

RETHINKING POLITICAL THUGGERY AND VOTERS' APATHY IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

MAIMUNA PAUL YUSUF (PhD)
Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences
Nasarawa State University
Keffi
E-Mail – murnapy@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the effect of political thuggery on voter apathy in Nigeria with special reference to the 2023 presidential election. The study argues that there is a relationship between political thuggery and voter apathy in Nigeria. The argument adopts Rational Choice Theory as its theoretical framework. This theory states that the electorates will take decisions to vote at elections or not based on cost-benefit analysis, meaning that they will always rank all possible alternatives and their consequences before making a choice. This study used qualitative approach as its method of data collection. Also, content analysis is used to analyze the data collected. The paper recommends that, the sitting government, INEC, the electorates, security agents and the law should be made active in dealing appropriately with political thuggery in all its ramification.

Key Words: Political Thuggery, Voter Apathy, Democracy, Election

Introduction

Elections are periodic activities conducted every four years in Nigeria by an independent arbitrator (Independent National Electoral Commission) for the purpose of engaging politicians to various political offices. These offices include; the president, the governors, members of both national, state assemblies, local government chairmen and counselors. Democratic societies that cherish enduring democracy deploy all its human and material resources to make sure that their elections are free, fair and credible, giving confidence to the electorates because their votes will be counted based on justice and fair play. According to Conteh, (2013), free and fair elections are sovereign and have the right to keep or vote out government.

Since the pre-independence general elections of 1959, politics in Nigeria has been characterized by thuggery and violence (Umar L. A. 2019). There is no gain saying that from that period till today, political thuggery has been institutionalized in the political life of Nigeria. It can be said, is a deadly parasite that burrow into the body polity of the nations and spreading like HIV/AIDS and now need political retroviral drugs that will help contain the continuous spread of this phenomenon. In each election, the Nigerian political space is turned into a battle ground as thugs move with dangerous weapons-guns, machets, sticks from one polling booth to another with reckless abandon and unhindered by security agents, issuing out threats and inflicting injuries on unsuspecting voters. These elements are indoctrinated by the gospel of 'winning by all means, popularized by former president Obasanjo's standpoint that "elections are a do or die affairs" (in Vanguard Newspapers of 11th February, 2007 by Kolade Larewaju).

It is very obvious, therefore, to say the least, that there emanates a certitude by the electorate that the highly priced gospel of free, fair and credible election truism has never been sown in Nigeria's political soil. Said differently, elections in Nigeria are always flawed and made non-sense by army of thugs sponsored by their principal politicians. Political thuggery is a massive threat to enduring democracy, it produces incompetent political leaders, mediocre, leaders without visions, museum bound political demagogues the consequence is bad governance which deprives the citizenry of the expected democratic dividends. As a result, the voters are disillusioned and therefore, produces voter apathy which is today a large and serious problem that is

affecting our nascent democracy. This study adopts secondary sources of data collection. These include: books, magazines, journal articles and internet materials.

Theoretical Framework

Rational Choice Theory

The first political theorist that made incursion into rational choice theory was Downs (1957) in his book “Economic Theory of Democracy” published in 1957 made a pious analysis of political apathy. The theory is anchored on the reasons why people vote or refuse to vote at elections. It emphasized that people will want to vote if the will appropriate commensurate dividend from doing so. Conversely, people will refuse to vote if the cost outweighs its benefit.

Tom, D. (1995:99) explained the concept of rational choice theory further “as an act of making rational choice, presumed to be the way person’s interest in the political work, is one which the individual most efficiently gains value, preferences or taste goals from a given set of political choices by analyzing relative benefits and costs.”

This theory is relevant to the Nigerian political space because Nigerian voters are rational people who will take decisions at elections based on cost-benefit analysis, meaning that they will always rank all possible alternatives and their consequences before making a choice. No Nigerian will lay his or her life down for a politician that will not make positive impact in his or her life. Or no rational Nigerian will go to the polling booth to vote if he or she knows that death is waiting there. The guiding principles of a rational Nigerian voters is self-interest. If going to vote will be against one’s self-interest, it should be avoided at all cost.

Conceptual Clarifications

This section looks at the conceptual meaning of the following key words: Political thuggery and voter apathy.

Political Thuggery

Different scholars have come up with various definition of political thuggery across ideological boundaries. According to Agagu (2010), political thuggery is an illegitimate and unauthorized use of force that is against the will of others. In a broad approach, Oni, (2014) defined political thuggery as the illegitimate means of seeking political power or any act of intimidation, violence or hooliganism, brutality or gangsterism, whether leading to death or not, calculated to pose a threat or scare political opponents or perceived political opponents before, during or after elections and aimed at achieving undue political result or advantage. In their conception of political thuggery all agreed that the underlying definitive features which include the use of illegitimate force by the ruffians on voters aimed at gaining undue advantage over their political opponents and their supporters.

Political thuggery, therefore, is the use of force by sponsored miscreants, hooligans and drug addicts to deter prospective voters from performing their civil responsibility of voting for their preferred candidates thereby creating room for election rigging that gives undue advantage to their political sponsors.

Voter Apathy

The word ‘apathy’ is derived from the Greek word ‘apatheia’ meaning “without feeling”. In the words of Victor Marie Hugo, a French poet “the apathetic are alive but are without feelings”, in other words, they are dead to political feelings. Arising from Hugo’s thesis, therefore, apathy refers to loss of passion towards voting at elections. Crew et al. (1992) in Odigbo, J., Okeke, C., Okafor, O., (2022) sees voter apathy as “a situation when eligible are unwilling and deliberately avoid participation in elections. Similarly, Temitope Fagunwa in her paper titled “Voters Apathy and Nigeria’s Electioneering Process: A Synopsis on 2015 General Elections” in Iyabode Ogunniran (2023) sees ‘voter apathy’ as a general decline in citizen’s involvement in the political activities of a particular country. Voter apathy can therefore be defined as a situation where electorates are unwilling to vote at elections because of reason(s) that is sacrosanct to them.

These definitions indicate that citizens will only vote at election where their self-interest is guaranteed. In Nigeria, the cost of voting in an election may include the risk of being killed in coming out to vote through sporadic shooting by military personnel, political thugs, militants or insurgents bomb targets and general insecurity on election day (Ebenezer; 2017, p.141 in Leo the Great Ebenezer, 2021). Some of these elements are applicable in South-Africa's elections as evident in recent unrest during elections. In both Nigeria and South-Africa, the perception of corruption, lack of accountability and lack of impact of a political dispensation on the lives of the citizenry in the areas of infrastructural development, citizens' empowerment and sustainable development as benefits of voting in an election, could trigger political apathy. Downs (1957) in Leo the Great Ebenezer (2021).

It can be said that if this trend is allowed to continue unchecked the result of elections will continue to harvest unqualified, museum bound political demagogues as leaders who lacked focus, vision and the ability to actualize the dividend of democracy for the citizens.

Causes of Political Thuggery

Financial Gains

According to Shankyula, (n.d:35) "statistics has also shown that a Nigerian senator earns more in salary than Barrack Obama, the former President of USA and David Cameron of the UK." Today in Nigeria many people have taken politics to be a source of making quick and fast money. They aspire for political positions or offices not because they want to serve the nation but their families, friends and cronies. The lucrative nature of political offices is alarming Shankyula, (n.d:35). To realize their clandestine dreams, they employ the most unpopular, antithetical way of getting this done by hiring a standing team of miscreants, hoodlums to threaten supporters of their opponents to win elections.

Unemployment

Unemployment in Nigeria is growing at a geometric rate, particularly with both private and public universities turning out thousands of graduates yearly into the economy that has no ability and capacity to employ them. The Global Audit and Tax Firm, projected that Nigerian unemployment rate is expected to rise to 40.6% as compared to 2022's 37.7%. This scenario gives birth to youth restiveness and indiscipline in the country. Politicians capitalize on this social inadequacy by adding them to the market of already existing thugs to do their biddings. Anthony, H. (2017), notes that many countries that are prone to political violence, especially terrorism, feature high unemployment rate among the youth population than their adult population. For example, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which hosted around 40% of the total incidence of terrorism attack in 2011-2015 period, experienced a youth unemployment rate of 30% in 2019, double the global average.

Dominance of Incumbents

Excessive desire to remain in power by hook or crook by incumbents is another factor promoting political thuggery in Nigeria. If politicians see a clear handwriting on the wall that they may likely lose in an election, they quickly recruit vulnerable youths to villainously muddy the waters of all the processes of election.

There is a general belief that during election period, incumbents employ fraudulent means to perpetuate their parties hold onto power (Chaturvedi, 2005; Mehler, 2007 in Hakeem, 2014). Said differently, this is a common strategy that incumbents use to prevent the opposition supporters from turning out (Hafner-Burton et al., 2014 in Shange, 2019). A number of studies are predicated on the perspective, and have empirically demonstrated, that the incumbent party has been the main perpetrator of violence (Chaturvedi 2005; Meyler 2007; Straus and Taylor 2009; Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski 2012 in Hakeem, 2014). For example, Mehler (2007: 204 in Hakeem, 2014) argues in his study that "violent behaviour more frequently emanates from ruling parties", especially in "multiparty systems which fail to meet minimal democratic standards". In their study of electoral violence in African elections between 1990 and 2007, Straus and Taylor (2009:15 in Hakeem, 2014) note that, "Of the 124 cases of any violence, incumbents were the primary perpetrators in 105 of the cases; by contrast, challengers (opposition) were the primary perpetrators in only 18 of those cases." Similarly, Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski (2012) in Hakeem, (2014), show in their study that

unpopular incumbents often use violence against their opponents to discourage competition because of the "fear of losing power".

Bias of Electoral Umpire

In a situation where political umpire refuses to provide a political level playing ground for all the political parties in contention, it has already assumed the position of a partial judge. This action is not quite different from that of a political thug. This is because, the partial umpire can use its officials to cook election results, planned late arrival of election materials, stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers, discrimination in issuing voter's cards and so on which are stock-in trade of political thugs.

Ademola Adegbamigbi/Desmond Utomwen in March 2007 accused Prof Maurice Iweu, the INEC Chairman to behave as less than objective umpire. In other words, they entertained fear that what happened in 1964 general election may be replicated. That year according to them, the then electoral commissioner, headed by Chief Eyo Esua in concert with dominant Nigerian National Alliance (The Northern Peoples's Congress), NPC, and others engaged in massive disqualification, intimidation, probe and imprisonment of political opponents. This action cannot be different from political thuggery. In this wise the supposedly unbiased umpire has turned to a political thug.

Poverty

According to World Bank report that about 4 million Nigerian were pushed into the poverty trap in first 6 months of 2023 with another 7.1 million more expected to join conundrum if properly targeted measures are not taken to manage the impact of fuel subsidy removal. If this trend of new entrants to poverty class continues unabated, it means in months to come this figure will double itself in addition to the already existing poverty-stricken population. This being so, Nigeria is producing potential political thugs in their numbers. It can be said that abject poverty can turn a God-fearing person into a monster and a brute. Nigerian politicians quite aware of this inadequacy quickly exploit this gap for their political interests by employing the services of these new entrants into the kingdom of thuggery to truncate the process of elections.

Balance of Power

Fierce political competition among regional leaders in Nigeria is a common experience. Nigeria since independence in 1960 has been grappling with conflict of interest between various population groups, especially, among the three major tribes in Nigeria; the Igbos in the East, the Yorubas in the West and the Hausas in the North. Thomson, (2000:35 in Human Rights, 2001) asserts that much of this has led to political mobilization on ethnic lines. Nigeria was dominated by ethno-religious groupings, equally, Nigerians responded to the ethno-regional constitution (which provided room for regional differences and created institutional base for group sentiments with the result that the First Republic was dominated by ethno-regional groupings) by voting for their cultural brokers (Human Rights, 2001). Similarly, Aba & Nwokwu (2015) explained that ridden situations have historically featured in all elections conducted in Nigeria since the 1950's. Hence, these issues surrounding the electioneering process potentially relate to violence and violence of the rights of individuals.

Godfatherism

Godfatherism is a well instituted phenomenon in Nigerian political space which breeds political thuggery. Samuel, (2017) notes that godfatherism is the man or woman who has enormous will and respect of the people, so much that his belief system represents those of his people. He said further that godfather maintains army of thugs who intimidate political opponents, snatch ballot boxes during elections and play other key roles in the manipulation of election results in accordance with the wishes of the godfather. They use their wealth, positions and influence to capture power for their mentee for who they will impose their total control

Effect of Political Violence on Voter Apathy

Electoral violence affects electoral participation. Systematic studies of the impact of electoral violence on electoral participation show a negative association between the two. A cross-sectional study revealed that

voters who have experienced threats of election violence at the polls were less likely to vote in Nigeria (Bratton, 2013, p. 129 in Hakeem, 2014). A cross-national study also found the same globally (Norris, 2014, p. 143 in Hakeem, 2014).

According to the theoretical literature, politicians often use pre-electoral violence to reduce the turnout of rivals' supporters, presumably without significantly affecting the voting support and turnout of their core voters (de Figueredo & Weingast, 1999; Chaturvedi, 2005; Collier & Vicente, 2012).

Another empirical and observational studies in Africa also confirm that electoral violence decrease turnout (Collier & Vicente, 2014). These results agree with studies inside and outside of Africa that find that turnout is affected by voters' fear or anticipation of disruption at the polls and by their disappointment with the legitimacy of the electoral process (Birch, 2010; von Borzyskowski & Kuhn, 2020; Young, 2020).

Agreed that systematic African studies have revealed that electoral violence tends to have a negative impact on discouraging Africans from participating in elections. However, in cases where opposition supporters were exposed to electoral violence, they were more willing to vote. This may not be so in most cases, in today's Nigerian political climate, very negligible few will like to put their lives on the line to vote if they are exposed to electoral violence that may cost their lives. Electoral violence can be used to mobilize voters to vote (see Travaglianti, 2014), to prevent them to turnout or to punish victors (Bekoe & Burchard, 2017; Burchard, 2015). This is plausible where the incumbent party is the perpetrator of election violence in order to prevent opposition supporter from coming out to vote. An empirical study conducted by Mehler (2007:204 in Hakeem, 2014) demonstrated that violent behaviour always come from the ruling parties. Proving this position further, in their study of electoral violence in African elections between 1990-2007, Straus and Taylor 2009:15 in Hakeem, 2014, assert that "Of the 124 cases of any violence, incumbents were the primary perpetrators in 105 of the cases as against the opposition who were the primary perpetrators in 18 cases.

It should be noted that the recent finding does not invalidate the later. This is because the context and the nature of political violence prevalent in the Nigerian political space calls for the validation of earlier studies. In Nigerian political space where:

Most part of the country is unsafe, Boko Haram/ISWAP and other terror off-shoots operate in the North East and other Northern states, bandits ravage throughout the North West; Fulani herdsmen spread terror and ethnic cleansing in the North Central; kidnappers, cultists and other violent transport union enforcers torment the South East, gunmen and separatist agitators wreak havoc in south East and South-South (Punch, 26 December, 2022).

From extant literature, political thuggery is no doubt one of the major causes of political apathy in Nigeria. Most Nigerians are rational people, they will not put their lives on line for the interest of a politician. To them no politician is worth dying for, therefore, if there is a threat to their lives at the polling booths, they will definitely abscond. Nigerians will like to stay put at home, enjoy the leisure of the day than to go to vote and be hacked or killed by political thugs that human life means nothing to them.

This is a replicate in all the elections in Nigeria so far. Voter's turnout has been on a steady decline since 1999 general elections. The worst is the 2023 elections which shows that only 24.9 million persons out of 93.47 million registered voters voted in the elections, representing 26.72% voter turnout. In 2023 also, no region recorded up to 40% voter turnout. It can be said that the major reason for the dwindling voter turnout is hinged on political violence. It can be averred that since the beginning of political process in Nigeria the elections so far has been bloody.

Overview of 2023 Political Violence in Nigeria

Political violence has been a feature of most African states since the beginning of their self-rule. Nigeria, after independence, have experienced myriad of political violence since the beginning of self-rule. It was hoped that Nigeria would have matured politically. Unfortunately, political violence seems to be increasing at a geometric rate at each election. This scenario is confirmed by the findings of Daily Trust of Sunday 10 October, 2021, which showed that voter's turnout in various elections, including off-session polls like local government elections, has continued to slide. Off-session elections conducted after 2019 general elections in states recorded all-time low voters' turnout.

The middle of 2022 ushered in politically charged atmosphere, showing that political violence is eminent and may take the center stage of the 2023 election campaigns.

As usual, the 2023 elections like other previous ones experienced escalating conflicts and violence noticed in almost all the states of Nigeria. The following are few examples:

In Lagos, the former Lagos state National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) chairman, Musiliu Akinsanya, popularly known as MC Oluomo, set the ball of violence rolling by issuing of threats to the Igbos not to vote against All Progressive Congress (APC) in the 2023 elections (Seun Opejobi, 30 March,2023).

Sponsored thugs unleashed mayhem on voters and officials of INEC. Extending from Sululere to Oshodi, Mile 12, Ejigbo, Bucknor, Oke-Afa, Bolade Oshodi, Surulere, Amuwo Odofin, Berger, Ojo, Agiliti, Ago Palace Way, Okota, Mushin, Igando, Ibeju Lekki, Alimosho, Ijegun, Ijesha, Ikeja, Magodo, Elegushi, Fadeyi, and many other areas. The hoodlums brutalized and maimed voters that were not pro-APC (THIS DAY, thisdaylive.com 2023).

In Aguda Sulurere, a woman by name Mrs Janifer Efeji was stabbed on her face by thugs who destructed the voting process by attacking voters, snatching ballot boxes and prevented opponents from voting for their preferred candidates (THIS DAY, thisdaylive.com 2023).

In addition, gunmen stormed the Governorship and State assembly elections, Polling Unit 003 in Bestford/Ganiyu Yusuff street, Oke-Afa, Ejigbo and attempted carting away election materials and ballot boxes, and as a result damaged many thumb-printed papers (THIS DAY, thisdaylive.com 2023).

Some thugs attacked and brutalized the crew of ARISE NEWS Channel, including the cinematographer, Opeyemi Ademihun and other crew were brutally assaulted at Ikate around Elegushi's Palace (THIS DAY, thisdaylive.com 2023).

In Kano state, it was reported by Election Watch that in November 2022, supporters of NNPP and those of APC clashed in Gwale Local Government Area (Election Watch, 2022). Also, the residence of a popular singer and chieftain of APC, Dauda Rarara was razed down by political thugs after the pronouncement of gubernatorial results by INEC (Vanguard Newspaper, 25 February, 2023). Alhaji Dahiru Abba, the village head of Maigari in Rimin Gado L.G.A. Kano state was killed by gunmen when he was attacked at his residence just few days before the gubernatorial election (Fortune Eromosele, Vanguard Newspaper, May 5, 2023).

There was also similar experience in Cross Rivers state where an adhoc staff of INEC, Miss Glory Effiom was hit by a stray bullet by gunmen. Also, 50 political thugs at about 2.15 am on Sunday 19th March, 2023 invaded INEC collation center for Ogoja constituency carting away election materials, phones and injured many collation officers (Election Watch, 2022).

Kogi state is not left out of this political crime as 101 INEC officials on their way to Kupa north and south wards to the constituency collation center in Lokoja were kidnapped by armed hoodlums at about 2 a.m. on Sunday 19th March 2023 at Abajana junction. However, 99 of them were rescued by the police (Election Watch, 2022). Ojochenemi Akayaba was short dead after allegedly snatching ballot boxes during the elections at Agwu-doko area of Anyigba (Fortune Eromosele, Vanguard Newspaper, May 5, 2023).

Though there was no serious violence in Nasarawa state as those reported above. However, it had a share of its own. One man identified as Yunusa Lolo lost his life near the constituency collation center in Awe Local Government Area (Seun Opejobi, 30 March,2023). Protesters took to the streets protesting alleged rigging of governorship election by INEC in the State. One person was killed at this instance.

Adamawa state like Nasarawa experienced a little bit of political disturbance as political thugs armed with guns and other dangerous weapons on the 19th of March, 2023, produced a show of terrors on innocent citizens as a result of the failure of INEC to declare the governorship election results.

Like in Adamawa and Nasarawa states, little skirmish was reported in Benue state as six political thugs that were trying to snatch election materials short dead by security agents. Some part of Agatu and Ukum areas also experienced destruction of election process as thugs intimidate voters with fire arms.

Edo state experience is a pathetic situation as election violence perpetrated by political thugs resulted to the death of Festus Idahosa, 33 years old, and Mrs. Elizabeth Owie, a 43 years old mother of 3. They were at the polling units where the thugs snipped life out of them. In a similar incident, David Uche, the chairman of the Young Progressive Party (YPP) on February 1, 2023 in Ibeme ward, Isiala Mbanjo Local Government Area of the state was killed in front of his house (Fortune Eromosele, Vanguard Newspaper, May 5, 2023).

Delta state had a similar experience as three people were short dead and a building set ablaze in Mosogar, Ethiope west local government of the State. Similarly, Hoodlums ambushed and snatched voting materials from INEC Officials in Tuomo area of Bomadi Local Government Area. BVAS machines, electoral materials were destroyed at the Ewerni Community in Ughelli North Local Government Area of the State.

The violence in Katsina state has a little bit of ethno-regional and religious connotation. ACLED on 3rd February 2023, reported that political thugs attacked the campaign convoy of the Labour Party presidential candidate, Mr. Peter Obi, while he was campaigning in Katsina on the 25th January, 2023

In Imo and other South Eastern states, secessionist groups have repeatedly attacked offices of INEC to disrupt elections (Human Right Watch, 6 February, 2023). Ben Ezeamalu, in the African Report reported that gunmen shot Oyibo Chukwu, the Labour Party candidate in Enugu East, and his Personal Assistant before setting their vehicle ablaze. According to Samson Nwafor, Mr Peter Nweke, the Chairman of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) Ezza north Local Government was killed at his polling unit 10, Ogboji ward by unknown gunmen during the March 18, governorship and state house of assembly elections. Also, HRH, Eze Igboke Ewa, the traditional ruler of the Umuezeokaha community, was killed at his residence in Ezza North LGA of the state. Also, on March 11, 2023, Mr. Ogbonnaya Ugwu, the Councillor representing Echara Ward 2 in Okposi Community in Ohaozara Local Government Area of the state, was attacked and killed by gunmen (Fortune Eromosele, Vanguard Newspaper, May 5, 2023).

Rivers state had a harrowing political violence as reports state that Mr. Chukwudi Ogbonna, the Accord Party candidate for Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA constituency 2 in the state House of Assembly was abducted at Rumuigbo, near Port-Harcourt. Also, in ward 12 Emohua LGA, Ubimini of the state, Ruth Osah, a pregnant woman, and a man Mark Orduize, were killed near a polling unit (Fortune Eromosele, Vanguard Newspaper, May 5, 2023). Similarly, the Director of All Progressive Congress, (APC). Campaign Council in Ahoada East Local Government Area, Chisom Lenard was among the five people killed in a mayhem perpetrated by thugs. A member of NYSC, who was an ad hoc member of INEC was brutally killed in Odua Clan in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of the state (Seun Opejobi, 30 March,2023).

Zamfara and some other northern states had similar experience like some southern states. According to the report, on March, 2023, Bashir Shagari, the Electoral Officer, together with the Returning Officer for the Zamfara governorship election in Maradun L.G.A. were both kidnapped on a bridge near Maradun town on their way to the collation centre. Haliru Lafka was killed at Migatari Local Government Area of Jigawa state. This happened as a result of the clash between supporter of the PDP and APC during the campaign rally of the PDP in the state. One Mohammed Abdullahi was killed while 15 others were injured during a violent clash between supporters of PDP and APC at a gubernatorial campaign rally in Duguri, Alkali L.G.A. of Bauchi state (Fortune Eromosele, Vanguard Newspaper, May 5, 2023).

In one of the south western states, precisely, Ondo state, Akintabi Akinnaso was also shot dead by security operatives as he attempted to disrupt collation at a ward collation centre in Idanre Local Government Area of the state (Fortune Eromosele, Vanguard Newspaper, May 5, 2023).

The spate of violence reported above is a microcosm or a piece of an ice-beg of the entire macrocosm of what happened during, after and before the build-up to the 2023 elections in all the states of Nigeria. Even in states captured above, many violent cases were under reported. This scenario is yet a signal that while the thinking was that as election seasons come and go, Nigeria will grow into a freer, fairer and credible elections, unfortunately elections continued to be marred with new strategic innovations of political violence, as a result of this unholy married, Nigerian democracy is enmesh with violence and this is a threat to democracy.

Consequences of Political Thuggery on Democracy

In an election where there is general apathy, the results will not reflect the opinion of the general population. This is because, only a handful will be at the polls to elect their representatives while the majority stay at home. This is why (Maarten Halff, n.d.) remarked that: “elections are not an end in themselves. Their purpose as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is to ascertain the will of the people regarding their government.

Breeds Terrorism

Terrorism does not just crop up within a system spontaneously, it has a trigger with a trajectory. It has been observed that all the terrorist group we have in Nigeria today started as thuggery groups who were recruited to actualize the interest of their principal. Their sponsors disband them when elections are over, because they are now jobless and lack financial sustainability, they metamorphosed into a terrorist gang, killing, maiming people and destroying properties without provocation. According to (Madiha Afzal, 2020), Boko Haram was allowed to function unchecked in Borno state before 2009, under political cover from the state governor then, Ali Modu Sheriff.

Bad Leaders are Elected

When voter apathy becomes so prominent during elections, it is obvious that the election results will harvest mediocre, self-seeking and non-performing leaders who by their nature may not be accountable to the nation at large. They rule to satisfy their immediate families, friends and to a very little extent their supporters who voted for them at elections. When a situation of this nature prevails in the polity over time, development is negatively affected. In an environment where citizens cannot access the dividend of democracy, the people become disillusioned and may not participate in any political activity planned for the nation.

Impact on Democracy

A vote of no confidence in elections and non-acceptance of results will be passed by the citizens of the country. It weakens public confidence in the process and the results of election. According to Kofi Annan, “Elections are at the heart of democracy, when conducted with integrity, they allow citizens to have a voice on how and by whom they are governed.” (Maarten Halff, n.d.)

Conclusion

Democracy as a popular sovereignty, is cherished by all civilized and politically open-minded societies of the world. Since the birth of this system of government, it has been seen as a core value of most nations of the world, a thing to be nourished, sustained and promoted for the good of the society. This is why nations agitate always for free, fair and credible elections, as it is the panacea for good governance.

However, the fragile democracy has been intercepted by a monster called political violence. This has down played the credibility of elections in most nations, particularly, Nigeria. As a consequence, elections are marred by voter apathy nationwide especially during the election of 2023. Experience in Nigeria shows that one will give up himself or herself like a sheep to the slaughter knowing fully well that going to vote at

elections will be the end of life. Nigerian electorate are people that will always weigh the consequences of their actions before making choices, so also, they will vote if their lives are protected and they will do the reverse if their lives are not protected

Political thuggery should not be allowed to thrive in the polity. All hands must be on deck to stamp out or checkmate political thuggery in order to have a new dawn of true democracy.

Recommendations

For free, fair and credible elections to take place, the constitutional provision of the independence of the electoral umpire should be strictly obeyed to the letter by the government of the day and all its agencies. In no way should the government stealthily or clandestinely remote control the processes and the build-up to elections. It is only through the independence of the electoral umpire that the legitimacy of elections can be achieved.

It is a common knowledge that in recent years there emerged political thuggery groups in almost all the states of Nigeria. For instance, Kalare in Gombe, Yan-daba in Kano, Sara-Suka in Bauchi, ECOMOG in Borno, Area Boys in Lagos, True Way Boys in Zamfara and late Terwase Akwaza (Gana) in Benue with others too numerous to mention. They turn into nursery for the recruits of some of the politicians who now activate them for their political interest. Any politician that is found to be sponsoring political thugs should be arrested and charge to court and if found guilty of the offence, should be barred from participating in politics for a period of 12 years without an option of fine.

There should be also law enacted by the government prohibiting the existence of political thugs. Since these groups are well known with their names, it makes it easier for the government to disband them by the use of state force. Any identified political thug should be made to face the music by arresting and charging them to court to be prosecuted and if found guilty they should be incarcerated for 10 years without option of fine.

The security operatives should be well equipped for more prompt action during elections. The country's security architecture should hold series of meetings with various political stakeholders at different levels with a view of sensitizing them on the need to promote peace during elections in order to achieve enduring democracy.

The government should provide the teeming youths with employment and to also improve the livelihood of the citizens to avoid them being vulnerable to crime and political thuggery. The government and the private sector should revamp the age-long firms and industries that have been abandoned, diversify the economy and uproot systematic and endemic corruption. The courses offered in the universities should be made relevant to the prevailing situation. In the age of technology, courses that will help employment opportunities should be the major focus of the universities, for example, courses like creative thinking and innovation, strategic management and innovation, design thinking for innovation, creativity, innovation and transformation; and digital technology and innovation.

For youths that have already graduated in arts and social sciences, skill development and entrepreneurship programme should be organized for them in all state capitals and Abuja to make these vulnerable youth to be self-employed.

Politicians, scholars and other stakeholders should exhibit great concern as regards citizen's low turnout rate at elections by encouraging political participation or automatic enrollment and voluntary voting by enacting voter registration and mandatory voting Act. This will help increase voter turnout and consequently reduce voter apathy.

References:

Agagu, A.A. (2010), *Combating Violence in Nigeria: Issues, Prospects and Problems*.
In Ajayi, K. (eds). *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies Unit, University of Edo Ekiti*. Ikeja: Solar Flares.

Anand, P. (1993). *Foundations of Rational Choice Under Risk*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Anthony, H. (2017), *Tracking the Trends and Numbers: Islam, Terrorism, Stability and Conflicts in the Middle East*, Washington DC: Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

Madiha Afzal, (2020). From “Western Education is Forbidden” to the World Deadliest Terrorist Group, Education and Boko Haram in Nigeria. *Security, Strategy and Order*. Foreign Policy at Bookings.

Shankyula, (n.d.), *Political Thuggery and Elections in Nigeria and the Law*.

Cloud, D. (2010). *Voter Apathy: Definitions, Statistics and Causes*.

Odigbo, J., Okeke, C., Okafor, O., (2022). *Political Science an Introduction*. Lagos: McMillan Publishers.

Tom, D. (1995). *Two Faces of Political Apathy*. Temple University Press.

Umar, L.A. (2019). *Causes and Effect of Political Thuggery*. Amazon Digital Services LLC-KDP, US.

Aba, E.O. & Nwokwu, P. *Political Violence and the Sustenance of Democracy in Nigeria*. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IOSR – JHSS). Vol. 20, Issue 11 Ver 1 (Nov. 2015) pp. 33-44. Accessed 7 August from www.journals.org

Samuel, O. (2017), *Youth Involvement in Political Violence/Thuggery: A Counter Weight to Democratic Development in Africa*. Short Communication – (2017) vol 5, Issue 3

INEC; IDEA 1 Chart: Dataphyte

Kristine, J., Keith, I., Jose, I.L., & Simrin, M. (2014), *Making Sense of Youth Political Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa* International Policy

Leo the Great Ebenezer, (2021). *National Elections and Political Apathy: A Comparative Study of Elections in Nigeria and South Africa*. Academic Paper

THIS DAY (2023) *Violence, Apathy, Voter Suppression Mar Governorship, State Assembly Elections*. Accessed 3 June, 2023 from thisdaylive.com

THISDAYLIVE, World Bank: *Four Million Nigerians Pushed into Poverty in the First 6 Months of 2023*. Accessed 7 August, 2023 from www.thisdaylive.com

Kolade Larewaju (11th February, 2007). *Nigeria: Obasanjo Explodes – April Polls Do or Die Affair for PDP*. Vanguard Newspapers. Accessed 4 August, 2023 from allafrica.com

Seun Opejobi, (30 March,2023). *2023 Elections: Families of 39 slain Nigerians, Victims Seek Justice*. Daily Post News Accessed on 7th June, 2023 from, dailypost.ng

ACLED (3 February, 2023). *Nigeria Election Violence Tracker Situation Summary: 16 – 31 January, 2023*. Accessed on 2 June, 2023 from reliefweb.int/report/Nigeria

- Allingham, M. (2002). *Choice Theory: A very Short Introduction*, Oxford, ISBN 978-0192803030. Accessed 7 August, 2023 from <https://global.oup.com/product>
- Ben Ezeamalu, (24 February, 2023). *Nigeria 2023: Killing in Nigeria's Southeast Ignite Fear of Voter Apathy*. Accessed on 5 June, 2023 from theafricanreport.com
- Conteh, N. (2013). *An Introduction to Election Managers and Tertiary Institutions in Sierra Leone*. Institute of Electoral Administration and Civic Education (INEACE) in Collaboration with University of Makeni (UNIMAK) in Sierra Leone. <https://necsl.org/pdf/media>
- Voter Apathy Worsens Ahead of 2023 (10 October, 2021), *Daily Trust* Accessed, 7 June, 2023 from <https://dailytrust.com/voter-apathy>
- Dennis Amata, (March 3, 2023). *Nigeria records only 26.72% voter turnout in 2023 election*. Accessed 4 August, 2023 from [Google.com/amp/search?q=](https://www.google.com/amp/search?q=)
- Fortune Eromosele, (May 5, 2023). *137 Killed, 577 Abducted During 2023 Elections – Report*. Accessed on 6th June, 2023 from <http://www.vanguardngr.com>
- Hakeem, O. (2014), *Violence and Votes in Nigeria: The Dominance of Incumbents in the Use of Violence to Rig Elections*. *African Spectrum*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (2014). Pp. 27-51. Sage Publications Ltd. Accessed 7 August, 2023 from <http://www.jstor.org>
- On the Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria, *Human Right*, February 26 2001. Accessed 7 August, 2023 from accord.org.az/
- Human Right Watch, (6 February, 2023). *Nigeria: Impunity, Insecurity Threaten Elections*. Accessed 3rd June, 2023 from [hrw.org/news/2023](https://www.hrw.org/news/2023)
- Maarten Halff, (n.d.). *Confidence in Elections and the acceptance of results: A Policy Brief of the Electoral Integrity Initiative*. Accessed on 7 June 2023 from [confidence-in-electi...e-acceptance-of-pdf](https://www.electoralintegrity.org/confidence-in-elections-and-the-acceptance-of-results)
- Melanie, L. (1922). *Rational Choice Theory: A School of Thought that Predicts Economic And Social Behaviour*, [google.com/amp/s/businessinsider](https://www.google.com/amp/s/businessinsider.com) Accessed 3 May, 2023.
- Nigeria's Unemployment Rate to Rise to 41% in 2023 - KPMG [google.com/amp/s/www.channeltv.com/2023/04/11/nigeria2021](https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.channeltv.com/2023/04/11/nigeria2021)
- Oni, G. (2014). *Ending Political Thuggery and Violence*. Accessed 6 May, 2023 from www.nigerianobservernews.com/23102014/features/features4html#-V-8TiTPTX10
- Resurgent Threats to 2023 Elections, *Punch Editorial Board*. 26 December, 2022 Accessed 7 August, 2023 from punching.com
- Roxana G., & Adrienne L. (9 January, 2020). *Does electoral violence affect vote choice and willingness to vote? Conjoint analysis of a vignette experiment*. Vol. 57, Issue 1, January 9, Accessed, 7 August, 2023 from journals.sagepub.com/doi/full...
- Sahara Reporters, *The Biased Umpire-THE NEWS*, 26 March 2007 Accessed, 7 August, 2023 from saharareporters.com/biased

Samson Nwafor, (25 March, 2023). 2023 Polls: A Harvests of Deaths As 130 Lost
Accessed on 6 June, 2023 from independent.ng/2023#pc

Shenga, C. (2019), The Effect of Electoral Violence on Electoral Participation in Africa
<https://journals.openedition.org/cea>