

Violence, Security Challenges and the Electoral Process in Nigeria: A Futuristic Projection and Management Strategy*

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Abstract

The history of elections in Nigeria since 1959 till date has, to a very large extent, been characterised by thuggery and violence among other notable electoral vices. The 1962 general elections, 1963 western regional election, 1979 and 1983 general elections are all experiences well known for their notorious and widespread acts of hooliganism and vandalism, with attendant loss of lives and property. The number of lives lost and property destroyed during the 1963 western regional election alone cannot be quantified. The police and other security agents during this election, watched helplessly as they were unable to control the situation. This development continued unabated, even in the 21st century when most young democracies in Africa are eschewing violence and other vices during elections. A case in point was the post-election violence in northern Nigeria after the 2011 presidential election. As the country prepares for another general election in 2015, many political observers are already entertaining fears over the security situation in the country and the ability of the police and other security agents to effectively provide security during elections, especially in the face of the instability in some parts of northern Nigeria due to the Boko Haram insurgency. Questions are still being asked, continuously, on what strategies must be put in place to ensure hitch-free elections in 2015. The paper against this background, scrutinises the unfolding scenario and proffers useful suggestions.

Keywords: Elections, Violence, Security, Democracy

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Introduction

Many political observers of electoral process in Nigeria today will not hesitate to express their fears over the forth-coming general elections in February, 2015 when asked to comment on the possible success or failure of the elections. Although, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) performance in the recently conducted gubernatorial elections in Ekiti and Osun States on June 12 and August 9, 2014 respectively have been highly rated as one major factor responsible for the relative success and violent-free elections in those states, political analysts are quick to note that the 2015 general elections will be a different ball game. This position is predicated on two major propositions. First, that the gubernatorial elections in Ekiti and Osun states were isolated cases where the INEC needed to concentrate on only one situation at a time as against several number of cases during general elections. For this reason, it was possible for the INEC to draft thousands of security agents including soldiers to these states to provide security and ensure violent-free elections. To a very high extent, the success of the Ekiti and Osun states gubernatorial elections have been attributed to the heavy presence of security personnel in these states. This strategy, however, has cast doubt on the ability of the INEC to conduct a violent-free election come 2015.

The fact that the 2015 general elections will be conducted in all the 36 states of the country simultaneously (except in those states that elections have been conducted already in the case of gubernatorial election) and the country cannot boast of such number of security personnel that were deployed for the Ekiti or Osun state gubernatorial election in 2014 multiply by 36, is something that should agitate the

mind of any political analyst of electoral process in Nigeria. Going by the precedence already set by the INEC in Ekiti and Osun states where the heavy presence of the military personnel were able to imbibe in the electorate some psychological compulsion for peaceful conduct and orderly behaviour throughout the elections, it is doubtful such strategy would be effective during the 2015 general elections. In the light of this, the INEC needs to fashion out more effective options directed towards ensuring supportive altitudinal disposition of the electorate, as well as the politicians during elections.

Secondly, and more worrisome is the state of insecurity in some parts of the Northern Nigeria where the Boko Haram, a terrorist religious sect, has continue to wreak havoc on the population through incessant bombing, kidnaping, indiscriminate killing and destruction of property since 2009 till date. All efforts by security agents, including the army, to arrest this situation remain abortive. The recent adoption of over 300 school girls at Chibok in Borno State by the Boko Haram and the inability of the security agents to identify their whereabouts since April 15, 2014 till date, talk-less of securing their freedom raises serious questions on the level of preparation of the security agents to protect life and property in the North East of Nigeria where the Boko Haram has vowed to continue with its sporadic attacks on the environment, even during the 2015 general elections.

The paper against this background analyses the options available for the INEC in ensuring a violent-free elections in the face of a likely-to-be over stretched security personnel available for the 2015 general elections, even as a new dimension of violence is envisaged during this exercise.

The Nature and Character of Election and Electoral Process in Nigeria since Independence

The first general elections conducted in Nigeria was in 1959. Irrespective of the flaws noticed during the elections, the 1959 general elections remain one of the few relatively peaceful and violent-free elections in Nigeria, simply because the elections were conducted under the watchful eyes of the British colonial administration. Subsequent elections starting with the second general election in 1964 till 2011 were all characterized by several electoral vices, including widespread violence involving the use of political thugs, manipulation of elections through multiple voting and rigging of votes, monetization of the electoral process through bribing of electoral officials and votes buying, extreme lawlessness, hooliganism and vandalism, etc. This development has contributed in no small measure to the slow advancement of democracy in Nigeria.

The 1964 general elections for instance witnessed several evidences of political violence before and after the elections. Before the elections, "there were claims and counter claims of intimidation of opponents, involving the use of thugs to disrupt and prevent campaigns, and to harass candidates and electoral officials, making it impossible in many cases for nomination papers to be filled" (Osaghae, 2002:44). Unlike earlier elections, the 1964 general elections were contested by two major alliances, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) which comprised mainly of the ruling party, the Northern People Congress (NPC) and Chief Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) formed by the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG) with few other minority parties from the Northern Nigeria.

Despite the peace meeting of all political parties earlier convened in October, 1964 to ensure free and fair election, “cases of irregularities, disruption of campaigns, harassment of candidates and electoral officers, as well as assassination of opponents continued unabated” (Awofeso, 2014:167). The elections themselves were inconclusive in some parts of the country due to the directives given by the APGA leadership that the elections be boycotted by its supporters. Both the boycotted elections which were rescheduled for March, 1965 and the Western Regional elections which were slated for December, 1965 were also greeted with widespread violence. The Western Regional election was particularly turbulent and brutal such that “the campaigns and preparation for the elections were violent, as the NNDP deployed the coercive forces at its disposal against the more popular AG” (Osaghae, 2002:46). The election was massively rigged by both camps, leading to complete breakdown of law and order. Many lives and property were lost in a protracted widespread violent demonstration popularly referred to as “operation wetie” which means “wet with petrol and burn”.

The third and fourth general elections in Nigeria were conducted in 1979 and 1983 respectively. Although, the 1979 general elections were not totally devoid of electoral malpractices, the elections were much more peaceful than that of the 1983 general elections because of the military regime factor which kept in check all anticipated crises during the 1978-9 electoral period (Joseph, 1991:154).

The calm atmosphere prevalent during the 1979 elections was not brought about by the existence of (a) fine political culture in the Nigerian people but was due to the veiled threat of immediate military retribution should law and order breakdown and were, the possibility of postponement of date of handover to the civilians (Kurfi, 1983:243).

Despite the relative orderliness witnessed during the 1979 general elections studies, including those conducted by Dudley (1982), Adamu and Ogunsanwo (1983) and Kurfi (1983), have noted how in 1979;

Surplus ballot papers had been sold to the highest bidder, that polling agents had thumb-printed ballots for those who paid them, that ballot boxes stuffed with pre-marked ballots were substituted for real ones on the way to counting centres, and that the deliberate invalidation of ballots by polling and counting officials had occurred, also, members of the huge temporary bureaucracy recruited by FEDECO to conduct the elections, as well as the police and other security officials assigned to guard against electoral malpractices, and finally the officers, candidates and supporters of the contesting parties, engaged in extensive act of collusion to manipulate various aspects of the electoral process, (Joseph, 1991:154).

The 1983 general elections was a reminiscent of the 1965 Western Regional elections, at least, in its widespread and style of violence. The election also recorded several cases of electoral malpractices including multiple registrations during revised voters registration exercise, over-voting and voting by under aged. Of particular interest was the style which mayhem were launched on the public in a way and manner similar to the 1965 Western Regional election where in Ondo State, for instance, the entire family of a politician were wiped out following the crisis that greeted the 1983 elections. The levels to which violent degenerated during this election as reported by the *Afrique France Press*, Paris in August, 1983 was succinctly documented by Richard Joseph (1991:175) in the following words:

According to the Nigerian News Agency, more than 60 people have died during the electoral campaign. Most of the dead over the last two weeks were buried alive, following a fairly common practice in Nigeria of pouring petrol over and setting alight the victim. In the last few days, several members of the NPN and at least two policemen accused of having "stolen" cotes have been lynched by this method, which is generally reserved for thieves caught red-handed. After being soaked in petrol, an old tyre is put over the victim, whose body then burns for several hours

after being ignited. The burning of thieves in this way “operation wet”, is also known as “the bonfire”.

It needs to be mentioned here that studies (Dudley, 1973; Post and Vickers; 1973; Madiebo, 1980) have equally identified electoral violence and several other misconducts on the part of politicians as part of the major excuses used by the January, 1966 and December, 1983 coup plotters which brought to an end the First and the Second Republics respectively.

The Third Republic which was aborted in November, 1993 following General Abacha military coup which removed Chief Earnest Shonekan as head of the imposed Interim National Government, also witnessed several electoral misconducts during the Babangida transition to civil rule. Needless to itemize or analyse here those elections conducted by the Babangida military regime, which to a very large extent were not meant to realize the very purpose they were organized for. A case in point was the June 12, 1993 Presidential election which was widely applauded as the most peaceful, free and fair election to be first conducted in Nigeria. That the Babangida regime annulled the June 12, 1993 Presidential election is now a history today, but the fact that the election was acclaimed to be peaceful and violent free remains a credit that must be given to the military.

Since 1999 when the Fourth Republic commenced in Nigeria and 2011 when the last general elections were conducted by the INEC, the country has witnessed four different general elections in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011. In all of these elections, cases of irregularities, electoral manipulations and wholesome rigging of votes were reported by both local and international observers who monitored these elections.

For instance, and in respect of the 2003 general elections, the European Union observer missions in Nigeria report reads in part:

In certain states particularly in Cross River, Delta, Enugu, Imo, Kaduna and Rivers, European Union EOM Observes witnessed or obtained evidence of widespread election fraud. The election in these states lack credibility and appropriate measures must be taken to provide voters with truly democratic electoral process (Punch, April 23, 2003, P. 53).

The 2007 general elections were even reported to be worse than earlier ones such that, the late President Umaru Yar'Adua openly admitted that the election that brought him to power in 2007 was characterized by high level of irregularities and electoral malpractices. One disturbing dimension that violence assumed during electoral process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic was the rising incidence of assassination of political opponents and perceived "political obstacles" to the electoral victory of certain individuals. This development had sent many brilliant politicians to their early graves while several others that survived it continue to live in fear. Few among the victims of political assassination were: Chief Funsho Williams, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) gubernatorial candidate in the 2003 election and the most favoured aspirant for Lagos State governorship in 2007 was murdered on July 27, 2006. Chief Henry Marshal, a chieftain and financial bigwig of the PDP was gruesomely murdered in his residence on March 6, 2003; Chief Daramola, who was set to challenge the incumbent governor, Ayo Fayose, for the PDP ticket in 2007, was murdered in August, 2006; both Alhaji Ahman Pategi and Dele Arojo who were the PDP Chairman and governorship aspirant in Kwara and Ogun states respectively, were killed in questionable circumstances. Despite the assurance from the federal government and security agents to uncover these crimes,

many killers of these individuals are still at large. As the 2015 general elections approach and the Nigerian political space continue to be threatened by the activities of Boko Haram, especially in some parts of Northern Nigeria where it is feared that the dreaded religious sect will disrupt peaceful conduct of the elections, in its usual style of bombing and killing indiscriminately, many Nigerians are already wondering the form violence will assume this period if the on-going insurgency in the North-East was not checked before time.

Explaining Violence and Related Electoral Vices during Elections in Nigeria

Election related violences are political in character and this may include, “riots, party clashes, political demonstration with violence, looting, arson and political assassination” (Anifowose, 1982:4). Thus, political violence according to Anifowose (1982:4) is:

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 target or victims, surrounding circumstance, implementation and effects have political significance, that is, tend to modify the behaviour of others in the existing arrangement of power structure that has some consequences for the political system.

The above definition aptly describes the very nature and character of election related violence in Nigeria since independence and the various dimensions they have assumed in Nigerian politics.

The proponents of the theories of political violence are not unanimous in their views over the causes and dimensions violence may assume in any society. In fact, political violence is believed to exhibit the capacity for multidimensional and multiphaceted dispositions in terms of its origin, spread and impact. For clarity and

analytical purpose, every political violence is a unique one and is better understood in its historical specificity.

There is no single cause... which is more or less potent. In fact, usually, there are multiple causes and important contributing conditions rooted in historical relationships and brought to violence by a variety of catalysts... Each conflict has been unique. (See Anifowose, 1982:5)

Nigeria has a long history of election related violence which span through over half a century. The causes of some of these violence can be subjected to theoretical explanations already propounded by scholars in this field. Having explored the literature on political violence, Anifowose (1982) for instance, provides us with three of such theoretical explanation that can be used either collectively or individually to explain election related violence. These are:

1. The relative deprivation, rising expectations and frustration-aggression hypothesis;
2. The systematic hypothesis; and
3. The group conflict hypothesis

Although, the three hypotheses have their relevance in explaining election related violence, it must however be mentioned that, the first hypothesis, the relative deprivation, rising expectations and frustration-aggression theory aptly explains why electorate most a time, react negatively and spontaneously through demonstration, riots and arson when their expectations do not tally with outcome of election results which are believed to have been manipulated. Such were the cases during the 1964 general elections, 1965 Western Regional election and the 1983 general elections. The only way to avoid such related crisis is to secure the confidence of the electorate through impartiality and transparency in the conduct of

elections. The two other hypotheses better explain political violence holistically both in their social and group contexts. Apart from these hypotheses, one other approach that have reliably explained election related violence such as the use of thugs during elections, snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation and assassination of political opponents, is the political economy approach.

Scholars like Claude Ake, Bade Onimode, Julius Inhovbere and others have impressively employed this approach to explain why the Nigerian political class holds unto political power so tenacitly, not minding the means or methods used. Among the reasons given by these scholars for this political altitude is that the political class relies heavily on political power in order to accumulate wealth fraudulently, and since the political class has no economic base, everything, ragging from elections to assassination of political rivals must be done to remain in power.

Ologbenla's (2003:81) response to the question: why we have predominant cases of election related violence in Nigeria aptly describes the position already explained above:

The answer to this question is that the political class use violence often in the political process to achieve their aims and objectives whenever they realize that competitive democratic process may not place them in power or position of authority desired. Further, we may say that some members of the political class are professional politicians. They have no other vocation or calling than politics. In fact, the political class has no economic base and because of this, capturing the Nigeria State (the superstructure) power, is often the only means by which they could accumulate wealth and live well. Thus, politics is a life sustainer for them. The consequence is that this group of politicians sees every election time as an opportunity to reap minimum financial returns on their efforts and financial commitment to politics. Thus, whenever a politician feels threatened by another person or a group in his quest for his daily bread, he could kill, maim and forment a huge conflagration of violence just to demonstrate his power and his relevance in the political process, all in the bid to make ends meet.

While the INEC and other stakeholders of election process in Nigeria continue to brainstorm on how to eliminate or reduce to its bearest minimum, the election related violence discussed so far, adequate steps, must be taken to forestall any breach of law and order and insecurity in the forthcoming election in all parts of the country.

INEC and the 2015 General Elections: Options and Management Strategies for a Violent Free Election.

It will be fair to commend the INEC under the leadership of Professor Attahiru Jega for 'revolutionizing' electoral process in Nigeria toward an enviable direction through several innovations.

Since the appointment of the new INEC chairman on June 8, 2010, the structure of the electoral body has been overhauled and several other internal mechanism have been put in place to ensure credible elections. The electoral body is now ICT's driven in its functions and electoral process, including the computation of votes and announcement of winners at the end of elections. As a matter of fact, the INEC has continued to improve over the years in its primary assignment from one election conducted to another. This is not to suggest that the INEC has been 100% efficient in its assignment lately. There are still works to be done, especially in the area of security.

At this juncture, let us highlight some of the innovations introduced by the INEC to reduce election related violence and restore credibility to elections in Nigeria.

It is very rare today to see the electorate negatively and spontaneously reacting to the outcome of elections because some elements of transparency have been imbibed into the process from the point of voting through counting of votes to the

announcement of results and winners. Unlike the 1964, 1965 and 1983 elections which were conducted through the secret ballot system and later counted and collated at different collation centres before results were announced, the practice now is better and more transparent than the former. Today, the modified open-secret ballot system is adopted. This allows the electorate to cast their votes in secret while the counting is done openly for all to see. The number of votes cast must not be more than number of accredited voters, neither must it exceed the total number of registered voters in a polling unit. The results of each polling unit are pasted in each polling unit for all to see before proceeding for collation at the ward level. This process as it were is a tension absorbing mechanism which announces to both the electorate and contestants each polling unit results without serious tension. In most cases, the outcome of elections are already known to all even before their final declarations. So, there was no need for any protest or mobilization of any kind including those that will lead to snatching of ballot boxes.

Closely related to the above is the attempt by INEC to re-invigorate integrity to the electoral process. The idea of using university lecturers, including high ranking professors as collation officers at various levels has brought some level of credibility to the process. It is generally believed that university lecturers are men and women of integrity who will not easily submit to cheap intimidation or bribery by politicians. Unknowing to most that served as collation officers in the recently conducted elections, the Technical Assistant attached to the collation officers were to serve dual functions – to assist in ensuring accurate figure and check any fraudulent collation officers. The collated results in each centre are forwarded electronically to

the Headquarters by the Technical Assistant, even before results are presented by him. This is a very effective control mechanism over manipulation of results. Unlike this practice, earlier electoral bodies relied on civil servants most of whom were politically aligned, as collation officers.

Also, the idea of a Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) for each electorate when perfected will help the INEC to eliminate incidence of double voting; and when integrated into electronic birth registration will in future help to forestall underage voting.

On the issue of security, it is regrettable to note that a section of the country is currently experiencing instability due to the persistent terror unleashed on them by the Boko Haram, while a state of emergency is still being imposed in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states in the Northern Nigeria. Many people have expressed concern on the possibility of conducting elections in these states, while others have equally expressed the danger of disenfranchising this section of the Nigerian population. Few others are even rooting for postponement of the elections until such a time there is peace in the affected environment. This is really a difficult situation which requires serious brainstorming and inputs from all the stakeholders of electoral process in Nigeria. One single approach is definitely not adequate to address this problem holistically. While the federal government continues to explore all available means at restoring peace in these places, the INEC should also continue to devise better ways of maximizing security in these areas during elections. Perhaps, the INEC may begin to think about staggering elections in the affected areas; the assistance of the international community may also be sought in some areas as they affect security,

whichever option adopted by the INEC, the overall security of members of the public should be paramount.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

Having x-rayed the nature and character of election process in Nigeria since independence by highlighting election related violence including rigging of votes, manipulation of election results, assassination of political opponents, etc, the paper further explained why these practices are so prevalence in Nigerian politics, using some theoretical underpinning. The paper equally acknowledged the contributions made so far by the INEC in advancing the credibility of electoral process in Nigeria. Aside from these, the paper recognized among other things, insecurity as a serious challenge to conducting a violent-free election in 2015, especially in the face of yet-to-be-resolved insurgency by the Boko Haram religious sect in some parts of the Northern Nigeria. The seriousness of this challenge has been emphasized and suggestions proffered. It should be noted however that caution should be taken on the level to which the military personnel are involved in the election, so that the entire process is not militarized and another problem unconsciously created. Also, post-election utterances that are capable of inciting the public much be checked through legislation to avoid the 2011 incidence in Northern Nigeria.

More importantly, the INEC and other stakeholders in electoral process in Nigeria must show high level of commitment towards the success of the 2015 general elections.

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