (2012), for example, states that in many contexts long term electoral security requires addressing rule of law issues and infusing the institutions of democracy with the philosophy of democracy.

Gienath (2008) established different guidelines how electoral violence could be prevented: He strongly focuses on Election Management Bodies, their independence, transparency and access to resources. Apart from these, he states that formalized dialogue between the political parties and the electoral body, voter

education, the unity of the electoral commission and the participation of political parties at all the important stages of the electoral process as relevant for conflict prevention. Impartial and legitimate electoral management bodies have proven important to address the issue of violence in relation to elections. Höglund & Jarstad (2010) distinguish different management strategies that can be taken up by different actors:

1. The presence of monitors can be instrumental in preventing electoral violence through naming and shaming mechanisms and by creating awareness of tensions building up.
2. Mediation can be carried out in critical situations to solve an ongoing election-related dispute.
3. The legal framework and institutional design provides the basis for combating impunity and for creating conditions discouraging violence.
4. Law enforcement highlights the deterring function of security forces.
5. Voter-focused strategies emphasize the importance of long-term prevention though the cultivation of democratic norms and tolerance in society at large.

Methods

The descriptive survey design was utilized for this study. Nigerians of voting age across the six geopolitical zones were randomly selected on a nationally representative sample of 6,000 respondents to provide empirical data on the impact of electoral violence on voter participation in Nigeria. The key sampling unit was the electoral ward. The sample size of 6,000 respondents was drawn from the population for administration of questionnaire by the use of multi-stage sampling technique. It comprised of twelve states (12) two (2) each from the six geopolitical zones and 24 local government areas and 72 wards. From the 6,000 questionnaires administered, 5,623 were completed and returned having an overall response rate of 93%. This study was carried out between March, 2012 and October, 2013. Both primary and secondary data were utilized in the collection of data for analysis. The primary source of data was based on the administration of questionnaire, while the secondary source included examination of textbooks, journals, newspapers, magazines, internet etc. The data collected were analyzed using standardized methods such as the Chi-Square (χ^2) and simple percentage.

Background Characteristics of the Respondents

From the 5,623 respondents, majority of them were males numbering up to 3,502 which represented 62.3% while 2,121 of them were females representing 37.7%. This implies that men are more likely to take part in electoral activities than women. The age group of 35 years and above constituted the highest frequency of 3,195 representing 56.8% of the respondents while those below 35 years make up the frequency of 2,428 representing 43.2%. This signifies that majority of the respondents who possess enough knowledge to give informed opinion are within the age bracket. Also, the study discovered that 2,131 of the 5,623 respondents representing 37.9% were single while 3,492 representing 62.1% were married. The indication is that

majority of the respondents are people considered to be knowledgeable and responsible enough to give dependable responses vital to this study. Finally, the study shows that 2,338 respondents representing 41.6% had secondary education/less while 3,285 of the respondents representing 58.4% had tertiary education. This distribution entails that majority of the respondents are enlightened and therefore in a position to give an informed judgment. The response rate for the twelve selected states is shown in table 1 below

Table 1: Response rate for the 12 selected states

Region	States	Response Rate	%
North Central	Nasarawa*	301	5.4
	Niger	501	8.9
North East	Taraba*	329	5.9
	Borno	512	9.1
North West	Kaduna	589	10.5
	Kebbi*	390	6.9
South East	Enugu*	490	8.7
	Imo	509	9.0
South South	Rivers	569	10.1
	Delta*	507	9.0
South West	Oyo	579	10.3
	Ekiti*	347	6.2

Source: Field Work (2012/2013)

The table above shows the sample distribution of twelve scientifically selected states from the six Geo-Political zones of Nigeria.

Statistical Analysis and Findings

The three hypotheses put forward at the beginning of this paper were tested to determine their validation or otherwise. That is whether or not a relationship exists between the variables under consideration. The respondents' responses to questions central to the study in percentages and the hypotheses results are displayed and discussed below.

Table 2: Many Eligible Nigerians do not vote for fear of violence

	Frequency	Percentage
Valid Yes	3879	69.0
No	1744	31.0
Total	5623	100.0

Table 4 reveals that 4551 of the respondents representing 67.7% are of the view that many Nigerians of voting age do not vote on Election Day because of fear of violence, while 2170 representing 32.3% do not share that view. This implies that

majority of the respondents' share the view that fear of violence scares many Nigerians from voting in elections.

Hypothesis 1:

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between respondents' marital status and their opinion about electoral violence.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a relationship between respondents' marital status and their opinion about electoral violence.

Table 3: Many Eligible Nigerians do not vote on Election Day for fear of outbreak of violence

Fear of Electoral violence	Marital Status		Total
	Married	Single	
Yes	2533	1346	3879
No	959	785	1744
Total	3492	2131	5623

Source: Field Work

The **Hypothesis 1** result shows that using the degree of freedom **1** and the level of significance $\alpha = .001$. The **calculated X² (54.36)** is greater than the **critical X² (10.83)**. Data are statistically significant with a sample error of **1%**. Therefore we reject H₀ and accept H_R. The **Yule's Q of +0.21** implies that there is a medium positive relationship between respondents' marital status and their opinion about electoral violence and insecurity in Nigeria.

Table 4: Would you be encouraged to vote in subsequent elections, if you were a victim of electoral violence?

	Frequency	Percentage
Valid Yes	1864	33.2
No	3759	66.8
Total	5623	100.0

Table 6 reveals that 4416 of the respondents representing 65.7% are of the view that they would not participate in subsequent voting if they were victims of electoral violence, while 2305 representing 34.3% do not share that view. This implies that majority of the respondents' share the view that victims of electoral violence would most probably not participate in future elections.

Hypothesis 2:

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between perceived victims of electoral violence and their opinion about voter turnout statistics during elections.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a relationship between perceived victims of electoral violence and their opinion about voter turnout statistics during elections.

Table 5: Would you be encouraged to participate in subsequent elections, if you were a victim of electoral violence?

Voter turnout	Electoral Violence Victims by Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	1214	650	1864
No	2288	1471	3759
Total	3502	2121	5623

Source: Field Work

The **Hypothesis 2** result shows that using the degree of freedom **1** and the level of significance $\alpha = .01$, the **calculated X^2 (10.12)** is greater than the **critical X^2 (6.64)**. Data are statistically significant with a sample error of **1%**. Therefore we reject H_0 and accept H_R .

The **Yule's Q of +0.09** indicates that there is a small positive relationship between perceived electoral violence victims and their opinion about voter turnout statistics during elections in Nigeria.

Table 6: Are you of the opinion that the government security arrangement is inadequate during the electoral process especially, on Election Day?

	Frequency	Percentage
Valid Yes	2502	44.5
No	3121	55.5
Total	5623	100.0

Table 8 reveals that 3051 of the respondents representing 45.4% are of the view that the government is providing adequate security during elections, while 3670 representing 54.6% share a contrary opinion. This implies that majority of the respondents' share the view that the government does not providing adequate security during election

Hypothesis 3:

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between voter turnout and adequate security provided by government.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a relationship between voter turnout and adequate security provided by government.

Table 7: Are you of the opinion that the government security arrangement is adequate to ensure safety of lives and property during the electoral process especially, on Election Day?

Provision of Adequate security	Voter Turnout by Age Group		Total
	Above 35 years	Below 35 years	
Yes	1000	1502	2502
No	2195	926	3121
Total	3195	2428	5623

Source: Field Work

The **Hypothesis 3** result reveals that using the degree of freedom **1** and the level of significance $\alpha = .001$, the **calculated X^2 (521.78)** is greater than the **critical X^2 (10.83)**. Data are statistically significant with a sample error of **1%**. Therefore we reject H_0 and accept H_R . The **Yule's Q of -0.56** implies that there is a large negative relationship between respondents age group and their opinion about provision of security by government

Policy Advice

Based on findings of this study, the following proposals to develop the electoral process and promote active voters' participation are offered for possible adoption by the Government of Nigeria, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, and other stakeholders. The government should set in motion electoral violence preventive mechanism to forestall the outbreak of violence and therefore encourage voters to participate actively in the electoral process. Also, the government should effectively utilize the various conflict resolution mechanisms to competently resolve conflicts arising from electoral issues. Furthermore, the government should ensure prompt prosecution of electoral offenders and adhere strictly to the principles of the rule of law which stipulates that no one is above the law. Moreover, the government should actively sponsor voter education, avoid interference with the electoral process, and ensure enforcement of law and order in the society. The INEC is advised to avoid partisanship, conduct transparent and credible elections, recruit adept staff, massively embark on voter education, and provide adequate voting materials, continuous update and improvement of voter register and registration process. The political parties are also advised to educate their members, conduct democratic political campaigns, primaries and general elections, tolerate and accommodate other political parties. Finally, voters are advised to choose candidates based on competence, resist the temptation to sell votes or engage in violent demonstrations, and to defend their votes and protest within the law when necessary.

Concluding Comments

The importunate and endemic nature of electoral violence in the Nigerian democratic project has not only remained an obstacle in the wheels of democratic politics but also indicate very fundamental socio-economic policy implications. Thus, the prevalence of electoral violence is a pointer to the failure to build on the tenets of democratic consolidation. The fact that elections are still being conducted with a measurable number of voters casting their votes and winners are still emerging does not mean that serious consideration should not be given to the current level of abstention by eligible voters. If this trend is allowed to continue unabated, it might lead to a serious problem of legitimacy and a danger to democratic survival in Nigeria. Therefore, the government should involve all relevant stakeholders in the construction of democratic development, to attain a credible electoral system conditioned by good governance. It is sincerely hoped that if implemented, the above recommendations would obviate or at least mitigate incidences of electoral violence

and boost the confidence of voters to actively participate in the electoral process under a safe and conducive atmosphere.

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