

Electoral Risk Management: A Panacea to Electoral Violence in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:

In the Nigeria polity, electoral violence has constituted a major feature of the electoral process. Ballot box snatching, thuggery, gunshots, etc. have almost become the norm during elections in Nigeria. This paper adopts a theoretical approach in proffering solution to this menace plaguing the Nigerian electoral system. It seeks to do so by suggesting the implementation of electoral risk management tool by the regulatory body (INEC). According to this paper, the use of this tool will engineer peaceful and credible elections in the coming years, especially in the forthcoming presidential election.

Keywords: Electoral violence, electoral risk management, peaceful and credible elections

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the Nigerian polity has been marred by several instabilities – political, economic, religious, etc. This may be due to the overlapping religious, regional, and ethnic divides existing in the country (Campbell, 2010). The lopsided view of ethnocentrism and religious sentiments possessed by political elites in the country have in no small way contributed to the perception of the masses as regards the rotation of power in the Nigerian polity. Desperate and power-drunk politicians often make use of ethnic and religious sentiments coupled with financial rewards to influence the voting decisions of the masses especially the uneducated and unemployed in their favour during elections. And in the event the outcome of such elections does not turn out in their favour, they resort to violence. This violence is referred to as electoral violence.

Electoral violence, according to Albert (2007), includes any type of coordinated threats aimed at frightening, hurting, or blackmailing a political actor or opponent before, during, or after an election with the goal of determining, delaying, or influencing the political process. With this

definition in mind, history has proven that the Nigerian politics and electoral process have suffered the whips of electoral violence over the past decades. This creates the impression that the Nigerian electoral process might be headed towards a cataclysmic collapse if there is no framework designed to properly manage the risks posed to the process.

This impression creates a sense of urgency in developing a framework called electoral risk management (ERM) that can help establish credible and peaceful elections. The presence of this framework could be likened to a violence-proof mechanism that totally eradicates or drastically reduce the possibility of electoral violence manifesting before, during or after elections. The presence of this framework poses a threat to electoral risks and violence and thereby strengthens democracy in the polity.

It is only an irony that a tool as potent as the ERM seems almost absent in scholarly literatures. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no scholarly article that addresses the issue of ERM in the literature. Hence, it is the aim of this study to fill this gap by giving scholarly opinions on it. Also, this study seeks to use ERM as a tool to proffer solution to the issue of electoral violence which has been plaguing the Nigerian electoral system for several decades. Concluding this study would provide the Nigerian electoral body (INEC) with a better idea on how to manage electoral risks and prevent electoral violence in the forthcoming coming presidential election in 2023.

1.1 Brief History of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Subsequent to the first electoral violence in 1964 which led to the first military coup on the 15th January, 1966, several electoral violence experiences have manifested at different times in the Nigerian state. At the election that took place in

1979 which brought in Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the president, it was reported that the election was characterised by electoral malpractices and irregularities which triggered post-election violence. After the Shagari's administration, the military again took over in the person of General Muhammadu Buhari in 1983. His regime which lasted for just two years was succeeded by General Ibrahim Babaginda who was willing to transfer power from military to civilian rule. On doing so, a general election was organised, which is believed to be freest and fairest election ever in the history of Nigerian politics. This election was won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola who was a member of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). But the result of the election did not go down well with the military junta. This made General Babaginda to annul such election. The annulment of the election was greeted with stiff opposition that led to political unrest resulting in the sudden demise of Chief M.K.O. Abiola.

To abate the current tension in the country at that time, General Babaginda relinquished power to Chief Ernest Shonekan who ruled for only three months after which power was taken again by the military in the person of General Sani Abacha on November 17, 1993. General Abacha ruled Nigeria for five good years until he met his death on June 8, 1998. This made General Abdulsalami Abubakar who was the next in rank to become the head of state on June 9, 1998. The emergence of General Abdulsalami made transition from military rule to civilian rule very easy and void of military intervention. On May 29th, 1999, democracy came into Nigeria with General Olusegun Obasanjo being the first president under a democratic government in Nigeria.

In practically every state of the Federation, his government orchestrated the 2003 election, which was marred by irregularities and violence. After his administration, President Umaru Yar'Adua emerged who openly rejected the 2007 election that brought him to office, calling it a "flaw." President Jonathan oversaw the 2015 General Election, which, like the previous one, was marred by violence. In 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari came into power and oversaw the election in 2019 which had about 626 killed as reported by a news outlet (Sanni, 2019). The foregoing gives an introductory presentation and brief history of electoral violence in Nigeria.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

2.1 Risk

Risk is an essential term in many scientific domains, but there is no agreement on how to

define and interpret it (Aven, 2011). Some definitions focus on probabilities, while others are focused on expected values, uncertainty, and aims (Sotic & Rajic, 2015). According to Vaughan (1989), risk is a circumstance in which there is a probability of a negative deviation from a planned or hoped-for outcome. Rosa (1998) from her perspective defined risk as a scenario or occurrence in which something of human worth (including people themselves) is put in jeopardy and the outcome is unclear. It is simply anticipated harm (Campbell, 2005). In the words of Aven and Renn (2009), risk refers to the unpredictability and severity of an activity's occurrences and repercussions (or outcomes) in relation to anything that humans value. Consequent upon the foregoing definitions, risk can be said to be the likelihood or probability of a negative event happening instead of the desired positive event. This means that risk is a possible event that may occur built in the abstract consciousness of an individual or corporate body.

2.2 Electoral Risk

Having surveyed the literature, there seems to be a dearth of the conceptualisation of electoral risk. Nonetheless, Hubscher and Sattler (2016) conceptualised the term from their perspective as the possibility of political parties being replaced in power if people are unsatisfied with government policies (Hubscher & Sattler, 2016). Wenzelburger (2011) and Afonso, Zartaloudis, and Papadopoulos (2015) in their studies consented to the foregoing definition by asserting that electoral risk is caused by special interest politics, in which electorally significant society groups who are badly affected by austerity measures withdraw their support for the government. However, this definition seems not to really address what electoral risk is about.

Electoral risk as discussed in this study refers to the possibility of the electoral process being disrupted by negative and harmful behaviours of individuals or groups. It is simply the likelihood of violence taking place before, during or after the electoral process. Any possibility of negative occurrences manifesting as a result of the electoral process could be referred to as electoral risk. International IDEA (2016) asserted that the electoral process is a complex one and due to its complexity, there is a high possibility of the manifestation of several mishaps such as misplaced election materials, electoral malpractice, malfunctioning equipment, poor time management, lack of funds, etc. These mishaps constitute electoral risk.

2.3 Electoral Risk Management

As earlier mentioned, scholarly works on electoral risk management is very scarce in the literature. This implies the scarcity of scholarly conceptualisations. However, in this section, electoral risk management would be conceptualised. Electoral risk management is defined as a systematic framework put in place to ensure peaceful and credible elections. It does that with the aid of an instrument called electoral risk management tool (ERM tool). The ERM tool is a multi-purpose tool aimed primarily at organizations responsible for conducting credible and peaceful elections, such as electoral administration bodies and security sector agencies (International IDEA, 2013). It is not only the foregoing that are users of the tool; but also those who are interested in supporting the body responsible for conducting peaceful and credible elections like the academia, civil society organisations, and international organisations (United Nations, European Union, etc.).

2.4 Violence

Violence has been seen from various perspectives by various scholars due to its multidimensionality. According to Isiaku, Obatta, and Nweke (2020), violence refers to the act that causes damage, injury or death by the use of physical force. In the view of Hamby (2017), violence is the planned, threatened, or real use of physical force or power against oneself, another person, or a group or community that results in or has a high chance of ending in damage, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. It is any act committed against humanity that causes or inflicts suffering, whether physical, mental, psychological, or psychosocial, in order to humiliate, demean, or ridicule individuals or structures. From these definitions, it is seen that any act intentionally performed that is detrimental to the mental, social and physical wellbeing of one's self or another, is referred to as violence.

The violence that has occurred in the Nigerian polity as a result of elections not favouring given political classes at different times cannot be overemphasised. Since the transfer of power from the colonialists to Nigerians, electoral violence has almost become a norm during election periods. History has it that, electoral violence manifested in post-colonial Nigeria for the first time in 1964 (Isiaku et al., 2020) and since then has become a common feature in the Nigeria electoral practices

2.5 Electoral Violence

Till recent times, there is still no universally accepted definition of electoral violence in the literature. The concept seems to enjoy varying definitions by various scholars as it appeals to them. According to Etannibi (2011), it is defined as any sort of violence used to influence electoral outcomes is referred to as electoral violence. It refers to any acts of hatred or aggression committed before, during, or after the election process (Egobueze & Ojirika, 2017). In the words of Obiam (2021), electoral violence has to do with any act of violence performed in the course of electoral conduct by individuals or groups with the purpose to influence the election's outcome to the desired outcome before, during, or after the election. Consequent upon the foregoing, electoral violence can simply be seen as any form of violence that occurs as a result of the electoral process.

III. ELECTORAL RISK MANAGEMENT AS A PANACEA TO ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

As seen in the introductory part of this paper, electoral violence is not alien to the Nigerian political sphere. With this in view, it is only imperative for the electoral body (INEC) in collaboration with the federal government to implement a system that can bring an end to this chronic malady in the Nigerian electoral process. This system is the electoral risk management system or tool.

The electoral risk management tool has the potency of preventing the occurrence of electoral violence in the nation. Its goal is to help users better recognize, assess, and manage electoral risks. The ERM tool may help users gain a better understanding of electoral risk factors, gather and evaluate risk data, develop preventative and mitigation measures, and track the outcomes of their activities. The tool is made up of three components that work together. These components include: knowledge resources, analytical instruments, and prevention and mitigation. Knowledge resources component is concerned with an electronic library containing a wide range of factors that are responsible for electoral violence. These factors are derived from various research works, election reports and other significant publications. Also, these factors are categorised into two groups – internal and external. The factors are internal if they are exclusive to the electoral context. That is, issues that spring up as a result of loopholes in the electoral process. Examples include: poor electoral administrative rules, favouritism by the electoral body, problematic

voter registration, loss of sensitive materials, etc. On the other hand, external factors are those that occur outside the electoral context but intensify during elections. Examples are: high unemployment rate, presence of thugs hired by contesting politicians, gender-based discrimination and violence, etc.

Analytical instruments component on the other hand, includes three major parts; data entry, data presentation and risk and action register. Data entry is simply an interface that allows for the entries of chosen factors, dates and regions where electoral violence has occurred in times past. Data presentation is concerned with the display of data in numeric values, trend charts, etc. While the risk and action register makes it possible for the user to create alerts and prescribe prevention and mitigation actions.

As regards the prevention and mitigation actions, it talks about the action steps one has to take to prevent or mitigate electoral violence. In this aspect, three areas have to be taken into consideration and they are: enhanced electoral management and justice, enhanced electoral security, and improved peace infrastructure.

The use of the ERM tool helps the electoral body (INEC) identify possible factors responsible for electoral violence based on past occurrences in different geographical locations of the country. As a result of this evaluation, the electoral body is empowered with the necessary information to prevent the occurrence of potential violence in subsequent elections.

IV. CONCLUSION

Electoral violence does not have to be a common feature in the Nigerian electoral process if the regulatory body (INEC) can implement the electoral risk management framework. This framework helps the body and other stakeholders identify causes of past electoral violence occurrences in various regions of the country and alert INEC and other stakeholders on actions that can be taken to prevent or mitigate electoral violence in future elections. Therefore, it is recommended that in the forthcoming presidential election in 2023, INEC should ensure that the ERM tool is used so as to have a credible and peaceful election.

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