

# Election Violence and Democracy in Nigeria: A Study of the 2011 and 2015 General Elections in Lagos State

**T. O. Kalu & D. E. Gberevbie,**

Department of Political Science and International Relations,  
Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.

## **Abstract**

This paper examines election violence and democracy in Nigeria with focus on the 2011 and 2015 general elections in Lagos State. The study adopts a qualitative method basically from primary data (oral interview) and secondary data, using observations, journal articles, newspaper reports and report of INEC obtained online. The study was anchored on the Frustration Aggression Theory in understanding the rational for engaging in electoral violence. It reveals that election violence was caused by many factors including; lack of internal democracy within political parties, inefficiency of the electoral commissions, inadequate security personnel, inadequate voter education, voters' bribery, rumour of rigging, among others. Therefore, the paper recommends among others that political leaders should play positive roles in building effective government through their constitutional duties and mandates. All political parties in Nigeria should endeavour to make internal democracy within the party a top priority.

## **Introduction**

Election is one of the fundamental duties of citizens in a democratic setting. Elections have been the medium through which contemporary representative democracy has functioned. Elections have become the most acceptable method by which citizens of an ever increasing number of political systems choose their leaders. Election enables people to choose the politicians they want to represent their interest in the government, which generates violence in most developing countries. Violence is a pervasive phenomenon in every society and every sphere of social life. It is

not restricted to the political spheres alone. It cuts across every aspect of human existence. In a study by Ayeni-Akeke (2008) it is recalled that violence from inception has been a major part of human existence, as man from time immemorial have tendencies to exhibit violent acts, especially politics related violence that varies from one political system to another.

According to Obakhedo (2011: 99), electoral violence is one of the greatest obstacles in Nigeria. Mostly, election violence occurs within party (intra-party) and outside the party (inter-party), this affects the quality of election (outcome) results in the electoral system, the rule of law and democratic practice in Nigeria. Furthermore, violence affects the stand of elections being free and fair, as well transparent by foreign observers.

According to Sesan, (2012) electoral violence has really discouraged citizens' participation in the political process in many states including Lagos State. It was noted that Nigerians participation in 2011 and 2015 general elections in many states in Nigeria including some Local Government Areas (LGA) in Lagos State recorded low turnout, that only 35 percent of the 70 Million registered voters took part in the general elections due to the fear of violence (Sesan, 2012). This development portends serious danger to Nigeria's democracy because without sufficient turnout, elections would not reflect the people's preferences.

## **Literature Review**

### ***The Concept of Election***

The concept of election is associated with several meanings. In political parlance, Ojo (2008: 6) further defines election, as a "formal expression of preferences by the governed, which are then aggregated and transformed into a collective decision about who will govern, who should stay in office, who should be thrown out, and who should replace those who have been thrown out." In support, Awopeju (2011) explains that, election is a procedure that allows members of a given society to choose representatives who will hold positions such as leaders of local, state and national government. According to Dye (2001) election is an important mechanism for the employment of administrative governance in democratic social order, a major involvement in a democracy; and the way of giving approval to a regime.

Robert (2011) traces modern and democratic elections to the 17th century, and a means through which modern democracies and newly independent colonies of formal colonial masters can choose those to represent them in the affair of governance and effective management of the common wealth of the country to the benefit of all. The conducts of elections to governmental offices are always branded with various preparatory events and political schemes that contenders embrace to surface as its party's contestant, in advance to contesting against other party's candidates in a general election. These strategies range from campaign, political movements, lobbying, promotions, and private connections (Olujide *et al*, 2010).

Elections overtime have been mentioned as the peak pointer of a post-conflict state in regard to a nonviolent representative outlook. The capacity to choose one's ruler, it is believed, to be vital in driving a government forward after scarring internal or external battles. Sadly, though the conduct of vote-casting is usually not as easy as it may initially look, with several experts and researchers classifying them as turning points for violent acts. Elections have become a climax for violence and uncertainty in many states in Nigeria (Ikyase & Egberi, 2015).

### ***Concept of Democracy***

Democracy has no universal acceptable definition as various scholars have different interpretations on the conceptualization of democracy. The term democracy is very common in political discourses. Hence, the term has attracted several explanations from different scholars and personalities. According to Falade (2014) the term democracy is derived from two Greek words: "*demos*" which mean people and "*kratos*" which means rule. In his classical definition, Abraham Lincoln defines Democracy as "the government of the people by the people and for the people". According to this view, people are central in any democratic process. Without given people the power to decide who become their leader as well as hold their leaders responsible, democracy would be a mirage.

According to Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1989) democracy as a system of government entails healthy competition between parties for an all effective positions of governance, devoid of violence for an all-encompassing level of political involvement in the

selection of leaders through the conduct of periodic free and fair elections, fundamental human rights and political participation.

Ajayi (1998) posits that democracy offers participatory opportunities for residents in choosing political aspirants through periodic elections of reliable representatives to govern and protect their interest. Furthermore, Ajayi (1998) states that democracy assure electorates happiness and the rule of law as the chosen leaders are answerable to the members of the electorate. Any nation that claims democracy but the citizens' vote and voice is not consider, such a nation is not practicing democracy. From all the submissions above, one can infer that, democracy is essentially people-centered. It (democracy) is system of government that promotes citizens' participation in the entire electoral process.

#### *The Concept of Electoral Violence*

The concept of electoral violence is made up of two distinct concepts in one, which include electoral and violence. In this section of the review, the two concepts are defined and then reviewed in the context of the subject matter of the current study.

The word electoral in the opinion of Bamgbose (2011) is the process involved in the conduct of elections either at the public or private level. Bamgbose (2011) further stated that electoral process at the public level is the process of planning and conducting elections to choose representatives of the people in public offices of governance such as the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government at state and national levels. Similarly, Robert (2011) posited that electoral process at the private level includes all the processes involved in the successful conduct of elections into other types of groups other than those of government such as associations and clubs.

The concept of violence has been examined by scholars in diverse perspectives which all relates to either positive or negative views towards achieving a given goal or end. Bamgbose (2011) opined that violence is an act of aggression that leads to inflicting injury on persons, destruction of properties and causing pandemonium within a given social gathering, community or society.

Having understood the concept of electoral and violence, this review of literature turns to the review of thoughts of authors on electoral violence. Robert (2011) stated that electoral violence

depicts acts of aggression, thuggery, and other similar acts that are displayed in the course of the electoral process. Balogun (2003) explains electoral violence as any form of violence that arise at any stage (pre, during and post-election) from differences in opinions, feelings and engagements of electoral processes. Ladan-Baki (2016) also noted that electoral violence during general elections include the snatching of ballot boxes to rig and manipulate election results; causing pandemonium in polling stations to hinder voters from voting; beating up electoral officers and sometimes killing same in the process when weapons such as guns and cutlass are used during the elections.

Electoral violence is one major problem that has affected Nigeria's democratic sustainability and achievement of good governance (Gberevbie, 2014). Absence of proper democratic institutions militates against the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. Democracy is a system of government that promotes citizens' participation in the entire electoral process. At the heart of democracy lies the concept of election. In this regard, Gberevbie (2014: 134) states that "democratic institutions are mechanisms for facilitation of the democratic process for the election of public officeholders in any democratic society." He further argues that democratic institution such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should put in place structures and election ethos with a view of conducting smooth and credible elections, built on the notion of "one man, one vote" (p. 134).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Given the emphasis of election violence in Nigeria and the constant struggle for political power in a democratic environment, the theory of Dollard et al. (1939) (Frustration Aggression) is adopted for the purpose of this research. This theory was developed in 1939 by Dollard and colleagues. They published a monograph on aggression, which later was known as the frustration-aggression theory, anchored on the assumption that "aggression is always the consequence of frustration." This theory primarily focuses on aggression, as Dollard theorized that "the occurrence of aggressive actions always presumes the existence of frustration and contra wise, and that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression" (Dollard et al., 1939).

Frustration aggression reflects the reasons for electoral violence because men who want to live beyond their social means do not accept their limitation in defeat this results into violence as the last resort in order to live beyond their social means. Frustration aggression theory addresses the pre-election and post-election violence. In cases of pre-election violence, frustration and aggression comes into play when a certain aspirant is power-hungry and possibly realizes the indications that he/she may possibly lose to the rival, thereby adopting vehemence for their own personal gains (Tamuno, 1991). In post-election violence, persons who feel cheated on election outcomes, isolated or disadvantaged by the injustice of the electoral practice are likely out of frustration, transfer aggression on other individuals through violent acts.

The relevance of the frustration aggression theory to this current study shows that political actors resort to violence as a means to achieving their aims and exercising power, out of feelings of frustration that leads to aggression, especially when the results of the election would not favor them. This theory helps in understanding the psychological behavior of persons in the use of violence to achieve selfish interest. Electoral candidates adopt violence when they fail in their bid to win elections, thereby employing thugs to execute their selfish intentions (Ladan-Baki, 2016). Therefore, the frustration aggression theory provides an explanation for electoral violence that has been occurring in Nigeria.

The theory stipulates that events surrounding electoral violence in Nigeria are as a result of fear of defeat exhibited by electoral candidates, which triggers frustration and then transfer of aggression, through the employment of human mercenaries in perpetrating violence in pre, during and after elections. Therefore, to achieve peace, fairness and transparency of elections in Nigeria, the theory specifies the need for enlightenment on the importance of citizens coming out to vote in their masses in support of a free and fair election, making their votes count and as well provisions for well-equipped security personnel that would safe guard life and properties of voters during elections.

### **Research Method**

This paper adopted the qualitative method to address electoral violence and democracy in Nigeria, taking into consideration the 2011 and 2015 general elections in Lagos State. Primary (Oral Interview) and Secondary source of data were adopted to obtain data from relevant books, journals, publications and which were analyzed to achieve the objective of the study.

### **Discussion and Findings**

Some of the causes of electoral violence witnessed during the elections in some Local Government Areas in 2011 and 2015 general elections in Lagos State include the following:

#### ***Lack of Internal Democracy within Political Parties***

When there are no level playing ground or internal democracy within and among political parties, especially when the party leaders are not carrying out their responsibilities and duties during elections, aggrieved political contestants uses this platform as a way of orchestrating violence by sponsoring thugs and hooligans who end up disrupting the peaceful conduct of a particular election. This was observed between the two major parties of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) as a result of level playing ground with political parties. According to Ogheneakoke (2014), lack of internal democracy, irregularities in registration and technical challenges during elections are responsible for election violence.

#### ***Inefficiency of the Electoral Commissions***

Adeniyi (2018) stated that the inefficiency of the electoral commissions in conducting its duties and responsibilities also contribute to incidence of violence during the 2011 and 2015 general elections in Lagos State. As a way of curbing this problem in subsequent elections, the Lagos State Independent Electoral Commission (LASIEC) through the Inter Party Advisory Council (IPAC) engages all political parties in Lagos State via their stakeholders in discussions on rules guiding the conduct of free and fair elections as a means to achieve a peaceful and credible election outcome. However, in situations where the commission fails to call all political parties together in a meeting, there is likely to be violence because political parties will not be able to inform

their candidates on rules of engagement.

Adeniyi (2018) further indicated that electoral violence both in 2011 and 2015 occurred at different periods; pre-election violence, campaign period violence, election day violence and post-election result violence. He added that during registration period in both 2011 and 2015 some observed irregularities in voters register, such as blurred identity, and poor technical quality which they suspected might lead to void registration and subsequently denials of voting right. Some attempted to beat up INEC officials and some of them were harassed in some registration centres.

#### *Inadequate Security Personnel*

In instances where a security agent (police) tries to support a particular party to rig an election in a polling unit, there is likely to be election violence. This leads to feeling of grievance from opposition parties, thereby resorting to violence as a means of disrupting election outcomes (Okon, 2018).

Among other causes of electoral violence in 2011 and 2015 general elections in Lagos State according to the respondents are listed below as;

- i) Inadequate voter education.
- ii) Spread of rumour of rigging.
- iii) Spread of inflammatory messages about an election or its outcome.
- iv) Religious and ethnic campaigning by supporters.
- v) The pursuit of electoral victory at any cost.
- vi) Miscounting or non- counting of ballots.
- vii) False tallying of votes.
- viii) Use of under-age voters.
- ix) Intimidation by opponents.

#### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

This section contains the recommendations for actions on incidence of election violence in Lagos State and Nigeria in general. These recommendations are based on the findings of this study.

1. There should be an electoral reform that will criminalize electoral offences and stipulates the punishment. Until legislature display political will, election violence cannot stop unless the law changes. Until the law is changed in the Parliament, end to electoral violence is only but mere wish.



2. The problems with the current analog method of running of elections should be visible. Votes are often miscounted, misread, or even simply misplaced. Electoral and adhoc officials consist of thousands of people across the country, paid overtime to stay up all night manually sorting and counting these votes. Electronic voting should be encouraged in other to achieve a good and reliable election outcome.

3. Winner-take-all elections rule should be modified because it discourages participation and results to violence.

4. The Nigerian government needs to engage in a comprehensive reform programme and involve key leaders in the military and police in order to implement any strategic reform programme to curb election violence

In conclusion, based on the data and findings of this study it is established that 2011 and 2015 elections witnessed election violence in Lagos State. Although, 2015 election was considered being free, fair and transparent, the outcome was not totally free of violence. Violence was witnessed during registration, campaign, the day of election and after release of results in some wards and local government areas. The two main political parties of (APC) and (PDP) witnessed intra and inter party violence. The aggrieved party supporters often vented their anger through protests initially, but in most cases it degenerated into the fracas between supporters of opposing parties. Considering these two elections (2011 and 2015), it seems that elections in Lagos State are periods in which the stability and security of the State hangs in the balance, due to the threat of election violence.

The process toward attainment of free, fair, credible and transparent elections as a system of consolidating democracy and good governance in Nigeria and in Lagos State specifically is characterised by violence in all the succeeding elections. Without getting full grips on the causes of this violence, it would be very difficult if not impossible to provide appropriate solutions to the negative tendencies that seem to have negative effects on the smooth conduct of elections and the democratic peace in Lagos State.

The factors that were responsible for election violence in Lagos State were discovered. First and foremost, electoral violence in Lagos State is linked with poverty. Situations where the economic

hardship becomes too unbearable, the propensity for violence increases and the teeming number of unemployed youth becomes a tool for electoral violence.

Electoral officers and adjunct staff must be well trained and motivated. The security sector must be educated on ethics of electoral process and the public should be told the consequences of violating the electoral laws. In addition, there must be periodic review of electoral laws to reflect current practices. If good governance disallows electoral violence, virtue such as accountability, social justice, transparency, rule of law, gender equality and due process must guide governance and leadership in the state. Electoral reforms must include other things as electoral education. There must be some level of education for the citizenry to know who is a registered and considered as an eligible voter under the laws of the land. When these measures are well instigated, integrated and adhered to, Lagos State will be free from electoral violence.

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