

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN CURBING YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

An obvious evil that has trailed the democratization process in Nigeria is electoral violence. The pitiable part of the situation is massive involvement of the youths used as political thugs, bodyguards and assassins. This paper is essentially a survey on the factors responsible for the involvement of youths in electoral violence and a discussion on the role social studies education can play in curbing the ugly situation. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency counts and is summarized in tables. Illiteracy was identified as the major monster, while social studies education unanimously believed to be a major aid to curb the menace. Recommendations are proffered to ensure the provision of qualitative social studies education that will inculcate democratic values, ideas and principles in youths for the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Violence, Thugs, Bodyguards, Youth, Election, Democracy

### 1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Youth is the period of being young. It is a period between being a child and being fully grown. It is a crucial stage in the development of the human personality. The period is characterized by vigorous health, adventure and activity. Youths as members of the society have the civic right to participate in the political activities of the country. According to Ndazagha (1999) political participation involves all the activities members of a society undertake on their own volition in order to contribute in electing leaders or in formulating public policy personality or through representation.

The bedrock of political activities in Nigeria since the colonial period has been the political parties. Anifawose and Enemu (1999) political parties even though cannot be differentiated ideologically, have one common feature. Each party keeps an army of youths used as political thugs to terrorize and intimidate opponents. Yau'u (2003) stated that as far back as the first republic, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) kept a large number of political thugs who were mainly youths named Yanbanga, a Hausa adoption of the English word "vanguards" to harass their political opponents especially in the Northern element peoples union (NEPU). The NEPU also had theirs. Those political thugs were frequent source of violent political clashes, between supporters of different political parties. In the struggle for power, these political thugs helped to recruit other youths not only for campaign purposes but to harass and intimidate the political opponents of their political masters. Furthermore, they terrorized constituencies where their patrons had no support. They created confusion and sometimes mounted roadblocks to

stop elections where they were unsure of their patrons winning. They were also part of the retinue of paid voters on Election Day and worked hard to discredit the electoral process. The youths that were so used were unemployed, illiterates, unskilled and redundant individuals who relied on their political masters for survival (Salisu, 1999 & Ya'u, 2003).

In extreme cases, these youths were used to settle political, personal and business disagreements through assassinations. These youths were completely dependent on big-time politicians for survival (Jomoh, 2003). These experiences have continued to trial elections and the political process in Nigeria. According to Nwabueze (1999) Nigeria presents the most blatant manifestation of electoral malpractices. The recently conducted 2007, 2011 general elections and the re-run elections arising from the complaints of the abuse of the electoral process was still characterized by violence and malpractices. The involvement of youths in these grievous activities create a bleak future for the youths and their generation; and holds serious consequences for democracy in Nigeria. Elections are increasingly being settled less by the choices of voters but more by the relative ability of contending political actors to deploy thugs complemented by money to edge out political opponents. This violent political culture has not only created voter apathy but also acts as major sources of instability stifling the democratic process and the development effort of the nation.

To state that Nigeria and Nigerians desire and prefer the democratic system of governance is to state an obvious fact. The smooth transition from civilian to civilian's governments on the 29 of May 2007, and 2011 portrays this clearly. Since the emergence of the fourth republic in 1999, concerted efforts have been made to ensure that the democratic experience works. Undoubtedly, a lot of progress has been recorded. However, there exist some areas that require urgent attention. One of such areas is the involvement of youths in electoral violence. In virtually all the elections conducted at federal, state and local government levels, there were reported cases of ballot box snatching, exchange of ballot boxes, abduction of electoral officials, abduction of opposition candidates, use of political thugs to harass and intimidate political opponents and even political assassination and most dastardly one is the post-election violence of 2011. This situation has created fear and instability into the body polity, discrediting to a large extent the process in Nigeria. Elections are principal features of democracy. They offer opportunities for smooth change and transparency in governance. This paper investigates that factors responsible for youth involvement in electoral violence and discussion on the role social studies educations can play to curb the dangerous trend.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth is the period of being young. It is a period between being a child and being fully grown. It is a crucial stage in the development of the human personality. The period is characterized by vigorous health, adventure and activity. Youths as members of the society have the civic right to participate in the political activities of the country. According to Ndazagha (2019), Political participation involves all the activities members of a society undertake on their own volition in order to contribute in electing leaders or in formulating public policy personally or through representation. The bedrock of political activities in Nigeria since the colonial period has been the political parties, Anifawose and Eneumo (1999). Political parties even though cannot be differentiated ideologically, have one common feature. Each party keeps an army of youths used as political thugs to terrorize and intimidate political opponents. Ya'u (2003) stated

that as far back as the first Republic, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) kept a large number of political thugs which were mainly youths named "Yanbanga", a Hausa adoption of the English word "Vanguards" to harass their political opponents especially in the Northern Element Peoples Union (NEPU). The NEPU also had theirs. Those political thugs were frequent source of violent political Clashes between supporters of different political parties.

In the struggle for power, these political thugs helped to recruit other youths not only for campaign purposes but to harass and intimidate the political opponents of their political masters. Furthermore, they terrorized constituencies where their patrons had no support. They created confusion and sometimes mount road blocks to stop elections where they were unsure of their patrons winning. They were also part of the retinue of paid voters on Election Day and worked hard to discredit the electoral process. The youth that were so used were unemployed, illiterate, unskilled and redundant individuals who relied on their political masters for survival (Salisu 2020 & Ya'u 2021). In extreme cases, these youths were used to settle political, personal and business disagreements through assassinations. These youths were completely dependent on big-time politicians for survival (Momoh 2018).

These experiences have continued to trail elections and the political process in Nigeria. According to Nwabueze (1999), Nigeria presents the most blatant manifestations of electoral malpractices. The 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 as well as the most recent 2023 general elections and most of the re-run elections arising from the complaints of the abuse of the electoral process were still characterized by violence and malpractices. The involvement of youths in this grievous activities create a bleak future for the youth and their generations; and holds serious consequences for Democracy in Nigeria. Elections are increasingly being settled less by the choices of voters but more by the relative ability of contending political actors to deploy thugs complemented by money to edge out political opponents. This violent political culture has not only created voter apathy but also acts as a major source of instability stifling the Democratic process and the development effort of the nation. In the case of 2023 general elections many local and international observers have condemned the February 25th presidential and national assembly elections and the March 18th governorship and states assembly elections following the wide spread of violence and electoral irregularities that accompanied election which were largely perpetrated by youths, Vanguard (2023) In Cross Rivers, an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) adhoc staff was hit by stray bullets after some youth carrying arms open fire while she is in a boat heading to Bakassi for election duty, also more than 50 thugs at about 2.15 Aminvade collation center. In Kogi State, 101 INEC officials and adhoc staff were kidnapped while on their way from Kupa north and south wards to the constituency collation center by armed hoodlums at about 2am. In lafia, the Nassarwa state protesters took to streets protesting alleged rigging of the governorship election by INEC in the state.

The protesting youth turned violent during which one person was killed and several others injured. Yola, the Adamawa state capital was in turmoil on the March 18th after political thugs and miscreants' unleashed terror on the citizens following a stalemate arising from a failure of the INEC to declare the governorship election results. In Aguda, Surulere Lagos a woman was stabbed on her face by thugs who disrupted the voting process. The political thugs were armed by 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 Kuje Amuwa, Mazamaza. The youth ordered the people should leave the polling booths for their safety, warning that they would come back. In Benue, no fewer than six persons were killed while many were injured during the governorship and state assembly elections. The six persons reputedly killed by security agencies at different locations stormed the polling units to snatch ballot boxes which were young people. In some part of Agatu and Ukum there were reports about disruption of electoral process. Benue Police command announced the arrest of 26 suspects for various electoral offences. The February 25th presidential election ended up in violence in Rivers State. Angry youths allegedly protested against attempt to manipulate the results of the presidential elections. Later, there were sporadic shooting and vandalization of properties and vehicles along Airport road by group of youths. The election in Edo state claimed the life of Festus Edahosa, 33 year old, and late Mrs. Elizabeth Owie a 43 year old mother of three. Kano, the Nigeria's North West turned in to a hotbed of violence as armed youths groups invaded the residence of a singer and a politician of All Progressive Congress (APC), Dauda Kahutu Rarara setting it ablaze after the announcement of gubernatorial election results in favor of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) by INEC Vanguard (2023)

### 3.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Democracy is essentially an ideal and a method. The idea is the individuals are given the freedom to associate together and work for their common good and advantage. This is based on the principle of self-respect and self-control. This method carries the process of the ballot box. This requires the presences of institutionalized mechanism by which citizens may, if they so desire change persons holding political power through regular competitive elections, respect for the rule of law, accountability and protection of human and civil rights. Elections are thus non-violent processes of political and social change. They are legal, peaceful and constitutional means of individuals and political groups competing to gain control of powers through popular participation and respect for the civil and political rights of people.

In many parts of Africa, Nigeria inclusive, elections are characterized by political violence, rigging, and suppression of opposition groups and the denial of the rights of the people. Nwabueze (1993) noted that the major problem of democratization in most African countries is the inability of the people to imbibe the values and principles of liberty, justice and fair play. He attributed this to illiteracy and poverty. However, constitutional democracy is an art that has to be learned and developed. Electoral violence may have a place in the political process to direct attention to segments of the society, which fell neglected, sidelined and marginalized. However, as experienced in Nigeria, electoral violence is perversion of the entire electoral process. The massive involvement of youths in this evil has left many wondering if there is hope for democracy in Nigeria. This is because it has prevented real popular participation in the choice of leaders and exercise of individual political rights of the citizenry.

### 4.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study specifically intends to find answers to two basic questions:

- i. What are the underlying factors responsible for youth involvement in electoral violence?
- ii. To what extent can the provision of qualitative social studies education help curb youth involvement in electoral violence?

## 5.0 METHODOLOGY

This study is a survey investigating the involvement of youths in electoral violence and the role of Social Studies Education can play in arresting the situation. The population of the study consisted of all NCE 200 and 300 level Social Studies Students of Federal College of Education, Kano. From the population of over six hundred and eighty four students, a sample of two hundred subjects was randomly selected from seven combinations. The main instrument used for data collected was a questionnaire. This instrument was chosen because all the respondents are youth and literate, able to express their opinion in relation to the problem under investigation. However, out of the 200 questionnaires distributed only 195 were received back. The data collected was analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics; frequency counts and percentages, the findings were summarized in tables.

## 6.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Factors responsible for youth involvement in electoral violence. The aspect of the study sought to find out the factors that lead youths to get involved in violent political activities. The responses of the subjects are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Factors responsible for youth involvement in electoral violence.**

Factors	Frequency of Responses	Percentage (%)
Illiteracy / Ignorance	82	42.1
Poverty	53	27.2
Unemployment	35	17.9
Peer influence/Youth exuberance	15	7.7
Corruption	05	2.6
Injustice	03	1.5
Drug Abuse	02	1.0
Total	195	100%

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

From Table 1, it could be observed that 82 (42.1%) of the respondents opined that illiteracy coupled with ignorance is a major factor leading youths to get involved in violent political activities. This is as noted by Ya'u (2003), that a common feature of adjustment and coping mechanisms of youths outside the school system is the resort to violence. 53 (27.2%) of the respondents opted for poverty as a major factor, and 35 (17.9%) stated that unemployment is the major factor. Due to the fact that the high rate of unemployment is pervasive, the fall is easy prey for manipulation and exploitation by selfish politicians who lure them into electoral violence.

This position was acknowledged by Ojo in Saliu (1999) and Nwabueze (1999) when they affirmed that most Nigerians live below starvation level and are stark illiterates with no skills to sell. Since poverty is so pervasive, it is difficult for youths to avoid the temptation of being led into violent behavior. It is also worthy of note that poverty and unemployment are direct products of illiteracy and ignorance (Pahuja, 2003). Peer influence and youthful exuberance as



a factor had 15 (7.7%) responses. This is not unexpected, as youths are vibrant people and rely on their peer group principally for personal and social adjustments. Also, youths used as political aids find it easy to recruit other youths as thugs, paid voters, or even assassins (Momoh, 2003; Ya'u, 2003). Corruption as a factor had 3 (1.5%) and drug abuse 2 (1%) of the total responses.

From the analysis of the responses, it is obvious that illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, and unemployment are major factors responsible for youth involvement in electoral violence. This is not unexpected, as inadequate education leaves youths with inadequate political education, inadequate skills for employment and self-reliance, and negative values and attitudes. Such youths become completely ruled by spontaneity and fatalism and are easily manipulated by selfish politicians. Thus, illiteracy is a monster standing against not only the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria but also creates a bleak future for the youths and their generations.

**Table 2: Showing the perception of youths about the role of social studies education in curbing youth involvement in electoral violence**

S/N	Variables	Frequency of Responses			Total
		Agreed	Not sure	Disagreed	
i.	Democratic ideas thrive with educated citizenry	180 (92.3%)	02 (1%)	13 (6.7%)	195 (100%)
ii.	Social studies Education molds thinking of the youth.	186 (95.4%)	00 (0%)	09 (4.6%)	195 (100%)
iii.	Social studies Education promotes knowledge, rational thinking and decision	180 (92.3%)	04 (2.1%)	11 (5.6%)	195 (100%)
iv.	Social Studies Educations aids good citizenship in youth.	195 (98.5%)	01 (0.5%)	02 (1%)	195 (100%)
v.	Social Studies Education equips youth with skills for self-reliance and productivity.	188 (96.4%)	07 (3.7%)	00 (0%)	195 (100%)

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

From Table 2, 180 (92.3%) of the respondents agreed that social studies education helps citizens acquire democratic ideals and principles to thrive in society. This is because the process of education instils self-discipline and self-control by helping youths work and interact responsibly with others. However, 13 (6.7%) disagreed. This last group may not seem to appreciate the close relationship between Social studies education and democracy. On the second item, which focuses on character development preventing irresponsible and unpatriotic behavior, 186 (95.4%) of respondents agreed, 4 (2.1%) were unsure, and 9 (4.6%) disagreed. On the promotion of critical thinking and rational decision-making, 180 (92.3%) agreed, 04 (2.1%) were unsure, and 11 (5.6%) disagreed. The role of social studies education in the promotion of good citizenship was overwhelming, with 195 (98.5%) agreeing, 1 (0.5%) unsure, and only 2 (1%) disagreeing. The pattern of responses on the last item, that social Studies

education equips youths with functional skills for self-reliance and productivity, was not different, as 188 (96.4%) agreed, 07 (3.6%) were unsure, and no respondent disagreed. From the responses, it is obvious that the majority of respondents believe in the potency of Social Studies education in equipping youths for responsible living, effective political participation, and the prevention of negative political behaviors. This aligns with the views of Saliu (1999) and Pahuja (2003). According to them Social studies education is the basis on which the edifice of a strong democracy is built, through Social studies education youths can be trained to be good citizens, co-operative, knowledgeable, vocationally efficient to display a high level of integrity, justice and fair play which are powerful democratic ideas. When youths have such broad-based qualitative education, it would become very difficult for politicians with sugar-coated tongues and ill-gotten wealth to recruit and mobilize them to cause violence.

## 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. There is an urgent need to make the school curriculum broad-based and political education concepts infused into every level of schooling so that democratic values, ideals and principles are taught. Teachers with Social Studies background should be made to handle such aspects of the curriculum.
- ii. Skill acquisition should be emphasized in the educational system SO that youths can appreciate the dignity of labor, self-reliance, productivity and professionalism.
- iii. Effort should be made by government, private organizations and NGOs to rehabilitate youths that have been led astray by unscrupulous politicians. Craft centers, adult education classes and non-formal training programs should be established for the purpose of educating the youths and training them for jobs.
- iv. The mass media should live up to expectation by properly enlightening the youths on their role in the political process and consequences of electoral violence. Also, they should abide by the ethics of their profession and prevent manipulation by the state and individuals to misinform the citizenry.
- v. There is need for a purposeful leadership with the political will to selflessly, honestly and transparently fight corruption, social injustice and marginalization. Such leaders should also use available state resources to provide basic amenities and educational facilities that will help build faith of the citizens in the democratic process, the nation and themselves.

## 8.0 CONCLUSION

One of the goals of the Nigerian nation is to build a free and democratic society. Democracy thrives in a society that has majority of its citizens educated. Social studies Education revives democracy, refines and maintains it. The youths are the next generation that would need to keep the flame of democratic life burning successfully. This is however made possible if attention is given to the provision of qualitative social studies education. Through social Studies education effective human relationship is possible. The youths can be raised and transformed to become good citizens, trained for effective leadership and followership and equipped with useful skills for honest living. The continuous use of the youths for electoral violence should stop. This does not only cause fear and instability, and a waste to human resources, but threatens the corporate existence of the nation.

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