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Peace Accord And Electioneering in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study applied constructivist theory, which emphasised the role of shared ideas, norms, and identities in influencing political behaviour, to examine how peace accords affected Nigeria's electioneering process. To prevent electoral violence and guarantee peaceful elections, the main goal was to investigate how these social constructions impacted the formulation and execution of peace agreements. The research, which focused on the Abuja Peace Accord, used a qualitative and quantitative technique and included case studies of the 2015 and 2019 elections. Document analysis, political actor interviews, and media content analysis were all part of the data collection process. The results showed that the identities and ideologies of political actors had a substantial impact on the socio-political setting of Nigeria, where peace accords were firmly anchored. The research offered empirical perspectives and policy suggestions to enhance the function of peace agreements in fostering democratic stability in Nigeria, among which included the fact that candidates agreed to have a constructive discourse, forge relationships across party lines, and explore areas of mutual interest by cooperating to negotiate terms of peaceful conduct during the election campaign. The views canvassed by Plato over two thousand years ago are, by and large, still relevant in contemporary statecraft.

Keywords

Constructivism, Nigeria, peace accords, electioneering

Introduction

A formal agreement to halt hostilities and establish peace between two or more parties involved in a conflict is called a peace accord, sometimes referred to as a peace agreement or peace treaty, (John, 2015). Peace agreements are essential for ending hostilities and fostering stability within nations or regions. These agreements frequently include provisions for a ceasefire, disarmament procedures, power-sharing arrangements, grievance procedures, and systems for resolving disputes and fostering reconciliation. They also often specify the terms and conditions for terminating the conflict, (John, 2015). There are a number of ways to achieve a peace agreement, including direct talks between the parties involved in the dispute, diplomatic initiatives by international organizations, and negotiations led by outside mediators. All parties concerned pledge to work toward enduring peace and stability when they sign a peace pact, (Sarah, 2018). However, putting peace accords into action may be difficult and complex, requiring consistent work to foster trust, deal with the underlying problems that caused the conflict, and guarantee that the conditions of the agreement are followed. A prominent illustration of a

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prosperous peace agreement is the Good Friday Agreement, which ended decades of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland and was signed in 1998, (Sarah, 2018). The accord demilitarized border areas, instituted institutions to foster cooperation and reconciliation within the region, and established power-sharing mechanisms between unionist and nationalist groups. Notwithstanding obstacles encountered during its execution, the Good Friday Agreement has played a crucial role in preserving tranquility within Northern Ireland. The 1978 Camp David Accords, which Israel and Egypt concluded with US mediation, are another noteworthy example. Israel's departure from the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt's acknowledgement of Israel's right to exist were two outcomes of the accords that brought about the normalization of relations between the two nations, (Center, 2017). Despite continued tensions in the Middle East, the Camp David Accords are still seen as a historic success in diplomatic relations between the parties. Peace agreements are essential for ending hostilities and promoting long-term harmony between the opposing sides. To guarantee long-term stability and reconciliation, these agreements need to be carefully negotiated, put into action, and closely observed. Despite potential difficulties in the aftermath of a conflict, effective peace agreements show that negotiation and compromise may result in amicable settlements even in protracted disputes.

Nigeria, a nation rich in natural and human resources, has struggled for decades with social unrest and political instability. Negotiating and implementing peace agreements has proven to be a reoccurring problem throughout its democratic journey, especially during electioneering procedures. In layman's words, democracy is a form of governance in which the people's rights are safeguarded by the law and they are granted the authority to engage in their government directly or through elected representatives (Ikpe, 2000). It is a well-established truth that the electoral process plays a significant role in determining democracy by giving voters the institutional framework they need to select representatives in a free, fair, and competitive election. However, politics in Nigeria is a very serious business in which the victor takes all and the vanquished loses all. The contending member of the political class employs every tactic under the sun to secure election victory because of the priceless prize that is at risk. These tactics include vote-buying, intimidation of opponents, bribery, rigging, thuggery, stealing ballot boxes, long and drawn-out legal fights resulting from election results, and reluctance to accept loss (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011). Election administration and procedure have the power to either promote or inhibit individual involvement. Voters can feel confident that their vote will matter in deciding the outcome of the election when there is a free and fair electoral process. Put differently, his view of a just process raises the political efficacy and engagement of the electorate. However, the desire to vote will be diminished if voters think that the outcome of the election will be tampered with in order to benefit a specific person or party (Ikpe, 2000). For instance, Omoyele Sowore, during a live interview on their morning TV show, on Thursday, September 29, 2022, whether the Kiribo-born activist-turned politician would be attending the National Peace Committee slated for later that day, in Abuja the federal capital territory? He responded, saying: "Yes, even though, I have no reservation about it", as to what necessitates such, when the country is not at war. He further clarified the importance of peace accord in Nigeria especially when it comes to election when affirmed that "I know that electoral contest in Nigeria, at any level, are much fiercer than being at war" this further strengthened the belief that the main contenders should follow the rules in order to guarantee a peaceful election. In order to do this, the presidential and gubernatorial candidates signed peace accords or agreements with the express purpose of abstaining from violence prior to, during, and following elections. Nigeria has seen many occasions in recent memory when agreements to end political hostilities and guarantee peaceful elections were mediated. For example, the Abuja Peace Accord, which brought together presidential candidates to pledge nonviolence and accept the results of the polls, was signed in the run-up to the 2015 general elections. The National Peace Accord was adopted in 2019 and 2023, indicating a continuous understanding of the significance of peaceful election procedures. But even with these peace agreements in place, Nigeria still faces problems with voter intimidation, election violence, and other irregularities. This calls into doubt the effectiveness of these agreements and the degree to which political players really follow them. Some contend that peace deals are symbolic acts that advance harmony and peace, while others see them as ineffective PR gimmicks. The weak

institutional and legal structures in place to hold signatories accountable for violating peace agreements are cited by critics. Further complicating the execution of peace agreements are the predominance of ethno-religious conflicts, economic disparity, and rivalry for political power. These agreements' success is seriously hampered by the underlying structural problems with Nigeria's democratic system, notwithstanding the good intentions behind them. Furthermore, the time and environment in which peace agreements are negotiated affect how successful they are. For example, General Abdulsalami Abubakar (ret'd), contend that rather than being proactively started to promote true reconciliation and political stability, peace treaties sometimes arise as reactionary measures in response to increasing violence or external pressure. Studying Nigerian electioneering and peace deals offers important insights into the challenges of democratization and conflict settlement in the nation. With the ultimate objective of promoting lasting peace and prosperity, this research attempts to contribute to a greater knowledge of the potential and problems inherent in Nigeria's democratic process by critically assessing the opinions and experiences of diverse stakeholders. To give an explicit explanation of the issue under discussion, the study shall provide among others, the conceptual reviews of terms related to the discourse, review of election in Nigeria, election violence in Nigeria with major focus on some hot zones over the years within the era of the regime of peace accord with a view of justifying whether or not the development has been effective or not. The research work will conclude its finding by providing some workable recommendation on how the peace accord can reduce electoral violence in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

According to eminent peacebuilding expert John Paul Lederach (2004), a peace pact is "a formal agreement between parties in conflict to end hostilities and work towards a peaceful resolution of their differences." Lederach draws attention to the formal character of these agreements, emphasizing their function in formalizing pledges and creating a framework for peacemaking after a war. In a similar vein, the renowned peace and conflict studies scholar Johan Galtung characterizes a peace pact as "a negotiated settlement between conflicting parties aimed at resolving the underlying causes of the conflict and establishing sustainable peace." Galtung's concept highlights how comprehensive peace agreements are, going beyond a simple end to hostilities to address underlying issues and advance long-term stability. Galtung, in 1996 Oliver P. Richmond and other academics, on the other hand, provide a more complex interpretation of peace treaties, contending that they are "social processes that involve dialogue, negotiation, and compromise" rather than merely legal papers. Richmond's viewpoint emphasizes the dynamic and iterative character of peace agreements, stressing the significance of local ownership, inclusion, and participation in their development and execution. Oliver (2009). Additionally, academics like Lisa Schirch stress the importance of peace agreements in resolving cultural conflicts, socioeconomic disparities, and political grievances. Schirch describes a peace deal as "a comprehensive agreement that addresses the structural, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions of conflict, with a focus on promoting justice, reconciliation, and sustainable development." This viewpoint emphasizes the need for a comprehensive strategy to establish long-term peace and stability. Schirch (2008). According to Barnes (2017), Trejo, and Ley (2018), there is frequently a correlation between criminal and electoral violence. It is crucial to remember that, first, criminal gangs occasionally target electoral violence on behalf of political players looking to evade identification, and, second, criminal actors frequently depend on protection arrangements with political elites. Elections may put these deals in jeopardy, which might lead to violent electoral rivalry between criminal players (Birch, Ducker, and Hogland, 2020). More broadly, actions or threats of coercion, intimidation, or bodily injury committed to effect an electoral process or that originates in the context of political competition are defined as election-related violence by UNDP (2009).

The purpose of a peace deal is to cease political or electoral violence in a nation and to establish the norms, processes, and tools necessary to make this happen (www.peaceagreements.org, 2019). The International Relations and Security Network Report (IRSNR), published in 2010, defines a peace accord

or agreement as a negotiated contract with a variety of purposes, all aimed at persuading disputing parties to pursue a path toward peace, which will be crucial to the advancement of society (www.inernijenja.org, 2019). An official agreement to halt hostilities or bring about peace is called a peace deal. Accordingly, political parties in Nigeria committed to holding peaceful elections in 2015, 2019 and 2023 by signing a peace treaty. The signed paper contains the following details of the agreement that the parties committed to:

- To conduct issue-based campaigns at the federal, state, and local levels of government; while doing so, we promise to abstain from any campaigns that use ethnic or tribal profiling or religious provocation, whether conducted by us directly or by any agents working on our behalf.
- To abstain from making or permitting to be made, before, during, or after the elections, any public remarks, declarations, or speeches that might incite violence in any way in our names or the names of our party.
- should pledge themselves and their political parties to a National Peace Committee composed of famous politicians, traditional and religious leaders, to oversee the pact's observance.
- To support all the institutions of government including INEC and security agencies to act and be seen to act with impartiality.
- must vehemently and openly denounce divisive remarks and condemn any instances of electoral violence, whether they are committed by opponents or supporters (Daniel Ugwu).

Theoretical Framework

Political unrest and violence have plagued Nigeria's electioneering process. Peace agreements have been put into place to tackle these issues and guarantee orderly handovers of power. Constructivism theory, which focuses on the social constructions that influence political conduct, provides a perspective through which to examine these agreements. We can have a better understanding of the intricacies of peace agreements in Nigeria's political environment by looking at constructivist theory. In political science and international relations, constructivism theory is most closely linked to Alexander Wendt, who made substantial contributions to its development with his 1999 publication of "Social Theory of International Politics," a foundational work. Wendt's constructivism emphasizes the social production of both local and international political realities, setting it apart from conventional theories like liberalism and realism. According to Wendt's constructivism, ideational rather than material structures predominate when forming the political environment. This viewpoint comprises a number of important claims:

Identity and Interests: Political actors' identities are constructed through social interactions, which in turn shape their interests and behaviours. These identities are not inherent but are formed through continuous social processes.

Social Construction of Reality: Political reality is not objective but is constructed through shared ideas, beliefs, and norms. What societies perceive as "real" is the product of social consensus.

Role of Norms and Ideas: Norms, beliefs, and ideas significantly influence the actions and decisions of political actors. These elements shape how actors perceive their interests and guide their behaviour.

Mutual Constitution of Agents and Structures: There is a dynamic interplay between agents (such as states and individuals) and structures (such as international norms and political institutions). Agents and structures are mutually constitutive, meaning they continuously shape and reshape each other, (Wendt, 1999).

Peace Accord and Electioneering Process in Nigeria

Applying constructivism to the issue of peace accords in Nigeria's electioneering process allows for a deeper understanding of how shared beliefs and norms influence political behaviour and the overall election environment.

Identity and Interests in Nigerian Politics

Political actors' identities in Nigeria are shaped by historical, cultural, and social interactions. These players include politicians, political parties, and electoral authorities. Their interests and actions during elections are greatly influenced by these identities. For example, some politicians may support peace treaties because they identify as "peacemakers." A good illustration of how a shared goal to guarantee a peaceful election process moulded the identities of important political players is the 2015 Abuja Peace Accord. Their interests were shaped by their identity, which made them resolve to vote peacefully.

Social Construction of Reality in the Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, a peaceful election is not just the absence of violence but also a socially created ideal based on shared values. The voter and political actors agree that elections ought to be free, fair, and peaceful in order for peaceful elections to actually occur. The broad support for peace agreements such as the Abuja Peace Accord is indicative of this common belief. The agreement was more than just a written commitment; it represented everyone's desire for a peaceful election process. The electorate's and political players' conduct is greatly influenced by this societal construction of peaceful elections.

Role of Norms and Ideas in Shaping Electoral Conduct

In the Nigerian setting, norms pertaining to democratic processes and peaceful handovers of power are crucial. The recurrent requests for peace agreements prior to elections demonstrate the creation and maintenance of these standards. An example of how deeply embedded the concept of peaceful elections is in political culture is the Abuja Peace Accord, which was signed prior to the 2015 and 2019 elections. These agreements have played a crucial role in reducing violence and encouraging political actors to take responsibility for one another. By influencing political actors' behaviour during elections, the standards created by these accords foster a culture of peace and democracy.

Mutual Constitution of Agents and Structures in Nigerian Politics

There is an interdependence between the conduct of Nigerian political actors, or agents, and the larger political framework, or structures. Peace agreements set standards and expectations for behaviour during elections, which affects how political actors behave, (Campbell, 2015) These actors have the power to both reinforce and weaken the current political systems at the same time. The 2015 election, which is often regarded as a turning point for Nigerian democracy, showed how important political figures including then-President Goodluck Jonathan and his opponent Muhammadu Buhari reinforced democratic structures and norms by abiding by the peace pact. Their adherence to the peace agreement established a standard for next elections, demonstrating the dynamic interaction between agents and systems. There were many people who were afraid that there might be violence and electoral fraud before the elections. Major political parties responded to these concerns and a joint attempt to guarantee a calm election process by signing the peace accord. The agreement contained pledges to uphold democratic values, accept election outcomes, and refrain from using violence. This agreement resulted from common standards and convictions about the value of nonviolent elections. The peaceful conduct of the 2015 elections and the smooth implementation of the deal demonstrated the influence of social constructions on political behaviour, (Kew, 2016). Additionally, it strengthened Nigeria's democratic institutions by demonstrating how political actors' deeds can have a favourable impact on the larger political system.

Overview of Election in Nigeria

The history of elections in Nigeria has its origin in colonial Nigeria. Nigeria as a country is a British creation. In the year 1884/1885 following the Berlin conference that took place in Germany under the chairmanship of Otto Von Bismarck, where Africa was partitioned amongst the European states, Nigeria was brought under the control of Britain. By 1900, the British government assumed formal administration of Nigeria after terminating her prior-to contract with the Royal Niger Company (RNC) to trade along the Niger area. The first administrator sent to the new colony by the British government was Sir Lord Lugard. Lugard administered the region with a “council” which did not do so much to the political life of the new colony. However, following the merging of the colony of Lagos and the Southern protectorate in 1906, Lord Lugard proceeded to amalgamate the Northern protectorate with the Lagos colony and southern protectorate in 1914, marking the birth of Nigeria as a country. By 1922, the successor of Lord Lugard in Nigeria, Sir Hugh Clifford, for administrative convenience, introduced the first constitution of Nigeria named after him as the “Clifford Constitution of 1922”. Amongst the provisions of the Clifford constitution was the “elective principle” which ushered in a new development in the political history of Nigeria.

This development was “elections”. Elections were first organized and conducted in Nigeria in 1922 by the British colonial government in response to the pressures of the nationalists who were agitating for participation in the colonial administration (Durnii & Joshua, 2014). This first election in the country made provision for four elective positions in the legislative council and it was allocated on the basis of three for Lagos and one for Calabar exempting the northern region. Though the franchise and the elective positions were limited, but the constitution at least brought something tangible that later formed the foundation for the modern Nigerian state. by 1946, the Richard’s constitution which was second in the series of constitutional development in the country modified the voting criteria by dropping requirement for qualification to vote from 100 pounds to 50 pounds per annum. It also saw the enlargement in the aspect of representative seats for Nigerians in the Legislative assembly. The earliest political parties included; Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) led by Herbert Macaulay, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) which was formerly the Lagos Youth Movement (LYM), (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2003). Later parties included; Northern People’s Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG), National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), United Middle-Belt Congress (UMBC), and the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU).

The electioneering trend continued throughout the colonial years in a multi-party system basis till Nigeria got her independence in 1960. The later parties that existed towards Nigeria’s attainment of independence was classified by Udo (2002) as nationalist parties since their major intent was to wrestle power from the colonialists. Those parties were regional in outlook. The major political parties in the first 13 republic were the NCNC, NPC, and AG, while others include UMBC, NEPU among others. The party system in the first republic was still multi-party though with regional parties, and elections were conducted across Nigeria in the year 1964. The first republic ended abruptly as the military seized powers in 1966 and the trend of events that followed lasted till 1979 when the Nigerian second republic was commissioned by the military government headed by General Olusegun Obasanjo as a fulfilment of the Murtala/Obasanjo regime to return the country to civilian rule when they assumed office as military heads of state in 1975. Coming to the second republic, the party system was still multi-party and the political parties then included; National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), Nigerian Advance Party (NAP), and the Nigerian National Congress, (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2003). Elections conducted in the second republic include the 1979 and 1983 elections. By 1984, General Muhammadu Buhari seized powers from Alhaji Musa Shehu Shagari who was the democratic president of Nigeria then. By 1985, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida toppled Buhari’s military government and took control over the reins of government in the country. On assumption of office, Babangida set up the transition move that led to the aborted third republic. The military

government under Babangida decreed two-party system for the third republic and the parties then were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Democratic Party (NDP). The elections that took place in 1993 to produce a new democratic government for Nigeria was annulled by the military government, which led to the constitution of an Interim National Government headed by Earnest Shonekan which lasted for 82 days and was replaced by General Sani Abacha in November 1993. In 1998, General Sani Abacha died in office as the military head of state, and the Supreme Military Council appointed General Abdulsalam Abubakar to head the National Government. In office, Abdulsalam worked towards returning the country to democratic rule with the establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which conducted the 1999 General Elections that brought on board Chief Olusegun Aremu Mathew Obasanjo as the Executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In addition, elections that have been conducted by INEC in the current (fourth) republic are; the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and the 2019 General Elections respectively. Since 1999, the country has maintained a multi-party system with an Open-secret ballot system of election.

In view of the above, elections in Nigeria can be broadly categorized into three via: elections organized by the colonial government in 1922, 1951 and 1959; and those organized by the military regimes in 1979, 1991, 1993 and 1999; and the ones organized by civilian governments in 1964, 1983, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023.

Overview of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Nigeria has experienced tremors from various sorts of violence during its electoral processes ever since gaining independence. As the nation gets ready for further elections later in the year, the trends are still evident. Since Nigeria's independence, almost all of its general elections have been marred by violent incidents. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the fury that followed the first election held in 1964–1965 took more than 200 lives, mostly in the Southwest. Following the 1983 election, the nation also saw "massive post-election violence," which resulted in several fatalities and property damage. Not even the 1993 presidential election, which was generally regarded as the freest in the nation's history and devoid of any significant violent incidents, ended with a perfect record. A surge of demonstrations and public uproar followed the military regime led by Ibrahim Babangida's annulment of it. The Campaign for Democracy (CD), led at the time by Beko Ransom-Kuti, calculated that more than a hundred innocent protestors and bystanders were shot and killed by security personnel who were purportedly attempting to quell the violent offshoot of the July demonstrations.

Table 1: Lives Lost to Election Violence in Nigeria Since Independence

YEAR	NO OF DEATH
1964/65	200
1993	100
1999	80
2003	100
2003	100

2007	300
2011	800
2015	100
2019	150
2023	238

Source: Kunle Adebajo (2023)

Since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999, not much has changed either. After claims of election fraud in 1999, which gave Olusegun Obasanjo the presidency, there was a great deal of violence. About 80 individuals are said to have perished. Comparably, federal and state elections in 2003 resulted in at least 100 deaths from violent occurrences; four years later, over 300 people died as a result of political violence, with pre-election violence accounting for over 70 of those deaths. Once more, in 2011, the greatest post-election violence in the nation's political history resulted in at least 800 deaths during three days of rioting in 12 states throughout northern Nigeria. Following the re-election of incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta in the south and the candidate for the ruling People's Democratic Party, enormous protests by followers of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim from the Congress for Progressive Change, sparked the violence, according to Human Rights Watch. According to the International Crisis Group, over 100 individuals died before, during, and after the 2015 general elections. Lastly, the European Union Election Observation Mission reported that violence associated with the 2019 national elections resulted in the deaths of around 150 persons. Fingers have been pointed at a number of issues in an attempt to explain why something that should be the hallmark of democracy meets such persistent difficulties. They include poor leadership, ineffectual security forces, destitution and joblessness, power abuse, political estrangement, an atmosphere of impunity, a "winner-take-all" political structure, and the widespread usage of small guns. The Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) has provided us with documentation efforts that have allowed us to examine the pattern of political and electoral violence in the nation more thoroughly from 2014 to the present. Asch Harwood, the founder of NST and research associate at the Council on Foreign Relations, revealed that just before the 2015 national elections, the tracker's scope was broadened to cover election-related violence.

Table 2: Trends of Election Violence in Nigeria

YEAR	KILLED	KIDNAPPED
2014	35	100
2016	30	10
2018	15	150

2020	12	25
2022	29	32

Source: Kunle Adebajo (2023)

Naturally, the years with the most documented deaths were those with general elections in 2015 and 2019. However, the NST dataset has an intriguing feature in that it gathers data outside of the general elections. Because of the way Nigerian politics have developed, general elections are held every four years, with gubernatorial elections and other political events occurring in between. Thus, the tracker also records violent acts that occur during certain times. With 25 deaths linked to election violence so far this year, it's almost as horrific as what was documented in 2014. The year that had the fewest occurrences and deaths was 2017, whereas the year that saw the greatest number of killings and kidnappings was 2019, the year that saw Muhammadu Buhari take office for the second time. Naturally, the years with the most documented deaths were those with general elections in 2015 and 2019. However, the NST dataset has an intriguing feature in that it gathers data outside of the general elections. Because of the way Nigerian politics have developed, general elections are held every four years, with gubernatorial elections and other political events occurring in between. Thus, the tracker also records violent acts that occur during certain times. With 25 deaths linked to election violence so far this year, it's almost as horrific as what was documented in 2014. The year that had the fewest occurrences and deaths was 2017, whereas the year that saw the greatest number of killings and kidnappings was 2019, the year that saw Muhammadu Buhari take office for the second time. In Nigeria Between 2014 and 2022, comparing numbers across the different states is another analytic method that may be done using the NST data. The states with the most incidences between 2014 and 2022 were Rivers, Lagos, Kogi, Ondo, and Ekiti, in that order. Once again, the states of Rivers and Lagos had the greatest death toll, followed by Taraba, Bayelsa, Delta, Ebonyi, Kano, and Kogi. In terms of kidnappings, Katsina had the greatest number of victims, followed by Imo, Enugu, Kogi, and Sokoto.

Table 3: Attack on INEC Offices in Nigeria 2019-2021

YEAR	NO OF ATTACKS
2009	9
2020	21
2021	11
2023	50

Source: Kunle Adebajo (2023)

Increased assaults on INEC sites throughout the nation is another form that electoral violence has taken recently. The commission said last year that there were 41 attacks on its offices in 14 states between May 24, 2021, and 2019. These were three incidents involving both arson and vandalism, and twenty occurrences of vandalism. Six of the occurrences were attributed to thuggery during the polls, eleven to

"unknown gunmen" and hoodlums, six to anti-police brutality (End SARS) protestors, and the other instances were attributed to bandits, Boko Haram terrorists, and post-election violence by INEC. The country's Southwest and Southeast regions accounted for the majority of the events. Imo accounted for seven of the instances, Osun for six, Akwa-Ibom for five, and Abia and Cross River for four. Anambra, Bayelsa, Borno, Ebonyi, Enugu, Kaduna, Lagos, Ondo, and Taraba reported the remaining ones. Human Rights Watch has encouraged President Buhari in 2019 to view his return to the top job as a chance to solve the issue, given the persistent pattern of violence that has coincided with Nigeria's general elections. Anietie Ewang, a researcher for HRW Nigeria, said that "Nigerian voters have entrusted Buhari with another opportunity to address the nation's serious human rights problems, including political violence." "He should begin by reorganizing the security forces to guarantee rigorous adherence to human rights norms, as well as swift inquiry and prosecution of individuals genuinely connected to violations."

Violence that Marred the 2023 General Election

Many observers have condemned the February 25th Presidential/National Assembly Elections and the March 18th Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections following the widespread violence and electoral irregularities that accompanied the elections. In fact, some described it as the worst in the history of electoral process in Nigeria. The elections held so much promise with the introduction of technology by the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, which was generally believed would solve the problem of rigging and the assurances by the Commission's chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu that the election results would be transmitted real time to the commission's central server where everybody would have the opportunity to see it.

CROSS RIVER

In Cross River state, an Adhoc staff of INEC, Miss Glory Effiom Essien was hit by a stray bullet after some gunmen opened fire while she was in a boat heading to Bakassi for election duty. The Resident Electoral Commissioner of the Independent National Electoral Commission INEC in Cross River state, Prof. Gabriel Yomere who confirmed the incident said the victim was taken to the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, UCTH, for treatment, thanking God that the bullet didn't touch her spinal cord. Also, more than 50 political thugs at about 2.15 am on Sunday March 19 invaded INEC collation centre for the Ogoja State Constituency disrupting collation of results, vandalized the place, carted away election materials, phones and inflicted injuries on many ward Collation officers. An injured Collation officer Mbube East, Dr Paul Basseyy told Vanguard at the Police Clinic, Ogoja where he was being treated for injuries inflicted on him by the invaders that the thugs also attacked one of his colleagues with heavy stones and planks and prayed, he survived it. The Electoral Officer for Ogoja Local Government Area, Mr Peter Kolo said the hoodlums broke all security barriers to disrupt Collation with the intention to destroy election results. The Ogoja State Constituency Collation Officers, Dr Timothy Ellah of the University of Calabar said he was beaten heavily by thugs who carted away some result sheets while he sustained minor injuries. Prof. John Undie, the Governorship Collation Officers for Ogoja Local Government said every one inside the hall was beaten mercilessly adding that they were lucky to be alive.

KOGI

In Kogi, 101 INEC officials and ad hoc staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC while on their way from Kupa North and South Wards to the Constituency Collation Centre in Lokoja were kidnapped by armed hoodlums at about 2am on Sunday, 19th of March, 2023 at Obajana junction which is less than 20km from the state capital. 99 of the abducted staff were later rescued by the police. Three of the rescued victims who were injured during the rescue operation were evacuated to the Federal Medical centre Lokoja for treatment while two of the abducted staff were yet to be accounted for.

NASARAWA

In Lafia, the Nasarawa State capital, protesters took to streets protesting alleged rigging of the governorship election by INEC in the state. The protest turned violent during which one person was killed and several others injured. The protesters also engaged in acts of vandalism and destruction of public and private property.

KANO

In Kano, the residence of a popular singer and chieftain of the All Progressives Congress, Dauda Rarara was set ablaze by political thugs after the announcement of the gubernatorial election results by INEC. A resident in the area, Malam Yusuf said the thugs invaded the house and started destroying valuables before setting the house on fire.

ADAMAWA

Yola, the Adamawa state capital was in turmoil late on Sunday, March 19 after political thugs and miscreants unleashed terror on the citizens following the stalemate arising from the failure of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC to declare the governorship election results. Trouble began at the Collation Centre at the INEC headquarters moments after the Returning Officer of the poll, Professor Mohammed Mele announced the shift of the declaration of the results to Monday morning at about 1 am. When news of the postponement filtered into the capital city, thugs in their hundreds took over strategic locations to attack innocent citizens and passersby, motorists and other commuters. The hoodlums who were armed with guns and other dangerous weapons burnt disused tyres, trees and sorts on the streets. Politicians, journalists, INEC staff and others at the Collation centre were held hostage at the INEC headquarters as nobody dared to drive out of the premises.

LAGOS

In Aguda, Surulere, Lagos, a woman, Mrs Jennifer Efedu was stabbed on her face by thugs who disrupted the voting process. The political thugs who were armed with dangerous weapons went about snatching ballot boxes, attacking voters and preventing those suspected to be opponents from voting. Sporadic gunshots also erupted in front of the palace of Alamuwo of Kuje Amuwo, Mazamaza, old Ojo Road leaving voters running for dear lives. The thugs ordered the people should leave the polling booths for their safety, warning that they would come back. Many voters could not return to the scene despite assurances from security men who rushed to the scene to restore normalcy. Armed thugs also invaded the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections, polling unit 003 in Bestford/Ganiyu Yusuff Street, Oke-Afa, Ejigbo in Lagos State. The thugs, who brandished the identity tags of a major party, stormed the polling unit and attempted to cart away election materials and ballot boxes and in the process damaged several thumb-printed papers. The rampaging thugs also destroyed chairs and tables used by officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission and attempted to seize the BVAS machine.

BENUE

No fewer than six persons were killed while many were injured in Benue state during the Governorship and State House of Assembly election. Security personnel were said to have shot dead six persons in Gboko area of the State for allegedly snatching ballot boxes. The six persons, who were killed at different locations by the security personnel, stormed polling units to snatch the ballot boxes. In some parts of Agatu and Ukum Local Government Areas of the State, there were reports about disruption of electoral process. Benue State Police Command announced the arrest of 26 suspects for various electoral offences and recovered various arms and ammunition during the elections. The police public relations officer (PPRO) Catherine Anene explained that the suspects were arrested across the state for various offences

including political thuggery and illegal possession of firearms, snatching of ballot boxes and intimidation of voters.

RIVERS

The February 25th Presidential Elections ended up in violence in most parts of Rivers State, as angry youths allegedly protesting against attempts to manipulate the results of the presidential election took to the streets in the late hours of the day. There were sporadic shootings and vandalization of properties and vehicles along the busy Igwuruta-Elele- Airport Road at the Igwuruta axis of the Ikwerre local government area. The angry youths who were shooting sporadically alleged that a prominent politician in Ikwerre local government area carted away ballot boxes at the collation center to frustrate further declaration of results. Three youths suspected to be political thugs were said to have been killed during a clash at Ogbakiri Community in the Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers state. The thugs were allegedly hired by two leading political parties in the community.

EDO

The election violence in Edo State claimed the lives of Festus Idahosa, 33 years old, and late Mrs. Elizabeth Owie, a 43-year-old mother of three. They were killed when political thugs stormed their polling units where they had gone to exercise their civic rights during the Presidential and National Assembly elections in the state.

DELTA

Amid a seeming low turnout and apathy of voters in Delta State during the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections, three persons were reportedly shot dead, and a building was set ablaze in Mosogar, Ethiope West Local Government Area of the state. The two young men were shot dead by military personnel as they allegedly tried to flee a polling unit with snatched ballot boxes. It was gathered that at Amukpe, Sapele, one of the youths lost his hand during a clash in one of the polling units in the area. Another thug who disrupted the polling exercise at Utagaba-Uno in Ndokwa West Local Government Area was also reportedly killed. Some hoodlums also ambushed and snatched voting materials from INEC officials in Tuomo area in Bomadi Local Government Area. Further electoral violence continued as rampaging thugs invaded and destroyed electoral materials, including the BVAS machine, at the Ewerni community in the Ughelli North Local Government Area of the state. The thugs disrupted the exercise in all the polling units in Ewerni. A team of journalists monitoring the elections were prevented from entering the community by the rampaging thugs. Some of the corps members and other electoral officials, who scampered to safety while security agents looked on, were attacked by the thugs, with some sustaining injuries, why about three BVAS machines were smashed. The multiparty system, which has abysmally failed to guarantee good governance and political accountability in Nigeria and across the African continent, is exacerbating existing tensions. This is the reason why Nigeria needs a peace accord in the first place many decades after the imposition of that system. The historical context of Nigeria provides some insights into the reasons behind this phenomenon. From the outset, political parties in Nigeria were not formed on any clear ideology; they were regional and perhaps religiously based and woven around individual politicians who were influential at the time. These politicians organized under different political parties to compete for political power and control of national resources without genuine interest in ensuring good governance (i.e., improving the lives of ordinary people) and accountability. The aims were and remain power and state capture. Such a fierce competition which is largely underpinned by “do or die” ideology and style of politics has led to conflicts (often exacerbated by ethno-regional/religious leanings of the political parties and their supporters), as seen over the years in Nigeria and various parts of Africa. If anything, elections have been a cog in the wheel of national integration, peace and unity in these places. While it is true that Nigeria has new dominant political parties today, the foundation of the ethno-regional/religious party system has remained in place to this day. Clearly, the

multipart system has not advanced democracy as expected, and the signing of peace accords or the need for handshakes in and after every election cycle highlights the lack of a democratic culture in Nigeria and across the continent. It means that peace is the exception in electoral processes. That is a serious failure of the democratization project. Even at that, the peace accord has also not been able to maintain the so much desired peace during the electioneering process. The failure of peace accords to quell election violence in Nigeria can be attributed to various factors, including structural weaknesses within the political system, socio-economic grievances, and the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities for political gain. Scholars have extensively analysed these dynamics, shedding light on the complex interplay between peace accords, democratic processes, and violence in the Nigerian context.

Despite the signing of peace accords and agreements between political parties and stakeholders, the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms undermines their impact in mitigating election violence. Scholars like Nic Cheeseman argue that peace agreements often lack credibility and are seen as mere symbolic gestures, with little incentive for parties to adhere to their provisions (Cheeseman, 2017). The Abuja Accord of 2014, aimed at ensuring peaceful conduct of elections and preventing violence, was largely disregarded by political parties and candidates. The failure to implement its provisions effectively contributed to the escalation of violence during the 2015 elections, particularly in hotspot regions such as the North-East and the Niger Delta.

Policy Implications of the Peace Accord

An electoral peace pact in Nigeria would have profound and varied policy ramifications. Nigeria has a history of electoral irregularities and violence, which have frequently damaged democracy and called into question the legitimacy of elections. In this regard, political parties and candidates signing a peace treaty prior to an election can benefit the democratic development and stability of the nation in a number of ways.

The promotion of credible and peaceful elections is one of the main policy implications of an election peace deal. Before, during, and after the election, political parties and candidates demonstrate their readiness to settle differences amicably by pledging to behave peacefully. This can ease tensions, stop violence, and foster an atmosphere that is favourable for free and fair elections. Furthermore, a peace agreement can raise public trust in the electoral process by displaying a dedication to maintaining democratic values and honouring the electorate's decision.

An agreement for peace after elections can also support national cohesion and political stability. In a nation such as Nigeria, which is ethnically, religiously, and regionally divided, elections frequently deepen divisions already present and spark civil instability. Political actors demonstrate their commitment to peaceful cohabitation and national cohesion by promising to follow the conditions of a peace agreement. This can lessen post-election disputes and encourage rapprochement between various societal groups.

A peace agreement can also improve institutional frameworks for handling disputes and resolving conflicts. Political parties and candidates show their respect for the rule of law and institutional frameworks by resolving to settle electoral disputes through recognized legal channels or mediation methods. Establishing trust with the judiciary, electoral commission, and other pertinent institutions that monitor the electoral process can be facilitated by doing this.

An electoral peace agreement can also improve diplomatic ties and international reputation. Maintaining diplomatic relations with other nations, encouraging economic progress, and drawing in foreign investment all depend on Nigeria's standing as a stable democracy. Political players in Nigeria demonstrate their support for democratic governance and human rights to the international community by formally agreeing to hold peaceful elections.

A peace agreement can also provide a forum for cooperation and communication amongst political opponents. Parties and candidates can have a constructive discourse, forge relationships across party lines, and explore areas of mutual interest by cooperating to negotiate terms of peaceful conduct during the election campaign. Future cooperation on legislative changes, policy matters, or national development plans may be facilitated by this.

In conclusion, Nigeria's election peace accord has significant policy ramifications for encouraging peaceful elections, improving political stability, fortifying institutional conflict resolution mechanisms, increasing international credibility, cultivating national cohesion, and facilitating communication between political rivals. Nigerian stakeholders may help create a more inclusive democracy that promotes democratic norms and the rule of law by accepting such accords as part of the electoral process.

Addressing the Root Causes of Conflict

When executed well, peace accords have the potential to significantly address the underlying causes of election violence in multiple ways.

First and foremost, peace agreements encourage open communication and negotiation between political parties, which lessens the resentment that frequently sparks bloodshed. Peace agreements establish a foundation for tackling fundamental problems including racial tensions, political marginalization, and economic disparities by uniting opposing parties in a commitment to nonviolence. For instance, the Nigerian Abuja Peace Accord of 2015 made it easier for major political parties to pledge to holding peaceful elections, which lessened the historically high rate of violence after elections.

Second, peace agreements have the potential to improve democratic procedures and institutions. They improve the legitimacy and openness of the electoral process by establishing explicit rules for appropriate electoral behaviour. This lessens the public's and political players' mistrust of one another, which frequently leads to bloodshed. For example, the peace agreement for the 2013 Kenyan elections included clauses pertaining to independent electoral commissions and electoral reforms, which made the election process more credible and resulted in less violence than in previous elections (Diamond, Linz, & Lipset, 1999).

Furthermore, monitoring and enforcement procedures that guarantee accountability are frequently included in peace deals. The possibility of sanctions or international censure serves as a deterrent for political actors to refrain from instigating or participating in acts of violence. National and international observers monitored the Abuja Peace Accord, which assisted in keeping parties responsible for their agreements.

Additionally, via enlightening and energizing the populace and civil society, peace accords promote a culture of peace and respect for democratic values. When people know what their leaders have promised to do, they may demand compliance and nonviolent behaviour. In order to increase the 2015 peace agreement in Nigeria's effectiveness and credibility, civil society organizations were important in monitoring and publicizing it.

Conclusion

The failure of peace accords to curb election violence in Nigeria is rooted in structural weaknesses within the political system, socio-economic grievances, and the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities for political gain. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, promote inclusive governance, and address underlying socio-economic disparities. Additionally, enhancing the credibility and enforcement mechanisms of peace agreements is essential to preventing election-related violence and fostering a culture of peaceful political competition in Nigeria.

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