

Electoral Process and National Security in Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis of the 2015 and 2019 General Elections.

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Abstract

This study examined Electoral Process and National Security in Nigeria with special attention on the 2015 and 2019 General Elections. The Cardinal objectives are to: determine whether there is any relationship between violence in Nigerian electoral process and national security; ascertain whether election irregularities constitute threat to national security in Nigeria; and examine the characteristics of the Nigerian electoral process. While employing Marxist Post Colonial state theory as a framework of analysis, ex-post facto research design was adopted in the study. Data were collected through secondary sources and content analysis was preferred as tool for data analysis. The findings indicates that the aggressiveness of Nigerian ruling class in pursuance of political power elicit electoral violence which lead to loss of lives and properties. The socio-economic implication of such violence is that it not undermines the nation's democracy and scare foreign investors but also an affront to national security. The study among other things recommends that Nigerian ruling class should change their mindset and work towards the promotion of free, fair, and credible elections as a prerequisite for consolidation of democracy and national security.

Keywords: Electoral Process, National Security, Democracy, Election Nigeria.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, election represents a modern and universally accepted process through which individuals are openly and methodologically chosen to represent a body or community in a large entity or government. It is one of the cardinal features of democracy. Essentially, if the elementary definition of democracy is accepted as government of the people, by the people and for the people, then elections would appear to be the only mechanism by which a democratic government can be realized and entrenched particularly in the 21st century (Nnadozie, 2007).

Surveying the history of electoral process in Nigeria, it can safely be argued that elections have been characterized by massive frauds, intimidation and assassination of political opponents. Adamu (2015) asserts that electoral process is the major issue standing against democracy in Nigeria. This is basically because electoral process has witnessed legal and security challenges (Ibeogu and Nkwede, 2015).

Nwanegbo and Alumona (2011) and Ndulu and Lulo (2010) explains that the Nigerian electoral process since 1959 till date has largely been characterized by thuggery, manipulation of elections through multiple voting and violence among other notable electoral vices. Furthermore, the 1964 general elections and successive elections have all been well known for their notorious and widespread acts of hooliganism and vandalism, with attendant loss of lives and properties. Indeed, this development has continued unabated even in the 21st century when most young democracies in Africa are eschewing violence and other vices during elections.

Obviously, the security implication of the electoral process are the intimidation of oppositions by the leading party; hate speeches, thuggery, kidnapping, snatching and stuffing of ballot box and other electoral

irregularities which result from unprofessional attitudes of the ruling class who heat the political process by either deploying state apparatus and resources to pursue their inordinate political ambitions at all cost.

Essentially, the overall security implication of poorly conducted elections on the Nigerian citizens, the socio-economic status of the country, her image abroad and legitimacy have all been underestimated. This is because the form and character of elections either as a reinforcement of democratic consolidation or regression are largely contingent upon electoral process. Besides, the inordinate ambition of the political class which serves as catalyst to electoral process manipulations and the irreconcilable interests between the political class and the electorates has continued to fan the ember of conflict in the electoral process; and these have not been given adequate systematic analysis especially the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Thus, the security implications of the 2015 and 2019 general elections have not been given adequate attention.

It is against this backdrop that the study sets out to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To determine whether there is any relationship between violence in Nigeria electoral process and national security.
- To ascertain whether election irregularities constitute threat to national security in Nigeria.
- To examine the characteristics of the Nigeria electoral process.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several attempts have been made by scholars to pin down the etymological meaning of electoral process. Apparently, some scholars have argued that electoral process in the developing countries is part of institutional building and that it is still part of development while at the same time its appeals constitute the heaviest milestones of any country (Daze, 2005; Jega, 2011; Adebayo, 2011; Iwu, 2008).

Electoral process for other scholars is a critical aspect for democratic governance of modern political societies. (Ebirim, 2013; Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011). Electoral process in the liberal democratic paradigm has become the most popular form of democracy in today's globalization era and election is expected to cushion transition from one civilian regime to another and case in legitimizing sitting government. Thus, electoral process is a pillar of democracy because it gives effect to the right of government by consent. For Iyayi (2005), electoral process is a way of selecting good types of politicians who would pursue the common good instead of their factional interests. The credibility and legitimacy of electoral processes is inextricably linked to electoral management and integrity.

For Eya (2003), electoral process is seen as the method adopted in the selection of persons for political offices. He further stressed that a fair electoral process must have some basic structures, which include: statutory provisions establishing the electoral bodies, delineation of wards/Constituencies, Registration of Political Parties, Registration of Voters, Recruitment and training of ad-hoc staff, procurement of electoral material, logistic, screening of candidates, provision of polling agents, monitoring agents, actual voting, accreditation of voters, counting votes and providing avenues for settlement of disputed results.

Similarly, Onyeka (2002) elucidates what characterizes a proper electoral process. For him, the basic objective of election is to select the official decision makers who are supposed to represent citizens' interest. He posits that an electoral process reinforces the concept of self-rule, celebrates it and legitimizes governmental power.

Also, the 1987 Political Bureau Report gave a lucid clarification and interpretation of elections and electoral processes. It states that four basic conditions are necessary for the holding and conduct of free and fair elections. These include:

- a. An honest, competent, non-partisan administration to run elections;
- b. Enabling rules and regulations-Electoral laws;
- c. A developed system of political parties;
- d. An independent judiciary to interpret electoral laws.

The Report underscores the importance of free and fair elections as a prerequisite and precursor for peace, stability and progress in the polity.

Another contestable concept in this study is "national security". Security, like peace, identity and other terminologies in the social science discipline has attracted many elucidations. Unfortunately, many scholars approach this concept from their own ideologies. Hence, broad areas of description of the term "security" exist. If conceptualizing security is that elusive, there is little wonder why operating within its coverage is so fluid. In the name of security, people and governments have taken actions in which intended and unintended outcomes have become difficult to handle. Based on its seeming lack of conceptual boundary, security, as a concept is used to entice and whip up patronage for many political projects both at the state and international domain of politicking. It could be this that made Williams (2008) to argue that "security" is a powerful tool in claiming attention for priority items in the competition for government attention.

In the context of this study, security can be seen as the preservation of the norms, rules, institutions and values of society. It can safely be argued that the institutions, principles and structures associated with society, including its people are to be protected from internal and external insurrections.

Contemporaneously, national security is thus, the ability of a state to cater for the protection and defense of its citizenry. For Alumona, Azom, Itoh (2018), national security is conceptualized as the protection of citizens, national sovereignty, democratic rights, freedoms and values, strategic assets and resources and the well being as well as prosperity of the states and its citizens.

Tromblay (2018) perceived national security as a state or condition where most cherished values and beliefs, democratic way of life, institutions of governance, unity, welfare and wellbeing of a nation and people are permanently protected and continuously enhanced. National Security in this wise, is a freedom from vulnerability to political threat or the absence of threat to acquired value. It suggests that government and its legislatures should protect the state and its citizens against all kinds of national crisis through a variety of power projections such as political power, diplomacy, economic power, military power amongst others.

Essentially, the concept of national security manifested in section 14(2) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which says that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government and the participation by the people in the government shall be ensured in accordance with the provision of this constitution.

To this extent, it is obvious that security is vital for developing any human collectivity. Howbeit, as part of the Colonial legacies in Africa, Security tends to assume the militarists approach either because the political system is inherently unstable or those in control of the state powers want to be there "ad infinitum". In recent times, the concept of security has shifted from the military angle to prioritize the provision of goods and services which make life more meaningful to the people and empower them to participate in the developmental processes. This is the more enduring aspect of national security where people go about their daily activities unhindered.

From this standpoint, it can safely be argued that the fierce struggle among the political parties to win elections and control the state apparatuses, and invariably exploit the situation for personal economic aggrandizement sparked off the root of electoral violence in Nigeria.

Theoretical Paradigm

The study is anchored on the framework of Marxist Post Colonial State theory as propounded by the radical scholars such as Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon in 1970s. The Marxist theory of post Colonial State was constructed around those fundamental views or ideas espoused by Karl Marx and his associates. The major component of this perspective is the class which is the subject of social conflict. In this study, the two dominant class deeply involved are the political gladiators (bourgeois) and the electorates (Proletariats). For Marx, conflict in human society arises from the division of human society into various social classes. The basis of such division in his view is on the access to and control of means of production. Simply put, people are categorized into social classes on the basis of the access and the volume of control they maintain over the society's major means of production.

To that extent, as the society developed into various social classes, an attendant social relation of production emerges. Those various social classes possessed divergent and irreconcilable interest. Conflict therefore emerges as each of this social class struggle to ensure the dominance of their contradicting class interest.

The rationale behind this emphasis is not far from the fact that what propels this study is the predicament of Nigerian electoral process and national security which has been a re-occurring phenomenon. The 2015 general elections provided us with lens to view the political strength of the electorates. The election marked a watershed in Nigeria democratic space as registered and accredited voters took to the polls to elect their leaders. The 2019 general election were also remarkable in the sense that people turned out enmass to vote but the post election violence recorded was unprecedented.

Marxist theory of post Colonial State Purports to elucidate how capitalism works in the colonized countries of the world and the injustices embedded on it. According to the proponents of this theory, capitalism submits people into what Marx called "the dull compulsion" of economic relations. It forces people into highly exploitative relations and it does so regardless of their socio-cultural milieu. It is only interested in profit maximization and status consolidation. As capitalism spreads around the world, it spreads these tenets into every community, every culture and every society.

The relevance of this theory to the present study is that it has a strong temporal dimension such as the willingness of the electorates to exercise their civic responsibilities in an atmosphere devoid of rancor and acrimony and also allows the political gladiators to do what is right in order to secure the mandate of the electorates without stress. But the irony of Nigerian political bourgeoisies is that they hardly keep to their electoral promises and when it becomes obvious to them that they have lost the confidence of the masses, they

look for alternative means of getting their mandate by force. This ranges from buying of votes to hiring of thugs and buying over the electoral officials to manipulate electoral result to their own favour. This undoubtedly brings national insecurity and bastardizes the electoral process in Nigeria.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted ex-post facto research design which refers to those studies which investigate possible cause and effect relationships by observing an existing condition and searching back in time for plausible factor. The choice of this design is because the 2015 and 2019 general elections have already taken place. The researchers attempt to link some already existing effects or observation to some variable(s) as causative agent(s).

Data for the study were sourced through secondary sources. This ranges from the review of available documents such as textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, statistical records, seminar papers, internet materials, published and unpublished works of scholars.

The data generated in the course of this study were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. Emphatically, qualitative descriptive analysis is used to summarize a mass of information verbally generated in the course of a study so that appropriate analytical methods could be used to further discover the relationship among the variables. To that extent, qualitative descriptive analysis was employed to analyze the data generated through secondary sources on the electoral process and national security in Nigeria.

IV. FINDINGS /DISCUSSION

Obviously, electoral process comprises political activities before, during and after election. The political activities before could be classified as pre-election period, while the political activities during the Election Day refers to the electoral period and the political activities after the election is classified as the post-electoral period.

The interplay of these phases of the electoral process cannot be overemphasized as far as this study is concerned. This is because, the manipulations of the pre-election phase which encompasses delimitation, voter registration, registration of political parties, nomination process, campaign process, media, civic and voter education definitely affects the election day phase which comprises polling stations, secrecy of political parties, ballot boxes, election materials (sensitive and non-sensitive), counting, election monitoring and observation.

Unarguably, if there is a breach of any kind in the aforementioned phases, it invariably impinge on the post-election phase which includes the announcement of results, post election review and post election disputes. The point of departure is that the use of violence in either pre-election phase, Election Day phase or post election phase definitely affects national security. Ultimately, Nigerians have witnessed several cases of electoral violence in the form of assassinations, bomb-blasts, intimidations, murder and destruction of properties in both 2015 and 2019 General Elections.

The political cold war between prominent political parties is one of the major challenges that threatened the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria (Nkwede, 2016). From disturbing political killings to dare devil banditry, the result was unpalatable as there were bizarre situation where the high and low were gripped by fear throughout the 2015 electioneering campaign and during elections. The electoral violence that charged the political atmosphere in 2015 raged hotly as all the political parties broke all the stereotypes that would see them through the uncommon rise to power. Each day of the electioneering era carried its own maximum fear as if the nation would not exist beyond April 2015. Significantly, incidences of shootings, protests, arson and fatalities were recorded in most geopolitical zones of the country.

The 2019 General Election were competitive with a large number of contenders for all seats. There were 91 registered political parties; each having a candidate vying for specific position; 73 presidential candidates, 1,899 for the 109 senatorial seats, 4,680 for the 360 House of Representative seats and 1,046 candidates for the 29 governorships as well as 14,609 candidates for the 991 State Assembly seats (Ojo, 2019).

Thus, the 2019 general elections like that of 2015 were characterized by incidents of violence, including/against electoral staff, damaged the process; parties and security agencies did not sufficiently protect citizens' right to vote safely free from intimidation (EU-EOM, 2019). An approximately 145 people were killed, 84 of which were in the South zone of the country. Equally, about 64 deaths were reported before the 23rd February elections, 21 of these were attributed to the postponement of the elections; about 35 deaths were reported on 23rd February and 24, on 8th March (Udu and Nkwede, 2019).

Similarly, during results collations, reports of intimidation of election officials in 29 LGA in 20 states of the federation, while some states were largely inaccessible due to electoral violence and insecurity. Specifically, in Rivers State, collation centres were invaded by some armed gangs resulting in the intimidation and unlawful arrest of election officials. Also in the vast majority of these cases, there were theft and destruction of sensitive election materials in addition to INEC announcing results under duress in states like Imo leading to

the election being declared inconclusive. Similar security challenges in the 2019 general elections happened in some other states leading to supplementary elections.

V. CONCLUSION

The Nigerian political firmament has been heightened by high degree of national insecurity during and after elections and this has grave consequences on Nigeria socio-economic and political image both home and abroad. Ultimately, to protect the battered image of this country, it has become imperative for our leaders to work on our democracy which has been conceived by renowned scholars as the best form of government. There is no way the country can achieve national security amidst hate speeches, character assassination, electoral malpractice such as stuffing of ballot box with ballot papers, snatching of ballot papers; thuggery; monetary inducement during the election day; ethnic sentiment; abuse of political office; marginalization of a particular zone etc.

Again, to actualize free, fair and credible elections which guarantee political stability and national security, there is need to enthrone genuine democratic tenets based on peoples' cultural values and universal principles which enhance the prospect for political stability, peace, development and continuity in governance.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the analogy, the possible alternative strategies for a virile electoral process and national security in Nigeria are set out below:

- Nigerian politicians should cultivate the ethics and values of sportsmanship in the course of their political struggle they should learn to tolerate opposition and desist from perceiving politics as a do or die affairs.
- All political parties should tolerate each other and the party in power should not kill opposition party. On the other hand, the opposition party should always criticize constructively because such criticism makes government in power to sit up.
- The national security outfits must play by the rule and ethics of their profession. They should not compromise their standard through monetary inducement which makes some of them to favour the party in power during election. The use of state security agencies and forces to intimidate, harass, and oppress the opposition parties, candidates and their supporters should not be advocated.
- There should be reduction in the salaries and allowances of our political office holders so as to reduce its attractiveness.
- Rule of law and due process should be given its rightful position by both the custodians and the citizens because rule of law and due process are the prerequisite for democracy.
- Nigerian Political gladiators should base their campaign or manifestoes on issues of great economic importance to the electorates rather than personality attack or character assassination.
- Campaigns of calumny during electioneering must be outlawed. Enabling laws must be put in place against this.

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