

**YOUTHS' VIOLENCE AND THE CREDIBILITY OF
THE 2019 GENERAL AND SUPPLEMENTARY ELECTIONS
IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Youths' violence is a key challenge to peaceful elections in Nigeria, as almost all the elections so far conducted in Nigeria were characterised by violence. This article provides an analysis of youths' violence and the credibility of the 2019 general and supplementary elections in Nigeria, by focusing on the role and experience of the youths as key stakeholders in political stability or otherwise in the country. The youths are supposed to be the most important players in ensuring credible elections, but their participation in electoral violence makes the credibility questionable. The paper argued that the availability of very active, unemployed youths with poor parental upbringing, poor education, moral bankruptcy and frustrated by the political system, provided a fertile ground which is exploited by desperate politicians seeking to grab power or to maintain it by all cost. The study generated qualitative data from secondary source such as journal articles, newspapers reports, and reports from foreign and domestic observers, reports from the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and internet materials. The paper employed Human Needs Theory as a framework to explain why youths take part in electoral violence. The paper concludes that the 2019 General and supplementary Elections for many elective positions were characterized by violence and that the youths were the key players, victims, casualties and the receivers of the long-term negative consequences of the menace. The paper recommends improvement in socio-economic situation of the youths by the governments at all levels and that the youth should be organized and engaged in self-help and productive ventures to enable them shun violence and lead a meaningful lifestyle in Nigeria.

Key words: Youths, Violence, Electoral Violence and Credible Elections.

Introduction

Elections are key ingredients of democracy and democratisation, throughout the globe and are the commonly acceptable means of creating, changing and legitimizing government. In situations, where elections are manipulated; inflation of elections results, false declaration of results, snatch of ballot papers and boxes etcetera, it is an invitation to electoral violence in the state, which may snowball into economic, political and even social chaos. The violence may take the form of pre-election, during election or post-election violence. In Nigeria, electoral violence is most often perpetrated by the youths, who are the major or key players in electoral violence. The youths are recruited, sponsored and armed by political elites, who want to grab political power by all means.

Electoral violence is situation characterised by threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arise in the context of electoral competition. When perpetrated to affect an electoral process, violence may be use to influence the process of the elections such as attempts to delay, change, inflate, disrupt, or derail a poll and to influence the outcomes. It can manifest in various forms such as ballot snatching, party clashes, thuggery, destruction of electoral materials, intimidating of voters, riots and even kidnapping of political opponents, which may occur before, during or after elections. All these gave a shattering blow to Nigerian nascent democratic experience and effort towards consolidation of democracy. Because whenever electoral violence occurred, the process is truncated and has to be start afresh. Its occurrence and persistence have ostensibly undermined and threatened social stability in the country. Research found out that, persistent youths violence and restiveness across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria is inimical to economic growth and development (Akpan et'al 2012; Ewetan and Urhie 2014; Abdullahi et'al 2016). Youths' violence has led to the loss of lives and property worth billions of naira. According to Suberu (2002), over 10,000 Nigerians have lost their lives; thousands have been displaced and properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed because of youths and other elections related violence (Suberu, 2002).

Electoral violence among Nigerian youths is not new in the political dictionary of Nigeria, this has made it difficult to have peaceful and credible elections in the country. All the eight general elections conducted in Nigeria since independence in 1960s to date including; 1964, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections have been marred by violence. This is as a result of the abysmal failure of the federal, state and local government to address the issues of poverty, unemployment, disunity, arms proliferation, illiteracy, political marginalisation, relative deprivation and corruption within and outside the security agencies, which have made electoral violence inevitable among Nigerian youths, because they are the most vulnerable population. As Jega rightly said; When such a huge young population is characterized by unemployment or underemployment, inadequacy of educational opportunities and entrepreneurial skills and capabilities, afflicted by multifarious health challenges, in addition to marginalization, disenfranchisement and exclusion from the electoral and political processes, it becomes a potential source of socio-political and economic instability as well as acute crises and wide-ranging conflicts (Jega, 2017:2).

When the youths are effectively managed, they play vital role toward ensuring peaceful and credible elections, being the most significant and deserving of meaningful and purposeful participation in their country's political, economic and even social affairs. However, reverse is the case in country like Nigeria, where the youths are the most marginalized or excluded citizens from political and economic affairs, electoral participation of the youths in their country where they remain a demographic majority, but politically, a minority. Therefore, the youth's talents, skills, energy, vibrancy, enthusiasm, creativity and innovativeness, which have been the hallmarks of progress and development in other countries of the world, are misplaced and misdirected, rather than appropriately channelled to add value to African democratic development (Jega, 2017). All these and avalanche of other factors make it impossible to have credible elections in Nigeria.

23 February 2019, was the Presidential and National Assembly elections, 9 March 2019, for the gubernatorial and state assemblies elections, the main contending political parties were the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC), with other minor political parties including; All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Action Alliance (AA), Labour Party (LP), Peoples Party of Nigeria (PPN), Kowa Party (KP), African Action Congress (AAC) among others, contested for the presidential election across the 36 states and the federal capital territory of Nigeria and 29 states for the governorship and state assemblies, with exemption of Edo, Ekiti, Ondo and Anambra States. Supplementary elections were later held on the 23, March 2019 for the governorship and house of assemblies in Kano, Lagos, Oyo, Bayelsa, Abia, Adamawa, Benue, Sokoto, Bauchi, and Plateau States, where there were cancellations, inconclusive and postponements of elections and where elections could not hold as a result of violence, while electoral processes was totally suspended in Rivers state. November 16 2019, was the day for Kogi and Bayelsa state governorship elections, the elections were marred by intense political violence.

Immediately after the elections, there were accusations and counter accusations by some political parties and their supporters, foreign/domestic observers, and social critiques, of vote buying, ballot snatching, inflation/falsification of results, intimidation and impersonation, thuggery and the use of security agencies to intimidate and harass voters in areas where a political party is not sure of winning elections and the destruction of ballot papers and boxes. Many observers and opposition parties sees this election as one of the incredible elections while others including the African union said the atmosphere was largely peaceful and conducive for conducting credible elections. The electoral umpire also described the elections as mostly peaceful.

It is against this backdrop this paper seeks to examine the role of youths in electoral violence and the credibility of the 2019 General and supplementary elections in Nigeria.

Conceptual Discourses

Election: Elections has to do with set of activities leading to the selection or choosing of one or more persons out of many to serve in positions of authority or steer the affairs of a society. Political scientists, analyst and development theorists link free, fair and credible elections to democratic governance, peace and development. In fact, they are of the opinion that, free, fair and credible elections are the brainchild of democratic, accountable and legitimate governments with the capacity to initiate and implement clearly articulated development programmes. Furthermore, they argued that, free, fair and credible elections encourage the electorate to hold the government accountable and to demand strong credentials and feasible development agenda from prospective government officials. In other words, free, fair and credible elections bestow on governments the legitimate authority to, on one hand, initiate and implement policies; while on the other hand, they encourage the citizens to hold governments accountable for their actions and/or inactions. Credible elections are, therefore, crucial for democratic governance, political stability and national development (Orji and Uzodi, 2012).

General Elections: refers to regularly conducted elections, where both the President and all members of the national assemblies are elected at the same time or period. In Nigeria, it is a time the chief executives at the national and state levels as well as the members of the state legislatures are elected through a universal adult suffrage.

Violence: The word violence has been viewed from different perspectives. For the purpose of this work, we looked at violence in terms of both violation of human rights and social injustice. (Adesola and Adesolate, 2014). Violence has to do with the physical use of force, with the intention to injure / kill persons, destroy properties or cause pandemonium.

Electoral Violence: According to Igbuzor, electoral violence is any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre-elections, during elections and post-election periods. This

includes: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings, campaigns or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate or harass voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person related with electoral processes. It is any form of physical force applied at disorganising the electoral process, destruction of electoral materials and intimidating of the electorate to vote against their wish (Nweke, 2005 cited in Odojin and Omojuwa, 2007). Electoral violence is "any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced 'protection', blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination" (Fischer 2002; Orji and Uzodi, 2012). The target of electoral violence can be people, places, data, or electoral materials. In an attempt to influence the electoral process, perpetrators of electoral violence may attempt to delay, disrupt, disorganise or derail a poll and determine the winners of political office (United Nation Development Programme 2009). These definitions of electoral violence is based on three elements. The first is that like any other form of violence, electoral violence manifests in physical forms (kidnapping, assassination and destruction of property) and non-physical forms (threats, assault, intimidation and blackmail) (Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance 2011:15). Secondly, the main goal of electoral violence is to influence the electoral process, either by changing the outcome of elections or by disorganising the electoral process. Thirdly, electoral violence can occur at different periods in the election cycle; that is, before, during, or after election (Orji and Uzodi, 2012).

Youth: youth can be defined by a person's age, specific status and role in a society. Broadly speaking, youths are generally define as meaningful, youthful persons under various laws, conventions and culture, who are within the ages of 13 and 44 years of age. Youths are those who are involved in community works, who do not have a stable source of income, or who do not have or cannot support a family, but struggling to fend for themselves and in most cases are part of the dependant population (World Bank, 2013) and they are considered as future leaders.

Credible Elections are elections characterized by inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, competitiveness and violence free. They are inclusive when they provide equal opportunities for all eligible citizens to participate as voters in selecting their representatives and as candidates for elective positions. Elections are transparent when each step is open to scrutiny, and stakeholders can independently verify whether the process is conducted peacefully, diligently and accurately. Accountability in elections refers to the rights of citizens with respect to the conduct of other electoral stakeholders, including the government, election management bodies (EMBs), political parties, candidates and security forces. They are competitive when citizens have reasonable and equitable opportunities to compete to be elected into governmental offices (OEDI, nd). Credible elections has to do with 'violent free' elections, devoid of intimidation and harassment of voters.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts the Human Needs Theory. Human needs theory, that was popularized in the works of Abraham Maslow (1973), Burton (1997), Marshal and Max-Neef. The basic assumption of the theory is that, the main cause of intractable conflict is the peoples' need to meet some of their basic needs. According to this theory, human beings have certain essentials needs if they must survive and attain well-being in any ramification of life. Such essentials are known as (basic) human needs. The argument of human needs theorists, therefore, is that the lack of alternative means to meet some basic needs of individuals or groups is what cause violence or conflict in the society. At times, violence also occurs when human lacks recognition, respect, identity, security, recognitions, creativity, control, belongingness, love, self-esteem and self-actuation.

The Human Needs Theory argues that, there are conflicts and instability in TWCs because people are have being deprived not only their biological needs, but also psychological needs that relate to their growth and development. The overriding importance of this theory is that it understands the needs, particularly basic needs (such as food, clothing, water, shelter and health) these needs, unlike interest

cannot be traded with, compromised, suppressed, or bargained for; thus any attempt to do this can ultimately result to conflict. According to Aristotle cited in Sabine and Thorson (1973), social violence and revolutions are not brought out by the conspiratorial or malignant natures of man, rather revolutions are derived from poverty and distributive injustice in society. Therefore, when the poor people constitute the majority and have no alternative means of ameliorating their suffering, they are vulnerable to violence and conflict. As Aristotle rightly said, poverty and unemployment are the parents of revolution and crimes. The argument of Human needs theory, is that conflict and violence are caused as a result unmet human needs; violence occurs when certain individuals or groups do not see any other way to meet their needs, or when they need understanding, respect and consideration for their needs (Turkish-Weekly, 2012).

In justifying the theory, one can argue that, failure of the Nigerian state to put in place some effective mechanisms in providing the basic needs of the citizenry led to security challenges like electoral violence. The theory explained how youths' deprivation of education, employment and other basic needs led to their frustration and aggression and left to the mercy of the social vices. The youths become available tools in the hands of politicians, who sponsor and finance them to carry out the nefarious activities of ; intimidation of political opponents from voting, snatching ballot boxes and papers, harassment of opposition political parties from campaign in areas where a political party has stronghold, falsification or inflation of election results at collation centers, threatening of electoral officials to announce election results under duress, thumb printing of ballot papers by thugs and party supporters and above all homicide, arson and assassination of political opponents.

Human Needs Theory of conflict is an interesting theory in this paper. Its value lies in the fact that it exposes and explains the expectation of any political system in providing some effective mechanisms to satisfy the basic needs of its citizenry, which must be fulfill in order to have peace and security and to avoid, conflict, violence in the polity.

Causes of Youths Electoral Violence

Many Scholars have contributed in their works, actions and writings on why youths are vulnerable to electoral violence in Nigeria and Africa at large. They cited unemployment, poverty, relative deprivation, money politics, godfatherism, lack of trust in the electoral management body and its officials, lack of respect for rule of law, lack of hope in the judicial system, manipulation, illiteracy, corruption, hate campaigns, clash between political parties supporters during campaign, lack of internal democracy in political parties, ethnicity and regionalism, the use of coercive apparatus to manipulate election results, desperate attitude towards politics by the party leaders and members, foreign interest and manipulation of election result among others as reasons.

According to Okechukwu Ibeanu (2012), high rate of illiteracy, unemployment and poverty are important indicators of underdevelopment. In Nigeria, majority of the population lack access to opportunities and resources to actualize their potentials and dreams. This situation breeds a class of economically marginalized people (mostly youths) who can be use as perpetrators of electoral violence. These categories of people (the youths) are easily lured and enticed by the 'wealthy violent entrepreneurs' who sponsor most of the political violence. Electoral violence in Nigeria is mostly carried out by gangs whose members are openly recruited, financed, and sometimes, armed by politicians, state officials, and party officials or their representatives. Members of these gangs are mostly illiterate, unemployed and poor young men, who are mobilized to attack their sponsors' rivals, intimidate members of the public, rig elections, and protect their patrons from similar attacks (Ibeanu, 2012:13, Aniekwe and Kushie 2011: 20).

Politics of Prebendalism, which is the concentration of resources in the state, which makes the possession of state powers means to an end of controlling state's resources. 'Prebendal politics' makes individuals, groups, communities and constituencies to seek for political office, in order to control state's

resources and use it for their personal interest. As Richards Joseph (who coined the word “Prebendalism”) rightly observed, “Nigerian present and future depend upon a prior understanding of the nature, extent and persistence of a certain mode of political behaviour, and of its social and economic ramifications” This mode of political behaviour is the “prebendal culture” which sees politics as the clearing house for jobs, contracts, and official resource plunder (UNDP 2003). Those who are already in control of state power use it to suppress, oppressing and even subjugate their political opponents. In this situation, the democratic culture of alternation of power among individuals, groups and political parties is difficult to achieve. Once in control of state power, the government in power try to maintain its powers by any means, including use of violence.

At the same time, those struggling to take over power from the incumbent government sometimes resort to violence to actualise their goal. In situations where there is competition for political power, politicians use tribal, communal and religious symbols and sentiments in order to crush or frustrate their political rivals. This eventually calls an entire tribal, sectional or religious community into conflict and competition over political power, which is supposed to be squarely political parties' affairs. Once candidates and political parties are identified with a particular ethnic, sectional or religious group, victory or defeat in the electoral contest is defined in communal, ethnic or religious terms. Thus, electoral violence is typically cause by attempts by individuals and political groups to use 'all available means' at their disposal, including the use of violence, to defend their 'communal honour' or interest (Ibeanu, 2012). This is true in states like kano, what triggered the 2019 general and supplementary election violence was the attempt by the incumbent governor to retain his seat by 'hook or by crook', same applied to Taraba and Sokoto states. Few days before Saturday's polls, a video showing the Kano state chairman of the APC, Abdullahi Abbas, describing the supplementary governorship election in the state as a “Do or Die” affair (Mohammed, 2019).

The Nigerian legal system and law enforcement agencies have legal challenges, to be able to address, prosecute, and convict criminals; as such, people affected by violence lack justice in the case of violation of their rights. Members of the security forces implicated in violations of civil and political rights of the people, including electoral violence, are in most cases not held accountable or face the full wrath of the law, which calls for violence with impunity. Reports shows that more than 11,000 people were killed in hundreds of separate outbreaks of politically motivated communal violence in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007 (Anieke and Kushie 2011:18). During the same period, the country recorded several high profile cases of politically motivated assassinations (Ladan and Kiru 2005). In all of these, no one was convicted or hold accountable for such crime (ICG 2011: 1). The possibility of political actors to use violence in the electoral process is defined by the state's capacity to enforce law and order. Sadly and tragically, the State's capacity to enforce law and order is undermine by the erosion of the states' monopoly of the use of violence. The state's monopoly of the use of violence in Nigeria is seriously challenged by the activities of 'cult gangs', 'area boys', ethnic militias, unlicensed vigilante groups, and armed bandits that operate in both rural and urban areas (Adewale 2005; Pratten 2006; Higazi and Chard 2008). The armed operations of these criminal elements are aided by the illicit and uncontrolled proliferation of small arms (Hazen and Horner 2007). As Nigeria's experience demonstrates, political actors can sometimes take control of these armed groups and use them to perpetrate electoral violence (HRW 2005 and 2007). In all, the political elites or the vested interest and state officials, who support and use armed groups to achieve political ends, are the greatest beneficiaries of the erosion of the state's monopoly of use of violence, and the culture of impunity that promotes electoral violence in Nigeria (Ibeanu, 2012).

Absence of internal democracy within the political parties is also a major challenge; Political parties are the backbone of democracy. However, the inability of many political parties in Nigeria to operate within democratic framework and civility led to disagreement, tension and violence in the electoral process. In Nigeria, political godfathers control the parties at local and national levels (HRW 2007, Omobowale and Olanrewaju 2007). These godfathers select the delegates who elect party leaders and candidates, through their control of the delegates, the godfathers decide who gets the party's nomination and leadership

positions. The activities of political godfathers create so much dissatisfaction and grievance in the political process because of their disregard for due process of the party's elections and nomination of candidates. Therefore, the activities of godfathers help to reinforce the central role of violence and corruption in politics by making it even more difficult to win elected office without resorting to the illegal tactics they represent. In some instances, results of primary elections are simply change by the party's godfathers to favour their interest. For instance, during the 2011 general elections, Olu Agunloye, was replaced as candidate for one of the Ondo state senatorial seats by the leadership of the party. This forced him to defect from Labour Party (LP) to the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). In another case, Mohammed Abacha's victory in the CPC gubernatorial primary election in Kano State was rejected by the party's leadership and was replaced by Lawal Ja'afaru Isa, despite the case he filed in court (ICG 2011:15) and recently was the endorsement of Sanwore Olu against the former governor of Lagos state Akiyumi Ambode, by the 'godfather' of Lagos state politics, Ahmed Bola Tinubu. Therefore, Imposition of candidate on the electorate by the government in power or political godfathers can also lead to electoral violence. Party members who dare to express their dissatisfaction with the kangaroo-arrangement of the political process in the party are normally charged with engaging in 'anti-party' activities and suspended or suspended indefinitely from the political party, also calls for violence in the political process.

Furthermore, When there are no level playing ground or internal democracy within and among political parties, especially when the party leaders are not carrying out their onerous responsibilities and duties during elections, aggrieved political contestants uses this platform as a way of masterminding or organising violence by sponsoring thugs and hooligans who end up disrupting the peaceful conduct of a particular election. This was observed between the two major parties of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) because of the level playing ground within the political parties (Kalu and Gberevbie, 2018). According to Oghenea koke (2014), lack of internal democracy, irregularities in registration and technical challenges during elections are responsible for election violence (Ibid).

Bribery and corruption, there are instances where security agencies (police, military and even Para-military) are being bribe by politicians to support a particular political party to rig an election in a polling unit, in this case, there is likely to be election violence. Because it leads to the feelings of grievance from opposition parties, thereby resorting to violence as a means of disrupting election outcomes (Okon, 2018; Awofeso and Odeyeme, 2016). For instance in Kano and Lagos state, the EU mission said it was disturbed that both the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security agencies did little to address the violence and malpractices, which spread to many parts of Kano and Lagos state (Premiums times, 2019).

Furthermore, the security personnel are not adequate to monitor all polling units on the day of general elections, the 2019 general elections held in 119,000 polling units in Nigeria (some of which have multiple voting points) and each of the polling unit is expected to have at least three or two security personnel, which is not realistic. Therefore, inadequate security presence in most cases makes some areas vulnerable to electoral violence.

The causes of electoral violence in the 2019 general and supplementary elections in Kano, Lagos, Rivers, Nasarawa, Benue, Kogi, Bayelsa, Taraba, Bauchi, Sokoto state and some other parts of the federation are as a results of inadequate voters' education, hate speech, rumour of rigging, spread of inflammatory messages about the election and its outcome, religious and ethnic campaigning by supporters, the pursuit of electoral victory by fair or foul means, inflation of election results, use of under-age voters card, intimidation of political opponents by thugs and security forces.

Literature Review

Concept of Electoral Violence

According to Obakhedo (2011), electoral violence is one of the greatest obstacles in Nigeria. Mostly, electoral violence occurs within party (intra-party) and between political parties (inter-party), this affects the quality of election (outcome) results in the electoral system, the rule of law and democratic practice in Nigeria. In addition, violence affects the quality of elections being free and fair, as well transparent by foreign observers (Kalu and Gberevbie, 2015; Obakhedo 2011).

Electoral violence has different stages in electoral cycle, the pre-election, election, and post-election phases. The pre election phase includes the long run-up to elections – specifically, the party nomination and campaign processes (Sisk 2008; UNDP 2009, Adoke 2011). Election violence at this stage usually manifests within political party (intra-party) and between political parties (inter-party) clashes arising from struggles over party nomination and access to the electorate (Ladan 2007). Violence at the pre election stage would usually take the form of inflammatory rhetoric, assault on politicians, and party supporters (Sisk 2008). Politicians make statements and comments that could be volatile and could be seen by followers or supporters as a call to violence, either before, during or after elections. Acts of violence at the election period has to do with intimidation and harassment of voters, snatching of ballot boxes or ballot papers, disruption and attack on election officials and observers. Violence at the election phase would normally begin from the polling centres and may tend to spread thereafter (Orji and Uzodi, 2012).

The post-election stage usually starts from the counting and announcement of election results to litigation and settlement of election disputes between political parties. Cases emerging from the pre-election and election stage are what usually trigger violence at the post-election period. Post-election violence manifests in several ways including attacks on rival candidates, party officials and supporters, as well as violent street protests (UNDP 2009). They could also include shooting, killings, arson and wanton destruction of properties, usually perpetrated by officials and/or supporters of different political parties (Adoke 2011) while all forms of electoral violence may have similar remote causes and manifest in comparable ways, they are not always cause by the same factors. Election experts argue that there is a need to identify the causes, types, and manifestations of election violence to enable stakeholders develop a 'strategic design of prevention and management programmes that can forestall recurrence' (Orji and Uzodi, 2012; Matlosa et al, 2010).

Election violence generally involves political parties, their supporters, journalists, agents of the government, election administrators and the general population, and includes threats, assault, murder, destruction of property, and physical or psychological harm. Electoral violence must involve specific victim(s), perpetrator(s) and occurs within a period and location. Electoral violence also comes with motive(s) and the victims can be people, places, things or data. This presupposes that electoral violence cuts across different stages of election starting from the registration period to post election period. (International Foundation for Election Systems, 2011; Fischer 2002) highlighted four descriptive categories of conflicts and violence that emerged, suggesting a variety of motives, perpetrators, and victims which includes the following.

- i. Aggrieved or discontented voters against the state as a result of the partiality in the election process
- ii. The state in conflict with voters, who challenges outcome of election or question the authority of the state.
- iii. Political rivals in conflict with each other in the quest to secure political power and
- iv. A mix of two or more of the above categories.

An election is said to be violent when its processes and outcomes result in the physical attack, disagreement or interruption that could make the election unacceptable or make it questionable and some cases the use of physical force with the aims of injuring, harming or killing an individual or a group of individuals or even vandalising public or private properties. Thus, violence that has to do with elections can be seen at different forms and level of electoral process; it involves the use of threats that hinders the smooth conduct of elections. In addition, it involves physical assaults, assassination and

interruption of the movements of election materials or attacks on collation centres after elections, as well as vandalism of public properties (Mohammed, 2014).

Youths and Violence

According to Obi (2006), the concept of youth has been subjected to different interpretations. At one level; the youth are seen in terms of their futuristic role as leaders of society. The categorization of the youth as future leaders takes the non-interrogation of the existing power relations in society and is a recipe for preparing the youths to perpetuate a particular mode of power relations that suggest a permanence of structures of dominance and interests, but with the entry and exit of occupants' overtime. According to him, this conceptualization also suggests the sub-ordination of youths to the power structure controlled by elders in order to facilitate system stability, unity and progress. During political period, they become a conveyor belt that takes the loyal and disciplined youth into future power, when the elders pass into myth and history. It is also important to note that for some youths particularly in the poverty-troubled countries, Nigeria inclusive, what is paramount is survival. They must first survive, before they can begin to think of fighting for their future. Where the very fact of survival is embedded in conflict, then the struggle for survival for the future is ambushed by more violence that forced the youths into a class of ethnic, communal and political agendas. (Obi; 2006: 6; Oluwaseun, 2013).

Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999 – 2019)

General Abdulsalami's regime upon coming on board in 1998 initiated a Transition Programme with the view of returning the State to civil rule in 1999 and to kick-start the fourth republic. Beside other programmes, the Regime set up an Electoral Body known as the Independent National Electoral Commission. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) set the rules and time-table for the commencement of political activities, thus, Political Parties were registered and only three Parties, namely: Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) scaled through the huddle and were registered (Dode, 2010). The results of the 1999 general elections indicated that Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), after winning in 21 States across the country was returned elected. The All Peoples Party (APP) came second with 9 states, while the Alliance for Democracy (AD), which held sway in the South-west, had 6 states. Unlike previous elections in Nigeria, there were less irregularities, in the 1999 election. In the next general election conducted in 2003 by Obasanjo's Regime, President Obasanjo was again returned to power for the second time in an election that was so badly flawed. That election was described as the "most fraudulent election" in the history of Nigeria (Ezirim and Mbah, 2014). In fact, the election results proved and confirmed that proper National Assembly, Gubernatorial and Presidential elections were not conducted in accordance with the INEC guidelines and the Electoral Act. Rather, figures were literally manufactured in Government Houses or collation centres as results for the return of President Obasanjo and the PDP to power. The alleged electoral malpractices of the ruling PDP were regarded as the most sophisticated in the electoral history of Nigeria (Ezirim and Mbah, 2014). The massive rigging provoked pockets of violence in different parts of Nigeria. According to the Human Right Watch's report, between April and May 2003, about one hundred people were killed and many more injured during federal and state elections in Nigeria (HRW, 2004). In addition, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of over ninety Civil Society Groups, in its report on the 2003 general elections, passed a vote of no confidence on the elections. Some political parties and their candidates decided to challenge some of the results before the various Election Petition tribunals and have gone ahead to do so while others declared "mass action" to pressure a government without popular mandate to abdicate power (TMG, 2015).

The 2007 elections was characterized by the disenfranchisement the electorate and announce fictitious results in areas where no elections did not hold at all, intimidation and harassment of the electorates by the police and military in many places, non-delivery and diversion of election materials, snatching of ballot papers and boxes, thumb printing of ballot papers, incarceration and humiliation of independent election observers, bribery of electoral officers in order to influence the election results, party agents

which all resulted in a bogus series of elections, which both foreign and domestic observers described as travesty. Marietu (2010) re-echoed this sentiment when he argued that: Prior to the elections, the political atmosphere was very tense. Among other overwhelming incidents, President Olusegun Obasanjo offensively declared that, the 2007 election will be 'a do or die affair' and gave life to this statement (Marietu, 2010).

Similarly, Ezirim and Mbah (2014) argued that the political violence that erupted in all these elections progressively had high ethnic tones, as there were ethnic insurgencies during the various elections, such that between June and August 2006, three gubernatorial candidates were assassinated. The run-up to the April 2007 elections was violent, as campaigning in many areas was marked political killings and armed clashes between supporters of rival political parties. The violence formed part of a broader pattern of violence and abuses that is inherent in Nigeria's still largely unacceptable political system (Ezirim and Mbah, 2014). The process was characterized by unprecedented electoral malpractices which led to wide condemnation from both domestic and foreign observers, to the extent that during inauguration ceremony, the then President, late Umaru Yar'adua condemned the flawed election that brought him to power (Abimbola and Adesote, 2012). He thus, decided to setup a committee known as the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) under the leadership of Justice Mohammed Uwais, to fashion out a transparent system that would ensure the conduct of free, fair and credible elections, which will ensure the progress and development of Nigeria's democracy. President Yar'adua was ready to deliver his promises of the restoration of the rule of law and guarantee sanity in the electoral system before he passed away in 2009.

Nigeria's 2011 polls marked the fourth multiparty election in Nigeria. The 2011 general elections were generally acceptable by both local and foreign observers to be partially fair when compared with the 2003 and 2007 general elections. The election however witnessed some violence; in the South-South, Akwa Ibom State witnessed one of the worst histories of political violence in March 22, 2011. The release of 2011 Presidential election result by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which produced President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP as the winner led to sectarian violence in some Northern parts of Nigeria. Some of the affected States were Bauchi, Yobe, Maiduguri, and Kaduna among others. The post electoral violence that accompanied the 2011 general election resulted in the killing of about ten Youth corps members in Bauchi state (Ezirim and Mbah, 2014).

The violence that followed the 2011 presidential election in the country led to the death of many Nigerians and created tension and apprehension of possible insecurity in 2015 general election. The sudden shift of election dates by the electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). A former Governor of Ekiti State, Fayemi states that, the postponement was more of a civilian coup against democracy because for military to have said that it cannot provide security for INEC to conduct the election imply that it has hands in gloves with the presidency. This is a travesty and a danger to our democracy (Fayemi, 2016). Also disturbing were series of litigations in court; a disqualification of any of the frontline presidential candidate would have led to an unprecedented pre-election violence that was capable of tearing the nation apart. In all, the journey to 2015 general election was rough, many politicians were assassinated including an attempt to assassinate the presidential candidate of the APC Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (rtd.) in Kaduna and others kidnapped. Campaign offices and cars of perceived opponents were burnt, while some campaign convoy were stoned including that of President Good luck Jonathan in Bauchi and Katsina state.

In the 2019 general elections, youths' violence in some parts of the country affected the credibility of the election. The general and supplementary elections were characterized by cases of electoral violence and electoral malpractices in some parts of the federation notably Abia, Bayelsa, Borno, Kogi, Kano, Osun, Lagos, Sokoto, Oyo and Rivers. The situation was especially bad in Rivers State, where clashes between political thugs and security personnel reflecting de facto proxy battles between top politicians in the state, who disrupted several collation centres. Surprisingly, the three states most affected by the Boko

Haram insurgency i.e. Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe were not among the states with very high level of reported collation challenges or electoral violence (CDD, 2019).

According to European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), violence, violation of ballot secrecy, harassment of voters and journalists characterised Nigeria's 2019 general elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) worked in porous security and politically charged environment, making the electoral officials exposed to physical attacks and intimidation. Around 150 people died in election-related violence during the campaign period and over the election days. INEC reported attacks on its offices and fatalities, abductions and sexual assault against its officials. The EU said both the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the main opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) failed to curb electoral violence in the country (Sanni, 2019). The election was characterised by the intimidation of voters, rigging, cancellations, inconclusive, vote buying, hiring of thugs that perpetuate electoral violence, inducement of voters, electoral officials and security personnel, disruption of polling units, destruction of electoral materials, ballot box snatching, human right violation, hate speeches as well as igniting ethnic and religious intolerance during the elections. All makes the election incredible and the youths are the major actors.

The Nexus between Youths Violence and Credibility of 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

Elections are said to be credible when they are characterized by inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, competitiveness and when they provide equal opportunities for all eligible citizens to participate as voters in selecting their representatives and as candidates for elective positions and when each step is open to scrutiny and stakeholders can independently verify whether the process is conducted honestly and accurately. Accountability in elections refers to the rights of citizens with respect to the conduct of other electoral stakeholders, including the government, election management bodies (EMBs), political parties, candidates and security forces. Credible elections has to do with 'violent free' elections, devoid of intimidation and harassment of voters.

At the heart of electoral violence in Nigeria lies a complex linkage between the electoral process, the Youth and the politician. Most youths in Nigeria are desperately, poor, haggard, hungry, aggressive, frustrated, and vulnerable and they are illiterates with nothing to survive on. The wealthy and powerful politicians who want to either seize or maintain power at all cost now prey on these aggressive youths, entice them with little money and loads of intoxicants and then spread them to units where they are not sure of election victory to intimidate the supporters of a political opponent from voting, snatching or swapping ballot boxes, falsify election results at collation centres, threaten electoral officials to announce election results under duress, thumb print ballot papers or to assassinate political opponents. Political leaders at all levels perpetrate electoral violence with impunity, Electoral violence in Nigeria is most often carried out by gangs (commonly called thugs) whose members are openly recruited, financed and sometimes armed by public officials, Politicians and party officials or their representatives. These gangs, comprised primarily of Unemployed young men are mobilized to attack their sponsor's rivals, intimidate members of the public, rig elections and protect their patrons from similar attacks. Often, sponsors of electoral violence take repeatedly to the same criminal gangs, violent campus-based "cults" and other sources to recruit agents of political violence. Those recruited are paid, often very little, and sometimes armed for the sole purpose of carrying out violent abuses on behalf of their political sponsors (NAPEN, 2011).

The 2019 general election in Nigeria was not free from the menace of electoral violence. According to European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), violence, violation of ballot secrecy, harassment of voters and journalists characterised Nigeria's 2019 general elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) worked in porous security and politically charged environment, making the electoral officials exposed to physical attacks and intimidation. Almost 150 people died during the election period. INEC reported attacks on its offices, fatalities, abductions and sexual assault against its officials. The EU said both the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the main

opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) failed to curb electoral violence in the country (Sanni, 2019). Therefore, there were cases of electoral violence and electoral malpractices in some parts of the federation notably Abia, Bayelsa, Borno, Kogi, Kano, Lagos, Sokoto, Oyo and Rivers. In Lagos State Aguda, Surulere, Okota polling units witnessed youth violence. In Anambra and other states affected by the electoral violence, ballot boxes and papers were destroyed and burnt to ashes.

In Rivers State, two brothers and a soldier became victims while 15 persons were shot dead during a violence that erupted at the Akuku-Toru council area of the state, where soldiers allegedly unleashed violence on party members and killed their agents. In the Emohua council area 10 youths were arrested for allegedly attempting to snatch ballot boxes and in Okrika, heavy gun fire prevented election staff from safely collating results. In Ahoada West LGA, violence involving thugs loyal to the two main political parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) forestalled ward-level collation efforts (CDD, 2019).

In Abia State, two persons were said to have been murdered in Amukpe, near Sapele, Delta state when gunmen stormed the polling unit while voting was ongoing. In addition, suspected hoodlums in a bid to snatch ballot box in Ibadan, Oyo State, killed one person. In Akwa Ibom, ballot box snatcher was shot dead by soldiers at a polling unit in Ikot Udo Ossiom village, Ukanafun local government area of the state.

Similarly, rampaging armed men in military uniform allegedly murdered a photographer and another victim at Oweikorogha in Bayelsa State alongside a ward chairperson of a major party in the area while waiting the counting of votes. In Borno state, terrorists group allegedly claimed responsibility for a rocket attack on Maiduguri, as another explosion occurred at the headquarters of the Nigerian Army 7th Division when troops were preparing for operations in which soldiers were killed and 20 civilians were injured. In Lokoja, Kogi state, a police inspector, Mohammed Hammani and 2 others lost their lives to the electoral violence. In Kano State, there was violence, vote trading and intimidation of voters characterised the February 23 supplementary governorship election in Dala, Takai and Nasarawa local government area of the state (CLEEN, 2019).

In Bauchi state, there was also attack on a collation officer (Dominion Anosike), she explained that thugs attacked her and other officials of INEC during collation and made away with result sheets and made her to announce the result "under duress". Furthermore, CLEEN observers were attacked by suspected thugs at PU 009 ward Madara Dunari, Katagum LGA of Bauchi State.

In Benue state, election materials were set ablaze by some irate youths, resulting in the cancellation of polling that affects 13,000 registered voters, and a collation officer carrying result sheets was shot in the leg. (Premiums times, 2019). The supplementary election in the state also suffered a huge setback when irate youths in Chito, the headquarters of Azendasha council ward, in Ukum Local Government Area, attacked INEC officials, agents and observers. Similarly, in Adamawa state, some APC members were allegedly attacked by the youths of Nassarawo Jereng at the collation centre for Nassarawo/Binyeri House of Assembly election (Thisday, 27 Feb. 2019).

In Kogi and Bayelsa state governorship elections, there was intense political violence. In Kogi state for instance, the police and other security personnel were used in disrupting the electoral process, there was open vote buying, coercing voters to vote for certain political parties and arson on political opponents. According to political parties Chairmen forum, police officers in uniforms were the ones aiding thugs to snatch ballot boxes and other sensitive materials from polling units. Furthermore, accredited observers and agents of opposition political parties were refused access to the collation centres by thugs, while over 35,000 police officers watched helplessly (Punch, 26 Nov. 2019). Furthermore, election did not hold in 780 polling units of the Kogi central senatorial district, as a result of violence unleashed by thugs whom attacked electoral officials, voters and electoral materials destroyed. The election cannot pass the test of fairness and credibility, said Natasha (Sahara Reporters, 17 Nov. 2019).

In Bayelsa state, thugs invaded a polling unit in Yenagoa, the state capital and carted away thumb printed ballot papers and other sensitive voting materials (Premium times, 16 Nov. 2019). All most all election observation groups testified that the elections in Kogi and Bayelsa states were marred by violence. International observers from Austria, the European Union, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, United States of America and United Kingdom reported that, there was incidence of violence, intimidation and fatalities, some even called for the cancellation of the election in Kogi state (Tribune, 28 Nov. 2019).

According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), there were 10 cases of death and 129 cases of violence and electoral crimes in Bayelsa and Kogi states and there were cases of inducement and intimidation of INEC officials during the collation and counting of results (Ibid). In all of these, the youths are the major tools used by the politicians to obstruct the system for selfish reasons, thereby denying the credibility of the elections.

Effects of Youths' Electoral Violence on Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Since the return to civil rule from 1999 to date Nigeria failed to conduct, free, fair and credible elections and the implications are these:

1. It causes voter's apathy, electoral violence scared people in most cases from participating in electoral process, as some people prefer to stay at home due to the fear of electoral violence. In states like Kano, majority of voters refused to come out en masse to cast their votes, during the 2019 supplementary elections, due to intimidation and assault on their persons by thugs at the polling units during the supplementary elections. Voters' apathy is a serious threat to democratic consolidation. Because absence of popular participation of the masses in electoral process is 'undemocratic'. This is what Obianyo (2008) described as the "devaluation of Democracy".
2. Loss of lives and properties, youths in their prime loss their lives and properties worth billions of naira were destroyed and a large number of people have been turned to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, due to elections related violence.
3. It gave Nigeria bad image and bad reputation in her democratic engineering. For instance, following the discredited 2007 and 2011 General elections, Nigerian international status diminished and her credibility in Africa and among the comity of nations got depleted (International Crisis Group, 2012).
4. It has brought loss of confidence in the electoral process and electoral institution that is responsible in steering the affairs of the elections. In this case, it takes a while for the institution to recover from its lost confidence and for the people to accept any attempt of having credible future elections. The insecurity generated as a result of electoral violence has also created doubts on deepening democracy, as future elections and electoral activities may not encourage capable hands who serves either as ad-hoc or volunteers, that may handle all the rigorous activities in the conduct of elections, leaving the exercise on the hands of the party supporters and sympathizers, who at the end may influence or manipulate the election results in favour of their respective parties and candidates that may probably raise unnecessary tension and violence, as well as affect the credibility of the entire elections (Abdullahi and Auwal, 2014).
5. Waste of resources and retards development, for instance, huge amount of monies that are supposed to be use for developmental purposes were used in funding re-elections, as a result of electoral violence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the data and findings of this study it is established that, the credibility of the 2019 general and supplementary elections in Kano, Lagos, Rivers, Nasarawa, Benue, Bayelsa, Taraba, Bauchi, Sokoto state and some other parts of the federation was marred by electoral violence. There was spread of rumour of rigging, Spread of inflammatory messages about an election or its outcome, the pursuit of electoral victory at any cost, inflation of election results, use of under-age voters card, denial of access to observers and the media, intimidation of political opponents by thugs, religious and ethnic

campaigning by party supporters and their candidates. There was series of violence during registration, campaign, on the day of general and supplementary elections and after release of results in some wards and local government areas, which made the credibility of the election questionable.

The two main political parties of (APC) and (PDP) witnessed intra and inter party violence, the aggrieved party supporters often vented their anger through protests initially, but in most cases it degenerated into the fracas between supporters of opposing parties. The process toward attainment of free, fair, credible and transparent elections as a system of consolidating democracy and good governance in Nigeria characterised by violence in all the succeeding elections.

Recommendations

1. Over 97 percents of electoral violence in Nigeria were masterminded by the teeming jobless youths. Therefore, government at all level should create employment opportunities and poverty alleviation programs to keep hundreds of thousands of restive youths and young pupils roaming the streets, to divert their attention and to reduce their vulnerability of being recruited as political thugs by desperate politicians.
2. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should intensify its awareness campaign, enlightenment and public education programmes on the dangers of electoral violence and bring to book the perpetrators and sponsors of electoral violence and security personnel found wanting, accordingly.
3. Political parties should allow internal democracy to flourish and caution their members against hate speech, religious or ethnic campaigns. More importantly, there is need to make political offices less attractive, to discourage the current penchant for do-or-die politics, god-fatherism and neopatrimonialism. Sponsors and those caught engaging in electoral violence should be severely punished in line with the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended). Being a civil offence, executive immunity does not cover election petitions and electoral offences; hence, no one should be shielded from prosecution (Kupoluyi, 2019).
4. Law enforcement agencies, the police, civil defence and army should know that it is part of their responsibility to contribute their own quotas in ensuring credible elections in Nigeria. They should stay away from being use by our politicians to scuttle electoral outcome.
5. There should be an electoral reform, which will criminalize electoral offences and stipulates the punishment. Until legislature display political will, election violence cannot stop unless the law changes. Until the law is changed in the Parliament, end to electoral violence is only but mere wish (Kalu & Gberevbie, 2018).
6. INEC should provide means by which the electorate can protect their votes and ensure that they are counted. A situation whereby, those who vote are convinced that their votes do not counted, portend real danger to the election mandate, in particular, and democracy in general (Zainawa and Jiddere, 2014) and government should introduce E-voting, as alternative to achieve a good and reliable election outcome.
7. Religious leaders should also preach in the mosques and churches against violence, malpractices and hate speeches during electioneering campaigns and elections.
8. Fight against corruption in Nigeria is one of the effective mechanisms to fix the electoral ills including electoral violence. Therefore, government should intensify the fight against corruption in Nigeria.
9. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) should double their efforts in civic education and mobilization of voters, to inform the Nigerian voters of their constitutional rights during election and to also come up with skills for greater participation of the youths in the political and electoral processes.

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