

Perception of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Students on Violent-free Politics and Elections in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Violence in political and electoral processes in Nigeria have been a serious challenge in the country's political life. The study sought to determine the perception of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution (PSCR) students on political and electoral violence in Nigeria. Nature and causes of political and electoral violence as well as the purpose of peace education are discussed. The population of the study covers all 300 and 400 level undergraduate students of Federal College of Education, Katsina. A stratified random sampling technique was used to sample 230 students. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Students' Perception on Political Violence in Nigeria Questionnaire" which was validated by three experts from Social Studies, General Studies departments, Federal College of Education, Katsina. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained. Mean and standard deviation were employed to analyze the two hypotheses. Based on the findings, recommendations are made which include among others, meaningful and purposeful engagement of youths, refocusing education sector for economic diversification and employment generation for sustainable development and self-reliance as well as strengthening of the electoral process.

Keywords: Perception, Peace Studies, Conflict Resolution, Violent Politics, Electoral and Violence

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I. INTRODUCTION

The beauty of democracy lies in the freedom of choice which characterizes the emergence of representative leadership through ballot. This is also in tune with the desire to improve the living conditions of the people as a foremost objective of democracy. However, one of the challenges before Nigeria politicians and governments at all levels under the nascent democratic dispensation is violent politics. Most of the elections conducted in Nigeria since 1951 are punctuated by one crises or the other. The prevalence of violence in Nigerian politics is largely due to poor leadership, injustice, inequality, unemployment, general insecurity of lives and property as well as uncoordinated policy implementation. Negative attitudinal and value orientation have greatly imbued Nigerian citizens with undesirable feelings and actions such as materialism, corruption, ethnic and religious bigotry etc. It is, therefore, high time to inculcate in the younger generation worth-while knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that would make them to become humanistic, functional and ethically sound individuals (Ahmed, 2011).

Political violence according to Salihi (2012) is a means of "expressing political demands or opposing undesirable policies". To him this could be within or outside the political arrangement. In other words, it could be intra or inter-party issue. Theoretically, several reasons have been advanced for violent trends in Nigerian political life. Some scholars are of the view that biological characteristics of the people as well as heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society trigger violence (Ahmed, 2011). However, others attributed political violence to governance failure. In other words, inability of the government of the day to satisfactorily meet up with the essential needs and aspirations of the citizens prompt crisis (Burton 1990, Salihi 2012, Bello 2013, Walker 2014).

In his analysis of Marxist concept of State and the capitalist tendencies that characterized colonial administration in Nigeria, Areo (2009) took a cursory look at election crises in the country from 1964/5 through 1983, 1993 as well as 2003 and 2007 respectively. He argued that elections are flawed because of selfish interest of some few individuals who wants to be in power at all cost. Although, the author does not propose any way out, the causative factors discussed may serve as eye opener to policy makers and conflict analysts. Ayuk (2012) categorized violence in Nigeria into political, religious, ethnic and regional as well as resource-based. Nigerian politicians and elites manipulate these variables to suit their interests irrespective of the consequences it may have on the nation and its citizens. What then can be done to arrest this ugly situation?

The solution lies in Jason Kester's (2010) postulations on peace education when he described it as "an emancipatory dialogical experience conducted through participatory learning, where learners cooperatively grapple with contemporary issues relevant to their local and global contexts". He sees peace education as a

training and fundamental principles which emphasizes corresponding balance between education and society. Furthermore, Kester cited UN declaration on culture of peace where education was singled out as an essential component for peace and a culture of peace in order to promote a paradigm shift from violence or war culture to a nonviolence or peace culture as illustrated in the figure 1:

Figure 1: Toward a Culture of Peace

<i>From</i> A CULTURE OF WAR	<i>towards</i> A CULTURE OF PEACE
Power based on force	Power based on mutual agreements
Having an enemy, dualism, dichotomy	Solidarity, international understanding
Authoritarian governance	Democratic participation
Secrecy	Transparency, free flow of information
Armaments stockpiling	Disarmament
Exploitation of people	Human Rights
Exploitation of nature	Sustainability
Straight male domination	Gender equity and equality

Source: Kester, 2010

Additionally, innovative methods and techniques such as study technology, Socratic Method (Questioning) problem-solving, inquiry as well as effective selection and use of instructional resources promotes the culture of peace (Ahmed, 2016). From the above analysis, there is no doubt that education and its processes can significantly transform a violent situation through the inculcation of peace culture.

Statement of the Problem

Nigerian youth are since independence in the vanguard of political crises in the country. This trend necessitated the inclusion of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution (PSCR) programme to serve as an antidote to political violence. The course which is designed as a General Studies Programme (GSP) and compulsory for all students is charged with the responsibility of providing the learners with appropriate skills to resolve conflicts that may arise from their day to day interactions as well as acquisition of broad spectrum of knowledge on how to mitigate violence in the society. The programme is to also inculcate in its clients, appreciation and value of peaceful co-existence in human society. This research endeavor is, therefore, undertaken to ascertain the level at which the purpose of the programme is being attained as part of peace building in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The study was purposely undertaken to:

- i. Identify the factors that promote political and electoral violence in Nigeria.
- ii. Determine the perception of PSCR students on political violence as a reflection of the course content.
- iii. Recommend in concrete terms possible remedies to violent politics.

Research Questions

- i. What are the causes or factors responsible for political violence?
- ii. What are the benefits of violent-free politics?
- iii. How can violent-free politics and elections be entrenched in Nigerian Political life?

Hypotheses

- 1. There is no significant difference between the students' perceptions and their awareness on political violence in Nigeria.
- 2. There is no significant difference in the perception of Science-based students and those of Humanities on political violence in Nigeria.

Methodology

The study employed the descriptive survey design in order to get the perception of a larger number of people and to make it generalizable to an even larger number of people. The population of this study covers all 300 and 400 level undergraduate students of Federal College of Education, Katsina who have under gone a course titled: Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution (PSCR).

A sample of 230 students from 600 was selected using stratified random sampling technique (Kreycie& Morgan, 1970). A questionnaire titled “Student Perception on Political violence in Nigeria Questionnaire” was constructed with options such as “Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree”. The instrument’s content validity was determined using expert judgment by three test construction experts at the Federal College of Education, Katsina. The three experts certified the instruments valid. Similarly, the instrument’s reliability was determined through a pilot study by administering the instrument on 200 level undergraduate students who were not part of the sample. Cronbach alpha method was used to calculate the reliability of the instrument to obtain reliability co-efficient of 0.82.

Data was analyzed using SPSS version 22.0 software while percentage (%) was used to answer the research questions. In addition, mean and standard deviation were used for analyzing hypothesis 1 while hypothesis 2 was tested with t-test statistics at 0.05 level significance.

II. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table1: Factors responsible for political violence in Nigeria

SN	Items	Responses				
		Total	Agreed	%	Disagree	%
1	Poverty and unemployment	230	226	98.3	4	1.7
2	Do or die attitude of politicians	229	219	95.6	10	4.4
3	Manipulation and falsification of results	230	206	89.6	24	10.4

Source: **2018 Field Survey**

The table1 showed that among the factors that causes political violence in Nigeria, the poverty and unemployment of the electorate carry the largest share (98.3%). Next is the do or die attitude of the politicians (95.6%) and then manipulation and falsification of election results by officials (89.6)

Table 2: Benefits of violent-free politics

SN	Items	Responses				
		Total	Agreed	%	Disagree	%
1	Ensures peaceful co-existence, law and order	225	189	84.0	36	16.0
2	Good governance and rapid development	223	172	77.1	51	22.9

Source: **2018 Field Survey**

Violent-free politics and election has many benefits according to the respondents as shown in table 2 among others, they agreed that it ensures peaceful co-existence, law and order among the citizens (84.0%) as well as ensuring good governance and rapid development of the nation (77).

Table 3: Ways of entrenching violent-free politics and elections in Nigeria

SN	Items	Responses				
		Total	Agreed	%	Disagree	%
1	Voters education and awareness	220	182	82.7	38	17.3
2	The use of card reader in elections	229	212	92.6	17	7.4
3	Trying and sanctioning violence perpetrators found guilty	223	196	87.9	27	12.1
4	Sound education and functional skills	227	188	82.8	39	17.2
5	Personal integrity and purposeful party programmes	227	197	86.8	30	13.2
6	Efficient and credible justice system	227	195	85.9	32	14.1

Source: **2018 Field Survey**

Violent-free politics and election can be entrenched according to the respondents through, first and foremost, the use of card reader and other devices in the conduct of elections (92.6%), followed by trying and sanctioning of violence perpetrator found guilty (87.9%), party programmes that are purposeful and protect personal integrity (86.8%), ensuring efficient and credible justice system (85.9%). Others include giving the electorates sound education and functional skills (82.8%) as well as providing voters education and awareness (82.7%).

Table 4: Perception and awareness of political violence among students\

Groups	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean difference
Sciences	88	36.70	8.20	0.68
Humanities	141	36.02	8.39	

Source: **2018 Field Survey**

From table 4, the mean difference of the perception among students is 0.68. Thus, there is no significant difference between the perception and awareness of science and humanities students on political violence in Nigeria. Thus students have similar perception and awareness in terms of political violence and elections in Nigeria.

Table 5: t-test results on the perception of Science-based students and those of humanities

Groups	Number	Mean	Stddev	t-critical	t-calculated	Decision
Sciences	88	36.70	8.20	1.97	0.61*	No significant
Humanities	142	36.02	8.39			

*At degree of freedom of 228 and alpha value of 0.05.

Source: **2018 Field Survey**

Table 5 showed that the t-calculated (0.61) is less than the t-critical (1.97) at the degree of freedom of 228 and 0.05 alpha value. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained and there is no significant difference between the perception of science and humanities students on political violence in Nigeria.

The findings of the research showed that:

1. The factors that causes political violence in Nigeria include:
 - Poverty and unemployment of the electorate
 - Do or die attitude of the politicians
 - Manipulation and falsification of election results by officials.
2. The benefits of violent-free politics and election in Nigeria includes:
 - it ensures peaceful co-existence, law and order among the citizens
 - ensures good governance and rapid development of the nation
3. Political violence can be discontinued in Nigerian politics through the following:
 - the use of card reader and other devices in the conduct of elections
 - trying and sanctioning of violence perpetrator found guilty
 - party programmes that are purposeful and protect personal integrity
 - ensuring efficient and credible justice system
 - sound education with functional skills
 - providing voters education and awareness
4. There is no significant difference between the perception and awareness of students studying sciences and those studying humanities on political violence in Nigeria.

III. DISCUSSION

The result of the study revealed that there is no difference in the perception as well as awareness between students who offer Science courses and those of Humanities. In spite of the students’ course background; there is no significant difference in their awareness and assimilation of the contents of PSCR as it relates to political violence in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study reveals that poverty and unemployment of able-bodied and qualified Nigerian graduate makes the youth ready-made tools (political thugs) in the hands of unscrupulous politicians. Similarly, “do or die” attitude of the Nigerian political class push them to go extra miles to realize their vested interests (Obakhedo, 2011). The study also show that both political and electoral related violence emanates from manipulation and falsification of election results between the process of counting, collating and the official declaration of the election results.

The second research question sought to know the benefits of violent-free politics. The respondents agreed that peaceful co-existence, obeying law and order are by-products of violent-free politics. It should be noted too that the respondents are consensus that issue-based campaigns and good governance promote rapid socio-economic development of the society. This assertion is supported by Salih (2012) and Walker (2014) when they observed that failure of the State to satisfy the basic human needs of the people may lead to political uprising. In the same vein, Aver, Nnorom & Targba (2013) advocated for issue-based campaigns rather than using acrimonious campaign languages.

The response to the third research question indicates that voter education and awareness; use of card reader; appropriate sanction for political and electoral offenders; purposeful and functional educational systems

as well as personal integrity of candidates, articulated party programmes and credible justice system are some of the ways by which Nigeria can promote violent-free politics.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no gain saying that the Nigeria project as well as sanctity of human lives is greater than individual interests. It is on this premises that concerted efforts should be made to put an end to the vicious circle of political and electoral violence in Nigeria. To achieve this, the following recommendations are put forward for policy makers and other stakeholders to peruse:

- Meaningful and purposeful engagement of youth should be vigorously pursued. Government should improve on the on-going N-power for youth empowerment by broadening the scope of the programme to include skills acquisition and training programme that would transform Nigerian youths to become self-employed as well as employers of labour. This will go a long way to strengthen the private sector since the civil service is saturated at all levels.
- Refocusing Nigeria education for economic diversification and employment generation will not only promote sustainability but will enhance rapid development and self-reliance. The laudable objectives of 6-3-3-4 system of education could be revisited to enhance the functionality of our educational pursuit at all levels.
- Another way to curb political violence is to strengthen the electoral process: The use of card reader should be improved upon in term of technology and technical know-how of the ad hoc staff and for INEC officials to live above board while the justice system should not be delayed nor denied.
- Recommendations of Justice Uwais' electoral reforms committee should be considerably looked into, especially the appointment of INEC officials and involvement of other stakeholders.
- Timely release of election results and other confidence building measures in the electoral system should be entrenched in the system.

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