

Peace Accord and Electoral Violence in Nigeria 2015 and 2019: Policy Implications

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Abstract

Electoral process is a major determinant of democracy which provides electorate the institutional framework for choosing representatives through a competitive, free and fair election. But in Nigeria, politics is both a serious and deadly business where the winner takes all while the loser loses everything. Because of the invaluable prize at stake, every imaginable strategy is utilized to ensure electoral victory by contesting members of the political elite class. These strategies include rigging, thuggery, intimidation of opponent, falsification of election results, bribery, vote buying, hate speech etc. To stem these, government recently resorted to the signing of peace accord by the presidential candidates of the various political parties, committing to a peaceful poll devoid of violence before and after election in Nigeria. The aim of this study is to examine how peace accord aids in sustaining a more orderly democratic process devoid of violence and other forms of electoral malpractices in Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive and historical method in collecting data. This study is predicated on economic theory of democracy. The findings of the study revealed that peace accord is not instituted in the constitution as part of our democratic process rather it is a pledge or promise for peaceful election which could be easily breached than obey; that as far as Nigerian electoral process is concerned, peace accord is a futile exercise since the stakes are so high. Based on this, the study recommended that the Nigerian government should strengthen the existing electoral laws against any unethical conduct before, during and after election. Also, any individual or party who flouts the laws should be sanctioned and made to face the consequences.

Keywords: Peace accord, Electoral violence, Nigeria, Policy implication.

Introduction

In Nigeria, there has been various attempts to change the attitude of Nigerians towards democratic participation, particularly ensuring a more orderly democratic process devoid of violence and other forms of electoral malpractices. Democracy in very simple terms refers to that system of government in which the rights of the citizens are protected by law and within the same law, the citizens are empowered to participate in their government either directly or through elected representatives (Ikpe, 2000 and Hudson, 2017).

It is an established fact that electoral process is a major determinant of democracy which provides electorate the institutional framework for choosing representatives through a competitive, free and fair election. But in Nigeria, politics is a deadly serious business where the winner takes all while the loser loses everything. Because of the invaluable prize at stake, every imaginable strategy is utilized to ensure electoral victory by the contesting member of the political class. These strategies include: rigging, thuggery, intimidation of opponent, falsification of election results, bribery, vote buying, snatching of ballot boxes, and refusal to accept defeat and long and protracted court cases arising from election results (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011).

The management and conduct of election can serve to encourage or discourage individual participation. An electoral process that is free and fair gives the voter the confidence that his vote will be relevant in determining the electoral outcome. In other words, his perception of a fair process increases the voters' or electorate's political involvement and efficacy. On the other hand, if the citizens believe that election results will be manipulated to give advantage to a particular

individual or party, the urge to participate will be low (Ikpe, 2000).

To ensure a violence free election, some notable Nigerians felt the need for the major contestants to play the game according to the rule. To achieve this, they resorted to signing of peace accord or agreement by both the presidential as well as the governorship candidates with the sole aim of eschewing violence before, during and after elections. The signing of peace accord was first introduced in 2015 followed by the 2019 general election. The question is, to what extent has the signing of peace accord helped in enhancing a more orderly election devoid of violence and other forms of electoral malpractices between 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria?

Conceptualizing Peace Accord and Electoral Violence

Peace accord is to bring an end to political or electoral violence in a country and to set the codes of conduct, procedures and mechanism to achieve this goal (www.peaceagreements.org, 2019). International Relations and Security Network Report (IRSNR), (2010) sees peace accord or agreement as a negotiated contract that falls under various but, with the same objective of making conflicting parties to follow the path of peace which will play key role in the social development (www.inernijenja.org, 2019).

Peace accord is an official agreement to come to peace or end conflict. In line with this, Nigerian political parties signed a peace accord or agreement committing to a peaceful poll in 2015 and 2019. The details of the agreement that parties committed themselves to, as recorded in the signed document are:

- (i) To run issued-based campaigns at national, state and local government levels; in this, we pledge to refrain from campaign that will involve religious incitement, ethnic or tribal profiling, both by ourselves and by all agents acting in our names;
- (ii) To refrain from making or causing to make in our names or that of our party, any public statements, pronouncements, declarations or speeches that have the capacity to incite any form of violence before, during and after the elections;
- (iii) To commit themselves and political parties to the monitoring of the adherence to the accord by a National Peace Committee, made up of respected statesmen and women, traditional and religious leaders;
- (iv) To support all the institutions of government including INEC and security agencies to act and be seen to act with impartiality;
- (v) To forcefully and publicly speak out against provocative utterances and oppose all acts of electoral violence, whether perpetrated by supporters and/or opponents (Tukur, 2019).

Speaking on the objective of peace accord, the National Peace Committee chairman, retired Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar, said that the accord was to ensure peace before, during and after polls. He pointed out that political parties must seek peace throughout the electioneering period, as elections would not hold without peace. He also stressed that “it is important that governance, after the elections will be impossible without a peaceful environment.” He enjoined political parties to adopt a code of conduct that promote peaceful conduct and inclusiveness during electioneering period – before, during and after the elections. Also by signing the accord, all the political parties and their candidates have agreed to maintain peace, beyond self-interest and accept the outcome of the election for the good of the country and its citizens (<https://www.pulse.ng>, 2019).

Electoral violence has to do with all manner of organized acts or threats such as physical, psychological and structural, all geared at intimidating, harming, blackmailing political stakeholders before, during and after election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process (Alberto, 2007). Nwolise (2007) harps on the multi-dimensional

nature of electoral violence which include: assassination of political opponents, arson, looting, shooting, kidnapping and hostage taking, forceful disruption of campaign rallies, armed raid on voting and collating centres, snatching of ballot papers and boxes at gun point etc. Lehouz (2003) sees electoral violence as the most deadly form of electoral fraud, which has been defined as clandestine efforts to shape election results. In the same vein, Bardal (2016) conceives of electoral violence as a subtype of political violence which entails controlling and or oppressing an individual or group's right of participation in political processes and institutions through the use of emotional, social or economic form, coercion or pressure, as well as physical and sexual harm. It may take place in public or in private, including in the family, the general community, online and via media, or be perpetrated or condoned by the State.

Commenting further, Barnes (2017), Trejo and Ley (2018) hold the view that electoral violence often interacts with criminal violence. It is important to note that first, electoral violence is sometimes pursued by criminal gangs on behalf of political actors that seek to avoid detection; second, criminal actors often rely on protection agreements with political elites. The holding of elections can threaten these agreements thereby resulting to violent electoral competition among criminal actors (Birch, Ducker and Hogland, 2020). UNDP (2009) defines election – related violence more broadly as acts or threats or coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arises in the context of electoral competition.

In all, it is obvious that when elections are characterized by violence, the system support tends to be low in that voters tend to lose confidence in the legislature and government and they are less likely to be satisfied with democracy and to obey the law (Norris, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

This study is predicated on Economic Theory of Democracy by Anthony Downs. The theory implicitly highlights the problem of free riding in relation to democracy. According to Downs, it is rational for an individual voter not to vote, given the cost associating with voting and the infinitesimal chance of influencing the electoral outcome. Downs also claimed that significant elements of political life could be explained in terms of voter self-interest.

The theory further explains political behaviour and participation in Nigeria. From the Marxist school of thought, political economy is the science of the law governing the production and exchange of the material means of subsistence in human society. The point here is that political economy is not the process of production itself, but the social relations into which human beings enter in the process of production, distribution, exchange and consumption (Downs, 1957, Ikpe, 2000).

The use of this approach to explain political behaviour of Nigerians is fitting because those who control the means of production establish a patron-client relationship with those who do not. Not only this, they also strive to preserve this pattern of relationship perpetually. Thus politics becomes an activity aimed at safeguarding the interest of the ruling classes (patrons), to win and preserve state power, and to use it in the interest of those classes. Therefore, mass participation is limited to those activities which help to legitimize the domination of the ruling classes (Joseph, 1987).

This theory is relevant to this work because public officials are fundamentally concerned with remaining in power. In order to achieve this, they consciously seek to provide benefits to a range of individuals and groups they believe will help them retain their offices. As a result, elected public officials follow a strategic calculus as they seek to use public resources to stay in power which leads to a kind of political competition that is generally ruthless and normless. In the face

of this, whatever methods which could give advantage to the competitors including violence in all ramifications, are used before and after election. This therefore, informed the signing of peace accord or agreement to checkmate electoral violence in Nigeria which is our focus (Ake, 1985, Ikpe, 2000).

Study Location

Nigeria is a federal state in West Africa. It borders Cameroon and Chad to the East, Benin to the West, and Niger to the North. It also has a Coast in the South that lies on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. Nigeria is made up of 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory called Abuja.

Nigeria was colonized by Britain and gained her independence on 1st October, 1960. In 1963, Nigeria became a republic but fell under military rule in 1966 as a result of a coup d'etat. The country became a republic again in 1976 after a new constitution was drafted. The new republic did not last as the military interrupted again after four (4) years. But 1999 saw the emergence of a fourth republic which has survived till date (<https://www.studycountry.com> 29/3/2019). However, it is sad to observed that election-related violence or violence has been an issue since the beginning of election in Nigeria, and of recent, has become a cause of concern which resulted to the signing of the peace accord or agreement by major stakeholders as a way of ensuring peace before and after election.

Method of Data Collection

This work relied on descriptive data which information were obtained from textbooks, journals, internet, newspapers, bulletin, personal observation, etc.

Peace Accord and Electoral Violence in Nigeria 2015 and 2019

Electoral violence is perhaps the most pronounced challenge to Nigeria's democratic process. Since independence, Nigeria's electoral history has been obsessed with violence. The most common forms of violence are, assassination, arsons, violence-pruned campaigns, thuggery, election-related ethno-religious crisis, snatching of ballot boxes etc. These have indeed ravaged the entire life of the country's political system and alienates the citizens politically (<https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2019>).

Although comparative political scientists have always argued that violence is a major feature of political life everywhere around the world, the pervasive acceptance, intensity, trends and dimensions in Nigeria's political system is devastating and causing great distortion to social and political, even administrative structures. To worsen the situation, of recent are increases in aggressive languages and hate speeches between and among political parties and supporters. And the fear of hostilities and the fear of these resulting into nationwide crisis become a major concern of the international community (Akinfenwa, 2019).

The attitude of our political leaders or politicians cannot be excused as they are the worst offenders when it comes to political violence in the country. The politicians in Nigeria have over the years become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power. They are more reckless and greedy in their use and abuse of power and more intolerant of opposition. These conflicts perpetrated by political elites and their allies have been for selfish actualization of primitive accumulation predicated on regional sentiments, ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry, economic materialism and political domination of the state. To achieve their selfish and inordinate interest, the politicians manipulate the youth to accepting them as the pillar for their survival in the state. They arm these youths with dangerous weapons to prosecute elections in their favour. Those who are already in government use the men of the Nigerian Police to chase opponents and protect them in order to use the youth to unleash mayhem against perceived

enemy. These youths are hardly arrested nor detained or prosecuted for the havoc or evil they often cause. From this, it can be deduced that the youths are at the heart of most violent conflicts in the country (Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017).

In 2015, 108 people were killed: 58 in pre-election violence and 50 or so on the polling day and afterword, fights brook out between the major parties' supporters in nine (9) states. Also, there were six (6) incidences of election violence in 22 states across the six (6) geopolitical zones in Nigeria (www.premiumtimes.com/news/headlines/176302-5828/10/2020).

In 2019, the situation became worse as many as six hundred and twenty-six (626) people were killed during the election cycle starting with campaigns in 2018.

Table 1: Presidential Election Violence (Dead) by State, Feb. 23, 2019

S/N	State	No of Dead
1	Zamfara	1
2	Yobe	2
3	Borno	17
4	Akwa Ibom	3
5	Kogi	2
6	Lagos	1
7	Delta	2
8	Bayelsa	4
9	Rivers	16
10	Ebonyi	2
11	Taraba	4
	Total	54

Source: Election Violence in numbers. www.Sbintel.com/2019/03/election-violence-in-numbers. 29/10/2021

Table 2: Gubernatorial Election Violence (Dead) by States November 16, 2018 to June 10, 2019

S/N	State	No of Dead
1	Sokoto	17
2	Zamfara	72
3	Katsina	9
4	Gigawa	1
5	Yobe	3
6	Borno	128
7	Kano	13
8	Kaduna	47
9	Niger	13
10	FCT	2
11	Plateau	7
12	Adamawa	1
13	Osun	10
14	Lagos	27
15	Osun	1
16	Ekiti	2
17	Kogi	14
18	Benue	73
19	Enugu	1
20	Ebonyi	1
21	Cross River	5
22	Anambra	8
23	Imo	2
24	Akwa Ibom	4
25	Rivers	55

Source: Election Violence in numbers. www.Sb mintel.com/2019/03/election-violence-in-numbers.29/10/2021.

A report also showed that in Lagos State there were disruption of voting by suspected political thugs, who shot in the air. In some places, ballot boxes and papers were set on fire like Okota, Isolo and Oshodi axis of Lagos (www.this.daylive.com, 29/10/2019).

To checkmate political violence particularly during the 2019 general elections, saw the signing of National Peace Accord by political leaders who agreed to run issue-based campaigns at national, state and local government levels and pledged that electoral campaigns would not involve any religious incitement, ethnic or tribal profiling, both by themselves and all agents acting in their names. The peace pledge also called on all citizens of Nigeria, party supporters, to refrain from violence or any act that may jeopardise the collective vision of a free, fair and credible election. Also, INEC and all security agencies were urged to ensure strict adherence to their constitutional role. Above all, they pledged to respect the outcome of free, fair and credible elections (Kaleyaiye, 2019).

With the peace accord, one would have expected a changed situation but the situation remained uncontrollable as the 2019 election was tainted or marred with violence (Fasan, 2019 and Onwuka, 2019). The violence experienced during the 2019 election in Nigeria once again affirmed the belief that the stakes are always too high in Nigerian politics and that something urgent needs to be done to make the occupation of political office less attractive as is the situation in other democracies. It is an irony to observe that the more elections are conducted in Nigeria, the more we experience electoral violence. At this point, it is worth reiterating that the life of one innocent individual is not worth expending for an exercise that is carried out in other parts of the world with minimal discomfort. The signing of peace accord was seen as a panacea for electoral violence and the sustainability of electoral process in Nigeria. Unless electoral violence is minimized or completely eradicated, our electoral process cannot be sustained (<https://punching.com/2019-rolls-steaming-the-tide-of-violence> 1/4/2019).

Policy Implications

The policy implication for future elections in Nigeria is that it is not possible to run a peaceful/violence-free election on the premise of a gentleman's agreement. The path of peace cannot be followed until Nigeria is willing and ready to play the game according to the rules as enshrined in the constitution and other laws pertaining to the conduct of elections. For future elections to be violence free, there is need to strengthen our electoral laws as well as enforce same. The law must be strictly followed. It is ironic to see Nigeria abandoning the law to embrace a gentleman's agreement which is not enforceable. So for the success of future election, laws governing electoral violence must be unleashed on the perpetrators of electoral violence, no matter how well-placed the person is. Also, new laws should be introduced by way of constitutional amendment to cater for those violent activities which are not fully captured in our constitution and other electoral related laws. On the other hand, for the workability of peace accord, it must be followed by enforceable sanctions. To achieve this, it must have legal backing to be enforceable.

Conclusion

Violence is not new to Nigeria's electoral process as exemplified by the Commonwealth that “violence has no place in modern democracy, and its prevalence in Nigeria's election is a political failure, (Fasan, 2019). Nigeria remains one of a very few countries where the signing of “peace accord” always predate a general election. This is because politicians and their supporters treat election as a state of war. For example, in 2011, over 800 people died in violent crisis after the result of the presidential election was announced (Fasan, 2019). The situation was worsened in 2015 and 2019 that the world literally put Nigeria on a suicide watch. Whatever the nature of violence that rocked the previous elections are totally unacceptable. The truth remains that what is supposed to be non-violent civil responsibilities by peace-loving citizens has turned into

killings, maiming and intimidation despite peace accord. To worsen the situation, some predatory politicians or political gladiators have turned the country to a war theatre where the promise to deliver a given number of votes to the party is a matter of life and death.

Recommendations

To achieve violence free elections as enshrined in the peace accord for sustainability of electoral process in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. That constitutional provisions for electoral violence must be strengthened and strictly enforced where necessary by the government.
2. That political offices should not be highly prized;
3. That Nigeria should introduce electronic voting to avoid fraud of all kinds;
4. That Nigerians should shun vote buying and vote according to their conscience.
5. That INEC should be given free hand to prosecute any individual or group of individuals who perpetuate violence of any kind, before, during and after election.
6. That anybody, be it politician or not, who violates electoral laws including Peace Accord, should be made to face the law squarely.

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