

Assessment Of The Consequences Of Election Political Violence On Democratic Social Order In Nigeria

S.A. Mezieobi Ph.D

Department of Curriculum Studies
and Educational Technology,
University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt.

D.I. Mezieobi Ph.D

Department of Social Science Education,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Jerome Anyanwu Ph.D

Department of Curriculum Studies
and Educational Technology,
University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt.

Abstract

This study assessed the consequences of political election violence on democratic social order in Nigeria. The study was carried out in North central geo-political zone of Nigeria. The population of the study was 200 respondents across the area of study. Data was generated through structured interviews. Three research questions guided the study. The study was focused on causes of political violence in Nigeria, the consequences and how to improve the scenario for institutionalization of credible democratic order in Nigeria. It was found that ethnicity and religion, doctoring of election results, massive rigging, poverty, thuggery amongst others stimulated political election violence. Some of the consequences were: non mass oriented governance, political instability, increased cost in maintenance of security, political assassination and so on the study found that national integration, fair distribution of resources by leadership, indigenous language utilization, political education amongst others can sanitize the democratic process. It was recommended that leadership should be focused on pursuit of national interest aspiration ventures, fair treatment of all citizens of Nigeria, irrespective of tribe and the institutionalization of laws against fraudulent elections.

Keywords: Assessment, election political violence and democratic social order.

INTRODUCTION

The bedrock of any stable and functional democratic state is the electoral process (Osakwe, 2009). Election results in Nigeria are hardly acceptable because of doctoring of election results, corruption, open rigging, perversion of justice and thuggery. The subject of (democratic instability) is ever more pertinent to Nigeria and indeed Africa as a whole where misrule and repression accompanied by gross human rights violations have become an intractable problem over the decades (sofekun, Oyakhiromen, Ige and Obayemi, 2008). Ogheneako (2014) averred that the conduct of general elections in Nigeria from 1960 till date is fraught with crises and undemocratic practices such as mass rigging, rioting, kidnapping, murder, snatching of ballot boxes, thuggery amongst others. It is interesting to note that politicians are nefariously determined to grab political power at all cost, while neglecting the sanctity of rule

of law and protection of the rights of electorates from political intimidation and imposition of governance, not genuinely generated from the popular mandate of the electorates. This ugly situation portends dangers for the sustainable development of democracy in Nigeria. In addition, injustices in the conduct of election stimulates violent oppositions, protests, riots, strikes amongst others which affects democratic social order and political stability in the state of Nigeria.

There are visible abuse of human rights and usurpation of political power by politicians in developing nations of Africa and Asia. To buttress the foregoing assertion, Atana (2014:150) remarked “politics in much of Asia and Africa became characterized by violence, inter-ethnic conflicts, massive corruption, intermittent military coups, supervision of opposition groups and denial of individual liberties. Elections in the country have been characterized by massive rigging, violence and confusion that often lead to undemocratic rules either by military take over of government or institution of a non-mass oriented and autocratic civilian government (Ikeanyibe, 2008). Democratic government is the pursuit of modern nations because it promotes fundamental human rights of the citizens, encourage full exercise of political civic rights, including popular involvement of the electorate in choosing their leaders through orderly conducted election (Mezieobi & Mezieobi, 2012). When elections are not properly conducted, the result is mass protests, civil strife, political assassination of character, civil disorder which works against the maintenance of democratic social order or relative peace which is ideal for maintenance of political stability, can only be achieved through democratic transparent practices in the conduct of elections.

Democracy thrives best where there is rule of law. The absence of rule of law makes mockery of democratic governance and as such, could degenerate to de-democratization (Erhagbe & Oghi, 2012: 127). (Democratic) social order is very important in the (Nigerian) society for the growth of the society, where there is no (democratic) social order in the society, the society will be chaotic (Eboh, 2015:29). Democratic social order connotes the existence of relative peace in a polity. Political violence which occasions uncontrolled democratic social disorder, acrimonies, conflicts and protests by large segment of aggrieved citizens of Nigeria are manifest because of the manipulation of election process, conducts and results. The state of general insecurity attracts a lot of costs on government in peace building and maintenance of damaged facilities. Emeka (2015) refers democratic social order as a condition in which citizens execute their nominal duties without this lens or undue intervention of enforcement agencies.

Onwuka (1997:100) said “...the state must guarantee and protect some rights of her citizens to contribute positively towards national growth and development. Popular participation is a direct opposite of political apathy. Participation is guaranteed in a democracy where rule of law is in full practice (Okafor & Mbabie, 2015:57).

The primary focus of nation building is to unite people of diverse cultures, interests and religion in a nation state (Mezieobi, 2016). Political election violence was said to emanate from “...numerous corrupt practices that exist in the country’s (political system)...lack of transparency and accountability (Kanu, 2016:43). Illegitimate power involves compulsion, dictatorship, the use of threat or use of sanction, an imposition of one self in influencing the behavior and thoughts of others (Eboh, 2015). In addition, corruption is the abuse or misuse of (political) power or position for personal or group benefits (Opoh, 2015).

Shaibu, Utulu and Odoma (2013) stresses that poverty is a manifest threat to the peaceful co-existence of the citizens of Nigeria. The vast resources of Nigeria are not adequately distributed or directed into projects to enhance the standard of living. Manbe (2009) and Abanyam (2012) conceived poverty as the major disruption of the democratic social order in Nigeria. Abanyam reinforced that this situation has lured our youths into criminal activities. It is not out of place that unemployed youths are substantially used for thuggery, rigging of elections, assassination, political murder amongst others.

Aroukudu (2014) observed that political, economic and religious crises have generated political instability in Nigeria, which potentially frustrates viable efforts at nation building and has in addition threatened the cooperative existence of Nigeria as a state. Political rights can be fully exercised in a time democratic state freedom of political participation and freedom of expression are not curtailed through oppressive and repressive policies, decrees and laws. Political rights are constitutionally provided and perfected for the full exercise by citizens of a state (Mezieobi, Ossai & Nwali, 2015). Political violence arises where the fundamental political rights of the citizens to freely choose their leaders are abused by the imposition of leadership through undemocratic elections and governance.

In search for the generating source of election violence and disorder, Joseph (1991) sees Nigeria's politics as the drive to acquire power, gain resources, acquire contracts and squander the economy. Political disorder through the use of thuggery. Okoigun (2003) identified thuggery and violence as strategic in Nigeria's party activities. On how to establish a sustainable democratic system in Nigeria, Erhagbe (2010) observed that national integration is primary in Nigeria, in the sense that ethnic differences and disagreements accentuate violent conflicts which result in destruction of both lives and properties.

Furthermore, the Nigerian society needs to be led by good people who have zero tolerance to corruption (Ituma, 2009). For effective practice of democracy to yield substantial dividends, Epelle (2013:214) comment "...leadership must embark on a complete value – reorientation programme, eschewing parochialism and use political power for the benefit of the generality of its citizens without this, democratic politics will continue to produce undemocratic divided of crisis?

Political (election violence)...has serious effects on...health and social life (of a people in a state) (Oyeoku, Mezieobi, Ezegbe & Obikwelu, 2013:247). Against this background, Asobie (2007) expressed that a responsible government actualizes the majority interests, needs and aspirations. This is done to create sustainable peace and serene democratic polity. Condemning the state of election conducts in Nigeria, Okolie (2015:37) quipped

...democracy in Nigeria today has come to mean "might is right". Governance has come to emphasize only distribution and not production...citizenship rights to exercise their franchise and choose their political leaders have now been vitiated, if not outright but tacitly banned.

Election violence can be moderated through the use of indigenous languages, the creative quality of language can enhance electorate participation and clear understanding of issues in the electoral process and electoral system. However, Essien in Iwuchukwu (2008) condemned black Africans who do not involve their mother tongue in political development. Language will deepen understanding of political concepts, the values of election transparency and the need for rightful conducts during and after elections, as well as persistent shunning of bribery from selfish ambitious politicians. Eminue (2005) perceives a credible electoral system as the one

that equalizes opportunities for electorates to freely choose their leaders without intimidation, molestation and abuses. Indeed, a good electoral system helps to strengthen the country's democracy. There should be genuine constitutional devices to outlaw indecent conduct of elections in Nigeria. In a democratic state, political equality of citizens are protected through transparency in the conduct of elections. Those at the corridors of power and political elites ought to be shielded and limited from potential abuses of state power through acts of massive rigging of elections. The credibility of democracy is in doubt, if it does not command popular votes and support of the masses.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Review of literatures is inundated with reports of persistent poor conducts of general elections in Nigeria socio-political environment since independence in 1960 till date. It is therefore the focus of this study to exhume the causes of election political violence in Nigeria, its consequences on democratic social order and how to improve the conduct of general elections to ensure the institutionalization of sustainable transparent and credible democratic order in the political state of Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions are posed to guide the study.

1. What are the causes of election political violence in Nigeria?
2. What are the consequences of election violence on democratic social order in Nigeria?
3. How can the conduct of election be improved in Nigeria's political scenario?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized descriptive survey design. Nworgu (2006) interpreted descriptive survey as one in which a group of persons or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data, based on a few people or items considered to be representative of the sample. This study was carried out in North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, covering Plateau, Nassarawa, Benue and Kogi States, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

The population comprises two hundred (200) respondents made up of males, females, youth and adult citizens, who were randomly sampled. The North Central geo-political zone was chosen because of its strategic position in the political affairs of the country. The major instrument used by the researchers and five research assistants, was an interview schedule designed to elicit vital information on electoral issues in Nigeria. English and Hausa languages were fluently used by the research assistant; this assisted the researchers to get down the grassroots.

The instrument constructed by the researchers was titled "interview schedule on consequences of election violence on Nigeria democratic social order". The instrument was face validated by one expert in social studies, one expert in political science and one in measurement and evaluation. The validates scrutinized the instrument to ascertain the relevance of the items, appropriateness and clarity. The instrument was trial tested with 50 Nigerian citizens in Enugu State, which is not the area of the study. A satisfactory reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained, which was considered adequate for the study. The instrument was administered by the researchers in company with five assistants. The exercise lasted for twelve weeks; it was synonymously carried out in the area of the study. The research assistants were trained on the best approach to reach the respondents and to clearly explain anything necessary as may be requested by the respondents. The interview schedule helped on

the spot collection of data. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Table 1: Causes of election political violence in Nigeria

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1.	Elections are highly falsified.	100 50%	80 40%	13 6.5%	7 3.5%
2.	Elections in Nigeria are not transparent.	99 49.5%	87 43.5%	4 2%	16 8%
3.	Election results are not credible.	150 75%	50 25%	0 0%	0 0%
4.	Injustices in the conduct of election stimulate protests.	80 60%	120 60%	0 0%	0 0%
5.	Unemployed youths are used as ready tools for violence.	63 31.5%	85 42.5%	33 16.5%	19 9.5%
6.	Religion and ethnicity has influenced the conduct of election.	50 25%	90 45%	47 23.5%	13 6.5%
7.	Violence is stimulated when citizens are not freely allowed to make rightful choices of leadership.	133 66.5%	57 28.5%	8 4%	2 1%
8.	Political thuggery is fronted by political parties.	111 65.5%	63 31.5%	20 10%	6 3%
9.	Continuous human rights violations are threat to the form stabilization of democracy in Nigeria.	80 40%	120 60%	0 0%	0 0%

The analysis of data election falsification, non credibility of election results in Nigeria, injustices in the conduct of election, political thuggery amongst others are the factors that stimulate election political violence.

Table 2: Consequences of election political violence in maintaining democratic social order in Nigeria

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
11.	Electoral process is not transport.	97 48.5%	52 26%	31 15.5%	20 10%
12.	There is mass rigging of elections.	100 50%	80 40%	10 5%	10 5%
13.	The fundamental rights of the citizens are abused.	66 33%	83 41.5%	29 14.5%	22 11%
14.	Pre- and post election protests are manifest.	70 35%	100 50%	21 10.5%	9 4.5%
15.	Politicians want to grab power at all cost.	160 80%	40 20%	0 0%	0 0%
16.	Political instability is the democratic order in Nigeria.	200 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
17.	Government spends a lot in security functions.	67 33.5%	80 40%	7 3.5%	40 20%
18.	There is suppression of legitimate protests by governance.	77 38.5%	100 50%	20 10%	3 1.5%
19.	Political assassination and murder dominate contest for political power.	200 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
20.	Poverty induces voters to sell voters cards.	103 51.5%	65 32.5%	30 15%	2 1%
21.	Insecurity is a threat to the cooperate existence of Nigeria.	100 50%	90 45%	10 5%	0 0%
22.	There are manifest impositions of leaders on the electorate.	107 53.5%	80 40%	11 5.5%	2 1%
23.	Usurpation of political power is in vogue.	77 38.5%	86 43%	20 10%	17 8.5%

The result findings indicated the consequences of election political violence as massive rigging, abuse of fundamental human rights, greed to grab power at all cost, political instability, high cost in security maintenance, political assassinations and imposition of leaders amongst others.

Table 3: How to improve the conduct of election in Nigeria political scenario

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
24.	National integration is a primary necessity in Nigeria body politic.	83 41.5%	80 40%	20 10%	17 8.5%
25.	Gaps and differences amongst ethnic groups should be narrowed down.	200 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
26.	Leadership should eschew parochialism and use political power for the benefit of all.	161 80.5%	32 16%	7 3.5%	0 0%
27.	Indigenous language should be used for positive political reorientation.	80 40%	80 40%	20 10%	20 10%
28.	Indigenous language will deepen understanding of democratic practices.	90 45%	70 35%	25 12.5%	15 7.5%
29.	Good electoral system strengthens the country's democracy.	70 35%	75 37.5%	30 15%	25 12.5%
30.	There is need for constitutional provision to outlaw indecent conducts of elections in Nigeria.	87 43.5%	50 25%	40 25%	23 11.5%
31.	Democracy thrives where there is rule of law.	60 30%	77 38.5%	43 21.5%	20 10%
32.	Security could be fortified before and after elections.	200 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
33.	State protection of electorates from abuses is advocated.	74 37.5%	77 38.5%	29 14.5%	20 10%
34.	Politicians in Nigeria require political education.	160 80%	40 20%	0 0%	0 0%

Statistical analysis showed that the conduct of election in Nigeria can be improved through national integration, judicious use of political power for the benefit of all, use of local languages for reorientation of the electorates on good political conducts, others are, the institutionalization of a good electoral system, constitutional provisions to outlaw indecent electoral conducts, including fortification of security, protection of electorates from abuses and extension of political education to the Nigerian politicians in particular.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study established that doctoring of results, imperfect conduct of elections, thuggery, injustices, ethnicity amongst others generate election violence in Nigeria. This in corroborating with the ideas put forward by Sofekun, Oyakhiromen, Ige and Obayemi, 2008, Atoukudu (2014), Atang (2014) and Ogheneakoke (2014).

It was further found that political elections violence have disastrous consequences as political instability, continuation of massive rigging, abuse of fundamental human rights, political murder and high cost of security maintenance on the side of the government. This is in

consonance with the perception of Ikeanyibe (2008), Osakwe (2009), Mezieobi and Mezieobi (2012).

Furthermore, it was discovered that the conduct of elections in Nigeria can be improved through national integration, use of indigenous language, political education, protection of human rights, judicious use of power and institutionalization of credible electoral system. This is in tandem with the postulations of Eminue (2005), Iwuchukwu (2008), Erhagbe (2010) and Epelle (2013).

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. There is need for political socialization of the Nigerian citizens on the need for the conduct of credible political elections.
2. Those at the corridors of power (government control of state affairs) should distribute resources equitably to all Nigerians.
3. Citizens should be freely allowed to vote the candidates of their choice.
4. Elections in Nigeria deserve investment in security so as to protect the fundamental human rights of Nigerians.
5. Civic education should be made compulsory in Nigerian school, in order to educate the youth early enough against election violence.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the consequences of political election violence on democratic order in Nigeria. The causes of political election violence are identified, the consequences and how to improve the conduct of elections in Nigeria to institutionalize a credible political system was established through data information. It is ideal to address poverty and curtail leadership abuse of powers and fundamental human rights of citizens. The imposition of leadership through fraudulent conduct of elections is a stigma against stabilizing credible democratic order in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Leadership should be fair to all Nigerians irrespective of tribe in the contest for political positions; this is to attract loyalty and peaceful conduct of election.
2. There is need to sanitize the political system by outlawing fraudulent elections through credible electoral reforms.
3. There should be a bold effort to provide employment and address poverty; this will help to stem the greed for power acquisition at all cost.
4. Political offices should be made less financially attractive; this will reduce the quest for power acquisition scramble.
5. Aggressive national reorientation of the masses on the need for conduct of credible election is ideal; this will help to control election malpractices.
6. The political contestants should be made to step out of political offices positions, before the conduct of fresh election, this is to control undue influences of power of incumbency on the conduct of elections in Nigeria.

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