

## **Politics and Violence in Nigeria: An Assessment of the 2019 General Elections in Taraba State, Nigeria.**

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### **Abstract**

Political campaigns are synonymous with political and electoral violence in Nigeria and Taraba State in particular. The 2019 general elections came with a character of its own in the context of prevailing political dynamics and the security atmosphere exacerbated by kidnappings, farmers/herders conflicts, rising youth restiveness and political thuggery in the State. This paper examines the links between political campaigns and electoral violence. The paper further argues that political parties lack ideologies and manifestoes which make candidates to base their campaigns on primordial sentiments of region, religion and ethnicity as core campaign factors rather than issue-based approach. Lack of ideologies and manifestoes are identified as being responsible for electoral violence or the use of political thugs, ethnic militia, INEC officials and manipulation of security agencies by the political gladiators during political campaigns and elections to capture power. The methodology adopted in gathering data was survey while data analysis was qualitative. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used. Findings reveal that most cases of political violence emanate from the electoral process, particularly political campaigns. The problem was more pronounced in the 2019 election in Taraba State. The study reveals that the major causes of the phenomenon include ethno-religious and regional issues exacerbated by voter illiteracy, unhealthy campaign slogans and utterances, intimidation, among others. The paper therefore recommends that for electoral violence to be eschewed in our politics, political parties must be ideological and articulated in their manifestoes, campaigns of issue-based, respect for the provision on campaigns as contained in the Electoral Act 2010, punishment of electoral offenders and banning of political thuggery in the electoral process.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Election, Political campaigns, Political violence, Taraba State.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria as a country has been experiencing electoral/political violence since independence, which has serious consequences on the lives and property of the people and threat to democracy. For instance, the electoral/political violence of 1964 and 1965 in the country contributed to the military takeover of Nigeria's nascent democracy in 1966

(Anifowase, 1983; Osaghae, 1998; Human Right Watch, 2007). Similarly, in 1983, the Shagari led government organized a general election, which was characterized by massive rigging and violence in many parts of the country, leading to another military takeover on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1983 (Obakhedo, 2011). In a similar vein, in June 1993, President Ibrahim Babangida annulled what was considered the most credible election in Nigeria's history and the consequence was the June 12, 1993 post-election violence that brought about the emergence of the Interim National Government (ING) led by Chief Ernest Shonekan in 1993 which lasted a few months (Ukase, 2011).

Nigeria's political and electoral experiences since 1999 up to the most recent general elections in 2019 have remained sad memories of political violence. In fact, violence has saturated the political atmosphere in the country. For instance, the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 elections were marred by widespread fraud and unprecedented political violence. The election violence in 2007, 2011 and 2015 led to severe damage to the political atmosphere in Nigeria, including loss of lives and property worth billions of Naira (Abah and Nwokwu, 2015).

Even though elections are supposed to be the legitimate way of transferring political power from one democratic regime to another through the ballot box, the reverse has remained the case in Nigeria (Ugoh, 2004). Electoral violence has featured in all elections conducted in Nigeria since independence. Hence, issues surrounding the electioneering campaigns potentially relate to violence, and violation of the rights of individuals. Thus, rather than serve as a means and a process of exercising legitimate political rights, elections in Nigeria have, since independence, turned out to be a serious political liability, causing serious political turmoil and threatening the survival of corporate existence in Nigeria (Abah and Nwokwu, 2015).

In the light of the foregoing, whenever elections draw near in Nigeria, there are usually palpable fears engulfing the well-meaning citizens of the country over the serious dangers that may trail the process. This is because elections are always characterized by cases of high incidences of political thuggery and uncontrollable violence always resulting in wanton destruction of lives and property. According to Sesan (2012), cited in Kalu and Gberevbie (2013), electoral violence has really discouraged citizens' participation in the political process in many states in Nigeria, and this development portends serious danger to Nigeria's democracy because without sufficient turnout, elections would not reflect the people's preference. It is against this background that it becomes imperative for this paper to isolate Taraba State and evaluate the causes, impacts and issues of political campaigns and political violence in the State.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Some key concepts are used in this paper prominent among which are Democracy, Election, Political Campaign and Political/electoral Violence. These concepts are explained in accordance with how they are used in this paper.

## **The Concept of Democracy**

There is no universally accepted definition of democracy. Various scholars have different definitions and interpretations on the conceptualization of democracy. The term democracy is derived from two Greek words: “*demos*” meaning ‘people’ and “*Kratos*” which means ‘rule of’ (Falade, 2014). Put together, democracy is the rule of the people. In his classic definition of democracy, Lincoln (1868) defines the concept as “the government of the people by the people and for the people”. That is to say, people are central in any democratic process. Without giving people the power to decide who become their political leaders, as well as hold their political leaders responsible, democracy would be a mirage.

According to Appadorai (2004), democracy is a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves. Democracy demands from the common man a certain level of ability and character; rational conduct and active participation in the government; the intelligent understanding of public affairs; independent judgment, tolerance and unselfish devotion to public interest, democracy believes in the principles of mutual discussion and persuasion. In a democracy, there is equality for all; every man has one vote; the opinion of everybody counts (Mahogan, 2017). Diamond, Liuz and Lipset (1989) believe that democracy as a system of government entails healthy competition between parties for an all effective positions of governance, devoid of violence for all encompassing levels of political participation in the selection of leaders through the conduct of periodically free and fair elections, and the observation of fundamental human rights. The foregoing definitions and conceptualizations imply that democracy is essentially a people-centered form of government.

## **Concept of Election**

According to Abah and Nwokwu (2015), election, no doubt, is one of the defining features of representative democracy. It paves way for citizens who are within the voting age in a country to exercise their franchise in determining who govern them. Casting of votes during an election is a powerful weapon to either select those contestants adjudged to have good tract records or to vote out those leaders who fail to fulfill their campaign promise.

In the words of Heywood (2000), the election is a device for filling an office or post through choices made by a designated body of people called electorates. Similarly, Dye (2005) defines election as a major instrument for the recruitment of political leadership in democratic societies; it is the key to effective participation in a democratic dispensation and the means through which people give their consent to government.

Election simply means the process through which eligible electorates cast their votes in order to choose from among political contestants that vie for various elective positions for the purpose of sound leadership, quality representation and good governance. In most

developing countries such as Nigeria, elections mostly always degenerate into violence (what is always referred to as electoral violence.

### **Political /Electoral Violence**

Several attempts have been made by scholars to conceptualize electoral violence. Fisher (2002) defines electoral violence as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced “protection”, blackmail, destruction of property or assassination. Nwolise (2007) citing Albert, sees political/electoral violence as all forms of organized acts or threat - physical, psychological and structural geared towards intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying or otherwise influencing an electoral process.

In view of the foregoing, Abah and Nwokwu (2015) state that, political/electoral violence is the use of force or threat of it to change the voting behavior pattern of electorates during elections. In modern times, electoral violence generally involves political parties, their supporters, journalists, and agents of government, election administrators and the general public and includes threats, assault, murder, destruction of property and physical or psychological harm (Fisher 2002; IFES, 2011).

In Nigeria, elections have been accompanied with election violence since independence. It may be physical, emotional/psychological and otherwise with the sole intent to intimidate and harass voters to change their minds before, during and after voting. This suggests that, electoral violence cuts across different segments of the electoral process commencing from the registration period to post-election period. Most often, electoral violence is always aimed at altering, influencing or changing, by force, the voting pattern or manipulating the electoral results in favor of a particular candidate or political party (Ugoh, 2004). Electoral violence is one major problem that has affected the Nigeria’s democratic sustainability and achievement of good governance (Gberevbie, 2014).

Electoral violence, particularly in Nigeria, is essentially an elitist phenomenon arising from the inordinate struggle for places in the structure of power. This has often degenerated into open violence among ethno-religious and communal groups or individuals who are deceived into believing that their interest is about to be imperiled (Michael, 2012).

### **Concept of Political Culture**

The concept “Political Culture” first appeared in modern empirical Political Science in the late 1950s or early 1960s and is chiefly associated with the American political scientist, Gabriel Almond. Almond (1956) states that, “every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientation to political actions”. Consequently, Almond and Verba (1963) define political culture as “the specifically political orientations and

attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system”. More broadly, Almond and Verba (1963) view the political culture of a nation as “the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation”.

Almond and Verba (1963) identified three modes of political orientation viz; the cognitive, the affective, and the evaluative. According to them, these three major kinds of belief influence the character and policy outcomes of political systems. Thus, political culture refers to something like the psycho-sociological limits or conditions within which individual political agents act. More generally expressed, it refers to the belief structure of a given polity, outside of which structure, political action would be incoherent (Bove, 2002). Hence, political campaign is conditioned by the culture of the people in a political system.

Generally, political culture simply means a set of shared views and normative judgments held by a population regarding its political system. The notion of political culture does not refer to attitudes toward specific actors, such as a president or prime minister, but rather it denotes how people view the political system as a whole and their belief in its legitimacy.

### **Historical Evolution of Political Violence in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic**

One of the key elements of modern representative democracy is election. Without election or periodic elections, the modern representative democracy would be impracticable. Invariably, election is indispensable to the practice of modern representative democracy that is guided by the principles of participation, representation and contestation.

In any democratic process, the right of the citizens to choose their leaders freely is only guaranteed through the electoral process (Przeworski, 2003). Hence, election is the right to choose freely from available alternatives and it ensures peaceful change of government through the ballots. The most interesting aspect of the electoral process is the political campaign. Political campaigns are those activities carried out by political parties and their candidates or independent candidates for furthering their prospects in an electoral competition (Ikeanyibe et al, 2018).

Since the return of civil rule in 1999, Nigeria’s democracy has witnessed changes in the electioneering process characterized by unhealthy political campaigns prone to political violence. The 2019 general election was the sixth in the series of elections conducted under the Fourth Republic. However, the most disturbing feature of the 2019 elections was that they were held despite the volatile security challenges exacerbated by Boko Haram, farmer/herders clashes and rampant kidnappings across the country, and Taraba State in particular.

One worrisome phenomenon in Nigeria is that political parties and their campaign approaches are not based on ideologies and issues. Rather, they are directed at individuals, and specifically to misinform and to utter hate speeches for the purpose of confusing or diverting the attention of the electorates and to cause disaffection between and among party supporters. Consequently, in the last two decades, most, if not all, of Nigeria's elections have been affected by political violence. The "do or die" attitude of the Nigerian political class always triggers violence during and after campaigns which usually results in several deaths and loss of property.

Most elections in Nigeria are characterized by violence, intimidation, harassment, killings and the snatching of ballot boxes (Human Rights Watch, 2007). There are several actors that are involved in political violence in the electoral process prominent which include government, political thugs, ethno-religious and regional militias, party leaderships and support groups. However, the major cause of political violence in Nigeria is the attitude of the political class, especially as it relates to utterances and conduct during campaigns.

The fact that political parties in Nigeria have always lacked ideologies makes them resort to the politics of identity, intimidation, thuggery and violence during campaigns (Omotola, 2009). This unfortunate feature has continued to produce ethno-religious and regional politics founded essentially on hate speeches, political violence, especially during and after elections. Experiences have shown that since 1999, the question of who wins in any election in Nigeria has remained how one is able to mobilize and harness ethno-religious and regional sentiments based essentially on very parochial primordial factors sustained mostly by political intimidation and all manner of electoral frauds. Little wonder that elections are always accompanied by violence and litigations as asserted by Iyayi (2006). For instance, in both the 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2019 Presidential and 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2019, Gubernatorial elections in the country, very disturbing electoral violence was reported in Lagos, Zamfara, Kebbi, Kano, Nasarawa, Benue, Plateau, Ekiti, Bauchi, Kwara and Oyo States with scores of lives lost and property destroyed (CSSR, 2019).

One of the controversial aspects of political campaigns in Nigeria is the lack of understanding and observance of campaign laws as stipulated in the Electoral Act. These issues include campaign funding, permission to hold rallies, commencement of campaigns, use of abusive language, and use of private security during the electioneering process. This informed the reason why the Electoral Act 2010, as amended, in Section 96 (1) says:

No candidate, a person or group of persons shall directly or indirectly threaten any person with the use of force or violence during any political campaign in order to compel that person or any other person to support or refrain from supporting a political party or candidate.

In Section 102, the Act further says:

Any candidate, person or association who engages in campaigning or broadcasting based on religious, tribal or sectional reason for the purpose of promoting or opposing a particular political party or the election of a particular candidate is guilty of an offense under this Act and on conviction shall be liable to a maximum fine of N1m or imprisonment for 12 months or to both.

To corroborate the Electoral Act, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as amended, in Section 277 says:

No person or association shall retain, organize, train, or equip any person or group of persons for the purpose of enabling them to be employed for the use or display of physical force or coercion in promoting any political objective or interest or in such manner as to arouse reasonable apprehension that they are organized and trained or equipped for that purpose.

On expenditure ceilings by candidates, Section 91, subsections 2-7 and Section 91 (2) say:

The maximum election expenses for a candidate at a Presidential level is (N1, 000,000,000), for Governorship election is (200,000,000), for Senatorial is (40,000,000), and the seat in the House of Representatives shall be (20, 000, 000).

It can be deduced from the foregoing that, there are regulations under Nigerian law guiding the conduct of the electoral process in order to prevent political violence in the political process. However, the challenge has been applying the provisions of the law in the electoral process, particularly when it comes to punishing offenders.

### **Political/Electoral Violence in Taraba State in the Fourth Republic**

Since the commencement of democratic process in Taraba State, elections have always been conducted in the atmosphere of varying degrees of electoral violence. This was evident, for instance, in the 2007, 2011 and 2015 at the gubernatorial campaigns and elections. The case of the 2019 elections was, however, more glaring. There were alarming cases of intimidation, harassment and killings during and after the 2019 gubernatorial election (Provide source of your information to substantiate your claims).

A review of political and electoral violence in Taraba State since creation, especially in the 2019 elections, shows that, the major causes of electoral and political violence are ethno-religious and regional factors, exacerbated by youth restiveness. This phenomenon became pronounced during the 2007 gubernatorial election. Since then, the phenomenon keeps assuming new dimension in each election. Mohammed (2018) laments that there is the emergence of a new phenomenon of youth restiveness known as “*Base Boys*”. This development has direct negative implications on the political process in the state, particularly in Jalingo, the state capital.

Among the major factors associated with political and electoral violence are the followings:

- i. Ethno-religious and regional politics.

- ii. Volatile security situation/inadequate security.
- iii. Use of political thugs in the electoral process.
- iv. Lack of internal party democracy.
- v. Poor voter education.
- vi. Politics as a zero sum game.
- vii. Poverty and unemployment

**Table 1: Reported Cases of Violence during Campaigns in Taraba State, 2019**

S/N	Nature of Violence	Place	Date
1.	Assassination attempt on APC Gubernatorial candidate resulting in five (5) deaths.	Ibi round-about, Wukari LGA.	17 <sup>th</sup> Jan., 2019
2.	Violent APC Presidential Campaign Rally resulting in deaths, destruction of billboards, cars, etc.	Jalingo Metropolis	7 <sup>th</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup> Feb., 2019
3.	Harassment of PDP Gubernatorial Candidate at a Campaign Rally.	Baissa, Kurmi LGA.	21 <sup>st</sup> Feb., 2019
4.	Post-Presidential election violence resulting in three (3) deaths.	Amar/Kambari, Karim-Lamido LGA.	24 <sup>th</sup> Feb., 2019
5.	Harassment on PDP Gubernatorial candidate.	Nyamusala, Jalingo LGA.	7 <sup>th</sup> March, 2019
6.	Violent clash between PDP and APC supporters.	Nyamusala, Jalingo LGA.	8 <sup>th</sup> March, 2019
7.	Violent clashes between political opponents resulting in one (1) death.	Kashimbilla, Takum LGA.	9 <sup>th</sup> March, 2019
8.	Violent clashes between political opponents resulting in one (1) death.	Lissam II, Ussa LGA.	21 <sup>st</sup> March, 2019

**Source:** Field Survey, 2019.

The above table presents the major instances of political and electoral violence and number of deaths during the 2019 elections in Taraba State. The nature and dynamics of the political violence vary. While some instances occurred during campaigns, others took place during and after elections. Generally, however, the level of violence in the state was not as glaring as was the case in other states of the federation.



**Table 2: Reported Violence & Deaths from Post-Election Violence in Jalingo, the Taraba State capital**

S/N	Place	Death (s)	Date
1	Anguwan Kassa, Jalingo LGA.	NIL	9/03/2019
2	Main Market Area, Jalingo LGA.	2	13/02/2019
3	Water Board Area, Jalingo LGA.	5	12-14/02/2019
4	Sabon Gari, Jalingo LGA.	1	13/02/2019
5	Nyamusala, Jalingo LGA.	NIL	12-13/02/2019
6	Tella, Gassol LGA.	NIL	12/02/2019

**Source:** Field Survey, 2019

The tension that accompanied the gubernatorial campaigns in Jalingo, the Taraba State capital, signalled the upsurge of post-election violence. Consequently, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, 2019, the Taraba State government imposed a dusk to dawn curfew in Jalingo Metropolis in order to prevent post-election violence. However, when the gubernatorial election result was announced by INEC on 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2019, with Governor Darius Dickson Ishaku of the PDP re-elected with the highest votes of 520, 432 against Alhaji Sani Abubakar Danladi of the APC who came second with 362, 735 votes, there were reported cases of violent clashes between supporters of PDP and APC in the Jalingo Metropolis. The occurrences were partly as a result of the celebration by PDP supporters. The post-election violence claimed eight (8) lives and over fifty-six (56) people were arrested for various offenses. The table above presents the major incidences, places and dates they occurred.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigates the dynamics associated with elections and political violence in Taraba State. The paper starts with a general review of the phenomenon in Nigeria since in the First Republic. However, the 2019 elections form the specific focus of the study. The study reveals that most cases of political violence emanate from the electoral process, particularly political campaigns. Among the factors highlighted as the major causes of the phenomenon include ethno-religious and regional issues exacerbated by voter illiteracy, unhealthy campaign slogans and utterances, intimidation, among others.

The study reveals that the foregoing phenomenon was more pronounced in the 2019 elections in the state, resulting in the loss of lives and destruction of property worth millions of Naira. It is also revealed that violence occurred even before, during and after the elections, which resulted in the imposition of twenty four (24) hour curfew in Jalingo Metropolis. The paper identifies the nature of political campaigns as the major factor that instigate election and post-election violence in Nigeria and Taraba State in particular, especially, during the 2019 elections.

## Recommendations

Deduced from the foregoing findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Political campaigns should be issue based.
- ii. Political parties should ensure internal party democracy.
- iii. Candidates/contestants should have manifestos as a policy guide.
- iv. Identity politics should be replaced by merit.
- v. Inculcation of democratic culture in the people.
- vi. Punishment of electoral offenders.

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