

Ethnicity and Political Violence in Nigeria: The Case Study of 2023 General Elections in Lagos State

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Abstract

The study therefore bridged this gap by examining ethnicity and political violence in Lagos State during the 2023 general elections. The study set to achieve five objectives: to examine whether or not ethnic politics occurred during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State; to examine the cause of ethnic politics during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos; to examine whether or not political violence occurred during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State; to understand the effect of ethnicity on political violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State; and to proffer solutions to ethnic politics in Nigeria. The study sampled 195 respondents and utilized both open and close-ended questionnaire to elicit responses from the respondents who were adult residents in Lagos State. The study found that ethnic politics and political violence did occur during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State. It also found that there is a significant relationship between ethnicity and political violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State. It was also found that the major cause of the ethnic politics was a quest for political power by candidates. The study therefore recommended that the law, judiciary and law enforcement agencies should take appropriate actions against political elites who utilize the instrument of ethnicity to influence electoral outcomes. Furthermore, the study recommended that an alternative compensatory position for any candidate that loses an election. By this, the zero-sum nature of Nigeria's electoral process would have been reduced.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Political Violence, Election, Electoral Process

Introduction

Nigeria is a plural society with a population of over 200 million and about 500 ethnic groupings (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022; Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). Nigeria is characteristically categorized as a deeply divided state in which burning national issues are construed and constructed along identity patterns (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). These patterns, which commonly manifest in the forms of religion, ethnicity, class, gender and language have shaped Nigeria's political system over the years. In fact, scholars have traced the origin and ubiquity of these identity patterns to colonial period when the British structurally constructed these patterns to suit their divide and rule framework (see Ikelegbe, 2019; Abutudu, 2014; Okafor, 2006). Since then onwards, the elites who succeeded these colonial masters appeared to have mastered the craft of using these patterns to achieve their political aims while dividing the masses along these lines. More worrisome is the fact that these patterns have orchestrated violent conflict in virtually every geo-political zones of

the country. Boko Haram insurgency and other terrorist insurgencies in the North have changed the security landscape of the country since 2009 and have been largely argued by various scholars to have taken religious ideological perspective since they proclaim the supremacy of Islam over other religions (Ebonine, 2022a). In other regions of the West and East, the identity patterns have taken the shape of ethnic agitations for Biafran and Oduduwa self-governments respectively (Ebonine, 2022b).

Ethnicity appears to have become an albatross towards nation building in Nigeria. Ideally, ethnicity is not a problem in any nation except when it is employed as a strategy to achieve some parochial and selfish goals and this has been the case since independence (Aluko, 2003; Nnoli, 1978). It is used to determine who gets what, when and how (Sokoh, 2021). A close look at the Nigerian society reveals a people with differences in the type of language, dressing, diet, social system and tribal marks. Ethnicity has determined the political structure and culture of Nigeria even

prior to independence. The foremost political parties such as the Action Group (AG), Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) incipiently took the complexion of ethnic associations which was sustained even after they metamorphosed into fully blown political parties (Ebonine and Akinyetun, 2022). Against this foreground, ethnicity has construed as 'attachments, nationalistic mind, feelings, and the level of vindictiveness demonstrated by persons or groups as a show of loyalty, obligation, solidarity, love and the desire to propel group aspirations over and above opposing views and similar aspirations' (Sokoh, 2021:107).

A great deal has been written on ethnic politics and its effect on electoral violence and by extension democratic consolidation in Nigeria (Sokoh, 2021; Aluko, 2003; Nnoli, 1978; Osaghae and Suberu, 2005; Edewor, Aluko and Folarin, 2014). However, there still appears to be a dearth of literature of its effect on political violence particularly as it relates to 2023 Nigerian election given that political violence is the sum of all violence that is politically motivated. It suffices to say that electoral violence is a subset of political violence. Nigerian political system has been ridden with political violence which often appears in the forms of killing, kidnapping, ballot box snatching, vote suppression, assassination of opposition, media censorship and others. Erunke (2012:8) specifically noted that the link between ethnic factors and violence stems from the fact that ethnicity has 'largely becomes a parameter for allocation of political offices, assessment of group representation in Government, federal character principles, indigeneship and residency rights, ethno-religious conflicts and wild protest and even the tendency to win the sympathies of persons or groups, as well as, given direct and unperturbed access to So Rock Villa.' It is in this context that the study sets out to examine ethnicity and political violence in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria using Lagos State as a case study.

Statement of Problem

The idolization of ethnicity has unleashed numerous challenges in today's world. This is evident in the many violent conflicts that are

believed to be ethnically motivated. Some of the examples of conflicts were ethnically motivated in recent times are Hutus against Tutsi, Kurds against Iraqis; Arabs against Jews; Croats against Serbs; Irish against British; Bosque against Spaniard; Tamil Nadir against Sri Lankans; Palestinians against Israelis; Ukrainians against Russians, among others. It appears that the heterogeneous nature of societies is just a time bomb waiting to explode (Suberu, 2001). In Nigeria, ethnic politics have raised a lot of questions regarding continued existence of people under the name 'Nigeria.' As posited by Salawu and Hassan (2011:28), "the diversity nature of the Nigerian State has made identification with the nation a difficult task. The consequence of this is that many of the citizens may never develop a proper concept of nation. This kind of ethnic group relation signifies a negative dimension and which may mean much for the Nigerian political system."

The 2023 General Election was one election that shook the Nigerian's political landscape due to few reasons: the inability of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) to bring about the desired change as they promised after 8 years in office, the sudden emergence of a third force and the repeated assurances from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure credibility of elections through the use of Bi-modal Verification and Accreditation System (BVAS) made, for long time since 1993, for the youths to participate in the elections. Given that the main contenders were from the three most popular political parties: Ahmed Asiwaju Tinubu (APC), Alhaji Atiku Abubakar (Peoples Democratic Party, PDP); and Gregory Obi (Labour Party, LP) representing the three major tribes of West (Yoruba), North (Hausa) and East (Igbo) respectively, the ethnic politics and tension brewed and intensified right from the primaries.

The event of ethnicity in Lagos was more pronounced due to the fact that the metropolitan state was the stronghold of the candidate of the APC. Thus, given its metropolitan nature, the state harbours people from other ethnic groups, particularly from the East (Ibo) where the candidate of LP also hailed from. To that extent, the fear and anxiety of likely emergence of Obi as the winner of the election over Tinubu unleashed threats and counter-threats from

Lagos indigenous people and supporters of Tinubu to other members of ethnic groups particularly the Ibos. Some scholars have argued that the popularity of Mr. Obi as a viable third force also intensified these threats. Furthermore, beyond the Presidential Election, account of ethnic profiling during the Governorship Election in the State was also pronounced. It is in this context that this study asks: What is the nature of ethnic politics in Lagos? What dimensions did it assume during the election process? Why was ethnic politics more pronounced in Lagos than other states during the 2023 General Elections? To what extent did this ethnic politics orchestrate political violence in Lagos State during the election period?

The effect of ethnic politics on political violence has defined the complexion and character of Nigeria's electoral system since independence. Numerous accounts of sudden disappearances, kidnapping, fake news, hate speech, ballot box snatching, shooting, voters intimidation, killings, assassination, obstruction and disruption of campaigns, election result falsification, harassment of electoral officers and voters, intimidation of voters, security-party agents-electoral officers' collusion, voters suppression and outright willful cancellation of polls (Ikelegbe, 2019; Abutudu, 2014).

Research Objectives

The following are the objectives of the study:

- i. To examine whether or not ethnic politics occurred during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State;
- ii. To examine whether or not political violence occurred during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State;
- iii. To understand the effect of ethnicity on political violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State;
- iv. To proffer solutions to ethnic politics in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions for the study:

- i. Was there an occurrence of ethnic politics during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State?

- ii. Was there occurrence of political violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State?
- iii. What was the effect of ethnicity on political violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State?
- iv. What solutions can be proffered on ethnic politics in Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Marxist theory to explain the interplay of ethnicity and political conflict in post-colonial states like Nigeria. The theory is significant in analyzing the political economy and struggle for survival among the people of post-colonial states. According to Marxist theory, the state is a construct and product of irreconcilable class antagonisms (Lenin, 1984). Ideally, according to Ebizem (2015), the state emerged in order to mediate between antagonistic groups in the society so that they do not consume themselves in fruitless struggle. However, unlike in the neo-colonial societies, state is part and parcel of class antagonisms and exists to satiate their interests (Ebohon, 2012). Therefore, instead of post-colonial states to be an instrument of resource distribution and redistribution among the haves and have-nots, it becomes an instrument of domination, exploitation and marginalization of the people.

Appropriated by the bourgeois against the proletariats, the state uses the instrumentalities of religion, class, ethnicity, education, income, gender and youth to divide the people to serve the interest of the few elites. The state becomes a purveyor and incubator of various forms of ethnic politics. This has been the case with Nigeria since independence where the elites readily used the instrumentality of ethnicity to divide the people and clinch power. When power is clinched, they use the state resources to oil the relationship that exists between them and members of their ethnic groups.

The inability of the members of other ethnic groups to partake in the state resources which should be collectively owned, they resort to various forms of political violence to make their demands known, remove the government in power or unsettle the government in power. Most often, the government in power mobilizes its ethnic members to counter these other groups leading to violence conflict in the society.

It is based on this reality that scholars and analysts have variously described the Nigerian state. For instance, Dudley (1982) summarized the state as “characterized by debilitating institutional immobilism and systemic flaws”. Ebohon (2012) sees the state as rooted in the culture of under-developmentalism which he described as resonant paradigm, constructed in the business of state-craft to serve the interest of the power-fixated ruling and governing classes whose reproduction as a parasitic class is guaranteed only by holding on to separate power. Odion-Akhaine (2007:10) described Nigerian political theatre as bizarre while Kesselman, Krieger and Joseph (1996:616) dubbed the state as an unfinished project characterized by instability and uncertainties. Ameh (2007) likened the state to a diabetic patient whose excess sugar in its blood stream serves no useful purpose. Sklar, Onwudiwe and Kew (2006) see it as a country where dysfunctional policies have drained its potential for greatness and stability.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design. By this, it utilizes designed questionnaire. The design is considered appropriate for this study as the researcher sets out to determine the relationships that exist between ethnicity and political violence. The population is the entire subset from which the representative sample is drawn. The population of this study comprises the adult registered voter in Lagos State, Nigeria. An adult registered voter here means anyone who has attained the age of 18+ before the conduct of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The population of adult registered voters in Lagos State was put at 7,060, 195 people (National Population Commission, 2023). A sample size of 200 hundred (200) respondents were randomly selected from the entire population of eligible voters. Out of the distributed 200 questionnaire, one hundred and ninety five (195) copies were returned and the remaining five were lost in the survey process. The data generated were analyzed using simple percentages.

Data Analysis

Assessment of Voters in the 2023 Election

Table 1: Assessment of Voters in the 2023 Election

Item	Question	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Did you vote during the recently held general election in Lagos State?	Yes	195	100
		No	0	0
		Total	195	100
3	Which of the elections did you participate in?	Presidential	31	15.9
		Governorship	22	11.3
		Both	142	72.8
		Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey (2023)

From table 1 above, it shows that all the respondents constituting 100% voted during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State. Notwithstanding, 31 respondents representing 15.9% said they voted only in presidential elections, 22 respondents representing 11.3%

said they voted only in governorship elections in Lagos State while 142 respondents representing 72.8% said they voted in both elections. Thus, from the survey, respondents who voted in both elections participated the most in the study.

Table 2: Assessment of Respondents' knowledge on ethnicity

Item	Question	Response	Frequency	Percent
4	Ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on their tribe?	Yes	134	68.7
		No	42	21.5
		Not sure	19	9.7
		Total	195	100
5	Ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on their language?	Yes	155	79.5
		No	32	16.4
		Not sure	8	4.1
		Total	195	100
6	Ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on their dressing?	Yes	104	53.3
		No	61	31.3
		Not sure	30	15.4
		Total	195	100
7	Ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on their looks?	Yes	98	50.3
		No	50	25.6
		Not sure	47	24.1
		Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey (2023)

From table 2 above, 134 respondents constituting 68.7% agreed that ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on their tribe, 42 respondents constituting 21.5% disagreed while 19 respondents constituting 9.7% were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on their tribe.

Furthermore, from table 2 above, 155 respondents constituting 79.5% agreed that ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on their language, 32 respondents constituting 16.4% disagreed while 8 respondents constituting 4.1% were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on language.

In addition, from table 2 above, 104

respondents constituting 53.3% agreed that ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on their dressing, 61 respondents constituting 31.3% disagreed while 30 respondents constituting 15.4% were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on dressing.

Finally, from table 2 above, 98 respondents constituting 50.3% agreed that ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on their looks, 47 respondents constituting 25.6% disagreed while 30 respondents constituting 24.1% were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on looks.

Table 3: Assessment of Respondents' knowledge on political violence

Item	Question	Response	Frequency	Percent
8	Political violence occurs when a person or group is attacked to achieve certain political gains?	Yes	179	91.8
		No	14	7.2
		Not sure	2	1.0
		Total	195	100
9	Political violence occurs when a person or group are prevented from collecting their voters card by another person or group to achieve certain political gains?	Yes	168	86.2
		No	20	10.3
		Not sure	7	3.6
		Total	195	100
10	Political violence occurs when a person or group are prevented from voting in an election day by another person or group to achieve certain political gains?	Yes	188	96.4
		No	6	3.1
		Not sure	1	0.5
		Total	195	100
11	Political violence occurs when a person or group are harassed, kidnapped, assassinated, injured or maimed by another person or group to achieve certain political gains?	Yes	191	97.9
		No	4	2.1
		Total	195	100
12	Political violence occurs when a person or group suffers from mental, psychological and emotional stress caused by another person or group to achieve certain political gains?	Yes	154	79.0
		No	30	15.4
		Not sure	11	5.6
		Total	195	100
13	Political violence can occur before, during and after elections?	Yes	179	91.8
		No	14	7.2
		Not sure	2	1.0
		Total	195	100

Source: Field Study (2023)

From table 3 above, 179 respondents constituting 91.8% agreed that political violence occurs when a person or group is attacked to achieve certain political gains, 14 respondents constituting 7.2% disagreed while 2 respondents constituting 1.0% were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that political violence occurs when a person or group are attacked to achieve certain political gains.

Furthermore, from table 3 above, 168 respondents constituting 86.2% agreed that political violence occurs when a person or group are prevented from collecting their voters card by another person or group to achieve certain political gains, 20 respondents constituting 10.3% disagreed while 7 respondents constituting 3.6% were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that political violence occurs when a person or group are prevented from collecting their voters card by another person or group to achieve certain political gains.

In addition, from table 3 above, 188 respondents constituting 96.4% agreed that political violence occurs when a person or

group are prevented from voting in an election day by another person or group to achieve certain political gains, 6 respondents constituting 3.1% disagreed while 1 respondents constituting 0.5 % were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that political violence occurs when a person or group are prevented from voting in an election day by another person or group to achieve certain political gains.

From table 3 above, 191 respondents constituting 97.9% agreed that political violence occurs when a person or group are harassed, kidnapped, assassinated, injured or maimed by another person or group to achieve certain political gains, 4 respondents constituting 2.1% disagreed. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that political violence occurs when a person or group are harassed, kidnapped, assassinated, injured or maimed by another person or group to achieve certain political gains.

Similarly, from table 3 above, 179 respondents constituting 91.8% agreed that political violence can occur before, during and after elections, 14 respondents constituting

7.2% disagreed while 2 respondents constituting 1.0% were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that political violence can occur before, during and after elections.

Finally, from table 3 above, 154 respondents constituting 79.0% agreed that ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on their looks, 30 respondents constituting 15.4% disagreed while 11 respondents constituting 5.6% were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that ethnicity is the discrimination of people based on looks.

Presentation and Discussion of Results Based on Research Questions

The study outlined five research questions. They are as follow: Was there occurrence of ethnic politics during the 2023 General

Elections in Lagos State? What was the cause of ethnic politics during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State? Was there occurrence of political violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State? What was the effect of ethnicity on political violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State? What solutions can be proffered on ethnic politics in Nigeria?

Under this section, the results of the first four are presented discussed while the last is presented and analyzed in Chapter five under recommendations.

Q1: Was there occurrence of ethnic politics during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State?

Table 4: Item 14: The occurrence of ethnic politics during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	186	95.4
No	6	3.1
Not sure	3	1.5
Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey (2023)

From table 4.4.1 above, 186 respondents constituting 95.4% agreed that there was occurrence of ethnic politics during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State, 6 respondents constituting 3.1% disagreed while 3 respondents constituting 1.5% were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that there was occurrence of ethnic politics during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State.

This finding clearly confirms the earlier findings made by authors and independent observers during the 2023 general elections. For instance, EU-EOM (2023) reports on the 2023 general elections noted that there was escalation of political violence in Lagos State based on ethnicity. Those that regarded themselves as

indigenes of Lagos State harassed, intimidated and attacked suspected non-indigenes whom they believed would vote against their candidates. According to the reports, the ethnic-based violence escalated after the presidential election in which the third force, Labour Party presidential candidate, sprang surprises by defeating the candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC), Bola Ahmed Tinubu whom many regarded as the 'owner' of Lagos State.

To Adibe (2023), the ethnic violence targeted the Igbos and non-Igbos but not Yorubas who were dominant in Lagos State and therefore capable of influencing the outcome of the elections.

Q2: Was there occurrence of political violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State?
Table 5: Item 16: The occurrence of political violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	167	85.6
No	28	14.4
Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey (2023)

From table 4.4.3 above, 167 respondents constituting 85.6% agreed that political violence occurs when a person or group is attacked to achieve certain political gains, 28 respondents constituting 14.4% disagreed. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that political violence occurred during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State.

This finding concurs with findings made by Yiaga Africa (2023), EU-EOM (2023, Adibe

(2023) and Hassan (2023). For instance, EU-EOM, Yiaga Africa and Hassan jointly noted that prior to the elections, voters cards were given based on the voter's agreement to vote for a particular candidate otherwise the card s withheld. During the elections, voters were threatened not to vote if they knew they would not vote for a particular candidate. There were also reported physical attacks on voters based on presumption of ethnic group in Lagos State.

Q3: What was the effect of ethnicity on political violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State?

Table 6: Item 17: Was the political violence that occurred during 2023 general elections in Lagos State due to ethnicity?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	161	82.6
No	10	5.1
Not sure	24	12.3
Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey (2023)

From table 4.4.4 above, 161 respondents constituting 82.6% agreed that political violence occurs when a person or group are attacked to achieve certain political gains, 10 respondents constituting 14.4% disagreed while 24 constituting 12.3% were not sure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that political violence occurred during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State.

Indeed, identities such as religion, party affiliation and ethnicity played a very big role in orchestrating political violence during the general elections in Lagos State. However, the most pronounced was ethnicity that affected negatively on the electoral outcome. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2023) reported that ethnicity severely affected the outcome of the elections in several states but chiefly including Lagos State.

Conclusion

Based on the findings made in the study, the following conclusions are made. First, politics of ethnicity occurred in Lagos State during the 2023 general elections. This finding confirmed the litany of reports by both local and international observers that the ethnic politics marred the entire election in some states including Lagos State. Second, the major cause of the ethnic politics was the quest for political

power while other cause were the intensity of campaigns and support base candidate of the Labour Party garnered during the electioneering campaign and the rise of third force (Labour Party). Third, there was an occurrence of political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State as also confirmed by various reports by election observers and scholars. Last, political violence that occurred in Lagos State was caused by ethnicity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions made in the study, the study made the following recommendations.

First, politicians should always be held accountable for the use of ethnicity as a weapon against the people. The law in Nigeria appears too weak in holding the political elites responsible for any atrocity. Likewise, the courts and law enforcement agents appear to always take sides with the political elites when they are found using the instrumentality of ethnicity to determine the outcome of elections to their favour. Until the political elites who utilize divisive instrumentalities to influence the outcome of an election are held criminally responsible, the use of ethnicity and attendant political violence would always occur in any Nigerian electoral process. This

recommendation was also made by the respondents (82.7% of them) that the law, judiciary and law enforcement agencies should hold political elites who use the instrument of ethnicity to perpetuate political violence accountable.

Last, following from above, there should be a total restructure of the political positions to reduce the intensity and anxiety that breeds zero-sum political process in Nigeria. The question that needs to be addressed is: what happens to any candidate that loses election? Lack of official benefit or compensation to any candidate that loses election is also responsible for the utilization of all forms of gimmicks including ethnicity to win at all cost. As alluded to by majority of the respondents (91.4% of them), there is a need to create an alternative compensatory position for losers in an election.

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