

Political Violence and Democratic Sustenance in Nigeria: An Assessment of the 2015 and 2019 General Elections in Nasarawa State

Dr. Erunke Canice Esidene^{1,*}, Dr. Joseph Shekwo², Bara'atu Abdullahi³, Rabo Maikeffi³

¹Department of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria, West Africa

²Department of Sociology, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria, West Africa

³Department of Registry, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria, West Africa

*Corresponding author: erunke@gmail.com

Abstract

The main thrust of this study is to examine the relationship between political violence and the sustenance of democratic values in Nigeria, with particular reference to Nasarawa State. The tragedy of violence that has permeated electoral processes in Nigeria ever since inception of democratic project in 1999, and particularly those of 2015 and 2019 general elections, remain a cause for concern. The said elections have been essentially characterized by massive violence, rigging, snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation and suppression by political opponents, among others. The scenario in Nasarawa state has witnessed some form of irregularities ranging from vote buying, arson and several other irregularities, which have congealed to mar the process of democratic sustenance. This work is a survey research and, hence, adopts the use of primary and secondary sources

of data collection as method of investigation. The major tool applied in the survey was questionnaire and interview method, while data was collected and analyzed using simple percentage analysis. The data generated was to be able to demonstrate possible linkages between political violence and the sustenance of Nigeria's democratic system, using Nasarawa State as a point of departure. The results from the findings reveal that though conscious efforts have been made by government and other stakeholders to mitigate violence during elections, not much has been achieved in sustaining the peace either before, during or after elections. The study recommends, among other things, that more efforts are needed to adequately enforce the desired rules required to tame the tides of increasing violence in Nigeria generally, and specifically in Nasarawa state, as panacea for democratic sustenance in the 21st century and beyond.

Keywords: Political Violence, Democratic Sustenance, General Elections, Electoral Malpractice.

Introduction

One of the prevailing circumstances bedeviling the process of democratic consolidation and sustenance in Nigeria is the increasing spate of political violence. The rate of violence that have been experienced by the nation is unarguably unprecedented, and have since become a bane in holding free and credible elections in the country. It goes without saying that violence, before, during and after elections have become part and parcel of the democratic process with very long historical trajectory spanning several decades, with the worse hit being the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections, respectively. In all of these electoral periods, extant literature and works of experts show that political violence have trailed the nation with reckless abandon. For the purpose of this study, however, our focus will be restricted to investigating the wave of political violence as it relates to the recent general elections between 2015 and 2019 in Nigeria generally, and particularly, Nasarawa State.

From the writings of scholars in the broader field of political and democratic studies such as Ladan-Baki (2016), opined that democratic practice as fashioned out by the then ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), did not fair better when it comes to political upheaval and violence. According to Ladan-Baki, the Peoples Democratic Party agents demonstrated high level of desperation and resolve to clinch victory at the polls against all odds. Thus states in Nigeria's South-South geo-political zone such as Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo and many others experienced difficult times pulling through the murky waters of violence and other forms of electoral irregularities. In some places such as Akwa-Ibom state, for instance, reports have it that candidates vying for political offices were either decapitated or gruesomely murdered by what was generally referred as unknown gunmen.

Similarly, and in the period preceding the 2015 elections, report has it that in most polling stations, there were massive presence of supposedly deadly armed thugs accompanied and/or escorted by men believed to be officers and men of the Nigeria Police. The thugs were alleged to have stampeded the polling stations and made away with election materials meant for voter accreditation (Vanguard News, 2015). One of Nigeria's sitting Governor of Akwa-Ibom at the time, His Excellency, Governor Obong Victor Attah under the auspices of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) lamented about the incidence of electoral irregularities when he noted that:

When I got to my poling unit to go and vote that fateful morning on the day of elections, I was rather taken aback. The reason for my surprises is that the electoral environment was empty with no body in sight. The story I got about this wasn't because electoral materials were hijacked on the way; but that a certain group of armed thugs invaded the distribution centers carting away all relevant electoral materials using dangerous materials like gun and cutlasses (emphasis added) (Vanguard Newss, 2015).

The above excerpts presents the frustration or otherwise of a serving chief security officer in the state of Akwa-Ibom over his helplessness to control and sufficiently man electoral activities in his domain.

In the same vein, the Sun News (2015) reported that upon conclusion of elections in Rivers state, the electoral umpire was asked to produce all electoral materials used during the elections in the state including those of governorship, presidential and parliamentary elections. Evidence from the presentation depicted an untoward show of a badly bastardized and mutilated electoral papers with liquid substances, so much so that one could scarcely read meanings to them. At some point, it was also gathered that some of the supposed fingerprints on the ballot papers were more or less those of inanimate beings rather than human! The reports made available by the United Kingdom forensic investigations also revealed ridiculous images of results for the various phases of elections in state such as Delta, Rivers and many other South-South states as running foul of all acceptable electoral standards. For instance, the abnormalities in the collection of the said results show that the total number of vote cast announced by returning officers was disproportionally different from the sum total of accredited voters as recorded by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). What can be deduced from these scenarios is that all extant rules enshrined in the INEC electoral Acts have been grossly abused by the managers of the electoral processes, and this could be detrimental to the much cherished peace and tranquility required to consolidate a democratic experiment. For instance, the electoral guideline Section 7(a) and Section 8(b) of the 2015 stated inter-alia that no person shall be allowed to vote in any polling station during other than where he/she has been officially assigned and designated. However, the actions of some of these belligerent groups proves to be contrary.

Again, such voters or potential voters must have been duly certified and verified as genuine voters using electronic equipments or card readers in conjunction with voters

registers as the case may be. However, what has happened over time is a contradiction of all electoral principles and regulations, which is why there has been so much hues and cries, leading to violence.

Consequently, and from some of the reports gathered at the twilight of the elections, most states in Northern Nigeria such as Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi and many others, witnessed unprecedented violence. To most commentators, the violence that erupted in those states broke out as a result of manipulation and concoction of election results in favour of the then ruling party, ostensibly for the party to continue to retain political power.

On the 2019 general elections, Ojukwu, Mbah and Maduekwe (2019) argued that the election for that year was the most ambitious of all previous polls in Nigeria. It has been noted that of over 84 million registered voters for that year, 72 million voters collected their voters card, Again, the 2019 election year recorded 91 political parties, 119, 973, polling outlets; a total of 120 certified and accredited foreign observers and a total of 23,000 candidates jostling for 1,558 electoral positions, respectively. Contested electoral positions by candidates includes those for presidential seats, governorship, House of Representatives and Senate. Conversely, the 2019 elections have been adjudged to be the most expensive of all previous elections in terms of financial costs. To be sure, a total of ₦242 billion was earmarked for the election, while ₦53 billion was made available as security votes during the elections. The outcome of the elections indicated that the incumbent president, Muhammadu Buhari won for a second term, with a total aggregate score of 15,191,847 (representing 55.6%) while his closest rival and member of the current opposition party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), had a total score of 11,262,978 (representing 41.22%). The results of the 2019 general elections, nonetheless, have been greeted with a lot of controversies. The Punch Newspaper (2019) alluded that from October 2018, the period proceeding the 2019 elections, there have been first and

foremost, over 600 litigations over political party aspirants and/or candidates. Again, shortly after the elections, there has been claims and counter claims of widespread irregularities.

Some of the claims find expression in ballot box stuffing and snatching, vote buying, assassinations of political opponents, indiscriminate bearing of fire arms, compromises by electoral officials and security agents as well as youth corp members, among others. Besides the aforementioned, critics are of the view that the 2019 general elections in Nigeria witnessed the highest number of cancellation of votes in Nigerian states of Kano, Sokoto, Plateau, Adamawa and Benue where election results were literally declared null and void, and therefore considered inconclusive. To further attest to the violent nature of the 2019 general elections, it has been alluded by the INEC Returning Officer for the Imo West senatorial elections that most candidates were allegedly declared winner against the wishes of INEC officials for fear of intimidation and threat to their lives. To further buttress this point an INEC official, Professor Ibeakwuchi Innocent claimed that he was forced to declare former Governor of the State, Rochas Okorochoa winner of the elections for the same reason. The said professor was reportedly incarcerated for over 24 hours in an undisclosed location in Imo state.

Similarly, after review of developments in Bauchi state in 2019, and particularly, the Tafawa Balewa Local Government area of the state, several unpalatable reports about the elections were rife. INEC has revealed that mid-way into the local government polls, unknown gun men had attacked the collection centres where elections were being conducted. In its wake, several result sheets (forms EC8C, EC40 G) were either mutilated or destroyed. The ripple effect of the violence also affected 11 registration centres, while 6 other governorship and state Houses of Assembly results were grossly affected by this singular act of violence. The implication of this is that out of a total of 29 states where

elections into governorship and House of Assembly were carried out at the time, six states namely, Bauchi, Benue, Adamawa, Kano, Plateau and Sokoto, were subjected to another phase of supplementary elections characterized by intimidation, inducement, suppression and compromises in all its ramifications.

In Nasarawa State, just like all other states in Nigeria, there has been reports of political violence. For instance, the Peace and Security Working Group (PSWG) (2014) has reported that though the nature of violence in the states takes the form of inter-religious and ethnic tensions, the ultimate predisposing factor for violence is tied around politics and the struggles and contestation for power. To be sure, the inter-communal clashes that erupted during the twilight of the first democratic experiment in 2001 and 2010 was believed to have been sparked off ostensibly by politics. The violence was perceived to be one of the worse in the history of democracy in Nasarawa state. Consequently, the drivers of the conflict, some of who include semi-nomadic pastoralists and disgruntled settled pregnant farming population around suburbs and rural communities such as Agwatashi, Obi, Keana, Kadarko, Giza and many others, were heavily affected. Reports from various sources has it that the political quest for dominance, oppression and exploitation as well as perceived injustice by tribesmen over the other in the state triggered the said violence. Conversely, however, the conflicts which involved the various sub-tribes namely, Tiv, Jukun and Fulani communities was said to have gulped over 200 lives, and property worth millions of naira, destroyed.

In the period following the 2011 general elections in Nasarawa state, most critics have argued that though, violence did happen in the state before and during elections, the embers of violence was effectively contained when compared to those that occurred in other states such as Bauchi and Kaduna states. From existing reports of one of the leading Nigerian newspapers, the Vanguard (2011) and Leadership (2011) insist that while

physical violence may have been relatively limited compared to widespread violence in neighbouring states as earlier mentioned, there have been cases, and particularly around Keana Local Government Area and other places such as Karu. In either of these two extremes, there has been reports of ad-hoc members of staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) absconding their statutory responsibilities (example youth corp members), and other belligerent groups threatening to bomb collation centres in Keffi local government at the time. To be sure, it can be said of a fact that political violence in Nasarawa state, at whatever level of analysis took place in two phases: First is the ranglings as well as what looks little in-fighting cum intra-party skirmishes between contending political parties in the state, and majorly the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and those of the progressives incumbent. Second, is the escalation of violence by party stalwarts in protest of some of their supporters supposedly arrested and detained by security forces in and around the state. While some of these allegations can be said to be true, there are counter insinuations pointing to violence in the state, apparently attributed to the spill-over effects of other political unrest in places like Jos, Plateau state. Because of the proximity of the Plateau to Nasarawa state, the spill-over and diffusion effects of increasing tensions around these states have become recurring decimals in Nasarawa state with far-reaching implications.

Just like every other elections, the 2015 general elections were reportedly marred by violence. The party candidates namely, Tanko Al-Makura of the Progressive party; David Ombugadu, Labaran Maku, Solomon Ewuga and many other contenders made up the lists for the contests in to the state's most revered Governorship post. However, it can be observed that in all of these, several factors congeal to determine who eventually clinch the number one seat at the Government House, Lafia. They range from primordial politics to factors such as religion, godfatherism, money politics and so on. To most disinterested parties, argue that aside from the foregoing reasons, the lack of fairness in

the processes that greeted the elections was a factor that stood out very clearly. Thus the 2015 elections was characterized by vote-buying, tribal and ethnic division, stealing of ballot boxes, high rate of corruption, lack of electoral materials among others.

Santas (2019) wrote that during the 2019 general elections in Nasarawa state, the dominant political parties that contested the Governorship, Senatorial and House of Representative elections include All Progressive Congress (APC), the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) as well as All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). Although the latter was not as pronounced in terms of impacts, it can be said that the APGA gave it a big fight to feature its candidates during the elections. Like all the other elections in the state, the 2019 was the most keenly contested with the incumbent Governor, Abdullahi Sule emerging winner. Though there appears to have been quite a number of conspiracy theories being thrown up by losers of the said elections. What is clear is that the highest bidder, the APC, has since assumed mantle of leadership in the state, and every other contradictions and contestations have been summarily put to rest by the judicial system overseeing electoral grievances in the state.

Conceptual Clarification

In this section, the concept of electoral violence, elections and democratic sustenance will be examined as separate, but mutually reinforcing concepts. This is because violence at whatever level of analysis is antithetical to democratic practice and other questions of holding credible, free and fair elections cannot be made possible when there is absence of peace and tranquility. According to Gurr (1970) and Zimmermann (2011) cited in Bashir, Ali and Lucy (2015) electoral violence or what is called political violence represents all kinds of collective attacks on political structures vested with the responsibility of conducting public elections within a given political community. They include all forms of attacks consciously or unconsciously conceived and intended to

cause harm, injury and alter laid down rules guiding the smooth administration of electoral practice within a system. What this portends is that there can be a deliberate action or intended actions being perpetrated to jettison due process and sway all collective efforts by the drivers of violence to the opposite side, largely for ulterior motives. This is why Ayang-Nyonongo (1993), Diouf (1995) Nzogola Ntalaja and Lee (1997) insist that for any violence to be political so to say, there must be an intension to alter the narrative or change existing political processes whatsoever.

Again, while election can be viewed as a method that involves selection of contestants during a political process to fill vacant political offices, violence clearly defines the violation of human rights and the pervasion of social justice. While we can say that election itself is a process that strengthens democratic objectives, violence on the other, can deface and dehumanize all meaningful and acceptable political norms of society. At whatever level of intellectual discourse one may look at it, elections constitute channels of freedom of choice and expression of dislike or likes by the electorates. This is effectively common place in a democracy, and it is a well sanctioned and cherished popular credo that has taken the pride of place between and amongst all developed and emerging nations currently. This is to say that the sustenance of democracy is a function of efficient and stable electoral system. It goes without saying that violence against the state structure, especially as it relates to elections is invariably a violence against a democratic process and elections. This is the more reason why obnoxious practices such as coup d'état are globally frowned at and, hence, considered an aberration of globally acceptable democratic ethoes.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts theory of conflict as its underpinning. The capitalist nature of emerging societies across the world has essentially created a platform for the survival of mediocrity

occasioned by largely weak political, social and economic institutions. To most political economy scholars such as Karl Marx, the increasing decline of the economic system perpetrated by the elite class to continue to oppress the disadvantaged groups in society breeds conflict. The import of this writing can be tied around the Marxian school of thought and his notion of domination of the power elite, and how much such actions could impact on social order in society. What Marx (1818-1883) has said is that the amount of economic influence wielded by the political class in society, and the overall goal of these privileged class to continue to subjugate the masses leads to violence. What this means is that when electoral violence occur, there is the general impression that top politicians are the brain behind violence, ostensibly to continue to retain political power and maintain same over a long period of time. This theory becomes relevant because it exposes the critical importance of violence and its impacts on elections. It therefore places electoral violence at the other extreme of political stability or instability as the case may be. From the works of Egobueze (2017) lamented that the failure of leadership, and particularly in Nigeria where those at the helm of affairs of the polity have failed to not only establish good corporate governance, engender economic progress and reduce poverty, misery and squalor. Some of these tendencies of the elite are largely responsible for why the younger generation, especially idle youths, have become very readily available for manipulation during elections. The multiplier effects of this is the dramatic twist that has gulped the Nigerian state all over the places – insecurity, banditry, conflicts, militia activities, religious tensions, secessionist agitations, fear and many other myriads of problems experienced within the nation's landscape.

Literature review

Quite a number of scholarly works have been done by academics, experts and intelligentsias on political violence and democratic sustenance in Nigeria and elsewhere. What some of these scholars have done is to examine the critical issues that have been of

immense concern to how well structures of governance sustain or mar electoral systems. At whatever level of intellectual prism one looks at it, there appears to be a pointer to the fact that violence in whatever form, can be inimical to social progress of society. From the works of most critics such as Morrison and Stevenson (1971) cited in Igwe and Amadi (2021) argued that political violence is conterminous with actions and inactions that can cause physical injury or inflict undesirable pain on its target, the essence of which is to alter the basic structures of political system. What this means is that the drive to cause violence is synonymous with the intention to disallow a workable political system from functioning effectively in according to its statutory mandate as spelt out in enabling extant laws. When this happens, it becomes difficult to realize set objectives of what the structure is meant to serve. On his part, Gurr (2011) attempted a classification of what constitutes violence in political sense. From Gurr's standpoint, political violence takes the shape of physical assault, effective use of force, denial of access to individual or groups fundamental human rights, among others. What this portends, again, is that during elections in for example Third World countries (Nigeria inclusive), there are cases where irate youths who are probably 'hired' as mercenaries brazenly invade electoral polling units, some of them with dangerous weapons ranging from cutlasses, rifles, broken bottles, stones and other kinds of weapons. When this happens, the electoral arena can be made ungovernable, and once violence breaks out, the electorates would have no choice than to flee for their personal safety. This tendency has been the general characteristics of public elections in most places in Nigeria, with very huge multiplier effects on voting behavior, apathy and lukewarmness in the overall electoral process.

One of the seasoned writers in political science, Anifowose (1982) had earlier buttressed the arguments made by Gurr to the effect that political violence takes the form of brutal physical assaults on the supposed enemy target. To Anifowose, insist that political violence presupposes physical assaults and the general motive of the characters involved

in this kind of attitude is to ensure that their victims sustain injuries or are being killed in the process. To Anifowose, violence in this circumstance tend to have political significance so much so that the overall interest of the belligerent group aims at modifying existing power structures, with dire consequences on the statusquo. From which ever angle one looks at these debates, one thing is very clear. The fact remains that political violence has very drastic implications on election and electoral process and democracy. Violence stifles elections and the lack of credibility in electoral process is dangerous to democratic stability. This is why Diamond, Jonathan, Linj and Lipset (1999) all maintained that the tenet of democracy and democratic governance abhors violence as the structure must be sustained. Violent-free society, good governance, respect, social justice equality in every facet of society is the much revered credo sanctioned by all well-meaning political system globally in this current era of globalization. One of the core objectives of democratic society is the ability of persons and groups to be able to experience and have self-determination, freedom of expression, popular opinion, participation, devoid of all forms of oppression and intimidation. When this happens, all societies would have been set for a walk on the long path of freedom, tolerance, mutual trust and the overall sustainability of political society where popular group interests out shrines primordial individual whims and caprices.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this research is to assess the relationship between political violence and he sustenance of democratic culture and values in Nigeria generally, and particularly in Nasarawa state. In specific terms however, the research considers the following objectives.

- i. To investigate the causes of political violence in Nasarawa state
- ii. To identify the major drivers of violence during elections in Nasarawa state

- iii. To establish the effects of political violence and sustenance democratic values in Nasarawa state
- iv. To examine the mechanisms put in place by the government to checkmate violence during elections in Nasarawa state.

Methodology

The population used for this investigation was voting households in Nasarawa state. Essentially, the population was drawn from three (3) local government areas of Nasarawa state. They are Akwanga, Awe and Karu Local government areas. the choice of these voting communities or households is to ensure that only people with political experience were consulted. Besides, the researchers ensured that there was adequate representation of electoral senatorial districts in terms of coverage across the state's geo-political zone. From the reports of the 2016 census enumeration projection, the official gazetted population head count of the National Population Commission (NPC), the aggregate population of Nasarawa state has been put at 2,523,400 (NPC, 2016). The state, as earlier pointed out, has thirteen (13) gazetted local government areas, three (3) of which were selected for the study. Similarly, aside from the total population of the state as shown above, each local government has specific population figure. For the purpose of this study, however, the investigation limits itself to the selected local governments earmarked for this study. Thus the total population of the three (3) selected local governments – Akwanga, Awe and Karu equals to (Akwanga: 111,902; Awe: 111,083; and Karu: 216,230), bringing it to the total of 439,215. This includes both males and females of voting age.

The sample size was generated from this population. As earlier stated in the study, the choice of these local governments was premised on the fact that it gives adequate coverage and political representation across the three (3) senatorial zones.

The sample size was carried out using the standard statistical formula for measurement propounded by Taro Yamane (1967). The Yamane formula becomes necessary in a situation where the population of study is already known and determined by acceptable government official statistics. The samples based on the selected local governments have been shared as shown below:

Table 1: Local Government Areas (LGAs) selected for the study and their population.

S/N	Name of LGA	Total population
i	Akwanga	111,902
ii	Awe	111,083
iii	Karu	216,230
	Total Population	439,215

Source: National Population Commission (NPC) Projected Report (2016)

The above table shows the three (3) selected local government areas and their population used for this investigation. As indicated, Akwanga has a total of 111,902, Awe has 111,083; while Karu has 216,230, bringing the sum total of all the local governments to 439,215. In order to obtain the sample size from the total population, the following statistical equation has been adopted as shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size

N = Population of the study

e = Tolerable error

1 = Constant

Substituting the population of 439,215 in the formula,

$$n = \frac{439,215}{1 + 439,215(5\%)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{439,215}{1 + 439,215(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{439,215}{1 + 439,215(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{439,215}{439,216 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{439,215}{1,098.04}$$

$$n = 399.99 \text{ (To a whole number)}$$

$$n = 400 \text{ (sample size)}$$

Below is the distribution of the sample size of the study on the basis of each of the local government areas selected for the study;

$$\text{i. Akwanga} = \frac{400}{439,215} \times \frac{111,902}{1} = 102$$

$$\text{ii. Awe} = \frac{400}{439,215} \times \frac{111,083}{1} = 101$$

$$\text{iii. Karu} = \frac{400}{439,215} \times \frac{216,230}{1} = 197$$

From the calculation, each of the selected local government has the following sample size:

$$\text{i. Akwanga} = 102$$

$$\text{ii. Awe} = 101$$

$$\text{iii. Karu} = 197$$

$$\text{Total} = 400$$

The sampling technique used was the stratified sampling technique. The process began from the top down in the following ways: the study basically focused on the three senatorial zones of Nasarawa state. They include Akwanga, Awe and Karu. These areas, it is believed, has potentials for political violence during elections in the state from the Senatorial Districts, the study was then narrowed to three (3) out of thirteen (13) local governments of the state. Respondents were drawn based on the sample size used in the work. From the proportion of samples for each of the local governments represented, Akwanga had a total distribution of 102 questionnaire, Awe had 101 questionnaire, while Karu local government had 197 as total questionnaire for the investigation. To be able to compliment the exercise and ensure comprehensive investigations in the study, interview survey instruments were also used. Quite a number of respondents ranging from party stalwarts, District Heads of respective communities, security agencies and members of the electoral umpires in the selected regions were contacted and interrogated. This was to ensure even spread of the investigation as well as elicit appropriate responses required to be able to derive critical information for the study.

Data Presentation

As earlier stated in the course of this paper, the study adopted survey method of investigation (questionnaire and interview) for the work. A total of 400 questionnaire were administered during the field exercise. The areas of study includes Akwanga, Awe and Karu local governments of Nasarawa state. Interview schedules were also used along sides questionnaire instruments. Of the total of 400 questionnaire administered in the various electoral wards and communities, only 365 were retrieved ad analyzed, while 43 of the questionnaire were invalid. The presentation was done using simple percentage analysis. During the field survey exercise, respondents were asked a number of questions using structural questionnaire formats, the result of which is presented below:

Table 1.2: Respondents on whether they have ever experienced violence during election in their respective communities

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	354	96.9%
No	07	1.9%
Not sure	04	1.1%
Total	365	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.2 above shows the responses elicited from respondents during the field survey. From above, a total of 354 respondents, representing 96.9% subscribed to the 'yes' answer. A total of 7 respondents (1.9%) gave a 'No' answer, while only 4 of the respondents, representing 1.1% were not sure. It can be inferred from the above table that the 'yes' answer is overwhelming, which means that political violence has occurred in Nasarawa state during election years under review.

Table 1.3: Respondents on which of the election years, 2015 and 2019 witnessed violence the most in Nasarawa state

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
The 2015 general elections	133	36.5%
The 2019 general elections	45	12.3%
The two election years witnessed the same measure of violence	196	48.2%
I am not sure which of the election years witnessed violence the most	11	3.1%
Total	365	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.3 above depicts response gotten from respondents which of the election years between 2015 and 2019, that witnessed violence the most. From the analysis, 133 respondents (36.5%) claimed that the 2015 general elections witnessed violence the most. Again, 45 of the respondents, representing 12.3% said the 2019 elections was the worst hit in terms of political violence. Similarly, 176 of the respondents (48.2%) alluded that the 2015 and 2019 general elections witnessed the same tempo of violence, while only 11 respondents (3.1%) were not sure which of the elections experienced violence. From a careful observation as shown in the table, 176 respondents (48.2%) represents the highest responses, which means that both elections years were subjected to political violence in Nasarawa state.

Table 1.4 showing opinions of respondents on what accounts for political violence in Nasarawa State.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Excessive quest by political actors to win elections at all cost breeds violence	302	82.7%
The inordinate desire by the political class to perpetuate itself in office leads to electoral violence	29	7.9%
Quite a number of people derives pleasure in violence during elections in Nasarawa state	13	3.6%
Violence appears to be part and parcel of democratic culture in Nasarawa state as it were	21	5.7%
Total	365	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.4 above shows the opinions of respondents on what accounts for political violence during general elections in Nasarawa State. 302 respondents (82.7%) claimed that

excessive quest by political actors to win elections by all means stand at all cost is a major predisposing factor for violence. 29 of the respondents (7.9%) said that the inordinate ambitions and desires by the political class to perpetuate itself in office could be a major driver for violence. However, only 13 of the respondents (3.6%) subscribed to the fact that most persons derive pressure when violence occur during elections in the state, while 21 respondents (5.7%) said that violence, at whatever level of analysis, appears to be part and parcel of democratic culture in Nasarawa state. It can however, be seen from the table above that outside all other factors, excessive quest by political actors to win elections by all means accounts for violence. This is depicted by the 302 responses by the respondents as indicated on the table.

What in your opinion accounts for political violence in Nasarawa state?

One of the interviewees, buttressing what respondents have earlier said in table 1.4 alluded that:

By my thinking, what generally, accounts for political violence, outside several factors in Nasarawa state that I know include poverty, ignorance, identify politics and other critical factors. To me, what even explains violence the more is the class dimension to the whole thing. You find that a lot of people being used to perpetrate acts of violence are very, very poor and hopeless. And because they are poor and hopeless, often times, such group of people do not take anything serious. Again the so-called conflict merchants that pay for the act of violence need very little financial resources to trigger the miscreants into the act of violence. The political class most times give their errand boys drugs and other dangerous substances to energize these boys into such violence (Field survey, 2022).

Table 1.5 showing respondents on who constitutes the major drivers of political violence in their respective communities.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Politicians	205	56.2%
Political thugs	86	23.6%
Traditional rulers	74	20.3%
Total	365	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.5 shows the opinion polls of respondents as elicited during the field survey on who constitutes the major drivers of political violence in their respective communities. From the responses, 205 respondents (56.2%) spoke in favour of political actors. 86 respondents (23.6%) said political thugs are major drivers of violence, while only 74 of the respondents (30.3%) argued in favour of traditional monarchs. From the investigation, 205 respondents constitute the greatest number in the survey. This goes to explain that political violence is orchestrated by politicians as opined by respondents.

Who are the drivers of political violence in your community?

In line with the overwhelming responses given by respondents in table 1.4, questions were posed to an interviewee on those that constitutes drivers of violence in Nasarawa communities. The following response was elicited viz:

...the politicians are upper most among those categories of people that drive political violence. I am saying this because, in a fledgling democracy, one of which is Nigeria, politics, rather than being a vocation for rendering services to the people, has been made to look like business. This means that those that go into politics are indirectly investing in 'business' so as to be able to make profits. Besides, the political actors who now behave like 'business' people will ensure that no other person is allowed to win elections.this

attitude is enough reason to promote violence during general elections in the state (Field survey, 2022).

Table 1.6 showing respondents on why they think certain individuals in Nasarawa state get involved in electoral violence

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
There is high rate of poverty amongst electorates	266	72.8%
Many youths are jobless, and therefore engage themselves in violence as means of survival	64	1.6%
Violence in my community remains the only available means to coerce political opponents into submission during elections in the state.	35	9.6%
Total	365	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

From table 1.6 above, a number of reasons, according to respondents, account for why certain individuals engage themselves in electoral violence in Nasarawa state. From the survey, 266 respondents, representing 72.8% claimed that increasing rates of poverty among electorates is a critical factor of violence. 64 of the respondents (1.6%) noted that many youths of voting age in the state are jobless, and so, not gainfully employed. As indicated in the survey, some of these youths become available tools for violence during elections, largely for pecuniary gains. However, 35 of the respondents (9.6%) alluded that violence in their respective communities over time, remains the option and available means through which political opponents are forced into submission during elections in the state. From the survey, majority of respondents (266) (72.8%) overwhelmingly supported and agreed on the high rate of poverty amongst electorates as being responsible for political violence.

Table 1.7 showing respondents on the multiplier effects of political violence on democratic sustenance in Nasarawa state.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Violence does not allow voters to make independent choices in terms of preferred electoral candidates	166	45.5%
Electoral violence can attract military intervention in a democratic state	199	54.5%
Violence during elections could generate political apathy among the electorates	29	7.9%
Total	365	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 1.7 above shows the opinions of respondents on the multiplier effects of political violence and the sustenance of democratic values, not only in Nasarawa state, but also in Nigeria as a whole. Thus 166 of the respondents (45.5%) claimed that violence does not allow voters to make informed as well as independent choices of preferred candidates during elections. 199 respondents, however, looks at the effects of violence differently. To the 199 respondents, violence could attract military intervention in politics, and, hence, capable of truncating democratic culture. However, 29 respondents (7.9%) said that violence during elections could generate political apathy among electorates. Of the total respondents, 199 is the highest, which indicates that violence could attract military intervention in politics, especially in Third World countries (Nigeria inclusive).

What are the effects of political violence to the sustenance of democracy in Nasarawa state?

In the words of one of the interviewees, opined that:

There are several effects associated with political violence. In the first place, once democratic institutions cannot be allowed to function smoothly because of acts of violence, it goes without saying that leaders that are not popular in society are the very ones that will emerge as winners of general elections. What happens after this is that, rather than doing what is expected of them while in office as public representatives of the electorates, the reverse becomes the case, and this translates to more poverty, hopelessness and apathy. Therefore, the lack of democratic opportunities such as these could unarguably result to the scuttling of the values of democracy the people are yearning for (Field survey, 2022).

Table 1.8 showing respondent’s opinions on some of the mechanisms being put in place by the government of Nasarawa state to contain political violence

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
The state electoral umpire, has been embarking on public enlightenment campaign against violence in Nasarawa state	242	66.3%
There has been effective inter-agency collaboration among security agencies in the state to stamp out political violence in Nasarawa state	110	30.2%
Government is attempting to discourage campaigns of hate during and after elections in Nasarawa state	13	3.6%
Total	365	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

From table 1.8 above, respondents have given their own respective opinions on the mechanisms adopted by the government of Nasarawa state to contain rising political violence in the state. 242 respondents (66.3%) have ascertain that in an attempt to curb political violence, the state government, through the state Independent Electoral Commission has been embarking on public enlightenment campaign, using appropriate media outfits such as radio, television and other outlets. 110 respondents (30.2%) noted that there has been effective inter-agency collaboration among security agencies in the state to stamp out political violence in Nasarawa state. 13 of the respondents, representing 3.6%, however, stated that the government of Nasarawa state is attempting to discourage hate speech and/or hate campaigns during and after general elections. From the above analysis, it can be inferred that majority of the respondents (242) (66.3% opted for enlightenment campaign by the state electoral umpire as a way of mitigating political violence. The fact that this figure represents the highest in the survey, it can be said that public enlightenment could be a veritable tool for a violence-free society in Nasarawa state.

Discussion of Findings

The study investigates political violence vis-à-vis the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria, with particular focus on Nasarawa state, Nigeria's north central geo-political zone. The whole essence of the investigation is to be able to establish the nexus between political violence and how the former affects the sustenance of democratic values in the state. From the survey, respondents have demonstrated ample knowledge of how elections, especially general elections, have been conducted, and some of the violence that have permeated the various communities during such elections. From the survey, it has been discovered that violence did exist in massive scale in the state, especially during the 2015 and 2019 general elections in the state (see table 1.2). From what the respondents have said, both election years (2015 and 2019) were worse hit by violence (see table 1.3).

Again, respondents have claimed that quite a number of reasons account for violence during elections such as excessive quest for political power, refusal to quit office by politicians and seemingly weak political culture inherent in African political system generally (see table 1.4). Again, the research investigation has revealed that the drivers of political violence in the state are mostly politicians vying for public offices (see table 1.5). This has been overwhelmingly alluded by (205) (56.2%) respondents (see table 1.5). From the survey, it has been found that the predisposing factors of violence in the state happen because most able-bodied youths are idle, and without gainful employment (see table 1.6). On the effects of violence, respondents claimed that voters become apathetical and may not actively participate in politics in the state (see table 1.7). 166 respondents have confirmed this proposition as shown. Moreover, respondents in the course of the investigation, have opined that to be able to contain this menace, the electoral umpire should do more on public enlightenment campaign as panacea for a violence-free society (see table 1.8). This position is put forward by 242 respondents as shown in the table.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to unravel the extent to which political violence could affect democratic sustenance in Nigeria generally, and particularly in Nasarawa state. The study has examined the nation's political trajectory over time, especially since the inception of democracy in Nigeria in 1999. Of particular interest in this investigation is the elections of 2015 and 2019, which to most critics, was considered to have been marred by violence. From the investigations carried out in the study, it can be said that political violence appears to be an aspect of the nation's democratic culture. Empirical evidence from the study reveals that not only is Nasarawa state the epicentre of political violence. Other parts of the Nigerian state have also had their own fair share of the menace of violence, which of course, has claimed several lives and many critical infrastructures destroyed in its wake. To a very large extent, and from copious examples depicted in this

work, several factors propelling violence in the country (Nasarawa state inclusive) can be attributed to inordinate quest by politicians in the game of politics to clinch to power, high rate of excruciating poverty amongst idle youths and several other known reasons. These factors congeal to stir up violence during and after public elections with very devastating consequences. In the light of this, the study puts forward the following recommendations to government and other stakeholders in the state and elsewhere, so as to effectively stamp out the orgies of violence at whatever level of analysis.

First, the law making bodies such as the Nasarawa State House of Assembly should urgently enact a law that deals, and decisively too, with all kinds of political corruption in the state. What this means is that no politician or would-be politician should be allowed to engage in any form of aggression while vying for public office. Aggression and violence, as a matter of fact should be outrightly disbanded and completely outlawed in the state.

Again, all political offices should have a maximum of three years instead of the statutory four years. The reduction of the number of years will ensure that public office holders are discouraged from what is called 'sit-tight' syndrome. What this portends is that the inability of such office holder to deliver on the dividends of democracy within such a time frame will be recorded against him/her as being incompetent. When this happens, only public officers who are genuinely committed to public service will be attracted into politics. This will reduce unnecessary quest for such public offices.

Nevertheless, the Nigerian state in general, and Nasarawa state government in particular should ensure that sufficient skills acquisition mechanisms are put in place for jobless youths. Most youths in the state as elsewhere, lack basic entrepreneurial engagements. When this happens, the said youths are left as available tools for mischief. They are in

turn recruited as political errand boys and thugs to unleash mayhem during elections for financial gains. The several incidences of deaths, arson and other dangerous acts during and after elections are believed to have been sponsored by the political class and sufficiently carried out or executed by their 'godsons' or errand boys. The rate of devastations arising from this act is better imagined.

Moreover, the Nigerian government should subscribe to e-voting rather than open ballot system. The introduction of e-voting method ensures that members of the public, and particularly, those of voting age are allowed to cast their votes in the comfort of their homes or offices, without necessarily converging in a field or polling centres for the same purpose. This can be electronically transmitted to the central collation centres by virtual means where the results are subsequently declared and announced. A hi-tech revolution in the nation's voting process can conveniently achieve this fit.

Consequently, there is need for a more active, frequent and effective public enlightenment campaigns against political violence. To do this, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) of the federal and state governments should be resuscitated and made to be at the fore front of the campaign against electoral violence. This can be done through radio and television gingles, flyers, Short Messaging System (SMS), rendition of gingles using local languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, Eggon, Nupe, Alago, Bassa, Ogoja, Afor, and many other tribal vernaculars.

Lastly, there should be effective reconnaissance and monitoring of all election facilities including transmission of electronic results down to the collation centres. This can be achieved through efficient inter-agency collaboration of the various strands of the nation's security architecture including, but not limited to the military and para-military organs namely, police, Nigerian Civil Defence, the State Security Service (SSS), the

Department of State Service (DSS) and other sister agencies. This way, the collaborative efforts will be able to ensure that voters and the electoral votes are adequately safeguarded and results transmitted to the appropriate quarters without any form of interference.

References

- “15 Nabbed for Electoral offences in Oyo, Nasarawa state”, Vanguard Newspaper, April 10, 2011.
- Anifowose, R. (1982) *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba Experience*. New York: Nok publishers International.
- Armed Conflict Location and Events Dataset-www.acleddata.com.
- Basher, M.U., Ali, K.B. & Lucy, S.S. (2015) “Review of Political Violence: The Nigerian Experience of Youth in Political Violence” *International Journal of Science and Research* 6.391.
- “Bombs, Guns, Blood, Gore...” Leadership Newspaper, April 10, 2011.
- Diamond, L; Jonathan, H., Linj, J; & Lipset, S. (eds); (1999) *Democracy in Developing Countries*. London: Lynne Rienne publishers.
- Egobueze, A. (2017) Electoral Violence in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic: Implications for Political Stability. Researchgate.
- Gurr, T. (2011) *Why men Rebel*. London: Routledge.
- Igwe, P.I. & Amadi, A. (2021) Democracy and Political Violence in Nigeria since multi-party practices in 1999: A Critical Appraisal. *Open Political Science*, 4:101-119.
- Ladan-Baki, I.S. (2016) “Electoral Violence and 2015 General Elections in Nigeria”. *Global Journal of Human Social Science*.
- Nigeria 2015 Election Scenarios and Recommendations: Nasaarawa state Peace and Security Working Group.

Ojukwu, U.G., Mbah, M.C.C. & Maduekwe, V.C. (2019) Elections and Democratic Consolidation: A Study of 2019 General Elections in Nigeria. *Direct Research Journal of Science and Educational Studies*, 6(4), pp.53-64.

Santas, T. (2020) Voters' Perception of Government-owned Broadcast media coverage of political candidate's campaign in the 2019 Gubernatorial Election in Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Researchgate.

Uchechukwu, G.O. (2019) *Elections and Democratic Consolidation: A Study of 2019 General Elections in Nigeria*. Researchgate.

Vanguard News (2015) www.vanguardngr.com/2015/03/ss/elections/gasour

JOURNAL OF STUDIES
IN SOCIAL SCIENCES