



Open Distance Learning and the Management of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

L'enseignement A Distance Et La Gestion De La Violence Electorale Au Nigeria

OJO, Olusola Matthew PhD

Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Programme,
Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN),
Abuja.
omojo@noun.edu.ng
08055915018, 07064289908

Abstract

The phenomenon of internal conflict has arguably assumed an enduring image of the Nigerian society in its post-colonial epoch. Apparently, electoral violence has significantly compounded the problem as it manifests at the three stages of the electoral process, thereby undermining peace and security in the country. Despite existing studies on the generation, manifestation and consequences of electoral violence, the menace seems protracted and intractable by assuming various dimensions with the devastating implications for the democratic process and national integration. Using qualitative method of data collection, this study identifies inadequate democratic orientation as central among the variables determining the intensity of electoral violence in the country. Findings show that among other factors, the political elite take advantage of inadequate democratic education on the part of the masses to recruit youths as triggers of electoral violence. Hence, considering its flexibility, cost effectiveness and multiple modes, this study contends that ODL is a veritable medium of impacting democratic education in the citizenry with a view

to preventing electoral violence and entrenching the democratic process in the interest of political stability and national integration.

Résumé

Le phénomène des conflits internes a, sans doute, assumé une image durable de la société nigériane à l'époque postcoloniale. Apparemment, la violence électorale a considérablement aggravé le problème tel qu'il se manifeste aux trois étapes du processus électoral, compromettant ainsi la paix et la sécurité dans le pays. Malgré les études existantes sur la génération, la manifestation et les conséquences de la violence électorale, la menace semble prolongée et insoluble en prenant diverses dimensions avec des implications dévastatrices pour le processus démocratique et l'intégration nationale. En utilisant une méthode qualitative de collecte de données, cette étude identifie l'orientation démocratique inadéquate comme l'une des principales variables déterminant l'intensité de la violence électorale dans le pays. Les résultats montrent que l'élite politique, entre autres facteurs, profite d'une éducation démocratique inadéquate de la part des masses pour recruter des jeunes comme déclencheurs de la violence électorale. Par conséquent, compte tenu de sa souplesse, de son rapport coût-efficacité et de la multiplicité de ses modes de fonctionnement, la présente étude soutient que l'apprentissage ouvert et à distance est un véritable moyen d'influencer l'éducation démocratique des citoyens en vue de prévenir la violence électorale et d'enraciner le processus démocratique dans l'intérêt de la stabilité politique et de l'intégration nationale.

Key Words: *Open Distance Learning(ODL); Electoral Violence; Peace and Security; Democratic Education; National Integration*

Mots-clés : *L'enseignement à distance (ODL) ; Violence électorale ; Paix et sécurité ; Education démocratique ; Intégration nationale*

Introduction

Internal conflicts have become endemic features of post-colonial Nigerian society. Existing literature has confirmed the prevalence of varying dimensions of internal conflicts across the country- ethno-communal acrimonies; sectarian violence; state repression; minority uprising; indigenes/settlers conflicts, and so on (Hutchful and Bathily, 1998; Zack-Williams, 2002; Green and Luehrmann, 2003; Albert, 2003; Osaghae, 2005). This has been significantly exacerbated by electoral violence with the devastating implications for democratic consolidation and development process.

Politicians and political patrons have become ‘licensees of violence’ by technically inducing youth into the electoral process and actively involving them as perpetrators of electoral violence (Ojo, 2017). These political elite and the political parties they patronise are fond of taking advantage of certain deficiencies in the political terrain including inadequate democratic education on the part of the electorate to perpetrate electoral violence in the polity. This development has grossly deprived the democratic process of the basic elements required to improve and also indulge the tendency for political instability at the detriment of the continued existence of Nigeria.

Existing literature seems to have dissected the manifestation and dynamics of electoral conflicts in Nigeria (Young, 1976; Nwankwo, 1987; Adedeji, 1999; Anyaoku, 1999; Osaghae, 2002; Akindele, 2003; Anifowose, 2011). Hence, a discourse on elections and electoral conflict in the polity is not novel. Nevertheless, the continued intensity of electoral violence and the implications it has had for democratic consolidation in the fourth republic have suggested that the electorate are not involved in the democratic process with adequate democratic orientation that will enable them perform their civic obligation as informed citizenry. This development has invariably become an obstacle to mutually benefitting interaction between the political class and the electorate on the one hand, and on the other, between the electorate and their participatory responsibility in the democratic process. Thus inadequate democratic education and the far-reaching implications it has had for the intensity of electoral violence have informed the need for reconstructing public perception on the

democratic education with a view to tackling the scourge of electoral violence in the interest of sustainable development and national integration.

The preoccupation of this study, therefore, is to explore the instrumentality of ODL for the dissemination of democratic education with a view to effecting attitudinal change in Nigerians, thereby preventing electoral violence in the polity. The central argument is that adequate democratic orientation for the citizenry is imperative for preventing electoral conflicts from assuming violent proportion before, during and after election in Nigeria's political space. What is the effect of electoral violence on the democratic process in Nigeria? What are the implications of inadequate democratic education for the intensity and manifestation of electoral violence in the country? What are the imperatives of ODL for the management of electoral violence in Nigeria's 4th Republic?

The objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the imperative of ODL as a veritable avenue for disseminating democratic education with a view to preventing electoral violence in Nigeria.
2. To analyse the intensity of electoral violence on the democratic process in Nigeria's 4th republic.
3. To discuss the impact of inadequate democratic education on the intensity and manifestation of electoral violence in Nigeria.
4. To emphasise the policy relevance of ODL for the prevention of electoral violence in the interest of democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Meaning, Nature and Concept of Electoral Violence

The term 'electoral' has been defined as "an activity or practice connected with the process of choosing a person, or a group of people for a position, especially a political position by voting" (Ogbu & Ladan, 2005: 5-7). On the other hand, violence is interpreted to indicate illegal or illegitimate use of force by state and non-state actors (Ladan, 2005; Malu & Ogbu, 2006; Anifowose, 2011). As Anifowose (2011) has rightly noted, violence carries overtones of 'violating' and is often referred to as illegitimate application of force. Electoral violence can,

therefore, be referred to as any act of violence associated with the electoral process, and perpetrated against political rivals and other target or accidental victims in the course of political activities in a democratic society. Electoral violence can take intra-party or inter-party dimension, and can occur at any stage of the electoral process, that is before, during and after election periods. That is why Albert (2007) argues that electoral violence is by and large a continuum in an electoral process spanning across pre-election, Election-Day and post-election periods and not necessarily a once-for-all event.

Emerging knowledge on the notion of violence has provoked paradigm shift from the tradition presumption that violence is all about application of physical force usually with the motive to damage the object of violence (Alanamu, 2005). Recent studies have revealed that this traditional line of exploration is not only grossly a misconception of the idea of violence but has also contributed to the defective measures for managing the problem. Analysing Johan Galtung's dissection on the dynamics of violence, Albert (2007) posits that apart from its physical connotation, violence has its structural and psychological dimensions. In relation to electoral process, therefore, electoral violence can be inflicted on the victim in physical, structural and psychological dimensions. Physical electoral violence refers to a situation where direct injuries are inflicted on the victims such that the effect of the assault could be determined in terms of mild or hard. Psychological electoral conflict manifests in terms of infliction of deliberate assault on the emotion or feelings of the victims such that they become psychologically insecure or demoralised. Structural violence is usually indirect and inherent in the structure of society. People become victims when the consequences of structural defect or bad governance make them insecure. In any case, the underlying variables within which context electoral violence could be expressed include struggle for power, position, status, values, goals, aspirations, resources or interest within the limited available political space.

Suffice it to say that electoral violence is an aspect of political violence, the consequential damage of which could be sustained physically, structurally or psychologically; or all combined. Thus, electoral violence in the context of this analysis comprises any antagonistic

situation or adversarial process between at least two individuals, parties or collective actors in a political system over electoral-inclined means or end. It can be perpetrated through arbitrary exertion of physical, structural or psychological force against political rivals or the citizenry before, during or after the election periods. These include propaganda, orchestrated conspiracy, discrimination based on political divide or ideological leaning, riots, abduction, torture, intimidation, victimisation, vandalism, looting, abuse of office, defamation of character, arson and assassination (Ojo, 2017).

It is worth noting that electoral violence is not predetermined by political thugs serve as triggers of the act and inflict injuries on victims. Rather, political elite comprising party stalwarts, political office aspirants, godfathers, money bags, among others always serve as initiators and sponsors of electoral conflicts. By implication, the demonstration of violent activities in the electoral process are always been orchestrated by the political elite in whose directive the political thugs operate. Electoral violence usually degenerates into ‘political apathy’ in the citizenry in a situation where stakeholders in electoral process cannot ensure “electoral security” in the polity. The structural effect of electoral violence manifests by undermining the credibility of the election outcomes; damage the integrity of the democratic process; and dent the legitimacy of the leadership in a given democratic society.

Conceptual Clarification: Open Distance Learning(ODL)

Education has remained the most potent instrument for socio-economic and political development of any organised society. This is because education is a process by which values, ideals, virtues, attitudes and norms that influence the behaviour of a people in consonance with their cultural heritage and historical antecedent are organised, preserved, modified and transmitted from one generation to another. Teaching is the medium by which instruction, the basic element of education is transmitted. Learning is the evidence of direct and indirect responses to teaching as it is the determinant of change in behaviour expected to be effected and retained in the learner either on short-term or long-term basis.

Over the ages, various approaches have been developed to carry out, and improve upon teaching and learning, the oldest being the traditional approach, which is practically teacher-centred. Research-based discoveries have necessitated radical departure from traditional approach to learning, establishing the scientific approach in which the process of teaching and learning is student-focused. This is a value-based development in teaching and learning as it elicits critical thinking and participatory culture in education. Among various innovations which research discoveries especially in science and technology have effectively incorporated into teaching and learning process include multimedia packages, textbooks, power point presentation and e-learning (Akindutire, 2013). ODL is one of the components of e-learning. By ODL is meant a medium whereby processed information is transmitted from the teacher to the learner without regard for distance barrier. Other commonly used terms in lieu of ODL include correspondence education, home study, independent study, and learner-centred education among others.

Historically, distance education began in 1963 (Perraton, 2000). In that year, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was planning to use distance education to train refugee Palestinian teachers. Ever since, the initiative has extended beyond the frontiers of equipping refugee teachers following the establishment of British Open University. Today ODL has become an acceptable global phenomenon in the education industry considering the evolution of Open Universities in many countries across the globe. ODL is a general term for the use of telecommunication to provide quality learning required by members of society for political development and socio-economic transformation. Across the globe, the academic community is exploring the internet, teleconferencing, and related means to achieve an extended classroom or learning experience (<http://searchsqlserver.techtarget.com/definition/ODL>). Empirical analysis shows that in advanced economies, between 5 and 12 percent of university students are likely to be studying at a distance, while in developing countries the figure ranges between 10 and 20 percent (Perraton, 2000). ODL is inherently distinguished from mainstream educational system in terms of the use of specific instructional techniques, resources and media to facilitate learning and teaching

between learners and teachers who may not necessarily have physical contact in a designated teaching and learning environment before dissemination and retention of knowledge take place.

Despite its distinguishing characteristics, ODL is a complementary component of mainstream educational system in the knowledge industry as it seeks to ensure availability, accessibility and affordability of quantitative and qualitative education to all without undue discrimination based on age, sex, creed or social status. Thus it provides ample opportunities for people to get quality education with a view to making them productive elements of their respective societies. Although the use of print materials constitutes part of the means by which information is disseminated to learners through ODL, the use of technological-based instructional materials has invariably enhanced the quality of ODL-based instructional capacity.

Following the revolution in information technology, distance education has been broadly categorised into two; namely synchronous and asynchronous distance education. Synchronous distance education takes place when technical equipment is used to bridge the gap between the educator and the student as the former gives a lesson. Synchronous distance education is bound in time and not in place. On the other hand, asynchronous distance education has to do with a situation where the connections between the educator and the learner are bounded neither in time nor in space.

Another major advantage of ODL is expressed in the provision of flexible educational opportunities in terms of access and multiple modes of knowledge acquisition without necessarily compromising standards. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), ODL is a philosophy founded on the principle of flexibility concerning when, where and how the learner studies. Ahmad, Philips, Santhi and Wahib (2010) explain these components of ODL thus:

- flexibility means the availability of choice for educational endeavours anywhere, any time and any how;
- Access means opportunities made available to all, freeing them

- from constraints of time and place; and
- multiple modes mean the use of various delivery systems and learning resources.

UNESCO has applauded the importance of ODL by stressing that educational skills acquired through mainstream approach across the globe particularly in developing economies is becoming more tasking than ever. According to UNESCO as cited in Ahmad, *et al* (2010):

Schools in developing countries lack the most basic resources needed for education such as qualified teachers, facilities and textbooks. Double and triple shifts of a few hours are the norm in some regions; the number of days in the school year has been reduced; and teachers' salaries have declined so much that fully qualified teachers are often a luxury and teachers' turnover and attendance are problematic. Even with low salaries almost all of the school budgets are spent on personnel, so there is little left for school textbooks and other instructional materials- less than \$1 in low-income countries at the primary level, versus \$52 in industrialised countries.

Considering the foregoing, the prevailing challenges facing education in developing world, Nigeria inclusive, it becomes necessary for governments to rise up to responsibility by developing problem-solving responsive measures. Therefore, developing countries have endeavoured to use ODL as part of such measures. In other words, increasing demand for higher education by people of various age brackets and social status has made the evolution of ODL a right step in the right direction. What is more, in an era of decreasing state funding for higher education and increasing demand for enrolments into conventional educational institutions, particularly in developing countries, there is growing interest in the use of ODL as a means of providing tertiary education for the people so as to enable them acquire skills and latest information that will make them positive change agents and productive members of their respective communities.

In Nigeria, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is at the front burner of ODL. In order to ensure quality assurance in various degrees and certificates being awarded by NOUN, and in order to ensure high delivery capacity on the part of NOUN products, various state-based educational agencies periodically evaluate the activities of NOUN. For instance, NOUN exposes its programmes for accreditation by National University Commission (NUC). Furthermore, decision makers ensure that study centres are built in designated locations across the country to ensure qualitative and quantitative service delivery by NOUN within the context of the policy framework that underpins its establishment as an ODL institution.

As a result of its potential for continual skills upgrading and re-skilling, and possible conduct of teaching by proxy, ODL is open to a wide range of learners who on completion of their programmes would be more promising towards self-actualisation and be more useful to the society at large. With specific emphasis on the present study, the increased flexible learning opportunities provided through ODL would enable learners become informed citizens through which means they would know their fundamental rights, which would in turn make them more productive participants in the democratic process.

Electoral Violence and the Democratic Process in Nigeria

The rate at which the political elite entice the youth to perpetrate electoral violence has become worrisome with devastating consequences on the democratic process in Nigeria. The “benefits” attached to political thuggery have influenced many a youth to consider violence as occupation, not minding the consequences of their illicit activities on individuals and the society at large. Some political office holders not only compensate their hired thugs based on contractual agreement but also enlist them on government payroll. Thus, with diminishing economic opportunities leading to rising desperation and social discontent, there is an increasing perception among youths that involvement in violent activities remains a viable means of improving their social and economic conditions. Thus, inordinate ambitions of some political elite have made them become patrons of criminality in the polity. Given their shallow orientation about the essence of credible

election on the democratic process, many young men and women are easily indulged by the politicians to perpetrate electoral violence.

Evidences abound across the country to buttress the assertion that the political elite are the primary originators of electoral violence at the three stages of the electoral process with specific emphasis on the fourth republic. In the build up to 2003 elections, politicians in Kwara State engaged youths to perpetrate electoral violence. For instance, the 'Akaje' and 'Maja' militant groups were allegedly employed by Bukola Saraki as his personal security services providers. These groups were disguised under the umbrella of the political association recruited to mobilise support for Bukola Saraki's gubernatorial ambition in 2003. They were renowned for the slogan "*Sai Saraki*", '*Oloye*', and '*Sai Bukky*'. Findings further revealed that Mohammad Lawal, the incumbent governor between 1999 and 2003 also had his own militia gang known as the '*Gbosa Boys*'. They were mostly recruited from among members of Odu'a People's Congress (OPC) of Kwara State Chapter.

In Bayelsa State, Dr. Dieprieve Aleamieyeseigha, the then incumbent governor allegedly armed the *creek boys* to perpetrate electoral violence towards accomplishing his second term ambition. It was revealed that the arms, ammunition and boats including security uniform with which the "Sea Pirates" were equipped were imported into the country by the Bayelsa State government (TELL Magazine, December 8, 2003, p. 19). Having used them to secure his political ambition, the governor dumped them contrary to the contractual agreement between them. Describing the governor as 'unreliable', the Sea pirates converted the uniforms, arms and ammunition and boats supplied them by the governor to tools being used to inflict terror in the creeks. This later snowballed into the 'Odi' disaster in 2003 where a lot of destruction of lives and property were recorded (TELL TELL Magazine, December 8, 2003, p.22).

The Northern part of the country is not an exemption in this phenomenon of politicians' patronage of our youths to perpetrate electoral violence. For instance, Abubakar Musa, a drop out undergraduate from the Department of Mechanical Engineering,

University of Maiduguri, alleged that he was been patronised by politicians of northern extraction for the supply of automatic and semi-automatic weapons being manufactured by him. He further stressed that he had uncommon contact with certain governors in the north who depended on him for regular supply of weapons for their cronies (TELL May 24, 2004. Pp. 20-31). In Gombe State, the politicians are alleged of employing the illicit services of a militant group called the '*Kalare*', for the perpetration of political violence. The *Kalare* gangs comprised cult members drawn from both campus-based and grassroots-based cult groups in the state. In the same vein, in Katsina State, in 2003, it was alleged that politicians from certain political parties engaged youths for perpetrating political violence. The argument here is that youths are cheaply giving in to politicians to perpetrate electoral violence because they are ignorant of the ideals of democracy which could be appreciated through adequate democratic education.

Preventing Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Exploring the Instrumentality of ODL

It has been established that ODL has the capacity to reach unto wide range of people across cultural lines and social status. This will provide an avenue for the electorate to acquire information that could enable them perform their democratic functions within the limit of civility and sense of purpose. Democratic education is all the more important now that almost two decades of democratic experimentation in Nigeria's 4th Republic, electoral violence has prevailed in the process of election. This indicates that substantial members of the public are still participating in election out of ignorance.

It is imperative to note that continued participation of the citizenry in democratic practice out of ignorance spells danger for national integration and the integrity of the democratic process. Citizens' participation in the democratic process without being properly informed will continue to vitiate the conduct of credible elections as the electorate will continue to be divided along ethnic, religious and regional borders. However, a remarkable change will be recorded if majority of the populace exercise their democratic and civic obligations with understanding. The argument here therefore, is that proper democratic education that is capable of pulling the electorate out of the

shackles of ignorance could be accessed through ODL. The Nigerian government has taken cognizance of the potential benefits of ODL in fulfilling its philosophy on education and in ensuring the fundamental human rights of the citizenry, which informed the establishment of National Open University of Nigeria in 1983, which, however, became functional since 2003. Basically, Nigeria's National policy on education as captured in the National Policy on Education, cited in Okolo (2003:300) aims at guaranteeing:

- i. A free and democratic society;
- ii. A just and egalitarian society;
- iii. A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- iv. A great and dynamic economy; and
- v. A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

When the people are lacking in basic democratic education, they tend to compromise the fundamentals of Nigeria's National policy on education, thereby undermining national integration and democratic consolidation. Proper democratic education will enable the people to appreciate the fact that voting in a democratic process is a civic responsibility which has to be conducted with considerable sense of civility, patriotism and integrity. ODL has the potential to disseminate knowledge-based information on democracy to the people so that they would observe the conditions that guide effective democratic conduct. Apparently, the right of the electorate to participate effectively and constructively in the democratic process is inherently dependent on their ability to make judicious choice of leadership. Lack of proper democratic education will intensify voter apathy, which could impact negatively on the entire democratic process. Hence, democratic education is the bedrock of democratic consolidation. Through the flexibility and accessibility of ODL, it is a veritable avenue for promoting knowledge-based participatory democracy, thereby reducing the possibility of electoral violence which has remained a cog in the wheel of democratic experimentation in Nigeria. The proliferation of information through ODL will effect attitudinal change in the citizenry within which context they would play their role effectively in the interest of national integration and democratic stability. The point of emphasis here is that ODL can provide education to many youths who might not have access to the conventional system.

The whole idea is that when they are informed about the values and ideals of true democracy, they will naturally become agents of positive change, and electoral violence will be grossly discouraged, which will add tremendous value to the integrity of the democratic experimentation and improve the credibility of leadership in the polity.

Conclusion

This study has made a discerning analysis on the imperative of ODL for disseminating democratic education with a view to effecting attitudinal change in the citizenry, thereby stemming the tide of electoral violence in the polity. The study contends that the prevalence of electoral violence constitutes danger for deepening the values and ideals of democracy in Nigeria.

As in the preceding republics, the issue of morality in politics and respect for the Electoral Act have been trivialised by political parties and politicians in the country. Hence, over the years, the democratic experimentation has been characteristically inundated with violence as election victory has always been considered a matter of life and death. Invariably, this has always informed the militarisation of the electoral process particularly during party primaries, party conventions, electioneering campaigns and the Election Day voting proper. Whereas, ordinarily, militarisation of the electoral process might be needless if every stakeholder acquires proper democratic education and apply same accordingly. Unfortunately, youths who are essential human materials for national development have constituted the majority of perpetrators and victims of electoral violence. Hence, preventing electoral violence in the country requires value re-orientation for Nigerian youths in particular, and the entire citizenry in general.

On that note, this study contends that ODL is a strategic medium through which Nigerian youths and the entire citizenry could acquire relevant information on democratic education, thereby improving their participatory culture in the democratic process. The quest for making Nigeria a better democratic society cannot transcend the realm of wishful thinking unless every citizen endeavours to play their role with

high sense of commitment, patriotism and responsibility. And the process of achieving a better society can only realistic when the citizenry acquires knowledge to function responsibly in the interest of sustainable development and national integration. For instance, democratically informed citizenry will entrench democratic culture, so much that they will be able to hold their leaders accountable and promote transparency in governance through appropriate use of their voting right, which could only be acquired through democratic education. This explains the imperative of ODL as it is capable of providing the required knowledge for people to participate in the process of democratic consolidation and integrated development.

Recommendations

This study has established the role of democratic education in ensuring violent-free electoral process in Nigeria and the imperatives of ODL in the process. Hence, the following recommendations are made within which context behavioural and attitudinal change could be effected in the citizenry in view of democratic consolidation in the country:

1. There is the need for NOUN to promote democratic orientation in the youth through public enlightenment programmes: Government and other stakeholders should improve on infrastructural facilities especially electricity supply across the country considering the fact that ODL is electrically-inclined. This will go a long way in maximising the potential benefits of ODL for producing informed citizenry who will participate meaningfully in democratic consolidation by enhancing violent-free electoral process in Nigeria.
2. NOUN should develop curriculum for democratic education which may be incorporated into the curriculum of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution being taken as General course for all NOUN students. The whole idea is to ensure that the scope of democratic education is extended to a wide range of citizens through ODL.
3. Private sector support and partnership with NOUN towards the promotion ODL: in line with the trend and practice in international community, private sector should provide

- financial and material supports for NOUN towards ensuring qualitative and quantitative delivery of democratic education in the country. For instance, the private sector can provide financial assistance for NOUN to engage in aggressive enlightenment campaigns for the citizenry on the essence of violent-free election in democratic consolidation in the country.
4. NOUN should engage in mass production of instructional materials on electoral and democratic education for free distribution to various sections of the society. For instance, lecture videos on Governance and Electoral Studies could be produced massively for free distribution to various categories of civil society including market women, politicians, Road Transport Workers, artisans and politicians, among others.

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