

Effects of Electoral Fraud and Violence on Nigeria Democracy: Lessons from 2011 Presidential Election

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Abstract: *The issue of electoral fraud and violence without doubt has remained a threat to Nigeria's existence and democracy. This paper therefore focuses on finding out the unavoidable negative consequences of electoral fraud and violence on Nigeria's democracy as well as its remedies. The work relied basically on content analysis of data in which existing records from secondary sources were used. It was admitted from the collected data, cases of implausible turn out figures, under-age voting, disenfranchising and intimidation of voters in some regions and unguided utterances from the politicians. The implication has always been a weakened electoral process that breeds riots, destruction of life and properties and terrorism that threatens national democracy. The paper recommends among others for the reorientation of our politicians on their conducts during elections and also committing them to taking responsibility of their actions by signing legal documents that they must accept electoral results calmly or take just legal actions if they are not satisfied.*

I. Introduction

Since independence, the country's democratization processes had witnessed massive electoral fraud followed by violence which has compromised the very ethics of liberal democracy in spite of several electoral reforms that have no positive effect. And this predicament to democratization process in Nigeria has rather been on the increase and there is no evidence of any serious and sincere effort made to stop it from reaching an unwanted level. Virtually, these have been breeding all sorts of violent scenarios to the possible feature of a total anarchy, a situation which some consider Nigeria moving towards a failed state.

Looking at the history of the Nigeria presidential election- 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003 elections were all affected by corruption and vote-rigging. The European Union Observer Mission described the 2003 state and Federal elections as "marred by serious irregularities and fraud".

They commented that 2007 general Elections fell far short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections" and that "given the lack of transparency and evidence of fraud, particularly in the result collation process, there can be no confidence in the results of the elections.

Democracy which has multiple definitions and meanings is believed to have a worldwide acceptance as the best form of government.

In the case of Nigeria, the concept of democracy has become difficult to define and this is because, the very factor which qualifies a democracy has been difficult to achieve in Nigeria.

The irregularities and malpractices characterize elections in Nigeria proceeds to unimaginable conflicts that consume lives and properties. During election, the ruling parties employ all devices using their incumbent power to suppress any opposition from other parties. They commit the national resources especially finance using it to influence the security agents to protect and safeguard their manipulations during elections.

The consequences and grievances emanating from the electoral fraud and misconducts as manifested by the opposition parties affect both our development and democracy. Most of the civil unrest which Nigeria is facing today like the recent Boko Haram have been linked to the dissatisfaction of those who felt not favoured in the 2011 presidential election.

The broad objective of this study is to ascertain the effect of electoral fraud and violence on Nigeria's democracy with particular reference to 2011 presidential election in Nigeria.

Other specific objectives are

1. To find out if the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria was marred by electoral fraud in some areas.
2. To highlight the possible remedies to electoral fraud and violence in Nigeria.

II. Perceptions On Electoral Fraud And Violence

Electoral fraud is the deliberate manipulation of the process of an election through direct or indirect means to influence a particular result. The commission of electoral fraud is most often illustrated through overt methods such as improper vote counting, ballot stuffing, and bribery. However, much more subtle methods of electoral fraud include gerrymandering and disenfranchisement of certain demographics. Electoral fraud is considered one of the more serious types of fraud because of its effects on the political process, and, though they vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, penalties are typically very severe.

The prototypical example of electoral fraud is that of ballot stuffing, the inclusion of fraudulent ballots that embody a vote for the candidate for whom the fraud is meant to benefit. This is less of a problem in developed nations than undeveloped nations because simple oversight measures can be used to prevent such fraud. The same is true of improper vote counting as simply employing multiple parties to count the individual votes and register a count is usually enough to ensure an accurate result.

However, even in developed nations, more subtle means of electoral fraud may be a concern. Gerrymandering, the act of drawing voting districts to create a political advantage for a particular group, can be done by a political body who holds power in that jurisdiction. For example, a particular urban area might be populated by poorer citizens who tend to vote more liberally than those in suburban areas. If a governmental body inexplicably divides this voting district encompassing the urban area to two separate districts that are expanded to include more conservative suburban areas, that may be an instance of gerrymandering for the benefit of the local conservative party.

Though disenfranchisement—the denial of the right to vote—is less of an issue in modern times, as the right to vote is almost universally recognized as a fundamental right, it may still be used to indirectly influence the voting population. For instance, it is commonly believed that the disenfranchisement of felons in the early part of the 20th Century in the United States was motivated by a desire to undermine African-American voting rights. The alleged rationale was that since a higher proportion of African-Americans were convicted of felonies than Caucasians, the law would have a disparate effect on the African-American population's right to vote.

The penalties for electoral fraud vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction but they tend to be more severe than other types of fraud. Depending on the method used, anyone convicted of electoral fraud is typically subject to hefty fines and prison time. Further, he or she may permanently lose the right to vote in future elections.

"Violence," within which is found the phenomena of political violence is defined by Bienen, (1968) as the use of illegitimate force.

Anifowose, (1982) argues that most violent acts are political in nature and for the definition to subsist; there must be the intent of affecting the political -process. To elucidate, he suggests that the political nature may not be immediately apparent. However, the definition seeks to exclude accidents and criminal actions for personal gains but includes acts of both representatives of government or dissidents. For him, Electoral violence therefore means"

"the use or threat of physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals, and /or property, with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and/ or damage or destruction to property; and whose objective, choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances ...tend to modify the behaviour of others in the existing arrangement of power structures."

Tilly (1978) Understands violence as "a variety of protest, militancy, coercion, destruction, or muscle flexing which the observer or object happens to fear or condemn. In the contemporary Nigerian example, shooting into the air at a polling station or threatening political rivals with death are instance of electoral violence.

It is important however, to identify the phenomenon of political struggle to explain how electoral violence develops and matures. In the Nigerian example, according to Dudley (1955) the possession of political power leads directly to economic power. Those who hold positions in the power structure determine the location and distribution of scarce resources Dudley (1955) puts it very clearly:

"Politics means money and money means politics, to get politics there is always a price. To be a member of the government party means 'Open Avenue' to government patronage, Contract deals and the likes".

Dudley (1955) explains it further by stating that once actors have known the profitability of having power they naturally use the same governmental machinery (Such as electoral commission and the law, enforcement agencies) to stay in power even perpetually. The leadership becomes a self-recruiting, Oligarchy that has been known not to tolerate opposition to itself.

When the elites have used the machinery of the state to gain power, they spend public resources in achieving the goal of controlling the government, thereby, disregarding the established channels of political actions. The result becomes the breakdown of justice, ordered relationships between individuals and groups and between the government and the opposition. Violence immediately develops as a feature of the struggle for power, thus, establishing itself as an emerging culture.

Interestingly, in a catalogue of acts of political violence and assassination titled “Trait of Blood”, Tell magazine, March 10, 2003 lists over twenty prominent Nigerians killed by assassins in the fourth Republic, thus confirming the positions of the various scholars as reviewed above.

III. Why Elections Are Rigged In Nigeria

Ezeadi, (1990) identified the following as the reasons why Elections are rigged in Nigeria. He emphasized the concern and worry about the consequences of rigging and its political instability in the country. They include: Nigerians lust for power, seeking power as a means to acquire wealth; protection of class interest, Geopolitics, ethnicity, colonial heritage; Bad foundation laid by the old politicians, politics of corruption, Great expectation from the voters and lack of mass orientation and illiteracy.

Ezeadi (1990) analysing those reasons accordingly emphasized that most Nigerians like to taste power no matter how small and the duration of his stay in office. Again many aspiring Nigerians want to be millionaires without working for it. The least elective posts in the country today for candidates who may not have acquired tertiary' institution certificate is being guaranteed of hundreds of thousands of Naira as salary per month far better compared to not more than twenty thousand Naira or little more his counterpart in the civil service would collect per month.

Some incumbent politicians go to the polls and rig to protect their looted property as well as the interest of the members of their elite class.

On the issue of geopolitics, Ezeadi (1990) maintained that the division of the country into Geopolitical Zones makes the parties that had their bases either in these zones to rig elections to maintain status quo. In the history of political development of Nigeria and even recently, most of the parties formed, had tribal influence. For example, the Action Group (AG), Action congress of Nigeria (ACN) was a Yoruba ethnic dominated party. The N.C.N-National council of Nigeria citizens, UP.GA -united progressive Grand Alliance, APGA-All progressive Grand Alliance are predominantly Igbo Parties while the former N.P.C - Northern Peoples congress, NPN -National Party of Nigeria, ANPP- All Nigerians peoples Party and C.P.C has Northern support and Patronage.

Ezeadi (1990), Further reiterates that the country inherited some of the features of decadent Western European type of democracy which thrives on electoral malpractices Also as bad foundation laid by the Old Politicians, they used to rig election in their areas of domain in order to remain in power and avoid the influence of other parties in these areas.

Most of the voters demand money and gifts from the contestants before voting for them and as the case may be, the contestants therefore rig in order to ensure that the money given is recovered if they are elected: finally, on the issue of lack of mass orientation and illiteracy, the voters as a result of lack of mobilization and poverty do not know why they should cast their votes free without any reward or gratification. (Ezeadi, 1990).

IV. Analysis Of 2011 Presidential Elections In Nigeria

The table below shows how the presidential flag bearers of various political parties in the 2011 presidential election fared. As released by INEC , the total of twenty (20) candidates representing twenty political parties contested where there was a record of 39,469,484 valid votes and 1,259,506 invalid votes.

Summary of 16 April 2011 Nigerian Presidential Election Results

	Candidates	Parties	Votes	%
1	Good Luck Jonathan	People's Democratic Party (PDP)	22,495,187	58.89
2	Muhammadu Buhari	Congress for progressive change (CPC)	12,214,853	31.98
3	Nuhu Ribuadu	Action Congress of Nigeria (CAN)	2,079,151	5.41
4	Ibrahim Shekarau	All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP)	917,012	2.40
5	Mahmud Waziri	People for Democratic change (PDC)	82,243	0.21
6	Nwadike Chikezie	Peoples Mandate Party (PMP)	56,248	0.15
7	Lawson Igboanugo	Peoples progressive party (PPP)	54,203	0.14
8	Peter Nwangwu	African Democratic Congress (ADC)	51,683	0.14
9	Iheanyichukwu Nnaji	Better Nigeria progressive Party (BNPP)	47,272	0.12
10	Chris Okotie	Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH)	34,331	0.09
11	Dele Momodu	National Conscience Party (NCP)	26,376	0.07
12	Akpona Solomon	National Majority Democratic Party (NMDP)	25,938	0.07
13	Lawrence makinde Adedoyin	African political system (APS)	23,740	0.06
14	Ebiti Ndok	United National Party for Development (UNPD)	21,203	0.06
15	John Dara	National Transformation Party (NTP)	19,744	0.05
16	Rasheed shitta-Bey	Mega Progressive peoples Party (MPPP)	16,492	0.04
17	Yahaya Ndu	African Renaissance Party (ARP)	12,264	0.03
18	Ambrose Awuru	Hope Democratic Party (HDP)	12,023	0.03
19	Patrick Utomi	Social Democratic Mega Party (SDMP)	11,544	0.03
20	Chris Nwaokobi	Liberal Democratic Party of Nigeria (LDPN)	8,472	0.02
	Invalid votes		1,259,506	3.19
	Valid votes (turnout 53.7%)		39,469,484	96.81

Source: INEC 2011

V. Electoral Malpractices And Post Election Violence

Particularly on the 2011 presidential election, the United States Department said “the election was successful” and a “substantial improvement over 2007 although it added that vote rigging and fraud also took place”.

Irregularities such as underage voting and snatching of ballot boxes were reported to have taken place. Buhari claimed that his supporters in the south were not allowed to vote.

Ayoade (2011) notes that “rigging in Nigeria often occurs not at polling stations where there is strong international oversight, but during the collation process where monitors are absent”. Illegal thumb-printing-whereby vote counters mark blank ballot papers with their own thumb prints-is common and in some cases, voters turnout figures have been known to be higher than the number of people registered to vote.

The US council on foreign relations accuses incumbent Nigerian governors of playing a prominent role in election rigging and points out that states which routinely report dubiously high voter turnout figures tend to be governed by the ruling parties in those states.

Newson (2011) contends that while acknowledging the seriousness of electoral malpractice in the south-south and south east as Jonathan’s rival claimed in 2011, other parts of the country shouldn’t be let off the hook”. According to him, some 2011 election results were pretty outrageous in parts of the north as well.

Also the EU observer mission report frowned at 78% voter turnout figures for Gombe State in the north as highly questionable bearing in mind that no voting took place in large parts of most of these northern states.

There were also wide spread allegations of underage voting across northern Nigeria during the 2011 elections. In a report produced after that ballot for instance, the international crisis group stated that angry underage youths turned on the resident electoral commissioner in Gombe State after he tried to stop them from voting. “More than half of the voters are under aged.

The election sparked riots in Northern Nigeria and in the following months after the polls. Up to 1,000 people are said to have died.

Following the re election of incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a christain from the Niger Delta in the south, who was the People Democratic Party Candidate, protests from outraged Muslim mobs supporting Buhari, the CPC candidate, degenerated into violent riots in the northern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. Relief officials estimate that more than 65,000 people were displaced.

The April 2011 election was heralded as being the fairest in Nigeria’s history but also was among the bloodiest as Corinne Dufka Senior West Africa researcher at human Rights Watch noted.

Muslim rioters targeted and killed Christians and members of ethnic groups from southern Nigeria who were perceived to have supported the ruling party, burning their churches, shops, and homes. The rioters also attacked police stations and ruling party and electoral commission offices. In Kaduna state where there are predominant Christian communities, mobs of Christians retaliated by killing Muslims and burning their mosques and properties. The Christian Association of Nigeria, reported that more than 350 churches were burned or destroyed by the Muslim rioters across 10 northern states.

In Bauchi State, rioters targeted members of the National Youth Corps Service who served as ad-hoc election staff. According to media reports and journalists interviewed by Human Rights watch, on the afternoon of April 17 in Giade, a rural town in Northern Bauchi State, rioters attacked the youth corps members who were from southern Nigeria. On the fateful day, the corps members ran to the local police station to seek refuge but the rioters stormed the police station, killed the police officer on duty, burned down the police station, raped two of the female youth corps members, then hacked them to death with machetes along with five male youth corps members. In total, rioters killed ten youth corps members in the state.

President Goodluck Jonathan on may 11th 2011 appointed a 22 member panel to investigate the causes and extent of the election violence. According to Human Rights watch 2011, more than 500 people were arrested and charged. But police and state prosecutors in the past have rarely followed through with criminal investigations and effective prosecutions.

VI. Effect Of Electoral Fraud And Violence On Nigeria’s Democracy

Without doubt, threat to national security, economic decay, terrorism, political upheavals and military confrontation could be the consequences of electoral fraud and violence on democracy.

Any thing that can undermine the progress and stability of a nation both socially, politically and economically is termed to be threat. The civil disturbances that occur as a result election violence without doubt could undermine the prospects of the harmonious relationship of the various communities that make up a nation.

Again where the political system is not conducive for business to thrive and for accommodation of investors as a result of pre and post election violence or grievances as a result of election outcomes, the economy is bound to decay leading to a decline of Gross Domestic Product; increases in unemployment and

significantly reduced amounts of trade and commerce as recently witnessed in the North east region of Nigeria.

Also there is a tendency that oppositions of the ruling party could be instrumental in sponsoring or supporting the activities of terrorist organizations using it as a means of protest or to disorganize constituted administration. Terrorism as Nigeria is currently witnessing today is considered as an extreme form of expression, which is most contrary to the values of democracy, civilization and humanity.

Finally commenting on political upheavals and military confrontation, a big change that causes a lot of confusion, worry and problems that can unsettle the existing democratic process could be another grievous outcome of electoral fraud and violence. The former president of Nigeria – Olusegun Obasanjo has warned of a possibility of military takeover should the 2015 presidential election be rigged.

VII. Findings

1. Although the 2011 presidential election was adjudged by the international community to be fair, they also added that vote rigging and fraud also took place in some regions.
2. While the Congress for Progressive Change candidate - Buhari claimed that his supporters were not allowed to vote in the south also there was recorded cases of massive under age voting in the northern states of Nigeria.
3. The unguided political utterances from the aspirants and leaders of the opposition political parties helped to fuel the post election violence in the north.
4. Massive protest, riots and violence were recorded in 10 northern states namely: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara.
5. Also lives and properties worth billions of naira were reported lost as a result of the post election violence to the extent that members of national youth service corps the symbol of our national integration were brutally murdered.

VIII. Conclusion

This study in its finding has proved that electoral fraud has turned to be a seemingly inevitable political culture in the history of Nigeria elections. The major culprits have remained the power holders. The only solace left for the opposition who are defeated had always been resorting to violence. Without doubt, there is an irrefutable relationship between violence and economic backwardness. This study has also shown that repression and violence within Nigeria after presidential polls across the country have been very common. Without doubt the violence and bloodshed commonly occur when established social and political mechanisms for containing conflicts break down and when one powerful group or another decides that it is no longer worth it to play by these acceptable rules.

The international observers-crisis group in their 2011 election report may not be wrong in noting after recognizing our democratic process but underlined that there is still a long way to go. The poll of 2011 were riddled with malpractices, logistical deficiencies, and procedural inconsistencies. Parties tend to rig where they have a stronghold and where the opposition is weak. Also the degree of rigging is proportional to the ability to mobilize funds and support from law enforcement agents.

That political violence does not occur often in a country like United States of America, cannot be attributed to modernization rather it is a product of its political maturity and level of democracy operated.

IX. Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this study, the researcher made the following recommendations

1. There should be an intensive re-orientation and enlightenment highlighting the dangers of making provocative statements or unguarded speeches and resorting to violence but rather be educated on the need to embrace democratic principles in their politicking.
2. The electoral body should be given more power and thoroughly separated with the executive arm of the government. It must be truly independent and autonomous, carrying out its functions without government influence.
3. Any one found to have a hand in political violence directly or indirectly should be made to face a severe punishment.
4. Politicians should be made to sign legal documents that they must accept election results calmly or take just legal actions if they are not satisfied.
5. The youths who have remained the working tools for the politicians should be provided with good jobs to avoid using them by the politicians as thugs during elections.

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