Historical Analysis of electoral violence in Nigeria: Patterns, Trends and evolution.

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Abstract

This paper conducts a historical analysis of electoral violence in Nigeria, examining its patterns, trends, and evolution over time. Electoral violence encompasses a wide range of aggressive acts and behaviors aimed at influencing election outcomes. The key elements of electoral violence include physical violence, intimidation, coercion, vote-buying, rigging, and property destruction. The impact on Nigeria's democracy is severe, leading to loss of lives, property damage, eroded trust in institutions, political instability, and voter suppression, among other consequences. Root causes of electoral violence in Nigeria are multifaceted, including ethnic tensions, competition for resources, weak institutions, impunity for perpetrators, socio-economic vulnerabilities, external influences, the proliferation of small arms, and high-stakes elections. Addressing electoral violence necessitates a comprehensive approach, involving strengthening institutions, promoting social cohesion, addressing economic disparities, and enforcing accountability for perpetrators. A peaceful and inclusive electoral process is crucial for upholding democratic principles and ensuring that the true will of the people is reflected in governance. By tackling the root causes of electoral violence and implementing effective measures to prevent and address violent incidents, Nigeria can move towards a more stable and democratic future. It is essential for all stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and the international community, to collaborate in creating an environment where free and fair elections can take place without fear of violence or manipulation.

Keywords: *Electoral violence, Patterns, Trends, Evolution, Vote-buying*

Introduction

Elections stand as the cornerstone of every democratic society, bestowing upon the populace the invaluable chance to actively engage in governance through the sacred act of choosing their representatives. However, in some countries, elections have been marred by violence, undermining the very essence of democracy. One such country is Nigeria, a country with a tumultuous history of electoral violence (Nwolise, 2006). This research delves into the patterns, trends, and evolution of electoral violence in Nigeria, aiming to shed light on the underlying factors and potential solutions to this critical issue. Nigeria, renowned as the " Giant of Africa," achieved its liberation from British colonial dominance in the year 1960. Since then, the country has experienced periods of military rule, coups, and brief experiments with democracy (Falola and Heaton, 2008). In 1999, Nigeria transitioned to democratic governance, with multi-party elections becoming the norm

concerning electoral violence. Electoral violence in Nigeria encompasses various forms, including physical intimidation, ballot-box snatching, political assassinations, and large-scale riots (Nwolise, 2006; Alao, 2021). It often occurs before, during, or after elections, perpetrated by political actors, party supporters, or even state security agencies. This violence has had severe consequences, leading to loss of lives, destruction of property, erosion of public trust in the electoral process, and undermining the credibility of elected officials.

The matter of electoral violence in Nigeria holds immense significance for various compelling reasons. Above all, the preservation of democracy and effective governance heavily relies on the conduct of free and impartial elections. When elections are tainted by violence, it erodes citizens' confidence in the democratic process, leading to voter apathy and disillusionment (Igiebor, n.d.). The credibility of elected representatives comes into question, hindering their ability to effectively govern and address the needs

of the populace. Secondly, electoral violence has significant implications for national stability and security. Igiebor, (n.d.) argued that prolonged violence, especially in regions with ethnic or religious divides, can escalate into broader conflicts, threatening peace and stability. This poses a challenge to Nigeria's development and progress, as resources that could be utilized for growth are diverted to address security concerns. Understanding the patterns and trends of electoral violence is crucial for developing targeted interventions to prevent further escalation and promote peaceful elections. By analyzing the historical evolution of electoral violence in Nigeria, researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders can gain insights into the root causes and identify potential triggers of violence. This knowledge can then be used to design evidence-based strategies to mitigate the risk of violence during electoral processes. Thirdly, Nigeria's position as the most populous country in Africa and a major oil producer bestows significant regional influence. Stability within Nigeria is critical not only for its citizens but also for regional economic and political dynamics. The spillover effects of electoral violence can destabilize neighboring countries and disrupt regional peace and cooperation. Thus, addressing the issue of electoral violence in Nigeria is not only a matter of national interest but also a regional imperative.

Efforts to address electoral violence in Nigeria have been ongoing, but success has been limited. Over the years, various stakeholders, including government bodies, civil society organizations, and international partners, have initiated measures to curb electoral violence and promote credible elections (Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dar, 2010). A pivotal measure undertaken during that era was the formalization of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the year 1998. INEC was tasked with overseeing the electoral process, and its creation was expected to reduce electoral malpractices and violence. However, despite its efforts, the commission has faced challenges in enforcing electoral regulations and ensuring a level playing field for all political parties. Additionally, Nigeria has witnessed the deployment of security forces during elections to maintain law and order (Nwokike et al., 2022). However, there have been instances where security agencies have been accused of partisan actions, exacerbating tensions and leading to violence. Civil society organizations have assumed a pivotal role in overseeing electoral processes and championing the principles of transparency and responsibility. Their efforts have led to increased awareness of electoral violence and its impact, but addressing the root causes of violence remains a complex task. Despite these initiatives, electoral violence continues to persist, necessitating a comprehensive historical analysis to understand its evolution, identify recurring patterns, and devise more effective strategies for prevention and resolution.

Definition of concept

Electoral violence
The intricate and diverse nature of election-related violence, coupled with the dynamic socio-political landscapes in which elections take place, precludes any singular definition or universally embraced jargon to encapsulate its essence. Election-related violence encompasses a wide range of incidents that can occur before, during, and after electoral processes, posing significant challenges to democratic systems worldwide. The lack of a uniform definition arises from the fact that election-related violence can manifest in diverse forms and intensity. Electoral violence is a term used to describe various types of violent actions

and behaviors that take place within the framework of elections. These incidents can occur at different stages of the electoral process, such as during the campaigning period, the actual polling day, or even in the aftermath of the elections. The primary objective of electoral violence is often to influence or manipulate the election's outcome in favor of a particular candidate, party, or group. Below are essential components encompassed by electoral violence:

i. **Physical Violence**: This refers to any act of aggression that involves the use of force against individuals, groups, or property during the election process. It may include physical assaults, clashes between rival political supporters, or attacks on election officials and voters.

ii. **Intimidation**: Electoral violence can also involve acts intended to instill fear or threaten people to influence their voting behavior. This could be through direct threats, harassment, or other forms of psychological pressure.

iii. **Coercion**: Similar to intimidation, coercion involves forcing or compelling individuals to vote in a specific way or to participate in the election process against their will.

iv. **Vote-buying**: This denotes the cunning tactic of proffering monetary enticements, lavish presents, or alluring rewards to potential voters, with the aim of coaxing their ballots in return. It is a form of electoral fraud aimed at influencing voters' choices.

v. **Rigging**: Electoral rigging encompasses various methods employed to manipulate the electoral process and its results. This can involve tampering with ballot counts, falsifying election results, or engaging in other fraudulent practices.

vi. **Destruction of Property**: Electoral violence may also manifest in the form of vandalism, arson, or other forms of property damage intended to disrupt the electoral process or intimidate opponents.

Electoral violence can have severe consequences for a country's democratic processes and stability. Governments, electoral bodies, civil society, and the international community often work together to prevent and address electoral violence, promote peaceful elections, and ensure the integrity of the democratic process. Measures may include implementing security measures, conducting voter education programs, promoting dialogue between political parties, and holding accountable those responsible for inciting or perpetrating electoral violence.

Bekoe (cited in Birch et al., 2020), provides a comprehensive analysis of electoral violence, highlighting its strategic nature and its direct impact on the electoral process and outcomes. According to Bekoe's research, electoral violence is a deliberate tactic employed by various political actors with the specific intention of influencing and shaping the electoral landscape in their favor. This tactic involves the utilization of coercive acts targeting not only human beings but also property and infrastructure. One of the central aspects of electoral violence is its purposeful design. Political actors, whether they are individuals, parties, or other groups, resort to violence as a calculated strategy to achieve their objectives. By instigating fear and chaos through violent means, they seek to manipulate the electoral environment and create an atmosphere of intimidation that can potentially deter opponents and voters from participating freely and fairly in the electoral process.

The targets of electoral violence are multifaceted. Human beings, including candidates, party supporters, election officials, and ordinary citizens, often bear the brunt of these acts. Physical harm, threats, intimidation, and even assassinations may be employed to silence opposition voices or to discourage voters from supporting rival candidates. Such acts can lead to a chilling effect on political participation, restricting democratic principles and undermining citizens' faith in the electoral system. Election violence is a disturbing and manipulative tactic employed to exert control over the electoral process and its participants. Its primary objective is to secure advantages and favor a specific political party involved in the electoral competition (Momen and Markony, 2020). This destructive phenomenon undermines the fundamental principles of democracy, as it seeks to intimidate voters, suppress opposition, and disrupt the free expression of political will. By employing such violent means, certain groups attempt to shape the outcome of elections in their favor, disregarding the democratic principles of fairness, transparency, and equal representation. The consequences of election violence are far-reaching, causing social unrest, undermining public trust in the electoral system, and posing serious threats to the stability and progress of a nation.

Emmanuela and Onyige (2019) assert that electoral violence poses a significant threat to the stability and progress of numerous democratic societies worldwide. It is characterized as a crisis that emerges during elections with the intent of forcibly altering, manipulating, or influencing the electoral behavior of voters, voting patterns, or even overturning electoral outcomes in support of a specific individual, group, or political party. This type of violence undermines the fundamental principles of democracy, eroding public trust in the electoral process and jeopardizing the legitimacy of elected leaders. Addressing and mitigating electoral violence is crucial to safeguarding the integrity of democratic institutions and fostering a peaceful and inclusive political environment.

Schwartz's (2001) conceptualization of electoral violence sheds light on a critical aspect of political turmoil where violence is strategically employed to target the very foundation of democratic processes—the electoral system. Electoral violence encompasses a range of disruptive and coercive tactics orchestrated with the ultimate goal of securing political dominance or power at any cost. The perpetrators of electoral violence seek to exploit the vulnerability of electoral processes to disrupt and manipulate the will of the people, thwarting the true expression of citizens' choices. Such violent acts may include intimidation, physical assaults, voter suppression, ballot tampering, or even outright electoral fraud. By resorting to these nefarious means, those engaging in electoral violence undermine the principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability that underpin any functioning democracy.
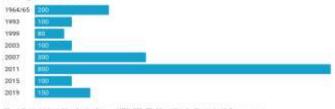
Mwagiru's argument, (cited in Schwartz, 2001), sheds light on the instrumental use of electoral violence as a means to achieve specific political objectives. According to Mwagiru, electoral violence serves as a tool to intimidate and disempower political opponents, which goes beyond its occurrence solely during election periods. Instead, it spans across the entire electoral process, from the pre-election phase, where tensions escalate, to the election day itself, when violence can be used to manipulate outcomes. Even in the aftermath of elections, during the critical phase of ballot counting, electoral violence may persist, further undermining the democratic process. By employing electoral

violence strategically, those in power or seeking power can create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, suppressing opposition voices, and discouraging civic participation. The goal is to shape the political landscape in favor of certain actors, consolidating or attaining power through undemocratic means. Mwagiru's argument highlights the importance of addressing electoral violence comprehensively, not just as an isolated event during elections but as a persistent threat that requires vigilance and preventive measures throughout the entire electoral cycle. Such an approach is crucial for safeguarding the integrity of democratic processes and upholding the principles of free and fair elections.

Historical Analysis of electoral violence in Nigeria

Since Nigeria gained independence, its general elections have been marred by frequent incidents of violence. The violence has been a recurring issue throughout the country's political history, with numerous lives lost and properties destroyed in several instances. The first election in 1964/5 resulted in over 200 deaths, particularly in the Southwest, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW) (Adebajo, 2022). Subsequent elections, including the 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003, and 2007 elections, were also plagued by violence, with varying death tolls and property damage. Even the 1993 presidential election, which was considered the freest in the country's history, faced the annulment that led to protests and loss of lives. In 2011, an immensely pivotal and tragic chapter unfolded in Nigeria's history as the aftermath of the election witnessed a surge of violence, leaving in its wake a toll of over 800 lives lost during three harrowing days of unrest across 12 states in northern Nigeria. The upheaval was ignited by the re-election of President Good luck Jonathan, hailing from the Christian community in the Niger Delta region, which sparked vehement protests from followers of Muhammadu Buhari, the prominent opposition candidate and a Muslim figure from the north (Adebajo, 2022).

Numerous elements have been identified as contributors to the persistent hurdles faced by Nigeria's democratic elections. Among these factors are frail governance structures, inadequate security apparatus, pervasive poverty, joblessness, instances of power exploitation, political estrangement, an atmosphere of unchecked behavior, a political framework favoring absolute victory, and the proliferation of minor weaponry. The Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) has meticulously documented incidents of electoral violence within the nation since 2014. Over the span from April 2014 to May 2022, a minimum of 350 individuals met their demise due to electoral violence, while 51 others, primarily officials from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), were subjected to kidnappings. These outbreaks of violence manifested in diverse manners, encompassing acts of arson, targeted assassinations, theft of ballot containers, abductions, eruptions of hate speech-fueled crises, and an array of other forms.

Lives Lost to Election Violence in Nigeria Since Independence

Chart: Kunle Adebajo/HumAngle • Source: HRW, ICG, CSL Africa Watch • Created with Datawrapper

According to the NST data, a significant surge in mortality rates was observed in the years 2015 and 2019, coinciding with the pivotal moments of general elections. During this critical period, several states experienced a pronounced increase in both incidents and fatalities. The regions most profoundly affected by this alarming trend include Rivers, Lagos, Kogi, Ondo, Ekiti, Taraba, Bayelsa, Delta, Ebonyi, Kano, and Sokoto. Moreover, INEC facilities have become targets of increased attacks across the country. Between 2019 and May 2021, INEC offices were attacked 41 times in 14 states, with cases of vandalization, arson, and other destructive acts. The focal points of these occurrences predominantly revolved around the Southeastern and Southwestern territories. According to Biriowo (2023), a Civil Society Organisation named Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI) conducted an election violence monitoring and mitigation report on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The report revealed that there were a total of 238 incidents of violence, resulting in 24 deaths during the elections. Out of these, 98 instances of violence occurred during the February 25 presidential election, while 140 were reported during the March Governorship and State House of Assembly polls.

In their study, Nwokike et al., (2023) highlight that the period leading up to the 2023 general election was marked by a concerning atmosphere of animosity, division, and polarization within the society. This negative climate created a backdrop that contributed to the unfolding of tragic events on the day of the election. The distressing climate of hostility may have been fueled by political differences, social tensions, or other factors that intensified divisions among various groups of people. As a result, this toxic environment likely exacerbated tensions and conflicts leading up to the election day. They posit that the charged ambiance played a momentous part in laying the groundwork for the calamitous incidents that unfolded during the electoral process. These events could have ranged from violence and protests to instances of electoral malpractice and voter suppression, impacting the democratic process and potentially causing harm to individuals and communities.

Unveiling the Underlying Triggers of Electoral Unrest in Nigeria

The roots of electoral violence in Nigeria run deep and can be attributed to a complex interplay of various factors that have shaped the country's political landscape over time. In order to attain a profound grasp, it becomes imperative to thoroughly explore every constituent factor.

1. Historical Ethnic and Religious Tensions: Nigeria is a diverse nation with over 250 ethnic groups and a significant religious divide between Islam and Christianity. These diversities have historically led to tensions and conflicts, often exacerbated during electoral periods. Political actors exploit these divisions to secure support from their ethnic or religious constituencies, leading to identity-based voting and heightened inter-communal rivalries.

2. Competition for Scarce Resources: Nigeria, despite its vast natural resources, faces a significant disparity in wealth distribution. The struggle for control and access to these resources becomes intense during elections as political power directly translates into control over lucrative opportunities and government contracts. This competition for scarce resources fuels electoral violence, as candidates and their supporters engage in fierce and sometimes violent struggles to gain an upper hand.

3. Weak Institutional Capacity: Nigeria's institutions, including law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, and the electoral commission, have often been plagued by inefficiency, corruption, and lack of independence. The weak institutional capacity creates an environment where electoral offenders feel they can act with impunity, knowing that the chances of facing consequences are low. Consequently, the occurrence of electoral misconduct and violence can persist without substantial apprehension of consequences, eroding the integrity and equity of the electoral proceedings.

4. Culture of Impunity for Electoral Offenders: Related to weak institutions, there has been a longstanding culture of impunity for those involved in electoral violence and malpractices. Perpetrators frequently evade responsibility, conveying an unsettling message that such conduct remains unchallenged or possibly endorsed. This fosters a cycle of violence and perpetuates the belief that electoral manipulation is a viable means of achieving political objectives.

5. Socio-economic Vulnerabilities: Nigeria faces numerous socio-economic challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and inadequate access to basic services like education and healthcare. Political actors often exploit these vulnerabilities, particularly in marginalized communities, to mobilize support through patronage systems and promises of better livelihoods. The desperation for improved conditions makes people more susceptible to manipulation, and this, in turn, increases tensions and the potential for violence during elections.

6. Influence of External Actors: Beyond internal factors, external actors can also play a role in electoral violence in Nigeria. Foreign interests, whether political or economic, might seek to manipulate the electoral process in their favor, leading to increased tensions and violence as local actors align with or oppose these external interests.

7. Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons: The unrestricted accessibility and circulation of small arms and light weaponry within Nigeria significantly fuel the intensity of electoral strife. The pervasive presence of these lethal tools accelerates the eruption of violence, frequently leading to tragic loss of lives and widespread destruction of properties during crucial election periods.

8. Perceived Stakes of Elections: Nigerian elections are often viewed as high-stake events, where the outcome can determine not only the political landscape but also access to resources and opportunities for the foreseeable future. This heightened perception of what is at stake further intensifies competition and polarizes political actors and their supporters, leading to more confrontations and violence.

9. Media Influence: Media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions and opinions during elections. Irresponsible or biased reporting can amplify existing tensions and promote misinformation, which, in turn, fuels electoral violence by inciting emotions and dividing communities along ethnic or religious lines.

Electoral violence in Nigeria is a complex issue with deep-rooted causes. Addressing this problem requires comprehensive efforts, including strengthening institutions, promoting social cohesion, addressing economic disparities, and enforcing accountability for electoral offenders. It is essential for all stakeholders, including political leaders, civil society, and citizens, to work together to foster a peaceful and inclusive electoral process that reflects the true will of the Nigerian people.

The Impact of electoral violence on Nigeria Democracy

The impact of electoral violence in Nigeria has been deeply troubling and far-reaching since the country gained independence. Over the years, the general elections have been marred by frequent incidents of violence, resulting in a devastating loss of lives and properties. From the first election in 1964/5, which saw over 200 deaths in the Southwest region, to subsequent elections in 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003, and 2007, electoral violence has been a recurring issue.

1. Loss of Lives and Property Destruction: Among the gravest and swift repercussions of electoral unrest lies the tragic toll on human lives and the wanton destruction inflicted upon properties. From the earliest elections after independence to recent times, violence during elections has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people. The 2011 post-election violence alone claimed at least 800 lives in just three days. Such loss of lives creates a climate of fear and hampers citizens' willingness to participate in future elections. One significant episode of violence occurred during the 2011 post-election period, where at least 800 people lost their lives in rioting across northern Nigeria. The catalyst behind this surge of unrest emerged with the re-election of President Goodluck Jonathan, hailing from the Christian community of the Niger Delta. This electoral outcome ignited fervent demonstrations among advocates rallying behind the primary contender of the opposition, Muhammadu Buhari, an individual of Northern Muslim descent.

2. Erosion of Trust in Democratic Institutions: The foundation of any thriving democracy lies in the trust and confidence the public places in its institutions and electoral process. However, one significant threat that poses a grave danger to the very essence of democracy is the erosion of trust resulting from repeated incidents of violence during elections. When acts of violence and irregularities become a recurring pattern during the electoral cycle, the repercussions on public perception can be profound and far-reaching. At the heart of the matter lies the pivotal belief that elections should be a peaceful and fair means of expressing the collective will of the people. Each episode of violence casts a dark shadow over the notion of free and fair elections, and as these incidents accumulate, the sense of disillusionment deepens among citizens. As a consequence, a sense of cynicism and apathy towards the democratic system starts to take root.

3. Political Instability and Insecurity: The impact of electoral violence on political instability and insecurity cannot be underestimated. As the democratic process is marred by violence and unrest, citizens lose faith in the system's ability to ensure a fair and peaceful transfer of power. In the aftermath of contested elections, especially those tainted by violence, the losing parties and their supporters may refuse to accept the results, leading to political gridlock and prolonged conflicts. Such prolonged disputes can create power vacuums, leaving the country vulnerable to exploitation by opportunistic individuals or groups seeking to advance their interests through further violence or even attempts at seizing power. The spillover effect of heightened tensions during election periods can extend well beyond the immediate aftermath. Post-election violence can foster a cycle of retaliation and counter-retaliation, perpetuating a climate of fear and uncertainty. This not only threatens the safety and well-being of citizens but also hampers economic development. Businesses become reluctant to invest in an unstable and unpredictable environment, resulting in a decline in both local and foreign investments. Consequently, economic growth stagnates, job opportunities decrease, and poverty rates may rise, exacerbating social grievances and potential for unrest.

4. Reinforcement of Ethnic and Regional Divisions: Nigeria's ethnic and regional diversity is both a source of richness and a potential challenge. Electoral violence can exploit these existing fault lines and amplify divisions among different groups. Incidents of violence targeted at specific ethnic or religious communities breed animosity and distrust, making reconciliation and social cohesion more elusive. As violence disproportionately affects certain groups, individuals from these communities may perceive the electoral process as rigged against them. This perception of unfairness can fuel resentment and deepen social rifts, undermining the nation's unity and progress. The idea of elections being a zero-sum game, where one group's victory comes at the expense of others, can intensify competition and animosities. This harmful perspective often leads to a winner-takes-all mentality, where the stakes become extremely high, and political power is seen as the only means of safeguarding a community's interests.

Ultimately, the reinforcement of ethnic and regional divisions erodes the sense of a shared national identity. This not only hinders efforts to build a cohesive and inclusive society but also weakens the country's ability to tackle shared challenges collectively.

5. Impaired Participation and Voter Suppression: Electoral violence can have far-reaching consequences, deeply impacting the democratic process and the fundamental rights of citizens. One of the most troubling outcomes is the discouragement it inflicts upon the population, dissuading them from actively participating in the electoral process. Fear for personal safety, uncertainty, and the dread of becoming victims of violence can drive people away from exercising their right to vote, eroding the very essence of democratic representation. In addition to dampening citizens' enthusiasm for voting, electoral violence is often targeted strategically to suppress voting in specific regions or among particular groups. By employing intimidation tactics and violence, perpetrators aim to disenfranchise segments of the population, thus distorting the true will of the people. This form of targeted voter suppression undermines the principles of inclusivity and fair representation, as it skews the electoral outcomes in favor of certain factions while silencing the voices of others. Consequently, the diverse perspectives and needs of various communities may remain unheard, leading to skewed policies and decisions that fail to reflect the nation's true diversity and aspirations.

6. Undermining Democratic Values: At the very core of democratic principles lies the peaceful transfer of power, respect for human rights, and upholding the rule of law. Electoral violence stands as a stark contradiction to these values and poses a significant threat to the foundation of any democratic society.

When violence becomes a recurrent occurrence during elections, it perpetuates an atmosphere of fear and instability, eroding the

people's trust in democratic institutions. This lack of trust can create a vicious cycle where citizens lose faith in the electoral process, thereby disengaging from politics altogether, and consequently, the democratic fabric starts to weaken. Candidates should ideally compete based on their ideas, policies, and the support they garner from the public. However, when violence and intimidation are prevalent, it distorts the electoral landscape, skewing the contest in favor of those willing to use force instead of those with the most compelling vision for the nation's future. As violence escalates, the risk of human rights abuses increases, as citizens' safety and security are compromised. This not only violates their fundamental rights but also perpetuates a climate of fear and oppression that stifles freedom of expression and assembly.

7. Economic Consequences: The prevalence of electoral violence poses a serious threat to a nation's economic well-being, and Nigeria is no exception. When elections are marred by violence, potential investors, both domestic and foreign, become hesitant to commit their resources to the country. Uncertainty about the safety of investments and business operations discourages businesses from expanding or establishing new ventures in Nigeria. As a result, the country experiences a decline in foreign direct investment and domestic investment, which could have otherwise contributed to economic growth and job creation. Moreover, electoral violence disrupts business activities on multiple levels. During periods of unrest, transportation networks may be affected, making it difficult for goods and services to be delivered efficiently. Essential infrastructures such as roads, communication systems, and power supply may also be damaged during violent incidents, further hindering business operations. These disruptions lead to economic inefficiencies, higher production costs, and reduced productivity, eventually impacting the overall economic output of the nation. One of the most significant economic implications of electoral violence is the increased expenditure on security and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The government must allocate substantial financial resources to maintain law and order during elections and handle the aftermath of violent incidents. These expenses divert funds that could have been utilized for developmental projects, public services, and social welfare programs. As a result, the overall economic progress of the country may slow down, affecting the quality of life for the citizens and perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

8. Impact on International Reputation: Frequent incidents of electoral violence can significantly tarnish Nigeria's international reputation, causing repercussions on its diplomatic relations and global standing. The international community closely observes the political stability and security situation of any nation, especially during critical events like elections. When a country experiences persistent electoral violence, it projects an image of instability and insecurity to the world. International partners and allies may hesitate to engage in trade agreements, foreign aid, and cooperative initiatives with Nigeria due to concerns about the reliability of its political environment. Diplomatic relations may be strained, and bilateral or multilateral agreements might face delays or reluctance from other countries. Furthermore, Nigeria's representation on the international stage may be negatively impacted. It may find it more challenging to secure leadership positions in international organizations or participate actively in global decision-making processes. Other nations may view Nigeria as a risky investment or trade partner, leading to reduced economic cooperation and

potential isolation from global economic networks. The consequences of a damaged international reputation go beyond the immediate diplomatic and economic impact. It can affect Nigeria's ability to attract foreign talent, access cutting-edge technologies, and participate in international cultural and educational exchanges. The soft power of a nation, which influences how it is perceived globally, can be eroded by the prevalence of electoral violence and its negative portrayal in the media and international reports.

Conclusion

Electoral violence in Nigeria has been a recurring issue, impacting democracy, stability, and progress. It erodes trust in institutions, reinforces divisions, and leads to loss of lives and property. Weak governance, poverty, and impunity contribute to its persistence. Tackling the underlying triggers, fortifying institutions, and fostering inclusiveness are imperative to secure Nigeria's democratic destiny. By combating electoral violence, Nigeria can foster a peaceful and prosperous nation, both domestically and on the international stage.

Recommendations

Combating electoral violence in Nigeria demands a diverse strategy that engages a multitude of stakeholders, encompassing governmental bodies, political entities, civil society groups, and the general populace. Here are some recommendations to mitigate electoral violence:

i. Strengthen Electoral Laws and Institutions: Enforce strict penalties for electoral violence and ensure that electoral laws are comprehensive and effectively enforced. Empower independent electoral commissions to oversee and conduct free and fair elections.

ii. Promote Political Education and Civic Awareness: Educate citizens about the electoral process, the importance of peaceful elections, and their rights and responsibilities as voters.

iii. Disarmament and Demobilization: Work towards the disarmament and demobilization of political thugs and militias involved in electoral violence. This may require dialogue, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs.

iv. Media Responsibility: Encourage responsible and unbiased reporting by the media during elections to avoid sensationalizing violence and inciting further unrest.

v. Deploy Security Personnel Adequately: Ensure the presence of security personnel at polling stations and other vulnerable areas during elections. These personnel should be properly trained to handle electoral situations without resorting to excessive force.

vi. Political Parties' Commitment: Political parties should commit to peaceful campaigns and elections, denouncing violence and not inciting their supporters to engage in it.

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