Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.2 No.1 March, 2019; p.g. 15 – 21 ; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

STRATEGIES TO CURB ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract
This paper examines various ways to check and curb election violence by security agents, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Nigerian people. This is because Nigeria's electoral process every election year has been posed by incidents of electoral violence in the country; Violence at the various phases of elections include thuggery, snatching of ballot boxes and papers, kidnapping or abduction of electoral officers and party agents as well as wanton destruction of life and property. Lessons learnt from previous election violence have put the nature and types of election violence into three broad categories, namely, before, during and post-election violence. Having observed these types and cycles of crises and violence that still recur severally in our present electoral processes, the security agencies and INEC have deemed it necessary to adopt a proactive and responsive posture that would allow free and fair elections to better respond to early signals of insecurity before they could escalate into a major security challenge. It is in this light that this study outlines the various strategies to monitor and curb election violence in Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive design. It drew upon primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include oral information and testimonies. Newspapers and magazines reports were also used in conjunction with official records in government publications. Secondary sources include relevant books. The researcher made use of direct observation method. All the pieces of information so gathered were subjected to critical historical analysis.

Keywords: Strategies, Curb, Electoral Violence, Democracy, Nigeria.

Introduction

Electoral violence in Nigeria manifests in many ways. Therefore the security agencies, Police, Army, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) supposed to have a situation room to monitor security levels before, during and after the general elections in the country. The situation room is charged with the responsibility of monitoring, overseeing, recording, scanning, screening, supervising and watch-dogging the electoral process. This will enable the security outfits to check, detect and keep an eye on violence, thuggery, kidnapping and vote buyers and sellers as well as Permanent Voters Card (PVC) buyers and sellers. For security agencies to curb election violence in Nigeria effectively they need to keep track of election riggers under surveillance so that they can oversee the plot and trace of thuggery and rigging. The security situation room is also charged with the responsibility of monitoring perceived flashpoints, violence prone areas and curbing the activities of hoodlums and miscreants who might want to create problems and deprive citizens the right to vote for the aspirants of their choice.

Tukur Yusuf Buratai (2019) the Army Chief of Staff of Nigerian Army explained that the security situation room became necessary in the 2019 election given the history of violence in past elections process in the country. Buratai (2019) further explained that the security situation room became pertinent because of the post-election violence which characterized previous elections. He clearly highlighted the challenges posed by incidents of election violence in the country. Hence the Nigerian Army saw the need to devise new strategies to stem such ugly tides or completely eliminate same lessons learnt from previous election violence. The nature and types of electoral violence in Nigeria are put into three categories, namely, pre, during, and post-election violence. Pre-election violence is a violence that happens before the election; during election violence is that electoral violence that happens during the course of the election, whereas post-election violence is the electoral violence that occurs after the elections. For example, pre-election violence includes vote and PVC buying and other financial inducements to lure voters. The full weight of

the relevant laws would be against such people. There are existing laws in the Electoral Act, 2010, that say any person giving money to any person as bribe at any election is liable to punishment of N500, 000 fine or 12 months imprisonment or both, upon conviction. Section 124 of the Electoral Act, 2010, also states that any person receiving any money or gift for voting or to refrain from voting at any election will be liable to a maximum fine of N500, 000 or 12 months imprisonment for both. As a strategy to fight financial inducement and electoral violence, Nigerians should avoid or resist Greek gifts from corrupt politicians and vote for candidates of their choice.

Strategies to curb Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Strategies to curb election violence in Nigeria include the following:

1. The Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in collaboration with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should reward any patriotic citizen that provides authentic information leading to the apprehension of any culprit of vote buying in accordance with the whistle blowing policy. This will also go a long way to curb vote buying and electoral violence in Nigeria. The Security agencies should have investigation and intelligence gathering sources to arrest and check corrupt politicians and people who intent to pollute the electorate with illicit and looted fund (Oji, 2019).

The EFCC and the Central Bank of Nigeria as agencies and tools to fight vote buying and electoral violence should monitor intelligence report on the plans by some countries, in collaboration with some politicians and looters to bring into Nigeria foreign currencies to induce voters and undermine the elections, the EFCC with its sisters agencies should do everything possible to block the illicit fund and ensure credible polls in the country. It is the collective duty of all Nigerians to resist attempt to stop corrupt politicians to induce and continue use violence to destroy the electoral process by exposing the evil perpetrators (Oji, 2019).

2. Another strategy that can help curb election violence and vote buying in Nigeria in the 21st century is for the Nigerian security agencies to adopt a proactive and responsive posture that would allow all the security outfits to better respond professionally to early warning signals of insecurity before they could escalate into a major security challenge. For example, it is in this light that the Nigerian Army has launched " TOP SAFE CONDUCT" and also gone ahead to establish the situation room for real time monitoring to assist the police and other security agencies to fight election violence and vote buying syndicates.

3. The security agencies should check the spread of fake news and fake propaganda by corrupt and ethnic politicians that pose a dangerous threat to both the democratic process and security agencies' operations. Likewise, the use of media, especially social media, to deliberately spread fake news should be a thing of concern to all Nigerians. The rapid spread of fake news has been responsible for misinformation, thereby influencing public sentiment and sowing confusion among the electorate or even easily igniting violence during the period of the election (Kilete, 2019). Therefore, the 2019 Army Situation Room to monitor violence, thuggery and fake news, kidnapping, vote buying and others is a welcome development if it is done professionally without bias. This is because it unfortunate to hear that the indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Owerri, Imo State and Aba, Abia State, had alleged that soldiers in the ongoing operation Python Dance 3 in the areas killed some of (IPOB) members and arrested some others in a clampdown, even though the Nigerian Army denies killing, arresting IPOB members (Agbodo, 2019) The role of the army to check election violence should be done with caution, carefulness, prudence, watchfulness and admonition and not with heedlessness and imprudence. The IPOB made an appeal to Israel and other world government to prevail on Nigeria government to stop killing its members as well as other Biafran agitators who visited Nigeria before Christmas and beyond from different countries.

4. In order to fight election violence and vote buying in Nigeria by security agencies, like police, it is important for such security outfit to introduce tags to ensure that there is no breach of security on Election Day. To guard against intruders, the police should introduce the use of tags, so that they can identify their officers and to ensure that fake policemen don't operate on "Election Day". To enhance the performance of policemen during "Election Day" their welfare should also be paramount, officers deployed for polls should receive bank alerts for their upkeep during the elections, so that they can be very alert on the election day and be abreast of the development in their areas of operation, and they should not compromise, but shun corrupt practices, and must not identify with any political party on the election day. The advice of the Inspector General of Police that voters should stay 300 meters away from the polling unit after casting their votes would go a long way to curb election violence and vote buying during the Election Day. (Mustapha, 2019). The police should ensure that the fundamental human rights of voters must not be trampled upon.

The Police should not tolerate or allow any misguided politician or group of individuals to derail the election process. The police should not permit any act that will cause disturbance of public peace, violence or intimidation of the election process. The Police shall be courteous, decisive and firm in their engagement before, during and after the elections. The Police should not hesitate to bring the full weight of the police resources to deal firmly and decisively with any unruly behavior or disturbance (Ojo, 2019:5).

The Nigeria Police should adopt professionalism and community policing. The police should shun corruption and bribery during the election period. Community policing will help the police discharge their duties before, during and after election. The Police at all the Zonal Headquarters should be totally ready for the election as the Inspector General of police should give the police proper orientation on how to behave and conduct themselves during and after the election. The Nigeria Police should avoid taking money from politicians to sell their conscience during election. They should tell the world that the Nigeria Police is totally different in the 21st century. The Inspector General of Police should train his officers on the values and practice of discipline in the profession and how to relate with the general public on how to implement community policing to enable them fight election riggers and criminals in their environs. The police should not take any chance from election miscreants. The Police should call the stakeholders and politicians to play according to the rule of the law. Politicians should warn their supporters and thugs not to destroy government properties, anybody caught should be prosecuted by the law. The Police should make spirited effort to arrest thugs and hired assassins in the state (Mustapha, 2019).

Anything politicians are doing must respect the rule of the law. The police should also work in collaboration with human rights organizations and election observer's teams to make sure that the corrupt police officers do not violate the law. The police must make sure they clampdown on hoodlums and bad elements ahead of the general poll. The police should strategize on how to be redeployed to all the hotspots and flashpoint zones to make sure that the elections are successful. The police should also check the disturbing activities of some overzealous party supporters whose actions, caustic comments or utterances may generate crisis and could set the stage for violence in the state. This is capable of threatening free, fair and credible election in Nigeria. The police should have good relationship with the public to enable them to work together to clampdown the criminals in the various geo-political zones. The police should be ready to work and cooperate with other security agencies to enable them achieve a peaceful election in Nigeria (Mustapha, 2019). In Oyo state, for example, Olukolu (2019) the commissioner of police in Oyo State noted that a total of 10,000 policemen have been deployed to the 33 local government areas of the state to ensure security on the election day, adding that there is synergy among security agencies in the state and that the police in Oyo State were prepared and ready to ensure safety of the people and smooth conduct of the polls. These are all strategies to curb election violence and vote buying in our electoral process.

5. The INEC is to be neutral and transparent in conducting the general elections. The INEC Chairman should avoid unholy alliance and holding nocturnal meetings with the incumbent president and other frontline political gladiators. INEC should not collide with politicians to rig election. The electoral commission should obey court orders to show that they are not above the rule of the law. INEC should not be working hand in gloves with any political party to do wrong things.

6. There is need to develop strong electoral institutions, leadership and systems; the electoral system should be robust, just like the electoral system in America and Britain is so robust. For example, when there is an election in Britain, you don't know anything is going on. You just walk into a school classroom designated. You vote and you go. No one is shouting, there are no thugs, one even can hardly see bill boards or papers on the wall, and it is very simple. Everything runs smoothly. The system is so down to earth, powerful, practical, pragmatic, straight forward and well planned; it can handle election violence and vote buying with ease. Nigeria electoral process needs to borrow the good aspect of the democratic process of the United States of America and Britain to help curb election violence and vote buying in Nigeria (Ashimolowo, 2019).

7. It is essential to have the political willingness of frontline politicians of all the political parties and the presidential flag-bearers across Nigeria in order to extend and maintain a hand shake of peace accord. For example, during the 2015 presidential elections, President Goodluck Jonathan of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Buhari of All Progressive Congress (APC) shook hands at the historic peace accord in the presence of the chairman of the National Peace Committee and former head of state, General Abdulsalami Abubakar. The peace accord signing was in order to ensure peaceful conduct of all elections. Likewise in 2019 presidential elections, the incumbent President Buhari of the APC and Atiku of the PDP shook hands at Peace Accord on Thursday, February 16, 2019 at exactly 11.55am, the president (Buhari) signed the

second peace accord, after Atiku, just as 71 other presidential candidates of the other parties had signed the peace accord. They shook hands at the prompting of former president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was leading the ECOWAS observer mission. President Buhari in his address, urged fellow presidential candidates to commit to the final outcome as announced by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). As a strategy to curb election violence in Nigeria, in the same vein, Atiku said just like former president Goodluck Jonathan that his "ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian". To curb election violence in Nigeria, Atiku reiterated his appeal to INEC and security agencies to be impartial during the elections. Atiku added, "I appeal, once again, to every staff and the leadership of INEC and the Nigerian police force, to be fair arbiters in the upcoming elections while letting neutrality prevail". For emphasis to curb election violence in Nigeria, in the spirit of fair play, Atiku also urged the Nigerian security agencies not to embark on indiscriminate arrests of members of the opposition, 24 to 48 hours before elections, as has been the case in previous elections such as the governorship election in Ekiti and Osun states which witnessed election violence. The Chairman of the National Peace Committee and former Head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar (2019) said in his welcome remark, "elections would not hold in the absence of peaceful atmosphere, and noted that even governance, after election, will not be peaceful without a peaceful environment. Don't do anything to make a bad situation worse. The former head of state noted that disharmony, among political parties retards Nigeria's development". (Abubakar, 2019).

To curb election violence, Ike Ekweremadu (2019), the Deputy Senate President, urged INEC and the security agencies that they would bear both the blame and praise in the conduct of 2019 general elections. Ekweremadu (2019) therefore, admonished them to exhibit the highest sense of patriotism and professionalism during the conduct of the election.

8. Britain and America should sanction Nigerian politicians who incite or execute violence during election would have their visas banned and assets in the United Kingdom seized. The Coalition of the Civil Society groups and organization in Nigeria, such as Amnesty International, Civil Liberty Organization, Transparency International and others should monitor the voting process; this will also help the United Nations with the idea on the process to curb elections violence in Africa and Nigeria in particular. To curb election violence and vote buying in Nigeria, the time has come for international community that cares so much about Nigeria to listen to the people of Nigeria and to see what UNO and the CSOs do to advance democracy and ensure that there are free and fair elections in Nigeria. According to the Head of the European Union Delegation to Nigeria, Ambassador Ketikarlsen (2019) said the work of the CSOs over the last years gave hope that continued consolidation of democracy clamoured for internally in Nigeria could happen. The CSOS launch of the situation room to monitor the 2019 general election was a good work toward the elections and it would go a long way to curb election violence in Nigeria. Other roles of the CSOs is to check hate speech by parties, militias being paid to disrupt, election and fake news, that is, why the United Nation rely on Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to get vital information on election situation room to monitor polls in Abuja. On the other hand, Oshiomole (2019) the National Chairman of the All Progressive Congress (APC) warned that Nigeria is not under the supervision of any foreign country, just as he assured the foreign observers that their security will be guaranteed during the 2019 General elections.

To curb election violence in Nigeria, the civil society organizations like Amnesty International must warn against election related violence, Nigerian authorities must ensure full respect for freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association before, during and after the elections. The election related violence in states such as Kano , Kwara, Kogi, Rivers, Taraba and Bayelsa is deeply troubling and if not urgently addressed will undermine respect for human rights throughout the 2019 election period. Amnesty International should continue to receive report of supporters of politicians, violently targeting opposition to allay election violence. The authorities must stop out any political impunity by ensuring these incidents of election violence are investigated and those suspected to responsible are brought to justice.

The authorities must put in place measures to ensure politicians and their supporters do not infringe on human rights. They must ensure that there is zero tolerance for human rights violations and that anyone suspected of wrong doing will be brought to justice. Amnesty International Nigeria must fully investigate all allegations of incitement to violence and human right abuses before, during and after the elections and see that suspected perpetrators are brought to justice. Political parties and candidates must publicly condemn any advocacy of hatred or incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. The authorities must also ensure that international and national civil society groups and agencies that will monitor the elections are able to do so in safety.

There should be no threat to return International Observers in body bags by Nigeria's desperate politicians. In fact, such aggressive politicians should be called to order by the Nigerian government and international community. The European Union support groups spent £200,000 in support of the 2019 election in the country as a way to curb election violence in Nigeria. The European Union support groups project advisor, Gender and inclusion, Cathy Lativa (2019) said, in preparation for the forthcoming elections in Nigeria, they carried out nine activities across the six geopolitical zones and in specific states in the country to enhance voters education in order to curb election violence in Nigeria. More so, imposition of godfathers role should be checked seriously to curb election violence and vote buying in Nigeria's electoral process. If god fathers engage their supporters to be very peaceful during elections then election violence will reduce drastically in Nigeria. For example, Rivers State Governor, Nyesom Wike (2019) urged his supporters not to engage in political violence on his behalf in the interest of the state and its people, this advice of the governor no doubt reduced election violence in 2019 Rivers State election. Likewise, if Christians continue to pray faithfully against those plotting electoral violence and bloodshed in Nigeria by the grace of God election violence will stop in Nigeria. Christians should no longer stand aloof, while Nigeria slides into anarchy, Christians should participate in politics and vote massively during election as their vote would make a huge difference to produce God-fearing leaders in Nigeria that can fight election violence. If Christians do persist on free and fair election in the electoral process, bad leaders who would tolerate election violence would not emerge as winners. Christians should not believe the false propaganda that they could not influence the outcome of political contests in the country, even if they exercise their franchise. If Christians don't vote and bad leaders emerge, they are part of those that brought the bad leadership. All religious groups are advised to encourage free, fair and credible election so that election violence can reduce in Nigeria.

If Nigerian political gladiators and actors come to understand that the country was not an exclusive possession of any individual, ethnic group, religion or political party to run at own whims and caprices, then election violence will reduce drastically. Nigeria remains a common patrimony of all Nigerians from the six-geo political zones no matter the religious inclination. This fairness to all can produce equality and justice and thus bring about free and fair elections. All the ethnic and professional groups in Nigeria should hold a street walk against election violence; to drive the quest for peaceful elections.

Conclusion

It is important to note that African countries are usually tension soaked because of the very cut throat competition for political power. This makes Africa and Nigeria in particular hot bed of election violence and controversies. Nigeria is not a stranger to political electoral violence, vote buying, thuggery and snatching of ballot boxes and papers. The country has historically had its fair share of election violence. Africa and Nigeria's leaders in particular should graciously concede, accept acknowledge and relinquish defeat at election, rather than persisting to hold onto power at the detriment of the nation. If politicians in Nigeria accept and surrender defeat easily it would go a long way to curb election dispute and violence in the country. For example, during the 2015 Presidential General Election in Nigeria, President Goodluck as gentleman kept his word that his presidency is not worth the blood of any Nigerian and he graciously conceded defeat at that election to President Buhari of APC. That art to surrender defeat saved Nigeria from falling into political crisis and in further strengthening the growth of democracy not only in Nigeria but Africa and indeed the World (Abubakar, 2019). Peaceful coexistence during election is absolutely relevant for the survival, growth and development of a nation, because without peaceful co-existence there will be no nation, without a nation there wouldn't be any election.

Recommendations

This study has come forth with the following recommendations to curb election violence in Nigeria. They are:

1) Political gladiators and actors in Nigeria should desist from any action that could trigger election violence and conflict before, during or after the polls.
2) Election violence hinders economic growth in Nigeria. Therefore, politicians should embrace peaceful election that ensures growth and development in the country.
3) Nigeria's politicians should be selfless without insisting to seek power at all selfish cost or wielding power for their own selfish interest. There is no gain saying that when politicians resort to desperate measures in the bid to occupy important political positions, they run the risk of plundering their

country into serious crisis that often lead to loss of lives, degradation of values as well as destruction of private and public asserts (Abubakar, 2019)

4) Nigeria's political gladiators seeking elective positions should be patriotic and not to be desperate to hold onto power at the detriment of the nation that can cause election violence and vote buying. God fearing politicians should struggle to earn a good name before, during and after election for good name is better than silver and gold.
5) It is important to note that in democracy, credible and peaceful elections are necessary gateways to improved governance and people oriented development. Nigeria's electorates should develop the political will to hold their leaders accountable for carrying out anti-democratic activities, such as, election violence and vote buying, even before the election tribunals. The Nigerian electorates should learn not to sell their votes or PVC for money, but should use it wisely to vote leaders of their choice. This will help reduce election violence and vote buying in Nigeria.
6) The Nigerian citizenry should rise up to the occasion to ensure elected officers stick to the principles of the rule of law (Kukah, 2019).
7) Politicians in Nigeria should take responsibility in ensuring that violence free elections become the norm in the country. There is no perfect democracy anywhere in the world, people have to learn that democracy requires sacrifice (Kukah, 2019).
8) Nigerians should understand that politics is the only thing you do not need a certificate or qualification for and this is why we ordinary voters must not leave our fate in the hands of politicians because we must remain constructively engaged in the process so that we get peaceful elections that can ensure development (Kukah, 2019).
9) The Inspector General of Police (IGP) to see that all Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) personnel and facilities nationwide are protected.
10) There should be collaboration among security agents to ensure the safety of all Nigerians.
11) Nigeria has to strengthened her electoral laws and invest in biometric technology, among other mile stones to reduce election rigging and violence, as politicians have kept devising new techniques in their desperation to grab electoral contests at all cost.
12) Let the journalists to be honest in their reportage. The reports should not be in favour of one candidate or the other candidate, but how it was objectively done.
13) Candidates should accept the outcome of the election results released by INEC peacefully or seek redress in court without inciting violence.
14) Electorates should cast their votes without being financially induced. (Konrad, 2019).
15) The Nigerian government should try to address the problem of hunger, illiteracy and unemployment that fuel election violence, for example, a young graduate that is gainfully employed by the government or a company cannot become a political thug to godfather politicians; this is because such a graduate will be very busy with his work, rather than engage in thuggery and election violence.
16) Money bag politicians that are set to hold on to power or grab power by all means should stop using unemployed youths to cause election violence in Nigeria.

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