

## Research Article

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## Article detail

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## Youth and the electoral violence in Nigeria's democratic regime: Lesson for youth ahead of 2023 general election

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**Abstract:** This study is a qualitative research data in which data were collected from the secondary sources from books, journals and the government reports. Youth in democratic governance have been used to thwarting the election process or creating confusion that could lead to generate doubt in the conduct of free, fair and credible election. Employing thugs to boycott the legal procedure in order to win the election or disruption the election creating avenue for electoral violence to manifest. Electoral violence is among the major factors that affect the democratic regime in Nigeria. Throughout the history of democratic governance in Nigeria, electoral violence have affected negatively the socio-political and economic wellbeing and democratization process that has been struggled to put place in the country since the independence. This paper examines the

manifestations of electoral violence instigated by youth in Nigerian democracy. The findings shows numerous factors that contributed to the electoral violence in democratic governance of Nigeria. These factors comprise electoral rigging which manifests in various stages such as snatching of ballot box, and voters buying, godfatherism and institutional incapacity in managing election and mismanagement.

**Keywords** – Election rigging, Election, Electoral violence, Nigeria, Youth

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The youth engagement into the arena of political spares did not start with the current political empire, since even before the independence in Nigeria, youths have been the prime agents of this is because youth constitute an overwhelming majority of the working/active population of Nigeria. The recognition of the youth in development may have led to the establishment of the National Youth Policy to cater for the yearnings and aspirations of youth in Nigeria (Amzat & Abdullahi, 2016). Moreover, elections as means towards popular participation and repeatedly involve a substantial degree of race and rivalry in which individuals strive for the positions of power at different levels in government. In the democratic system of government, elections resolved the longest dispute as well as political violence thereby tend to improve the political stability and improve development and good governance. However, when the election are named with irregularities, violence and other malpractices will lead to question the stability of the democratic regime and put national security of question (Ighodalo, 2012).

Unfortunately, the youth nowadays have been used as promoters of electoral violence by the political gladiators' in order to win the election or to disrupt the election process where necessary. Scholer like Habu Mohammed have categorically believed that the electoral violence was perpetuated by the youth during the election. The paper attempt to addressed the the role of youth in perpetuated the electoral violence in Nigerian democratic regime. It's against this backdrop this article will examine the role of youth in perpetrating electoral violence in Nigerian democracy. Hence since the rebirth of democratic dispensation in Nigeria in 1999 after prolonged military rule there has been increasing incidences of electoral violence in every election conducted as witnessed in 2003, 2007 as well as 2011 general lection where almost 800 people where report to have been killed in sevseral incidences of electoral violence (HRW, 2011).

## 2. LITERATURE SURVEY

Similarly, the paper looked at role of youth in perpetrating electoral violence in fourth republic which witnessed series of the electoral violence. Election is refers to electing the candidates who represent the mandate of the people in a given country into parliament, executive and perhaps other parts of government (Kolawole, Kayode & Samson, 2020). Darry (2009) belief that election is the most preferable means which people select their representatives. If the election is free and fair, will encourages strong competition, political participation, accountability and serves as means to change government peacefully. It give opportunity to assessment the popularity of government and check its excessiveness, or member of parliament or political party. Electoral process begins with pre-election activities such as constituency delimitation, voter registration and electoral campaigns, and culminates in election and post-election activities like voting, vote counting/compilation, declaration of election results and election litigation (Orji, 2021). Since the establishment of the election as a means of governance in the Nigeria have been associated with the intense competition for political power among the country's political elites (Mohammed, 2019).

Since independence Nigerian election have been associated with massive election irregularitiesand accusations of gigantic rigging with violence and subversion of electoral process, politics of zero-sum game and intimidation, monetizing politics including vote buying and corruption as well as malpractices (Sule & Sambo, 2020).

### 2.1. Electoral violence

Electoral violence explains the longest features of the democratisation process in the African continent (Omotola, 2010). In this regard Abdullahi (2013) contendsthat political competition in African countries have been associated with some degree of violence related to it, particularly during elections. Individuals and groups resorted to violence using open dangerous weapons as such as guns, axes and cutlasses as an approach to political. As pointed out by Kuro and Ebi (2011) Electoral violence became the greatest threats to various democratizing societies. Moreover, electoral violence have been manifested in various dimensions which compresses among others murderand abduction as well as violent in order to seizure and damage the electoral material using gun, weapon in some cases employing security operatives and youths. These misdemeanour are propagated by folks and groups (involving mostly youths in order to manipulatingelection results).

Since the rebirth of the democratic regime in 1999 the frequent of electoral violence became worrisome to the extent that the government had taken measure to improve the election process by adopting technological devices such as data capture machine and card reader to minimise the election irregularities. In 2011 alone election as mention earlier in the paper, the HRW 2011 mention that more than 800 people have killed during the post election violence in Nigeria such as Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna, Gombe and Taraba States. Electoral violence in Nigerian political context became a weapon used by political gladiators to win the elections hence is the only way toward enriched themselves through democratic leadership. Fischer (2002) sees electoral violence as any random and organized deedaim to regulate, delayin order to controlthe electoral process through menace, assault and verbal intimidation others includes hate speech, propaganda, and destruction of public property.

Electoral violence in Nigeria particularly Fourth republic became a serious concern to both scholars and policy makers over an increases incidence of violence and other related criminal activities during the election period as witnessed in almost all the election conducted since the rebirth of the democratic dispensation in the country after prolonged military rule in 1999. It is again this backdrop that Samson and Abimbola (2014) posit that the first general election conducted after military rule in Nigeria's fourth republic was that of the 2003 and that election was allegedly been the corrupt and fraudulent elections as well as characterised with different sorts of malpractices which includes ballot stuffing, intimidation, killing, and assassination among others.

In similar argument, Human Right Watch report that nearly 800 peoples where believed to have been killed in 2011 general as a result of incidences of electoral violence in Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi, Gombe and Taraba States (2011). It was also reported that during the 2015 election massive contestation and used of thugs and other extreme criminal measures have characterised the election day by the rival political parties. Hence, the extent of insecurity arising from the political accomplishments reached to the point that the government introduced components of armed forces to keep peace during the elections (Jude, 2015).

In 2019 the elections was not immune from the cycle of electoral violence and other related irregularities as electoral violence was assert the life of many ad-hoc staff Porthercourtand six other people reportedly killed in another attacked by political thugs few days to general elections during a clashed betweenmain supporter of political parties opponentsin Delta state; in another incidence an alleged ballot box snatcher was killed dead in Akwa Ibom in one polling unit. In Osun state gangster burnt down office and election materials at INEC office Oriade Local Government Area (Onimisi & Leah, 2019).

## 2.2. Youth

Youths refers to a transitional period from childhood to adulthood and mostly are people between the range of 15 and 39 years of ages. Although, in most of the African countries youth are define differently. For instance, in Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa youth population are define as those between the ages of 15 to 35 years but in Nigeria and Swaziland youth are define as population between the ages of 12 and 30 years; in the same vain Botswana and Mauritius sees youth population between the ages of 14 and 25 years (Idike & Innocent, 2015). The history of Nigeria confirms believes that young people are the custodians of change and have been playing important roles in the country's political space during colonial era (i.e before 1960) with the establishment of Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1936. Indeed, NYM was the first political movement with the major aim to foster politsical advancement and enhance socio-economic well-being of Nigerians. Youth, also paved way for the emergence of other political parties such as National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun (NCNC) in 1944, Action Group (AG) in 1950; National Element Progressive Union (NEPU) in 1950; Northern People's Congress (NPC) (Amzat & Abdullahi, 2016).

Accordingly, the reappearanceof the democracy is complemented by democratic principles such as freedom of association, speech to smooth the growth and development of thuggaryin the other hand and severaljobless youths join different political parties in order to secure the chance of being employed, youth participatedinpolitical party campaigns and rallies of their desired candidates under the camouflage of supporters. Since political parties have their right to mobilize supporters at their discretion, and the supporters have the right to choose a political party to belong to, subsequently, politicians display their interest of sponsoring thugs to help them to influencethe political processes as such conflict arose due to the difference in their objective, interest and manifestation (Suleiman & Muhammad, 2017).

## 2.3. Election rigging

Election rigging can also be seen as any procedure the undue authority use to control and manipulate the election results in an undefined way to protect their certain interests against others. When people's interests are expressed in credible election, the regime in power would enjoy the acceptability of the people. However, election malpractice

removes people's concern due to unpopular imposition of a candidate (Osinakachukwu & Jawan, 2011). Rigging is one of the influencing factors which can easily make the whole election process violent. Considering previous elections, it discloses that destabilizing the electoral process via massive fraud causes violence either before, during or after the elections. Employing political thugs to manoeuvre the electoral process by some politicians leads to violence, particularly if resisted by oppositions or citizens, when unpopular candidates are declared winners of the election. For instance, the 1965/1966 Western regional election was followed by destruction of lives and properties as witnessed in 2007 violence after the announcement of gubernatorial elections in some 50 states as a result of alleged rigging. Curfew was enforced in Edo, Osun, Ondo, Kogi and Kano States to restore peace or calm the violence (Ojo, 2014). Similar to the 2011 general election when the election was announced that the then president win the election against Buhari almost the states run in the violence alleging the election was rig in favour of the ruling party.

Election rigging is a phenomena that bedevilling Nigerian political system throughout the conduct of the election history in Nigeria. That is why it became a topic of concern of every government coming into power to put more emphasis and concern to review the electoral system in order to provide sound election process. Election rigging according to includes these:

- *Acknowledgement of non-existing polling units by INEC and allocation of voting materials to same.*
- *Bribing the INEC staff, and security apparatus with desirable amounts to commit election rigging.*
- *Alteration of electoral materials to private offices, residences and palaces of traditional rulers for manipulation and falsification.*
- *Concealment or non-release of voters' register loaded with false names later used as ghost votes.*
- *Used un-numbered Voters' register at polling units, thus permitting arbitrary addition of names to the register*
- *Unannounced and swift changes of locations of polling stations and collection centres.*
- *Thumb-printing ballot papers by INEC officials, security agents and other domestic monitors.*
- *Accumulation and use of illegally acquired voting cards to vote on election days.*
- *Applying police and security agencies to terrorize opponents and rival party agents (Kwasau, 2013).*

Election rigging has delayed the hope of Nigeria democratic consolidation. Many leaders who emerged as winners find themselves adopting possible every means of manipulation to restrict the chances of good candidates from winning despite having the people's support. When unpopular candidates are elected, people lose confidence in the government as they are aware of the administration's unjust mandate due to rigging (Majekodunmi & Adejuwon, 2012). As the then president Yar'adua observed that the election that brought him into power was associated with the massive irregularities, as such he set up a committee to review the electoral process by adopting new technological devices during the election in order to limit the tendencies of election malpractices in the electoral system.

#### **2.4. Money political and vote buying**

The role of money in the political arrangement cannot be over emphasized. Money in political spares of Nigeria was basically subjective with voters buying and selling. Money Politics has rapidly shrink the political arrangement and has become avital variable in shaping who partakes in the electoral politics (Samuel,Uto,Akeem& Israel. 2019). Vote buying manifest in different forms, it takes place during voter registration exercise, campaign process, election day and even after the election particularly in the tribunal (Rauf, Fatima & Muhammed, 2015; Sha, 2008). This furthermore, indicates that Lucky (2013) opined that the democracy, which seems to be the best technique of government, is being continually assaulted in many countries such as Nigeria due to the phenomenon of money politics and vote buying.

Money politics is regarded the most factors destabilising Nigeria's good governance and instigates electoral violence. President Obasanjo in a 2013 at a lecture organised by INEC, on the budget set for conducting and organising elections have been more worrying, nonetheless, the no limit to candidate and his party spending during election.

### 2.5. Framework for analysis

This paper adapted structural functionalist theory advanced by Robert K Morton (1956) as the framework for analysis. The theory opined that society as organism with various parts and each part has function to perform for the survival of the whole system. The same will apply to the electoral system and the conduct of election. Election is a multi-task of different agencies and when is tapered intentionally or otherwise it will thereby bringing about dysfunction in the system (Ifeanyi, 20015). Electoral violence is an act tempering with election process usually organized by the politicians using some portions of youth in order to disrupt the election process to take advantage of either winning the election by all means or upset the election where they have less popularity. The irregularities associated with the conduct of the election which led to election violence includes; election rigging, snatching of ballot box, inflation of figures, voter buying/money politics. Since the rebirth of the democratic regime in Nigeria in 1999 the election in the country have feature different kind of electoral related violence either pre, during and post-election due to the irregularities associated with conduct of the election process. The 2011 general election have a clear picture of high level of electoral violence during the conduct of the election (HRW, 2011).

### 3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The paper attempt to addressed the the role of youth in perpetuated the electoral violence in Nigerian democratic regime. It's against this backdrop this article will examine the role of youth in perpetrating electoral violence in Nigerian democracy. Hence since the rebirth of democratic dispensation in Nigeria in 1999 after prolonged military rule there has been increasing incidences of electoral violence in every election conducted as witnessed in 2003,2007 as well as 2011 general lection where almost 800 people where report to have been killed in sevseral incidences of electoral violence (HRW, 2011).

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OR METHODS

The paper adopted content analysis to source the data and required information from the existing secondary source. The sources of the data includes published materials from the journals, books, reports and other related materials were used

### 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study indicates that the electoral violence was the results of youth vanguard, election rigging which manifestations into different phases such as Money Politics, Voter Buying in Nigerian politics as witnessed in the role Money played in campaigning for votes, primary elections which has shown evidences in many places including viral videos on how delegates collect bribes before the election. Nigeria youth have been used and are subjected to Money politics when it come to election period, youth where used as vanguard and thugs during the election to perpetuate electoral violence during the election period with little amount of money given to them as incentive and promising juice work when the political leaders win the election.

It's also categorically found that the political leaders and their candidates for election set huge amount of money for votes buying during the election period and another money for court cases. One of the clear evidence was also discovered that Money politics, vote buying and selling were not only limited to voters but it was committed during the (PDP) Presidential Primary conducted inPort Harcourt 2018, the report indicated that the aspirants bribed many of the delegated with dollars with thousands of dollars ranging from \$2,500 to \$9,000 each in

exchange for votes (Nelson & Saka-Olokungboye 2019). The recent happening in the ongoing primary elections this week, it has been reported by many candidates as witnessed by the Senator Shehu Sani a PDP candidate in Kaduna gubernatorial position today in his twitter handle that he cannot give a single kobo to the delegate to vote for him and it was captured in the daily trust of 26/5/2020 that he only got two votes.

Snatching of ballot box in Nigeria politics is very common issue during the election period, political elites used youth population to snatch the ballot box in two reasons, in one hand the politicians organized group of youth where they have large majority to snatch ballot box order to rig the election in their favor, while the latter is to disrupt the election where they have less majority in order to invalidate the votes in the polling unit. This attitude and behavior of the youth create an avenue for serious conflict and violence. In this regard the current president during the 2019 election announced that anybody caught snatching the ballot box should be instantly by the security agencies attached to the election unit. This indicate that the snatching of ballot box in Nigeria politics has taking away the aspiration of demand of the voters who anticipated free and fair election.

Others cases were been witnessed concerning vote buying and selling "do or die" contests. For instance, in Imo State, money was offered in exchange for voters' cards in the polling units, in Edo and Ogun State, INEC officials and party agents were bribed; Osun and Oyo State also witnessed INEC personnel bribed into allowing multiple votes; and in Benue State, money was shared among the state gubernatorial election officers, others are Kano, Bayelsa, Enugu (Rauf et al., 2015; Victor, 2008; Ahmed, Suleiman & Abubakar, 2021). The recent cases that have been going around presently are during the primary election in 2022 by both in the PDP and APC in for example Bauchi State delegates were collecting money from different aspirant and another saga that shown a clear picture is the consultation of all political flag bearers into different states in the name of meeting with the state Exco's and given them a lot of money with cars as a gift.

Godfatherism and godson also a glaring issue that led to the electoral violence in Nigerian political sphere can be connected to the impact of money in the electoral politics through uncontrolled party finance. As pointed out by Igbini and Okolie (2020) that Politics of godfathers and godson is anticipated of winning the election by influence and wealth so as to payback the godfather. This in many case generate into violence during the election period as in many cases found. During the primary election in Kogi state former Senator Dino Melaye posit that he was failed to win the primary election because of the conspired by many top political leaders in their party.

### 5.1. Institutional incapacity

The credible election is not an activities that took place on election day only but it encompasses the whole election process from voter registration to the conduct of the election, this activities make the administration of INEC (Luqman, 2009). The main aim of all the election management body is to organize a free and fair elections with the acceptable conclusion by all the stakeholders. In order to achieve the desire result the election management body must be total independent, neutral as well as transparent and accountable (Chris, 2008; Aiyede, 2008). Nevertheless, the problems that associated with electoral process and election in Nigerian elections have been connected to the attitude and the behavioral of the political leaders and the major fault is linked to the election management body conducting the elections (Luqman, 2009). It was reported during the 2019 senatorial election in Imo state were the former governor was announced the winner of the election and later the returning officer was said that he announced the result under duress. This indicate the INEC incapacity to run a free and fair election.

These incapacitation of the election management body and collaboration allegation of the commission with the political elites shows clear indication of INEC staff involving and triggering the electoral violence in many places in the country.

## 6. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The paper recommend that the government most take measures to curbed the occurrences of the electoral violence which includes

- Frequent aware to the voters/electorate on the importance of peaceful elections as the source of development.
- Improving the technological device of the election such as card reader.
- Transparency in the conduct of the election process to all.
- Punishing of all engaged in manipulation of election process without fear or favour.
- Uses of well-trained ad-hoc and election management body staff in order to adhere with the laid down rule and regulation to avoid future occurrences.
- Frequent political party sensitization by the political party to its member to understand the danger associated with the electoral violence.
- Youth population must be engage in the sensitization process to enlighten its member to get full knowledge on the problems of engagings themselves in the electoral violence.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Since independence, elections in the Nigeria have feature intense competition and incidence of electoral violence that has been perpetrated by the youth in both free election, during election and post-election period. This have signify that the electoral violence need to be studies in order to find a solution that will reduce menace of the election related violence and youth involvement in this unhealthy attitude during the election in the country. Many factors have been identify as the major courses of the electoral violence and youth involvement in electoral violence includes money politics, godfatherism, others factors are voters buying, corruption, rigging and the institutional incapacity. These factors have led to recurrences of violence in every period of the election from the First Republic to the present day civilian administration after the handover of power in 1999. These challenges have damaged the image of the democratic system and citizens have lost hope for receiving any rewards from the system. it is also point out that the youth must be awerken to understand the implications of involving in electoral violence. Youth as an important part of any developed society must be look into engaging them in sentitazation to avoid future occurances.

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