

Electioneering Process and Manifestation of Violence and Criminality: A Case Study of Oye Ekiti in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Since Nigeria's independence, elections have been a highly contentious affair characterized by violence and criminality that has discouraged peace-loving and change-thirsty Nigerians from exercising their voting rights. The use of coercion, rigging, and vote buying among other veritable tools by political actors to seize power or mandate disenfranchises and alienates the electorates. Despite considerable measures taken by the government and the hapless citizenry to nix electoral violence in the bud, it appears that this multifaceted problem has not been tackled holistically; therefore the menace remains unabated. Thus this study examines electioneering processes, manifestation of violence and criminality: a case study conducted on 200 respondents selected in totality with 66 based on three areas (Irele, Idofin & Egbe) in Oye local government who are reproductive age adults by unravelling major catalysts fostering electoral violence/criminality; evaluating various implications on the electoral process while examining various efforts made towards stemming the rise in electoral violence/criminality within Oye-Ekiti. Data was collected through structured questionnaires using the Cluster Sampling Technique to select participants. Findings revealed major causes for electoral violence/criminality are political will (82.5%), proliferation of small arms/light weapons (80.5%), vote buying (78.5%) & and result manipulation (64.5%). The majority disagreed with hate speech being a significant cause. Furthermore, findings showed that an overwhelming (73%) acknowledged that Electoral Violence/Criminality does affect voter turnout while only an infinitesimal (17%) disagreed. The study recommends urgent action be taken such as re-orientating voters via formal/informal institutions against the cancerous octopus "vote-buying", neutrality of security personnel deployed during the election process along strong legislation against the proliferation of illegal arms currently circulating our society.

Keywords: Electioneering Process, Violence, Criminality, Vote buying, and Poverty

Introduction

Electioneering procedures has been associated with the whole of the actions associated with campaigns and mobilisation the population of a nation for elections. These activities do not rule out the electoral commission conducting the elections (Akubor, 2020). It is one of the most common civic obligation with regulated and codified processes. It is also the periodic choosing of political representation of citizens at different stages of administration by the voters themselves. In an attempt to conceive electioneering, Rasheed (2016), convincingly claimed that it may also be regarded as:

the full or sequence of acts performed by those who have consented to subject themselves to elections, their political parties, organisations, communities, political networks, relatives, acquaintances, and others to favorably influence the expected choice of the voters or choosers.(p. 15)

The foregoing demonstrates that election-related activities comprise all the actions that prompt voters to weigh in on contenders in the polls. By law, the EMB supervises the actions of political groups, notably throughout the process of election-related activities, (Maina, 2020). This involves keeping track of political parties to promote internal democracy, notably during their primaries, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been in charge since 1998 (Asuquo, 2022). Elections have relevance for most individuals only in a democratic framework; election is an intrinsic characteristic of democratic administration because it results in the choice of decision-makers (Khan et al., 2021). Elections are the definitive evaluation of every democratic administration. Nigeria throughout the years has staged multiple elections generally marked by violence. Thus, this quality has

impeded democratic growth and also adversely affected the trustworthiness of election outcomes (Lawal, 2023). According to Blokker (2021), elections are designed to be competitive, open, and equal both fundamentally and systematically, in which the capacity of those who were elected to wield authority to make decisions is regulated according to the rule of law, and typically regulated by a legal framework which focuses on the safeguarding of the liberties and privileges of individuals, and which places boundaries on those in power and on the degree to which the preference of the majority can be exercised to undermine the rights of minorities. Despite the legal structure that controls the election process, there is generally a battle between those who wish to obtain power as opposed to those who are likely to lose power (Cheeseman & Klass 2024). The race generally creates a toga of violence since certain politicians usually seek to cut costs.

Ekiti state, since its creation in 1996 has experienced various elections stretching from local government nomination process, state house of assembly elections, and the governorship elections to both the national assembly elections and the presidential elections (Sule & Sambo 2024). The elections in question had been either calm or tainted by violence. The sort of crime during these elections includes ballot box theft, ballot box stuffing, beating of INEC workers, and vote buying as observed (Shehu & Shehu, 2024). The problem of votes buying reached a height during the July, 14th 2018 gubernatorial elections in the state. It attained a terrifying condition that political leaders expanded their scope of enticement to election officials, security services, poll observers, and the press. But this was later denounced inside and without the state. Vote selling has heightened political corruption since individuals who spent big money to produce electoral success are not selfless benefactors but savvy business people who aim to gain abundant profits via unscrupulous tactics. However, the security services who typically are authorised to remain impartial in the electioneering and throughout the process of polling have not lived up to expectations (Ebrim & Ogunleye, 2024) According to Daly (2022), political actors are not helping things either; the ruling class regarding party allegiance is also in the practise of fomenting violence before during or after elections to cement their political domination.

Objectives of the Study

1. Unravel the major catalyst fostering electoral violence and criminality in Oye-Ekiti.
2. Evaluate the various implications of violence and criminality on the electoral process in Oye-Ekiti
3. Examine the various efforts made by the government towards stemming the rise of electoral violence and criminality in Oye-Ekiti.

Theoretical Framework

This derives its framework from Merton's Social Structure and Anomie theory (1949) a theory of social structure utilised in understanding the difference in the prevalence of deviant conduct throughout the social systems.

Electoral violence, much like other criminal behaviours, may be attributed to numerous causes (Birch et al., 2020). Hence numerous ideas might serve as a framework for this investigation. Merton's Social Structure and Anomie Theory are consequently employed as a theoretical frame of reference. According to Merton (1949), every society defines objectives as well as the methods of reaching those goals. While it is anticipated every member of society should employ culturally appropriate ways to attain the aims, not everyone will have the chance of employing the aforementioned allowed means. Indeed, only those who can access the sanctioned means may legally accomplish the aims as prescribed by society; this class he dubbed conformist. Other groups, dubbed innovatists, ritualists, rebels, and retreatists frequently develop deviant subcultures, adopting or rejecting the aims set by the community and substituting them with their own. Accordingly, as Merton (1949) observed, having developed a deviant and criminal subculture, this group will exist and resort to unlawful tactics such as sponsored electoral violence to attain the objectives set by themselves or the community. In other words, while society sets a goal of work and becomes successful, the young are not permitted to work so they chose to participate in electoral violence typically funded by elected officials, and emerge "successful".

The main notion of Robert K. Merton's anomie theory is that most individuals attempt to accomplish socially acknowledged objectives. A condition of anomie occurs when accessibility to these aspirations is prohibited to large groups of people or individuals. The outcome is aberrant conduct marked by revolt, retreat, ritualism, innovation, and/or conformity. Crime stems largely from creativity (Faizi & Nayebi, 2023)

Methods

The study adopted a quantitative research design using a questionnaire as the quantitative research instrument, the questionnaire was used in collecting the needed primary data from the respondents. The study area for this study is Oye-Ekiti state. Oye is a town and headquarters of Oye Local Government Area in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Oye Local Government Area was carved out from the defunct Ekiti North Local Government on 17 May 1989. According to the 2006 census, the population of people dwelling in Oye local government is 134, 210. All men and women who have reached 18 years and above will form the study population. The choice of men and women from that age range is not far-fetched from the constitutional provision that allows only persons who are 18 years and above to be eligible to partake in the electioneering process. A cluster sample was adopted to select respondents for quantitative methods. The questionnaire was used in collecting data.

The statistical programme for social science was employed in the entering, coding, and analysis of data at univariate levels. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were utilised to portray demographic and background information of respondents.

Findings

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Socio-demographic Characteristics (n=200)

Socio-demographic variables	Frequency (N=200)	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-30	87	43.5
31-40	35	17.5
41-50	37	18.5
51-60	22	11
60 and above	19	9.5
Sex		
Male	63	31.5
Female	137	68.5
Religion		
Christianity	179	89.5
Islamism	16	8
Traditionalist	5	2.5
Marital Status		
Single	71	35.5
Married	123	61.5
Widow/widower	6	3
Educational background		
No formal education	35	17.5
Primary	48	24
Secondary	47	23.5
Tertiary	70	36
Ethnicity		
Yoruba	173	86.5
Igbo	11	5.5
Hausa	16	8
Occupation		
Unemployed	19	9.5
Self-employed	37	18.5
Public/civil servant	32	16
Business/trading	112	56
Average monthly income		
10000-20000	8	4
21000-30000	56	28
31000-40000	62	31
41000-50000	68	34

51000 and above	6	3
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Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 4.1 above shows the percentage distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, religion, marital status, educational background, ethnicity, occupation, and income. On the age ratio of respondents, a substantial (43.5%) of respondents were between the age range 18-30, followed by 18.5% who were within the 41-50 age range, closely followed by 17.5% who were within 31-40, however, respondents who were 60 and above had the least (9.5%) of the respondents. This could imply that respondents in the youthful age strata are more active in the electioneering process of the locale. On the sex status of respondents, the majority (68.5%) were females while a trifling (31.5%) were males. More than two-thirds (80%) of the respondents were Christians, followed faintly (8%) who were Muslims and an infinitesimal (2.5%) who were Traditionalists. This could be attributed to the fact that the location is a Christian-dominated area. A majority (61.5%) were married, 35.5% were singles and 3% were either widows or widowers. The educational background of respondents was close in range (17.5%) had no formal education, followed by 23.5% who had secondary education, closely followed by 24% who had primary education, and 36% who were graduates. The low educational standing could be attributed to the non-availability of staff and students of the University in the locale occasioned by the ASUU strike. The distribution table also reflects that more than three-quarters (86.5%) of respondents were Yoruba, faintly followed by 8% Hausa and 5% Igbo. This could be linked to the fact that the study area is a core Yoruba community. On the occupation ratio of the respondents, the majority (56%) were either in businesses or trading, 18.5% were Self-employed, 16% were public servants and 9.5% were not employed. The distribution table also signalled that the majority (77%) of the respondents earned less than 51000 naira; however, an infinitesimal 3% earned above 51000 naira.

Table 2 Percentage distribution of respondents by the major causes of electoral violence and criminality in Oye-Ekiti

Major causes of electoral violence and criminality	Frequency (N=200)	Total (%)
Result manipulation		
Yes	129	64.5
No	71	35.5
Vote buying		
Yes	157	78.5
No	43	21.5
Hate speech		
Yes	74	37.0
No	126	63.0
Proliferation of small arms and light weapon		
Yes	161	80.5
No	39	19.5
Political will		
Yes	165	82.5
No	35	17.5

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2 above shows the result of the analysis of the major causes of electoral violence and criminality. It shows that the majority 64% of the respondents agreed that result manipulation is a major cause of electoral violence and criminality. Also, 78.5% of the respondents agreed to vote buying was a major cause of electoral violence and criminality, 80% on proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and 82.5% on political will respectively. However, on hate speech as a major cause of electoral violence and criminality 63.0% disapproved, while 60.5% accented to ballot box snatching. This implies that while result manipulation, vote buying, proliferation of small arms, and political will are major causes of electoral violence and criminality hate speech was not.

Table 3 Percentage distribution of respondents by parties involved in electoral violence and criminality in Oye-Ekiti

Who were the parties involved in electoral violence and criminality in Oye-Ekiti	Frequency (N=200)	Total (%)
Youth	152	76.0
Adult male	26	13.0
Adult female	13	6.5
Elderly	8	4.0
Children	1	0.5

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

The finding from Table 3 revealed that the majority (76%) of respondents approved that youths were actively involved in electoral violence and criminality in Oye-Ekiti, faintly followed by 13% adult male, 6.5% adult female, 4.0% elderly, and infinitesimal 0.5% children. This further affirms the earlier result of the socio-demographic age variable that Youth has its highest population (43.5%)

Table 4 Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Does Electoral Violence and Criminality affect voters' Registration and if yes how does electoral violence and criminality affect voters' Registration?

Does Electoral Violence and Criminality affect voter's registration	Frequency (N=200)	Total (%)
Yes	53	26.5
No	147	73.5
if yes how do electoral violence and criminality affect voter registration?		
Low registration of prospective voters	16	30.2
Creation of fear and panic	27	50.0
Voters apathy	6	11.3
Undue political advantage	4	7.6

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 4 revealed that a substantial 73.5% of respondent accented that electoral violence and criminality does not affect voter registration however 26.5% agreed in the study area. The table above shows the responses of respondents on the possible side effects of electoral violence and criminality on voter registration in the study area. The majority 64.5% of respondents agreed to the creation of fear and panic as the highest possible side effect followed by 30.2% who agreed to low registration of prospective voters, 11.3% agreed to have voter apathy with the least 7.5% who believed that the possible side effect of electoral violence and criminality on voters registration to be undue political advantage. This implies that electoral violence and criminality creates fear and panic but does not affect voter's registration.

Table 5 Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Does Electoral Violence and Criminality affect voting and if yes how does electoral Violence and criminality affect voting?

Does Electoral Violence and Criminality affect voting	Frequency (N=200)	Total (%)
Yes	185	92.5
No	15	7.5
if yes how do electoral violence and criminality affect voting?		
Electorate refusal to show up	5	2.7
It questions the credibility of the system	101	54.6
Widespread discouragement	34	18.4
It questions the credibility of the result	45	24.3

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 5 revealed that an overwhelming 92.5% of respondents accented that electoral violence and criminality actively affect voting however 7.5% disagreed in the study area. The table above shows the responses of respondents on the possible side effects of electoral violence and criminality on voting in the study area. The

majority 54.6% of respondents agreed that it questions the credibility of the system as the highest possible side effect, faintly followed by 30.2% who agreed to question the credibility of the result, 18.4% agreed to have widespread discouragement with the least as 7.5% who believed that the possible side effect of electoral violence and criminality on voting to refusal of the electorate to show up. This implies that the resultant effect of electoral violence and criminality on the electioneering process is the questioning of the credibility of the system.

Table 6 Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Does Electoral Violence and Criminality Affect the election result and if yes how does electoral violence and criminality affect the election result?

Does Electoral Violence and Criminality Affect Election Result	Frequency (N=200)	Total (%)
Yes	167	83.5
No	33	16.5
if yes how does electoral violence and criminality affect election result?		
Doctored result	107	64.1
Intimidation of electoral result	26	15.6
Loss of life and property	8	4.8
Voters apathy	26	15.6

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Table 6 revealed that an overwhelming 83.5% of respondents accented that electoral violence and criminality do affect election results however a diminutive 16.5% disagreed in the study area. The table above shows the responses of respondents on the possible side effects of electoral violence and criminality on election results in the study area. The majority 64.1% of respondents agreed that it births doctored results, faintly followed by 15.6% who agreed to generate voter apathy and intimidation of electoral personnel while a trifling 4.8% agreed that electoral violence and criminality affect election results in terms of loss of life and property. This implies that an overwhelming effect of electoral violence and criminality is the presentation and announcement of doctored electoral results.

Table 7 Percentage Distribution of Respondents by the description of the conduct of law enforcement agencies during an election, Are there adequate voter education to the electorate before the election, what happens to persons who disrupt the election, and what happens to offenders arrested for electoral offences

How would you describe the conduct of law enforcement agencies during an election	Frequency (N=200)	Total (%)
They uphold the tenets of election	39	19.5
They turn a blind eye to electoral malpractices	126	63.0
They corroborate the efforts of an electoral offender	35	17.5
Is there adequate voter education for the electorate before the election		
Yes	135	67.5
No	65	32.5
What happens to persons who disrupt the election		
They are arrested by law enforcement agencies	28	14.0
They are left alone to disrupt the election	102	51.0
They overpower law enforcement agents	12	6.0
Law enforcement agents turn a blind eye	58	29.0
What happens to offenders arrested for electoral offences		
They are later released	128	64.0
Offenders face the full wrath of the law	20	10.0
Offenders are shielded by political godfathers	31	15.5
Offenders are given a political appointment	21	10.5

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 7 showcases the responses of respondents on how they described the conduct of law enforcement agencies during an election. A substantial 63.0% of respondents agreed that law enforcement agents turn a blind eye to electoral malpractices, faintly followed by 19.5% who affirmed that they uphold the tenets of an election,

however a trifling 17.5% of respondents agreed to the corroboration of efforts of electoral offenders by law enforcement agents. More so, on the adequateness of voter education to the electorate before an election. The majority 67.5% agreed to the adequateness of voter's education to the electorate before an election. However, a minor 32.5% disagreed with the above. On what happens to persons who disrupt elections, the majority 51.0% noted that electoral offenders are left alone to disrupt the election, followed by 29.0% whom law enforcement agents turn a blind eye to, followed by a trifling 14.0% who are arrested by law enforcement agencies, with the least respondent 6.0% agreeing to the overpowering of law enforcement agents.

In conclusion, on what happens to offenders arrested for electoral offenses, the majority 64.0% of respondents attested that electoral offenders are later released, followed by 15.5% who are shielded by political godfathers, 10.5% are given political appointment, and with the least respondent 10.0% facing the full wrath of the law. This implies that law enforcement agents turn a blind eye to electoral offenders, however, only unconnected offenders face the full wrath of the law.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in Table 2 revealed that the major causes of electoral violence and criminality are political wills (82.5%), the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (80.5%), vote buying (78.5%), and result manipulation (64.5%). However, a majority (78.5%) of respondents disagreed that hate speech was a major cause. This corroborated the research carried out by Adesote et al (2014) on electoral violence and the survival of democracy in Nigeria's fourth republic: a historical perspective that showed that one of the major contributors responsible for electoral violence and criminality was massive electoral irregularities which led to unprecedented electoral violence. The study also examines the implication of violence and criminality on the electoral process in Oye-Ekiti. The result indicated in Table 3 shows that electoral violence and criminality do not affect voter registration with an overwhelming (73.5%) of respondents agreeing to the above. However, Table 5 portrays the disparaging effect (92.5%) of electoral violence and criminality on voting with questioning the credibility of the system having the highest (54.6%) poll. This finding is in line with research conducted by Aniekwe (2014) on civic engagement and its role in mitigating electoral violence in Nigeria: implications for 2015 general elections which showed that if signs and trends are anything to go by, then the stage is set for widespread electoral violence. Already the auguries of electoral violence are evident.

In conclusion, on efforts made by the government towards stemming the rise of electoral violence, alas only infinitesimal (10%) who are unconnected electoral offenders face the full wrath of the law. This is corroborated by the research carried out by Nkwede (2016) on electoral violence and the 2015 general elections in Nigeria: a focus on the ramifications of political development in Ebonyi State which showed that frustration and fair partial judgments lead to the hard option of electoral violence and a large extent, lead to higher violence beyond election.

Conclusion

Without controversy, Tonja (2022) posits that no political violence has ever taken place in Africa without its facilitation on the ground by youths which appears in the form of political thuggery, which had been seen as a criminalization of politics. This study further affirms that youths are veritable tools in kick starting and sustaining electoral violence and criminality in Oye-Ekiti, also Political will and availability of small arms and light weapons has been the major cause of electoral violence and criminality more so, government machinery has hitherto proved ineffective in curbing the menace because her organs are complicit, more so, despite the multi-faceted unmet electoral needs, the neutrality/ non-partisaness of security agencies would go long way in curbing most tendencies.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this research the following recommendations are made:

There is an urgent need for the electoral body to put in place machinery to address the cancerous octopus (vote buying). This could be achieved through re-orientation of the electorate through government designated agencies, coupled with neutrality of security personnel deployed, In addition to conventional education, the government should emphasis the importance civic education with view to making citizen understand the short term long term effect of electoral violence and criminality, the message of civic should be disseminated through the mass media, place of worship and the public space, job creation for the army of the unemployed youths, erring security personnel and electorate during the electioneering process should be brought to book so as to serve as

deterrent to others, strengthening of the judiciary to be fully independent, transparent and autonomous and ultimately a strong legislation should be made on the proliferation of small arms and light weapons as well as making a conscious to retrieve illegal arms in circulation.

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