

**ADDRESSING ELECTION INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: STRATEGIES FOR A
SECURE ELECTORAL PROCESS**

FADEYI, OLAJIDE ISAAC
DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION
REDEEMER'S UNIVERSITY, EDE.
EMAIL ADDRESS: fadeyii@run.edu.ng
&

AKINTOLA, OLUWALAYOMI IYINOLUWA
DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION
REDEEMER'S UNIVERSITY, EDE.
akintola.layomi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

For decades, Nigerian elections have been tarnished by violence and insecurity; the 2023 general elections were no exception. This study sought to examine the reasons for insecurity in Nigeria during the election season and suggest solutions to the issue. The study found the main causes of electoral violence in Nigeria to be poverty, political thuggery, ethnic and religious conflicts, and ineffective law enforcement agencies. To address these issues, this study emphasises the importance of a political will, inter-agency cooperation, and proactive engagement with civil society. It calls for the implementation of electoral changes that prioritize voter education, responsibility, and transparency in addition to making better use of the new media to improve the credibility of the electoral process. The study also emphasizes the necessity for an all-encompassing strategy that involves government, security services, political parties, civil society organizations, and the media in addressing election insecurity in the nation. The study concluded by stating that all stakeholders must put forth a consistent effort and dedication in order to combat insecurity during the Nigerian election season. By putting these measures in place, Nigerian elections will be free, fair, and peaceful, and the nation's democracy will continue to thrive and be sustainable.

KEYWORDS: Nigeria, Elections, Insecurity, Violence, Solutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Elections are a crucial feature of democracy because they allow citizens to exercise their right to vote and participate in governmental processes. The open and intentional choosing of individuals to serve as representatives of organisations, communities, or governmental organisations through elections is one of democracy's core tenets (Joab-Peterside, 2018). However, violence and insecurity ruined the Nigerian elections, putting the country's democracy and stability in jeopardy (Verjee et al., 2018). Concerning allegations of voting fraud, violence, and fatalities plagued the general elections in 2019 and 2023 (Onimisi, & Tinuola, 2019; Vanguard, 2023).

Nigeria has seen similar acts of violence during previous elections, particularly in the northern and southern regions of the country (Joab-Peterside, 2018), so the problem of election insecurity is not new to the country. For many people, Nigeria's history of electoral violence is a sad reality that cannot be divorced from the nation's enormous social and economic inequalities, ethnic and religious conflicts, and structural weaknesses like corruption and a weak administrative machinery (Osawe, 2015). According to Verjee et al. (2018), the election violence has significantly weakened public confidence in elections and the authority of elected officials, endangering Nigeria's democracy and stability. This has increased social, political, and economic pressures that were previously there, which could lead to additional bloodshed and instability (Kohnert, 2023).

This paper examines the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria during election season and suggests practical solutions. According to Oni et al. (2013), tackling Nigeria's election-related insecurity calls for a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of violence, enhances security, and promotes electoral accountability. According to the report, racial and religious tensions, poverty, political thuggery, and poor law enforcement are the top contributors to electoral violence in Nigeria (Nwagwu et al., 2021).

To solve these issues, a comprehensive and well-coordinated effort from many stakeholders is required, including the government, security services, political parties, civil society organisations, and the media. If these issues are not fixed, the nation's democracy, stability, and socioeconomic advancement will continue to be in jeopardy. As a result, this study will look at the problem of election insecurity in Nigeria as well as its causes, effects, and potential solutions. The study will provide information on the roles that various parties, including the government and law enforcement, play in guaranteeing fair elections. The purpose of this study is to enhance the dialogue on election security in Nigeria and provide solutions. It is hoped that the study's findings would direct policy and decision-making processes so that future elections in Nigeria are free, fair, and peaceful.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This theory adopted the class conflict theory.

Class Conflict Theory:

The conflict theory, created by Karl Marx, is the theory used in this study. In his attempt to explain society and its relationships, Marx focused on the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, or the workers and the owners of the means of production. The theory, which first concentrated on the conflict between classes, has since been modified to analyse

different types of conflicts based on deprivation, oppression, exploitation, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and nationality (Chidozie, 2017). The character of the state's security will depend on the rulers' capacity to control the ongoing conflict (Adebambo et al., 2016). This explains why different political actors engaged in a violent struggle for control during the electoral process.

The theory has come under fire for being 'over-attentive to economic interactions, which Marx regarded to be the most critical of all relationships in the society,' despite the fact that it is still relevant. In other words, Marxists frequently overlook the interaction of non-economic elements in causing disputes, despite the fact that Marx focused on economic dynamics as the root of class conflict. Marxists overlook class struggle as a defect that arises from egotism and the pursuit of individual self-interest and/or power, as in the case of political elites during the Nigerian election process.

Despite the criticism, the theory is useful for explaining how political parties and ethnic groups have shaped conflict during the electoral process. Political parties and ethnic groupings in Nigeria have a reputation for following through on their threats and pledges. Even though it is frequently violent, it develops a reputation for reliability even when efforts by the government and state machinery to maintain national security are jeopardised.

2. METHODOLOGY

Secondary research was utilised in this study. The method known as secondary research uses data from a number of sources, such as reports, surveys that have previously been conducted, and other resources that are accessible online, in public libraries, and other locations.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following topics are to be reviewed in this section:

- i. Election Violence in Nigeria
- ii. Causes of election insecurity in Nigeria
- iii. The way forward.
- iv. The role of the new media in minimizing election violence in Nigeria
- v. Stakeholder Perspectives on election security

The history of electoral violence in Nigeria

In Nigeria's political scene, electoral violence has consistently been a problem (Verjee et al., 2019). It frequently happens during election times and includes violent activities including physical assault, property destruction, and even fatalities. Although there are many different and complex factors that contribute to electoral violence in Nigeria, political rivalry, racial and religious tensions, deprivation, and unemployment are frequently to blame (Bakare et al., 2020). A loss of trust in the democratic process, infrastructural damage, and fatalities are only a few of the far-reaching effects of electoral violence. Therefore, it is imperative that the government and all stakeholders work to prevent electoral violence and ensure that Nigeria holds peaceful and credible elections (Omilusi, 2019).

There have been numerous elections in African republics as a result of the necessity for democratic consolidation, the suspension of one-party control, and military dictatorships. The Clifford Constitution introduced the elective principle to Nigerian politics, but the colonialists used election rigging along communal lines, which resulted in prejudice and victimisation of Northern friends of Southerners (Onimisi, & Tinuola, 2019). The north, east, and west of the nation were separated under the Richards Constitution. The United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) were the two main coalitions that were established to run in the election in 1964. UPGA leaders instructed their supporters to abstain from voting on election day. Ofeimun claimed that Azikiwe originally declined to convene Balewa to form a cabinet since the election had been so expertly planned with violence and normlessness. Elections were held in Western Nigeria in 1965 by the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) and Action Group (AG), but there was no peace because there were no government officials present, no election officials, and no ballots.

Fifteen of the candidates received uncontested returns. Serious incidents, including the murder of an election official, two election officials, and two poll workers, disrupted the 1979 elections. Radio and newspapers reported conflicting election results, and Alhaji Adegbenro was detained. Following widespread murder and looting, dozens of delegates were murdered just one mile from the airport. Due to the contentious nature of the Supreme Court's judgement, the military and FEDECO decided to nominate Shagari as president. (Obakhedo, 2011).

Violent protests over rigged gubernatorial elections occurred in Nigeria during the 1983 federal elections. The military coup on December 31, 1983, swept the Second Republic into oblivion three months later. Babangida started a futile transitional programme and called off the presidential election on June 12, 1993, which resulted in an interim administration under Chief Shonekan that was overthrown by General Sani Abacha's palace coup. Abacha was killed just as he was about to become the president of a country run by civilians. Olu Falae voiced his discontent with the 1999 elections, but he abandoned his attempt to get the results declared in favour of Obasanjo (Obakhedo, 2011).

The Obasanjo government presided over the 2003 elections, which were marred by electoral violence and political assassination. Election tampering, fraud, and intimidation were caused by security concerns that existed prior to the polls. Corruption, electoral fraud, and violence made the 2007 Nigerian elections a "do-or-die affair." Voters in Rivers State were subjected to violence and intimidation, and a police station was stormed and set on fire. Election results were rigged in Ekiti State, while opposition supporters set fire to government facilities in Katsina. In the states of Nasarawa and Oyo, soldiers and incensed voters fought.

As a result, the 2007 election was widely regarded as the worst in Nigerian election management history. The election saw the majority of fraud. Due to Muhammadu Buhari's defeat in Kaduna state, the 2011 elections saw the worst election-related violence in recent memory, with over 800 deaths. The initial wave of attacks by Boko Haram against the Nigerian state persisted. In Nigeria, there were more than 60 incidences of violence during the 2015 elections, which resulted in 58 fatalities and numerous injuries (Kohnert, 2023).

Tensions between local politicians, disturbances at campaign rallies, and altercations between supporters of opposing political parties characterised Nigeria's 2019 elections. There were 626 fatalities, with the North-West region suffering the greatest loss of life. Additionally, there were kidnappings, assaults, ballot box snatchings, and harassment. The results of Nigeria's presidential elections in 2023 could influence politics throughout Africa, notably in nearby West African nations. The same goal may be achieved by militarising the voting process, and the rise of social media and politicians' appeal to Nigeria's youth could inspire fresh interest in political engagement. In Nigeria's 2023 elections, the emergence of a potent third party offers a singular case study for the expansion of democracy throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (Kohnert, 2023).

Causes of election insecurity in Nigeria

The principles of democracy, which uphold the right of citizens to exercise their vote in what should, in theory, be a representative government of the people by the people, are made laughable by this arbitrary use of violence to grab power. The problem has destroyed public confidence in voting during elections and tarnished the integrity of the democratic process (Joab-Peterside, 2018). Election violence can take many different forms, including the deployment of thugs to steal ballot boxes, voter intimidation, interruption of the voting process with the use of firearms at the polling place, vandalism of electoral equipment, or any other type of physical assault. (Nwagwu et al., 2022). Thus, electoral violence is any act of violence carried out in the course of political activities before, during or after election.

Prior to and during elections, the Nigerian political class exploits sentiment that is communal, sectional, ethnic, and religious. As a result of the unchecked ethnic and sectional sentiment that was displayed before, during, and after the elections, there has been electoral violence in several areas of the country. The political class or party in Nigeria that does not go beyond sectional or regional, religious, and ethnic predilection generally initiates the use of ethnicity in electioneering (Onimisi&Tinuola, 2019).

The high levels of poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic knowledge made it simple to utilise political thugs to incite violence during Nigeria's 2019 elections. According to studies, political party officials, politicians, and government officials recruit, arm, and pay gangs or political thugs who commit the majority of election violence (Nwagwu et al., 2022). Onimisi and Tinuola (2019) point out that because law enforcement agencies were unable to apprehend and hold accountable electoral offenders, impunity in Nigeria fostered the use of violence for political advantage. As evidenced by the 2019 election, more crimes were committed as a result of the absence of prosecution. Violence in Nigeria was also exacerbated by a lack of internal democracy (Oni et al., 2013).

The Way Forward

Modifications to the Electoral Act Since the perception among citizens that the Electoral Act has some fundamental problem that needs to be resolved is the cause of electoral violence. Therefore, it is imperative that the Act be amended as soon as possible, with a focus on areas that will strengthen the electoral system and guarantee the credibility and transparency of election administration. The election Offences Commission, whose

primary duty would be to investigate, enforce, and prosecute election offences, should be included in the modification to the Electoral Act. As more emphasis would be placed on conducting free, fair, and credible elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission's work would be made easier by releasing them from this responsibility.

Law Enforcement Agencies

The Nigerian Police and Civil Defence in particular have a bigger role to play in reducing electoral violence. Before, during, and after the country's elections, Nigeria's security agencies must maintain their impartiality. The impartiality of the security services is conveniently integrated into the citizens and guarantees the fairness of the voting process. However, when citizens believed that the security forces in the nation were siding with the incumbent party, as was frequently the case in Nigeria, the opposition political parties would rebel. Thus, to ensure the validity of the election, Nigeria's security agency should be impartial. Additionally, the coordination of the Nigerian Policy and other relevant security agencies in the coordination of the Independent National Electoral Commission should be more assertive and consistent (Verjee, et al 2018).

The role of the digital media in minimizing election violence in Nigeria

Since 2011, social media has played a key role in Nigeria's electoral politics, with the Facebook generation's 2008 election of Barack Obama serving as inspiration. According to the Nigerian Communications Commission, there are currently close to 150 million internet users in the country. According to statistics gathered by Data Reportal, an online reference library, the number of active social media users, excluding the approximately 90 million WhatsApp users, is predicted to be about 32 million as of January 2022. According to Luckscheiter (2022) there are around 26 million Facebook users, 9 million Instagram users, 6 million LinkedIn users, and 9.5 million Snapchat users.

Twitter usage in Nigeria increased 10 times during the 2015 election cycle compared to other times, according to a 2015 report by the UK-based market research company Demos. Over the course of the election, 12.4 million tweets were sent about it on social media, and 216,000 Facebook users interacted with election-related content on popular public pages. In the lead-up to the impending general elections in 2023, it appears that the same pattern is playing out. In the past six months, the three leading presidential candidates—Peter Obi, AtikuAbubakar, and Bola Ahmed Tinubu—have seen a huge increase in their Facebook and Twitter followings. Nearly every day, hashtags related to candidates are popular on regional Facebook and Twitter (Ajulo, 2022).

Social media channels are used by citizens to provide daily news and updates on the electoral process. Ordinary Nigerians have recently followed real-time electoral developments across the nation. Through social media platforms, they have called on relevant organisations to take action, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security services, news outlets, international organisations, etc. The recent 2022 Osun State governor's race is a prime illustration. When regular people asked questions on social media platforms, INEC, security agencies, and other pertinent organisations responded immediately (Vanguard, 2022). This has made social media an essential tool in the hands of citizens to protect the nation's election integrity.

In Nigeria, the media is essential in combating election-related insecurity. They are accountable for educating the public about the nation's security condition and keeping them informed of any developments (Ajulo, 2022). The media can also utilise their platforms to educate the public on the importance of nonviolent elections and the risks associated with them (Luckscheiter, 2022).

They can also give stakeholders a forum to debate security challenges and offer solutions. The media may contribute to increasing transparency and accountability in the political process, which can ultimately reduce insecurity, by reporting with objectivity and responsibility. The free, fair, and peaceful conduct of elections in Nigeria is largely dependent on the media.

Stakeholder Perspectives on election security

Concern has been expressed by stakeholders regarding the recent spike in insecurity in the nation and the potential effects it may have on the smooth running of the elections. The holding of recent elections in Nigeria has been hampered by the country's deteriorating security situation; as a result of growing violence, frequently committed by the supporters of desperate candidates, the voting environment has become militarised (Emelike et al., 2022). The government's approach to combating insecurity during an election season is to make sure that the election is free, fair, and peaceful (Bakare et al., 2020).

To prevent any type of violence or intimidation, the government typically sends security agents to voting places and other important locations (Kohnet, 2023). Additionally, they work together with pertinent parties, organisations, and media outlets to educate the public about the importance of peaceful elections (Verjee et al., 2018).

4. CONCLUSION

Election insecurity in Nigeria continues to pose a severe threat to the stability and development of the country, with incidents of violence and disruption during voting. This study has shown that there are several factors that contribute to election insecurity, including racial and religious tensions, poverty, political thuggery, lax law enforcement, and corruption. Because previous efforts to address the issue have only yielded patchy results, there is a need for an all-encompassing strategy that addresses the root causes of the problem.

The study has also demonstrated how the use of new media, particularly electronic voting systems, biometric voter registration, and real-time observation of election-related violence, can aid in the reduction of election violence. While reducing the likelihood of violence, the media can help make the political process more transparent and credible. All parties involved in Nigeria's elections must consistently work to facilitate peaceful and credible elections in order to address the issue of election insecurity there.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE STUDY

The following recommendations were made for the study:

1. The Nigerian government must address the root causes of electoral insecurity, including racial and religious conflicts, poverty, political thuggery, a lack of effective law enforcement, and corruption.

2. To hold free, fair, and credible elections, it is necessary to increase the effectiveness of electoral institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This can be accomplished by providing sufficient resources, educating election officials, and strengthening the electoral laws.
3. More security forces need to be sent by the government to monitor the polls during elections, especially in violently volatile areas.
4. The use of new media to improve electoral integrity should be employed by the administration. The use of electronic voting machines, biometric voter registration, and live monitoring of election-related violence are a few examples of this.

6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Researchers can investigate how information sharing during election seasons and media coverage of political events contribute to electoral insecurity to ascertain the media's contribution to Nigeria's election insecurity. Also, the success of Nigeria's election violence prevention measures could be studied.

REFERENCES

- Adebambo, W. O., Sanni, M. O., & Mamudu, G. K. (2016). National security and electoral process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: A study of 2015 general elections. Being a conference paper delivered at the Tenth International Conference on Science and Humanities at the University of Abomey-Calavi, Cotonou, Republic of Benin.
- Ajulo, O. (2022). Security, role of the media in Nigeria's democracy – Part 3. [Security, role of the media in Nigeria's democracy - Part 3 | The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News — Opinion — The Guardian Nigeria News – Nigeria and World News](#)
- Bakare, K., Akinyetun, S. T., & Ahoton, S. A. (2020). Election, the electoral process and national security in the Nigeria Fourth Republic. *Development*, 16(1), 162-170. [Electiontheelectoralprocessandnationalsecurity.pdf](#)
- Chidozie, F. (2017). Lecture note on the theory of international relations. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319630456_the_importance_of_realistic_conflict_theory_to_nigeria_resource_control_situation
- Emelike, O., Iwok, I., & Churchill, O. (2022). What worsening insecurity means for 2023 election (Newspaper post). [What worsening insecurity means for 2023 election - Businessday NG](#)
- Ewetan, O. O., & Urhie, E. (2014). Insecurity and socio-economic development in Nigeria. *Journal of sustainable development studies*, 5(1). <https://www.infinitypress.info/index.php/jsds/article/viewFile/531/261>
- Joab-Peterside, S. (2018). Election and violence in 2016 rerun elections in Rivers State, Nigeria. *African Research Review*, 12(4), 28-39. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/afrrrev/article/view/179869/169218>
- Kohnert, D. (2023). The aftermath of Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections and its impact on the sub-region. <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/85385/ssoar-2023-kohnert->

- [The aftermath of Nigerias 2023.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-2023-kohnert-The aftermath of Nigerias 2023.pdf](#)
- Luckscheiter, J. (2022). Bots and Biases: The Role of Social Media in Nigeria's Elections (Blog post). [Bots and Biases: The Role of Social Media in Nigeria's Elections | Heinrich BöllStiftung | Abuja office - Nigeria \(boell.org\)](#)
- Nwagwu, E. J., Uwaechia, O. G., Udegbuma, K. C., & Nnamani, R. (2022). Vote buying during 2015 and 2019 general elections: Manifestation and Implications on Democratic Development in Nigeria. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1). <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/23311886.2021.1995237?needAccess=true&role=button>
- Obakhedo, N. O. (2011). Curbing electoral violence in Nigeria: The imperative of political education. *African Research Review*, 5(5), 99-110. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/afrrrev/article/view/72297/61230>
- Omilusi, M. (2019). Human tragedy as electoral strategy: Nigerian politicians and the unique selling proposition (USP) towards the 2019 general elections. *Sociology International Journal*, 3(2), 172-177. https://www.academia.edu/download/58743394/Human_tragedy_as_electoral_strategy.pdf
- Oni, S., Chidozie, F., & Agbude, G. (2013). Electoral politics in the fourth republic of Nigeria's democratic governance. *Developing Country Studies*, 3(12). <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/32225172.pdf>
- Onimisi, T., & Tinuola, O. L. (2019). Appraisal of the 2019 post-electoral violence in Nigeria. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 4(3), 107-113. <https://msocialsciences.com/index.php/mjssh/article/download/217/155>
- Osawe, C. O. (2015). Increase wave of violent crime and insecurity: A threat to socio-economic development in Nigeria. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20(1), 123-133. <https://www.academia.edu/download/47611741/K2014123133.pdf>
- Vanguard, (2023). [Full report] TMG report on 2023 presidential and national assembly elections in Nigeria. [\[Full report\] TMG report on 2023 presidential and National Assembly elections in Nigeria - Vanguard News \(vanguardngr.com\)](#)
- Verjee, A., Kwaja, C., & Onubogu, O. (2018). *Nigeria's 2019 Elections: Change, Continuity, and the Risks to Peace* (p. 429). Special Report: United States Institute of Peace. [Nigerias-2019-Elections-Change-Continuity-and-the-Risks-to-Peace.pdf \(researchgate.net\)](#)