

The Youth and Management of Electoral Violence in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the dynamics of youth participation in midwifing sustainable democracy amidst the spare of debilitating electoral violence in Rivers State, Nigeria. It further subjects the nature of electoral upheavals to the crucibles of scholarly analysis. From a combination of peace studies and historical perspective, the paper observes that past elections in the political landscape were married by massive irregularities by desperate politicians with a "win -at-cost mentality. The paper adopts the interdisciplinary approach which harnesses the research arsenal of both primary and secondary sources as a viable methodology. The paper recommends a paradigm shift from the colonial praxis which forced leadership on the "subject people" to a pragmatic democratic model that with the inculcation of civic values that will mitigate electoral maladies and mould the psyche of the youth for peaceful political transitions and holistic national development.

Keywords: Youth, Management, Electoral Violence, Political Transition, Rivers State

Introduction

There is an overwhelming nexus between credible election and electoral violence in Nigeria as those who are fraudulently rigged out of electoral contest often result (sic) to violent agitation for redress (Shittu, 2019:86).

Oh God of creation, direct our noble cause
 Guide our leader's right
 Help our youth the truth to know
 In love and honesty to grow
 And living just and true
 Great lofty heights attain
 To build a nation where peace and justice shall reign.

(Nigeria's National Anthem, Stanza 2)

Election is the first step towards establishing any people-oriented government in many parts of the world. This is why politicians, leaders at all levels and their followers usually prioritise every election to make their impact for the success of their parties and associations so as to provide security and welfare for the citizenry. Such participation is also hinged on the periodic nature of elections based on tenures of leaders. As observed by Shittu (2019:71), "electoral contest gives legitimate authorities to elected political leaders to govern while also serving as a transitional renewal of governance process and a competitive avenue for stable polity." The responsibility for ensuring democratic peace starts, but does not end, with the government; it must include collaborative work of civil society organisations, business organisations, private individuals, academic institutions, religious bodies, the media, and the international community.

Over the years, the Nigerian political scene has been characterised by greed, deceit, deception, fraud, intrigue, unbridled corruption and poor human rights and dignity record. In the words of General Muhammadu Buhari (ret'd), "the premium of political power became so exceedingly high that political contestants regarded victory in elections as a matter of life and death struggle, and were determined to capture or retain power by any means". This is why it is argued that electoral contests in Africa are largely characterized by manipulation and fraudulent practices, leading to outright violence and crisis of legitimacy in governance in many countries (Shittu, 2019:76). This possibly suggests why Nigerians are yet to experience electoral integrity, democratic development and good governance.

Consolidating democracy in the Fourth Republic has not been an easy task for the country; various lapses were recorded in the past six elections. Electoral malpractice continues to attain a crisis dimension with each successive election, making the citizens wonder whether a transparent and credible election is not a mirage.

The development has shaken the faith of the majority of Nigerians in their deep-rooted and indestructible desire for a democratic system of government characterised by citizens' participation and good governance. This study is apt and could not have come at a better time than now when the country is warming up for the 2023 general elections. The study rests on the normative democratic peace theory, which posits that mature democracies hardly resort to violence in dealing with problems but the transitional ones do. Essentially, therefore, one of the ingredients of a mature democracy is preference for peaceful settlement of differences. Ghandi said, "non-violence is the greatest power under humanity." This paper is crucial to politicians and the public, particularly the youth, who are always used and exploited by politicians to achieve their selfish interests. This paper will provide enduring solutions to peace and security problems. It will equally help reposition elections in terms of integrity, besides getting citizens' constructive participation for good governance to tackle the challenges and constraints of development.

The planned 2023 general elections have continued to generate tensions in many quarters across Nigeria, with politicians, the electorate and observers within and outside the country expressing their concerns over the peacefulness or otherwise of the electoral process. This has also been exacerbated by the primary elections in many parties, particularly the question of transparency of the processes leading to the emergence of candidates of the parties.

Linking good governance, human security and development and democratic consolidation, this paper examines the benefits and dangers of election in Rivers State and the role of youths in building a nation where peace and justice shall reign.

Conceptual Pathway

1. Civic Responsibility: This is the responsibility that the youth owe their society as patriotic citizens of their country. Such responsibilities are aimed at promoting the image of the country. These are legal responsibilities expected of them in line with the rule of law. In this regard, the interest of the state comes first in every action of the youth.
2. Election: This is a political process through which citizens choose their representatives at any level of government. It is an integral part of democracy.

Elections play a crucial role in the political development of every nation. The electoral process offers the electorate the opportunity to freely decide which political parties and candidates to cast their votes for. Elections are either considered transparent, credible, free and fair or considered to be marred by irregularities and other forms of electoral fraud.

3. Electoral Violence: This refers to the disturbances that usually occur in the build-up to elections, especially among political parties or among party members and their supporters. Such confrontations could manifest in the form of verbal abuse, physical assault, vandalism, issuance of threats to voters and the candidates they support, violent protests, ballot snatching, thuggery, mutilation of electoral materials, and kidnapping of electoral officials and observers, among others.
4. Youth: Youths belong to the social group that are in their early and active years. This is the age group of people between 15 and 35 years, as recognized by African Youth Charter and the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Nwobueze (2021: 105) claims that:

The Niger Delta youth can be categorized into three: The first group question their current socio-economic situation and the disadvantages associated with it and insist that the government must address the destruction of their means of livelihood, unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation and lack of basic social amenities, and infrastructures. While this group is seen as interested in the positive youth development, its strategy can be, but are not always, through violence or civil disruption. The second category includes young people who have been manipulated by corrupt leaders and are typically employed as thugs to exert pressure on the public or political opponents. Hence, in dealing with social and political problems, they use violence, intimidation and extortion to fight for what they believe is rightly theirs. The third category of youth claims to be engaged in civil disobedience to better the circumstances of the Niger Delta but they are often agitating for narrow and selfish reasons. These young people are often involved in sabotaging pipelines, crude oil theft, kidnapping and other vices with the primary goal of extorting money through ransoms and bribes.

In the view of Albert (2009:6):

The young ones are also involved in violence partly because the resources meant for making life more peaceful for them are stolen by their leaders

who are daily implicated in monumental cases of financial corruption and wastage of the country's resources on projects that hardly promote national growth.

5. Transitional Democracy

This refers to states still learning to shift from lawlessness of the past to demonstrating respect for due process. Such a society is marked by residual imperfections of the past but needs to be a "fast learner" in order to give democracy a good name and image. In this context, the maturity or advancement of democracy in a transitional democracy is not necessarily measured by the number of elections conducted over time, but rather the extent to which the democratic process is characterized by joint problem-solving attitudes and behaviours, such as compromise, cooperation, understanding as well as transparency and accountability.

Benefits and Dangers of Elections

Election gives citizens the opportunity to choose representatives that possess integrity. It helps in building legitimacy of government to check abuse of power. Election promotes political education. It also creates opportunities for different jobs. Ad hoc staff are recruited to coordinate and facilitate the election, voting and carrying of electoral materials. Elections create opportunities for reforms and constitutional reviews. It is difficult to have democratic consolidation without elections.

Dangers of election: Most times, some politicians are more interested in campaigning to win the next election without being interested in delivering good governance to the masses. When campaigns are not issue-based, but are characterized by blame game and campaign of calumny, elections become dangerous.

Anti-party activities become more pronounced during election because of the desperation of politicians to win by all means. Vote buying, ballot snatching and rigging are more pronounced when parties are desperate to win by fraudulent means. Living becomes riskier when fatalities occur in the process, like the post-election violence that greeted the outcome of the presidential election in 2011.

Some Salient Issues

The central challenge facing Nigeria is how to promote credible elections, democratic consolidation and good governance. Most of Nigeria's political conflicts are associated with elections resulting in violation of human rights and dignity.

Since 1954, when the British conducted the first major election under the Lyttleton Constitution, there have been series of issues. The post-independence election of 1964 brought about alignment and re-alignment of Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG), and National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) as well as the emergence of Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA).

The 1964 election marked a watershed in the country's history, as it laid the foundation for the military coup and counter-coup which culminated in the thirty months' Civil War. The military held sway until Nigerians went to the polls in 1979 to elect their representatives. This experiment was truncated in 1983 by a military coup. This was followed by two (2) other coups in 1985 and 1993 and several failed ones in between. Another attempt at democracy in 1993 did not yield any result, as the presidential election was annulled by the military.

Successive military regimes in Nigeria have paid only lip service to the concept of national integration: many of their policies tended to deepen inter-group tensions and suspicions. This is the root cause of the Jos crisis, the Boko Haram insurgency, the Niger Delta crisis, ethnic militias, ethno-religious violence/conflict, corruption, crime and conflict, cross-border crisis and gender issues.

Lives and property are still being lost in most parts of the country on account of political, ethnic and religious differences. There have been communal initiatives or inter-ethnic/inter-religious dialogues and networks as well as official national intervention projects aimed at promoting healthy working relationship between people from different cultural backgrounds in various parts of Nigeria. The official government policies in this regard include the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC), the Unity School System, the Federal Character Policy, and provision and maintenance of federal road infrastructure. However, these have not been able to prevent, manage and transform inter-ethnic, religious and electoral extremism and violence in Nigeria.

The unsuccessful attempts at conducting credible elections have thrown up a number of security and development challenges which are still plaguing the nation. These include cultism, militancy and robbery in the South-South and South-East, sectarian violence in the North, and thuggery in the South-West. These problems largely emanated from the leadership and followership crisis that has been plaguing the nation since 1914. Abuse of the constitution, political violence and hijack of the electoral process by those with instruments of violence have deprived Nigerians the benefits of elections that would lead

to building legitimacy of government to check abuse of power, leading to security and development.

Where the Nation Is

Revisiting the past will show that conducting elections in Nigeria has always been a difficult task, as a result of massive irregularities, dubious actions of desperate politicians and poor electoral reform. One of the major causes of electoral conflict and electoral malpractice in Nigeria is the win-at-all-cost disposition of most politicians. Owing to such a mindset, rules and regulations guiding the conduct of elections are discarded, paving the way for thuggery, snatching of ballot boxes, outright manipulation of election results, as well as lack of transparency and integrity. This has resulted in promotion of unqualified persons to positions of authority.

Repositioning of election to manifest integrity and good governance is frustrated by many factors. Prominent among them are incessant political killings and communal conflicts, violent ethno-religious and communal conflicts, unconstitutional interruptions through flawed electoral processes and upsurge in deadly clashes among various political parties, and ethnic and religious bias. Others are ignorance of and apathy towards electoral matters on the part of the electorate, authoritarian disposition of the elite, pervasive corruption in the polity, lawlessness and insecurity.

Sources and Nature of Electoral Violence

Electoral violence in Nigeria has been attributed to a number of factors, including the following:

- i Availability of an army of unemployable and unemployed youths, which provides a ready tool for unscrupulous politicians to recruit as thugs;
- ii Non-review of obsolete laws to facilitate prosecution of electoral offenders;
- iii Non-enforcement of extant laws on electoral violence;
- iv Proliferation of small arms and the attendant militarization of society;
- v Bad governance and depression;
- vi Elite rascality, impunity, and win-at-all-cost disposition of Nigerian politicians;
- vii The philosophy of winner takes it all;
- viii Voter apathy and ignorance of the political process;
- ix Authoritarian disposition;
- x Lack of transparency and integrity;
- xi Use of money to compromise security and electoral officers;
- xii Vote selling and buying.
- xiii Lawlessness and fear of insecurity;

- xiv Fraudulent voters' registration and conduct of elections;
- xv Widespread electoral malpractices, thuggery and politically-motivated assassination;
- xvi Reactivation of militants' network of terror to upstage political opponents;
- xvii Intra- and inter-party squabbles;
- xviii Ethno-religion consideration;
- xix Non-conformity with standard electoral outcomes;
- xx Weak state institutions;
- xxi Deliberate exclusion of women from Nigerian politics; and
- xxii Social vices and youth restiveness.
- xxiii Lack of trust and confidence on the judiciary arising from judicial rascality, delay in administration of justice, questionable, bad and doubtful pronouncements/judgements.

New threats include poor human development, insurgency and religious extremism, organised crime, and international terrorism.

The Role of Youths in the Actualization of Peaceful Electoral Process

Every state that desires peaceful transition requires youths who eschew violence, especially during elections. This will enhance the march towards consolidation of democracy and good governance. Nigeria's political history since the 1950s has recorded series of marred elections, leading to disputed election results. Since 1999, Nigeria has witnessed different levels of openness and transparency in the democratic process. The year 2011 has been significant in the history of Nigeria because it has seen the nation as a whole go through a number of elections to choose leaders at federal and state levels. Evidence of electoral fraud is important for aggrieved candidates and political parties cannot be overemphasized.

Any election that ignores the strategic roles of the youths, negative or positive, is at risk of being marred by violence. Since the Fourth Republic, Rivers State has witnessed numerous instances of electoral violence with different fatalities that revealed youth involvement in violence. Generally, there is hardly any election in which young people are not involved. The youth must realize that getting engaged in violence during elections makes youth participation negative. It equally portrays the youth as crisis agent and gives selfish politicians the notion that the youth can be cheaply recruited into anarchy whenever politicians' interests are threatened.

The youth must be taught that a transparent, free, fair and credible election remains the beauty of democracy. This is important for them to appreciate the significance of youth pilot projects ahead of elections in Rivers State and beyond. Civic education for election should focus on one of the greatest advantages of a transparent and credible periodic election, which is the fact that it compels elected political officers to be accountable to the electorate. They should not be violently influenced to heat up the polity. The practice of citizens voting out incumbent governments whose policies, programmes and projects run counter to the people's expectations, aspirations and wishes has not solidly gained recognition because of the nature of the nation's electoral system.

The paper adopts the following approach to youth programmes outlined by Bello (2019:25):

- a. Pursue youth programmes across a broad spectrum of objectives
- b. Focus on youth development and empowerment;
- c. Ensure youth engagement in the civic process;
- d. Engage in academic enrichment and mentoring through after school programmes;
- e. Make youth programmes more accessible and preventing youth delinquency and substance abuse;
- f. Establish a taskforce to study the effects of mentoring youths in the juvenile justice system;
- g. After school practical experiments, produce comprehensive dropout-prevention and -recovery programmes;
- h. Create a mechanism to fund delinquency-prevention and -intervention programmes;
- i. Form youth organizations, particularly those that are community-based, and provide substantial benefit to them;
- j. Establish a healthy mentoring relationship and empower youths in policy-making;
- k. Create a youth-development fund to generate grants to community-based youth programmes that focus on youth development;
- l. Youth council should offer advice on matters of policy and include young people in decision-making;
- m. Engage youths in the civic and political process;
- n. Create a commission to study the scope and quality of citizenship education;
- o. Support creative and aggressive implementation of activities to get young people involved in the electoral process; and
- p. Create an after-school committee to identify best practices.

When youths realize that transparent, free, fair and credible elections are capable of making leaders to remain accountable through transparency and purposeful governance, they will avoid violence in elections.

In this era of ethnically-charged political landscape, the youth could prevent unnecessary tensions in the electoral process by avoiding any form of hate speech before, during and after elections. Identifying with political parties should not make them to indulge in hate speech. If campaigns of parties online and offline are carried out with hate speech and actions that divide the country, the threat of violence will be imminent. Political opponents deserve the respect of the youth no matter their manifestoes or whether they conflict with those of the parties of their choice. Since the country's general elections in 2023 will be transitional at certain levels, the threat of hate speech and character assassination needs to be prevented. Also, having had a particular party govern Nigeria for eight years, the probability of opposition parties being eager to capture power in 2023 could exist, and that is why the role of the youth is critical in building a nation where peace and justice reign.

Youth Advocacy against Vote Buying and Thuggery for Peaceful 2023 Polls

The quest for votes and the appeal to primordial divisive sentiments by politicians during elections work against the success of elections in Nigeria. According to Aloysius-Michaels (2006:174):

The 2003 general elections where vote stuffing and writing of election results ahead of elections, and use of law enforcement agencies to commit electoral fraud had further institutionalized political jobbers, prostitutes, criminals and miscreants whose activities in office have further undermined democratic principles and entrenched cheating, sharp practices and corruption which the present administration 'claim' to be fighting. No meaningful results can be achieved unless the products of this monumental criminality are flushed out from top to bottom.

The above view is a true reflection of the 2011 general elections, which were also characterized by thuggery, ballot snatching, under-age voting, multiple registration and apathy. In fact, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) admitted that only 35% of registered voters participated in the elections.

Dzurgba (2008) asserts that politicians buy votes with money and goods. They bribe electoral officials so that they will condone any form of election rigging, including the use of thugs and militias to intimidate, harass and assassinate political opponents. At the time

of elections, politicians and electoral officials engage in electoral conspiracy, intrigues, manoeuvres and manipulation of the opponents and voters.

According to Aluko (2009), the 2007 elections were not in any way different from their predecessors. Even Human Rights Watch also described the 2007 elections as the worst in Nigerian history. Elected officials and government agencies charged with the responsibility of ensuring the credibility of polls reduced the elections to a violent and fraud-riddled farce. Across most parts of the country, armed gangs, in the employ of politicians raided polling stations and carried off ballot boxes. Electoral officials reported massive turnout figures in areas where no voting took place at all. In many areas, ballot boxes were openly stuffed or results fabricated (HRW, 2007). The final results bore little resemblance to the realities reported by all credible election observers, domestic and foreign, but the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reported a landslide victory for the People's Democratic Party (PDP) (HRW, 2007).

Prebendalism, as it applies to Nigeria, manifests more in the manner of acquisition of state power and use of same to allocate values and dispense favour (Igwe, 2002). This portrays a political system that encourages corruption and outright criminality. Dzurgba (2008: 36) opines that:

During elections, political leaders turn their personal homes into polling units and multiple voting is done there under the supervision of the prominent politicians across Local Government Areas and the 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. A deliberate attempt is made to omit the names of rival groups from electoral register while some communities are prevented from voting by either late arrival of electoral materials and officers or destruction of electoral materials such as ballot boxes and voting cards. Political thugs are organized and paid to snatch ballot boxes and voting cards with which they run to unknown destinations. This is done when an opposition party appears to be winning at certain polling units. The votes and figures are thereafter swapped between the two opposing political parties. The figures of the election results are altered in favour of the candidates for whom elections are being rigged. In some cases, election results are cancelled in a number of polling units in order to prevent certain candidates from winning. .

The above scenarios require the attention of youths in the interest of Rivers State and Nigeria, at large. The issue of multiple registrations of voters is a major source of concern

in the electoral process. Although some scholars and observers noted that there was a significant shift from what was experienced in the 2003 and 2007 elections, the report released by INEC showed that 73, 528, 040 voters were registered for the 2011 general elections and there were 870, 612 multiple registrations (*The Nation*, 2011, May 3). The youth are not expected to indulge in multiple registrations of voters to prevent violence. This is because, with multiple registrations, the temptation of engaging in thuggery and rigging will be difficult to avoid.

Positive Actions by Youths Ahead of the 2023 Polls

The overview of past elections in Nigeria revealed that the evolution of a truly representative government properly elected by the people and answerable to the people has been aborted by anti-democratic forces masquerading as true democrats, especially at the apex level of government in Nigeria. For how long would well-meaning individuals sit back and watch the cabal destroy the nation? The youth can only protect their future by not giving in to the demands of few selfish individuals parading themselves as the saviours of the people.

The youth need to protect their freedom by identifying leaders that are ready to protect the interest of the majority of the citizens and actively participating in the electoral process. They should recognise their real strength, which is the voter's card. They should participate actively in determining who represents them at all levels of government.

The youth ought to identify men and women that have good track records, either in the private or public sector, who must have distinguished themselves. They should motivate such people by giving them the support to participate in active politics and make it less of contestation of desperate individuals. Failure to attract men and women of integrity and goodwill into public offices makes public offices the preserve for the mediocre political elite, who are mere rulers of men, with questionable character.

The sudden philanthropists and fraudsters who suddenly emerge on the scene during their electioneering campaigns to dole out bags of rice, salt, cows and money to associations, unions, community leaders, churches and allied organisations can hardly serve the interest of the people if elected. It is the civic duty of youths to advocate a corruption-free electoral process. They should emphasise that, whether victorious or not, any politicians paying for votes risks wasting his/her funds. If such politicians get to know that there would be no opportunity for them to recoup their expenses after elections, their focus of gaining power will centre on good governance, people-focused projects and significant transformation. Through this approach, political representation will no longer

be seen as a gold mine, but rather as an avenue for men and women of integrity to prove their worth and render selfless service to the country.

It is better for the youth to use their youthfulness to cooperate with INEC and offer any technical and professional contribution rather than engaging in election violence. Doing this could also position them to monitor the processes and function as election observers at various levels. With this development, the youth will be solution providers instead of spoilers.

As Rivers State and other states prepare for the general elections, sensitizing youths against all forms of election violence is imperative. This will make Rivers State and the entire country experience free, fair and credible elections in 2023, which will turn the transitional democracy into a mature and consolidated democracy. This is achievable where all stakeholders in the multi-track spectrum collaboratively develop a clear institutional framework for provision of security that integrates security and development policy.

Defining and rethinking peace and security systems in transitional democracy in contemporary Nigeria will require new directions of exploring the necessity and effectiveness of peacebuilding education in curbing social vices and youth restiveness. Promoting the comfort of everyone concerned remains a sustainable approach achievable when people seek common ground to create and guard sustainable peace and development (Nwobueze, 2021).

Conclusion

Democracy in Nigeria has come a long way and has evolved over three decades. Consequently, it is not fair to the country's state-building journey to describe democracy as nascent in 2022. This is why the development of Nigeria's democracy greatly depends on the level of transparency and people-oriented efforts in the electoral process. This demands effective implementation of standard procedures to discourage any form of abuse that could motivate electoral violence. Nigeria's electoral history has recorded series of electoral violence owing to struggle for power and desperation for victory. Some politicians desire this fraudulently, thereby recruiting the youth to manipulate votes where election has not taken place. This is a criminal act against the state they desire to govern; they forget that governance promotes transparency and equity to safeguard the nation's constitution.

The root causes of setbacks in Nigeria's electoral system should be diagnosed and given timely attention. Therefore, this paper submits that the idea of might is right and the

colonial mentality of forcing rulers on the people must be expunged from the mindsets of the current leadership class in order to discourage the manipulations that fuel violence in the electoral process. To this end, the youth can assist by not supporting the leadership class to replicate a trend set by the colonial administrators, who created and left a legacy of determining in advance to whom power will be handed over, after which they set out to manipulate the factors necessary for the realization of the predetermined objective. They used questionable means that negated the spirit of well-being and fairness.

The freeness and fairness level of the elections in 2023 will be determined by the ability of the youth to take up the responsibility of prioritizing peacefulness as their civic duty. They need to stop and discourage any politicians attempting to influence their conscience.

The peace education that youths need urgently to make the 2023 elections successful involves engaging in reorientation programmes by the National Orientation Agency and various media organizations, stressing that election is not synonymous with combat, but a peaceful transition mechanism. Such training also needs to consider areas that are hotspots of electoral violence. The peace education must be an avenue to address the transparency needs of all candidates and their supporters. This will make the election results acceptable to them and they will embrace defeat as not a loss of existence and relevance but an opportunity for them to collaborate with the winners of all the levels of election.

The youth are expected to use their peace education skills to advocate peace during the elections rather than soliciting votes with financial resources to influence the choices of the electorate. Such move will make it possible for them to congratulate the winners after the announcement of results. Also, the Independent National Electoral Commission should note that discouraging electoral fraud could convince the electorate and youths in particular to accept the results. The commission needs to recruit credible people to conduct the voter's registration exercise and the general elections in order to reduce the possibility of aggrieved parties resorting to violence.

The stability of the country depends on the ability of stakeholders to put into consideration the need to ensure credibility of the electoral system. The Federal Government must, therefore, make priority the achievement of a transparent electoral system. Instead of engaging in violence, politicians and their supporters should allow the election petition tribunals to do their jobs without any threat of violence.

Ensuring credible elections, democratic consolidation and good governance in Nigeria requires giving Nigerians the opportunity to elect representatives of trust and integrity. .

The political class must brace up for transparency and integrity if Nigeria and Nigerians are to experience democratic peace. The judiciary has a responsibility to discharge its constitutional mandate to aid law, justice and peace. "We must adopt peace as a way of life if we are to manage the turbulent nature of Rivers, where metaphorically Rivers State derived its name" (Nwobueze, 2022:218). Community leaders and religious bodies should also be sensitized on the need to educate their people to eschew violence during election and imbibe the democratic culture.

Free and fair elections in a state depend on two related factors: the structures and process of elections. The structures refer to the institutions and political structure. These include an independent/neutral electoral body, law enforcement agencies and a virile and free press. These structures or agencies must be seen to be autonomous and impartial in the roles they play in monitoring the movement of electoral materials, monitoring of the movement of ballot boxes to the collation centres, recording of collated results and post-election processes. The processes of election include the precepts, procedures and social values which govern elections. Social values encompass the behavioural dispositions of the political elite.

Elections are potent tools for diffusing conflict. It is in the light of this that election can be rightly viewed as a national security issue. Security is pervasive in this process and can affect both the actual and perceived legitimacy of the electoral outcome. An equitably secure environment for electoral participants is fundamental to their engagement with the process and, by extension, the goal of the election. Whether or not an election lifts a conflict out of violence or generates conflict is strongly influenced by the integration of effective security into the electoral process.

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