

INSECURITY AND WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Pastoralist-farmer conflict, Boko Haram insurgency, ethno-religious violence and communal clashes have constituted security challenges in the country. They have caused numerous deaths, destruction of property and massive displacement of people with associated socio-economic negative impacts. The paper interrogated how insecurity affects women participation in the electoral processes in Nigeria. The paper relied on secondary source of information. Human security approach was employed as the theoretical framework. The paper argued that insecurity has not only affected the electoral processes in Nigeria but limited the involvement of women in exercising their political rights. When a political system is characterized by insecurity, women tend to stay away from playing active role which further perpetuates gender inequality in the decision making process. The paper recommended that for women to effectively participate in the electoral processes, insecurity which has constituted a serious challenge to peace and development needs to be tackled by government at all levels. There is need for re-orientation of all political parties to shun any form of political brigandage and violence in order to encourage more women participation in the electoral processes. Security agents, particularly, the Nigeria Police need to be trained and retrained for capacity building and well remunerated to ensure peace during elections.

Keywords: election, electoral process, insecurity, political participation, women

Introduction

Nigeria has been experiencing security and governance challenges since the advent of the Fourth Republic. Inter-and intra- communal conflicts, religious violence, indigene and settler conundrums, armed banditry, resource-induced conflict and Boko Haram insurgency have exacerbated the security challenges the country is confronted with. Women have been victims of insecurity particularly as it affects their participation in the electoral processes. In a situation where the political system is characterized by different forms of insecurity, women suffer more harms and vulnerabilities which hinder them from exercising their civic and political rights.

Over the years, women have suffered a setback in having more access to political leadership positions and decision making process in the country as a result of various challenges including patriarchy, derogatory cultural and traditional beliefs, lack of funds to pursue political ambitions, political party insensitivity towards women's issues, to mention a few. The history of electoral process in Nigeria has been dotted with violence of different nature such as thuggery, political assassination, maiming, brigandage, terrorism and communal conflicts. In the areas affected by insecurity such as the North East, North Central, South East and South, where incessant killings occur mostly on a daily basis particularly in the rural communities, women have been scared away from participating in the electoral process which underscore why there was low turnout of women during voters' registration, campaigns and voting exercise.

As noted by Rasak and Garuba (2017), there has been poor involvement of women in the electoral process despite the increased number of educated women who can ably contest for elective positions in the Nigeria's political system. The reason for this dilemma is as a result of the violent nature of the electioneering process and the prevalent insecurity before election period which hinder women's advancement politically. Women suffer a lot of insecurity right from the family level which transcends to other socio-economic political institutions. Literature abounds on the various challenges perpetuating gender inequality in Nigerian political system; however, the role insecurity plays as a barrier to women participation in the electoral processes seems not to have been exhaustively explored.

Concept of security

Security, as a concept, has attracted various definitions by scholars. It is one of the highly contested concepts in Peace and Conflict Studies. According to Stan (2004), security implies mechanism put in place to avoid, prevent, reduce or resolve violent conflicts and threats which originate from the states, non-state actors or structural, socio-political and economic conditions. What is implied in the conception of security by Stan (2004) is that insecurity is multi-causal in nature and there are different actors whether state or non-state and situations which can constitute threats to security of human lives. That is the reason why there was a shift from the state centric approach to the conceptualization of security to embrace human security approach. It is of no use if the territorial integrity of the state is guaranteed and human lives within the state are not protected. Therefore, the primary responsibility of the state is to promote and protect human lives. However, the state can also perpetrate human rights violations as cases abound globally. Security to mean the feeling of being safe and secure, lack of threats and the management of future risks (Jore, 2019; Jenkins, 2019).

According to Egbewole (2013), security means a state, feeling or means of being secure, to be free from any form of danger. It also involves measures put in place to keep a person or country safe from danger or crime. Security is the opposite of insecurity, which connotes the state of fear, grave danger, deprivation and unqualified exposure to want and despair (Egbewole, 2013). There are two dimensions of security namely internal and external.

The state has the basic duty of protecting lives and property internally while it also ensures that its territorial integrity is not violated. The essence of any responsive and responsible government is to guarantee both internal and external security, ensuring that lives are secured and borders of a nation are adequately protected from external aggression by any other state and violent non-state actors. Every nation of the world has it as its duty to protect its citizens from any acts of insurrection which may violate their fundamental basic rights. Although, nations may hide under responsibility to protect to perpetrate acts of criminality against their citizens by preventing intervention from external actors to render humanitarian assistance to their citizens during conflict situations

From the post-modernist point of view, security is a mechanism put in place to ensure the safety of lives by the non-state actors and this put the state as the secondary provider of security in the society. Security in another way can be viewed as protection from danger, violence, fear and want which impair or capable of impairing the full development and existential wellbeing of the citizens (Alemika, 2015). Security has to do with efforts to protect oneself from dangers, need for order and continuity and aspirations for inner and mental balance. Boutros-Ghali (1994) conceives security as involving not only military, but also non-military dimensions such as environment, ethno-religious and natural identities, migration, poverty and disease. Security involves all conditions that guarantee peace, justice and good health of individuals in the society. Security is vital for national cohesion, peace and sustainable development and that is why national security is important for any form of good governance and development to occur in a society. Security has to do with conditions within which individuals in a society can go about their normal activities without any form of fear, intimidation or threat to lives and property (Ogege, 2013). The essence of security provisioning cannot be over-emphasised in a nation and that is why it is well entrenched in the constitution of every nation. For instance, in the 1999 Nigerian constitution, section 14 (2) (b), the essence of security and welfare provisioning for the Nigerians is accentuated but unfortunately, it has become elusive as lives and property are lost on a daily basis and the government and civil society organizations have become helpless.

Concept of Insecurity

In a situation where there is no security, the direct experience of the citizens is the opposite, which is insecurity. From different ideological and academic points of view, insecurity has been conceptualised in various ways. Insecurity is a situation that exists as a result of lack of effective measures put in place to guarantee the protection of individuals, information and property against hostile persons, influences and actions. In a situation where there is insecurity, people will not be able to go about their normal daily activities, personal, economic, social and political securities will be grossly affected.

Insecurity according to Balard (2005) means lack of protection and freedom from unprotected harms, that is, not being protected from emotional stress resulting from paucity of assurance that an individual is accepted, has opportunity and choices to fulfill his or her potentials including freedom from fear. From another perspective, Achumba, Ighomereho, Akpor-Robaro (2013) conceptualise insecurity as a state of being subjected to danger, expose to risk and or anxiety. Also, insecurity is conceptualized as absence of safety or presence of a threat, risk, doubt, lack of trust, inadequate security, or protection, feeling uneasy and unsafe (Nasiru, 2020; Anaele & Barikor, 2022). In the view of Cameron and McCormnell (1954), sources of insecurity include threat from within or beliefs particularly religion and emotional response to sudden external threats. Feelings of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, poverty, injustice, unemployment and other forms of social violence create a political environment characterized by insecurity. On the other hand, insecurity is a condition of being vulnerable to anxiety or

risks. As applied to the paper, insecurity is a condition of fear, not being safe, threat to lives and property and restriction from carrying out political and civic responsibilities which can impinge on the fundamental human rights of individuals particularly women.

Concept of Electoral Process

Electoral process does not readily lend itself to any generally acceptable definition. Various conceptions by scholars from different academic backgrounds exist. According to Elekwa (2008), electoral process involves the entire cycle ranging from the provision of voter education to the final voting of all aspirants. In another dimension, Ogbeide (2013) defines electoral process as including registration of voters, identifying the political parties to vote for, voting, counting of votes and declaration of election results.

Also, electoral process involves the selection of candidates, registration of voters and the entire voting procedures. It can be conceptualized as the orderly consequence of acts and activities regulated by the constitution and electoral law, that is, the activities political parties and citizens carry out with the aim of periodically renewing the seats of elected public officials. It is the procedure that guides the conduct of election in a particular nation. Any acts of violence that threatens the process jeopardise the will of the people. Insecurity can threaten the electoral process which can affect people's participation particularly the women. Electoral process can also involve the method and law for holding an election and explanation of laws and customs that must be followed by all partakers which must be periodic, free and fair elections (Foundation for Democratic Process, 2017).

Electoral process is divided into three major phases. These include pre-election phase, election day and post elections. The pre-election phase covers electoral legislation, delimitation of constituencies, registration of voters, nominations and campaign period. The second phase which is the Election Day, involves voting, counting of votes, announcement of results. The third phase is the post elections period which involves review of elections and filing of any complaint by the candidates. Electoral process also means civil activities and procedures involved in the election of representatives by the electorate (Akamere, 2001).

In the view of Jinadu (1997), electoral process involves rules, procedures and activities relating to the establishment of electoral bodies, appointment of members, voters' registration, nomination of candidates, balloting, counting of the ballots, declaration of results, selection and training of electoral officials, delimitation of constituency, voter education, registration of political parties and supervision of party primaries/congresses. The implication of this conception is that electoral process is carried out during democratic dispensation and all activities should guarantee free and fair process in the conduct of elections. Rules and regulations must exist in the political system in order to ensure fairness, justice and equality.

According to Nwanegbo (2015), electoral process has to do with all the institutional procedures, arrangements and actions involved in election. In another way, the United Nations Development Programme (2009) conceptualizes electoral process as fundamental to the attainment of political order which most often involves high stakes which can be a catalyst or acceleration of conflict. Electoral process is about procedures involved in electing people into political offices in order to allocate resources in a political system. If the process of electing leadership into political power is characterized by insecurity, the credible people can be scared away and the end product will be poor governance. That is why election is perceived as an alternative to violence and a way of achieving good governance (Nwanegbo, 2015). All activities and procedures put in place to ensure periodic election of political leaders by the electorate constitutes what is referred to as electoral process and for it to be adjudged good enough for the enthronement of political leaders, every phase of it must be free, fair, transparent and inclusive of all the eligible participants, including the women.

Theoretical framework

The paper adopted human security approach as its framework of analysis. The major proponent of human security approach is Mahbub ul Hag (1995). Human security approach proposes that if security policy and analysis are to be effective and legitimate, they must pay attention to individuals as the primary beneficiaries. As an approach, it argues that there is an ethical responsibility to re-orient security around the individual citizens in a society rather than placing emphasis on the territorial integrity of the state and it should be in accordance with internationally recognized standards of human rights and governance (Oxford Research Encyclopedia, 2019). Commission on Human Security (2003), argues that human security is needed so as to respond to the complexity and interrelatedness of both old and new security threats arising from chronic and persistent poverty to ethnic violence, human trafficking, climate change, terrorism, health issues and other socio-economic challenges.

Human security approach emphasises protection of fundamental freedoms that are essential to life. It also encompasses creating political, social, economic, environmental, military and cultural systems that give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity (Commission on Human Security, 2003). It involves human elements of security, rights and development. The characteristics of human security approach include people-centredness, multi-sectorality, comprehensiveness, context-specificity and prevention-oriented analysis (CHS, 2003). It places individuals at the centre of analysis instead of the state. State security centres on the protection of the territorial integrity of the state. From the traditional point of view, security has to do with protection of the territory of the state and if the state is protected, individuals living in it will also be protected. Human security approach focuses on a wide range of dangers that might be faced by the individual citizens and communities. It ex-rays the root causes of insecurities by advancing people-centred or oriented approach that are locally driven in providing solution to security challenges. Human security approach also advances that the realization of human security will include the governments and different actors such as regional and international organizations, non-governmental organizations and local communities (Mbagwu, 2015). However, it must be pointed out that state security and human security approaches are interdependent. The point of departure of the human security approach is that it emphasises the security of the people through development, not through arms, cooperation, not confrontation, peace and not war (UNDP, 1994). Human security also focuses on protection of people from harms such as political, economic, environmental, personal, communal, among others. According to the United Nations Development Programme (1994), human security approach adopts two strategies namely protection and empowerment. Protection shields people away from dangers while empowerment enables them to develop their potentials. In ensuring human development, there is need for human security approach to be adopted which will not only focus on protection of border integrity but also on the socio-political and economic well-beings and securities of people. The approach is adopted to anchor the paper because of postulating and emphasising human security in all its ramifications particularly as it regards issues of violence.

As a people-centred approach, it considers the conditions that threaten people's survival, livelihood and dignity, therefore advocating for protection and empowerment of individuals in the society. Since security provisioning is not time-bound, it must also cover the period of election in order to allow inclusivity in the electoral process. If insecurity characterizes electoral process, women will not participate and essence of inclusive government is jeopardised. For instance, political violence is one of the security challenges affecting peaceful conduct of elections scares women away and robs them of exercising their political rights.

As a framework that emphasises protection of fundamental freedoms that are essential to life, it is suitable to the paper because it advocates that individuals should not be denied freedom particularly rights to participate in civic responsibilities. Electoral process characterized by insecurity will not attract the citizens' participation particularly women who are allergic to political violence. Human security approach identifies and alleviates the direct and structural violence that give room for insecurity to fester in a society (Mbagwu, 2015). In addressing myriads of security challenges prevalent in Nigeria, inclusive security approach needs to be adopted which will enable the citizens including women to participate in the electoral process.

Insecurity in Nigeria: An historical overview

Insecurity is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria, before the advent of colonial invasion, it had been in place. Inter and intra-tribal conflicts were prevalent creating atmosphere of uncertainty and fear among the people. The prevalent wars in the pre-colonial period supplied captives into the slave trade industry which gave room for the Africans selling their brothers to the Europeans who were used as labourers in the sugar plantation and as domestic workers. The pre-colonial situation was characterised by insecurity which prompted tribal groups to migrate to the perceived 'secured places'.

Insecurity continued with colonialism and its characteristic oppressive rule. The manner in which the British colonisers conquered some parts of Nigeria particularly the North created an environment of insecurity in the society. Merging different ethnic groups existing independently further created atmosphere of tension and violence in Nigeria. As argued by Agbalajobi (2016), colonialism is the root of violence particularly with the introduction of election, which is one of the factors causing insecurity in the country. From her perspective, colonialism built the culture of violence due to its absolutist and oppressive rule adopted in seeking obedience to the British government. The nature of colonial administration encouraged the use of violence to enforce policies on the local people corralled together. Bringing ethnic groups of diverse backgrounds together induced atmosphere of crisis creating insecure environment as the major ethnic groups sought to dominate the minority groups. A political system characterised by inter- and intra-ethnic wranglings will be insecure for any credible and acceptable political activities to take place. As regards the violent electoral process, it was part of the electoral system during the colonial times as the case of the 1959 British conducted elections which witnessed intimidation of opponents, ballot stuffing and other irregularities (Jinadu, 1997).

In the post-independent Nigeria, insecurity has manifested in different dimensions in the electoral process in form of political assassination, gangsterism, hooliganism, killing of people, cultism, to mention but a few. The first republic experienced insecurity caused by the electoral violence due to winners-take all or zero-sum political culture and ethnicised politics which eventually led to its collapse. For instance, the 1964 general elections occasioned various dimensions of violence leading to insecurity in Nigeria. It witnessed intimidation of political opponents, harassment of voters and electoral officers and use of thugs to wreck havoc on the general body polity. Also, the December 1965 Western regional election which was characterised by insecurity that led to the declaration of state of emergency cannot be forgotten in a jiffy in the political history of the region and Nigeria as a whole.

In the opinion of Agbalajobi (2016), electoral violence constituted a serious security challenge in the first republic as a result of the nationalist leaders' attachment to the primordial interests. The ethnicised nature of Nigeria's politics aggravated the already tensed political environment which led to the killing of people and destruction of property. Electioneering campaigns during the time was characterized with violence creating uncertainty across the land.

It must be noted that election period in Nigeria is like preparing for war of attrition. As noted by Ehinmore and Ehiah (2013), electioneering campaign is associated with fake electoral promises, intimidation, confrontation, thuggery, political assassination and inciting hate speech which can ignite pre- and post-election conflicts.

On the issue of security caused as a result of electoral violence, the 1983 general elections were replica of the 1965 Western regional elections which led to the outright breakdown of law and order. The supporters of the National Party of Nigeria were caught with stolen votes (Joseph, 1991 cited in Awofeso, et al (2014). In the 1979 elections, the political environment was relatively peaceful. But the most peaceful, credible, freest and fairest election in the democratisation process in Nigeria was June 12 presidential elections annulled by the retired military head of state, Gbadamosi Babangida. The elections that ushered in the fourth republic was conducted by the Retired General Abdulsalam Abubakar were violence free which was characteristic of the military- conducted elections in Nigeria. The insecurity that permeated the political terrain during the inglorious reign of the late General Sanni Abacha made the country to be treated as a pariah state. It is noteworthy that the general insecurity that pervaded the political environment constituted a barrier to women active involvement in the electoral process, before, during and after elections in Nigeria. Since the military hand-over to the civilian administration in Nigeria in the fourth republic, elections conducted have been the replica of those of the first republic as they were characterised by the symptomatic experiences of ethnocentrism, parochialism, acrimony, rancor and violence (Obialor&Ugochukwu,2015). Lives and property were usually destroyed during elections threatening the corporate existence of the nation as ethnic groups agitated for secession at different times in the history of the country. In the fourth republic in particular, insecurity has increased due to lack of employment which has promoted abject poverty among the people most especially the Nigerian youths. For instance, the 2003 general elections were crisis-ridden and reminiscent of the violent elections which constituted security threats to the national survival. Political assassination cuts across all the geographical zones (Obi, 2015). With insecurity that characterized the electoral process across the nation during the period, there was distrust in the political system thereby discouraging many credible people particularly the women to participate in politics. Insecurity also characterised 2011 post-election period when more than 800 people were massacred in the North including the corpors who served as electoral officials.

The spate of violence skyrocketed in 2009 with the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency which devastated and depleted human and material resources in the North East, Nigeria. The insecurity is regionally- based but gradually spreads its tentacles to the other parts of the country. For instance, Boko Haram insurgency has been entrenched in the North East claiming lives and property with no permanent solution in sight. The criminality perpetrated by insurgents reached its highest apogee when 274 school girls were abducted in Chibok in 2014 with only 93 of them released (Women International League for Peace and Freedom, 2017). A lot of women and girls were abducted by the insurgents and used as bush wives, sex slaves and suicide bombers (WILPF, 2017).

Prevalence of militancy and kidnapping exacerbated the insecurity in the South East, Nigeria. Kidnapping involves illegal keeping of an individual in order to release the person after paying ransom. It is a way of making money by the criminal gangs who will never mind if the person kept in hostage dies or not. As observed by Nwagboso (2018), kidnapping became a prevalent issue since 2007 after the general elections in Nigeria as the political thugs used during the period became redundant. Herdsmen insurgency has constituted a serious security threat in the North-Central, Nigeria which is gradually spreading to other parts of the country. In the same vein, insurrection of militant and ethnic militias such as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni

People (MOSOP), Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Egbesu Boys, to mention but a few, have contributed to the security challenges affecting Nigeria as a nation. Insurrection of ethno nationalistic activities has compounded the security challenges the government has to grapple with. In a situation where there is terrorism (North East), militancy (South-South), separatist agitation (South East), resource conflict (North-Central), ethno-religious conflicts, kidnapping and a host of other security challenges, civic engagement will be difficult.

The porous nature of the Nigerian borders has not really helped the matter with increased influx of light weapons being circulated by the criminal gangs and other violent non-state actors. A political system characterised by insecurity of different kinds will definitely scare away citizens from performing their civic responsibilities.

Insecurity and Women Participation in the Electoral Process

Women face security challenge in different forms adversely affecting their participation in the electoral process. Right from the domestic level, women face a lot of security issues due to human rights violations. There is a general orientation that women are subordinate to men. They are to be dominated in every aspect of social life. The patriarchal belief in some African societies particularly Nigeria supports that women can be beaten as a corrective measure. This has contributed in no small way to perpetuate domestic violence against women until recently when women rights organisations began to advocate against it. As a matter of fact, women who face domestic and structural violence will not have the confidence of participating in the electoral process because insecurity at home and in political system will not encourage them to venture into public arena. As argued by Agbalajobi (2016), whatever treatment a man gives to a woman even if violent particularly within the family setting is accepted as the norm and should be endured by her particularly when children are involved.

There are some insecurities that women face at the private realm that are not observable but negatively affect their involvement in the electoral process which constitute a psychological threat or social restriction (Paasilinna, Palmer-Wetherald & Ritche, 2017). Insecurity perpetrated in form of electoral violence can manifest in the family level in form of psychological, economic and physical violence. Familial pressure is a form of intimidation or forced disenfranchisement which may include spousal or parental pressure on who to vote for, refusal to leave home to vote, refusal of relatives to watch children for women to vote, among other challenges, affect women disproportionately (Paasilinna, et al 2017). Psychological violence which is a form of insecurity perpetuated against women debars them from taking part in the electoral processes. This can be inflicted on women by the family members, particularly their husbands. Threat of divorce is another form of insecurity that women face which prevents them from participating in politics generally, that is the more reason it is a common phenomenon that women politicians are majorly divorcees, unmarried or widows. Due to violent nature of the Nigerian political environment, husbands will not readily support their women to go out to participate in politics particularly attending the night political meetings. In the opinion of O'Connell and Ramshaw (2018), as women's political activity has grown, the frequency and degree of violent responses to their presence in politics increased exponentially. According to them, globally, politically active women such as voters, candidates, local councilors, members of parliament, community activists, bloggers, among others, often experience physical threats. Insecurity experienced by women particularly the active ones such as psychological, physical, sexual and economic, in no small way perpetuate gender inequality in the political process.

Primary elections in Nigeria are also characterised with rancours which can be allergic to women. During election periods, insecurity can increase apathy among women thereby

robbing them of meaningful exercise of franchise. Women face sexual harassment from their male counterparts which makes them lose interest in politics. Cases abound when women aspirants were robbed of electoral victory as a result to failure to submit to sexual overtures by the political party bigwigs and money bags (Paasilinna, et al 2017). Social, religious and cultural expectations of women's electoral participation can result in social, psychological, sexual, economic and physical forms of electoral violence directed against women in the public sphere. Women candidates face psychological and sexual forms of violence coupled with economic and physical violence. Character assassination and slanders are also targeted at women who particularly want to be voted into power.

National Democratic Institute (2017) also noted that abuse and harassment that constitute psychological violence seek to delegitimize women as political actors, undermine their confidence, competence and visibility in the political and public spheres which negatively affect how they are portrayed and perceived. In a situation where women face psychological violence, it affects their confidence in participation in the electoral process dominated by men and glass ceiling will be reinforced and social policies will be men-centred. In the case of Nigeria, gender-based violence further exposes women to insecurity and attendant vulnerabilities. The challenges have grown astronomically in Nigeria particularly in the insurgence ridden areas of the North East which manifests in form of forced and early marriage, sexual assault, and this has led to psychological violence and harrowing experience that can rob women of meaningful participation in the electoral process. In the areas where insecurity is very prevalent, women find it difficult to register as voters, cast votes or contest for elective posts.

One major electoral process that gives opportunity for the citizens to express their will is election. Elections characterised with insecurity scare away the voters particularly the women. In the history of the Nigerian elections, hardly was there an election without security crisis. It must be noted that political environment and events before election do give signal on what will happen on the election day. In Nigeria, some election campaigns have been marred by violence causing death of people. For instance, prior to the 2015 general elections, a lot of people died during campaigns as a result of the 'win or die' attitude of the Nigerian politicians. Also, a prelude to the 2019 general elections, six states like Akwa Ibom, Kaduna, Plateau, Adamawa, Kano and Rivers were hotbeds of electoral violence (International Crisis Group, 2018). There were security challenges such as power struggle between the incumbent APC and PDP to take over the control of the states, rivalry between the incumbent and former governors, herder-farmer conflict and activities of criminal groups who were recruited by the politicians to attack the opposition (ICG, 2018).

The political environment had been tensed up in those states before 2019 general elections took place which prevented women from participating actively in the electoral process. Insecurity also characterised the inauguration of the APC campaign in Lagos state when political thugs invaded the venue and engaged their opponents in a gun duel which claimed lives and property.

One of the major actors in creating an atmosphere of insecurity/violence is the political party. Despite the fact most political parties in Nigeria have women wings for mobilising women, yet, they are not always in support of those ones who are actively involved in the politics, particularly as the contestants. Many cases abound where political thugs were deployed to intimidate, violate and assault women out of the political race. A lot of women politicians at one point or the other faced gender-based violence to prevent them from running for public offices. Those who proved deviant faced the music by losing their lives or family members very dear to them.

It is noteworthy that when electoral process is characterised by insecurity, women will stay off and this robs them of civic engagement. As asserted by Paasilinna (2017), women do not have the economic means to engage in “muscle” politics like the men who can hire thugs to perpetuate acts of violence. Use of political thugs to militarize the political process makes it uncomfortable for women to participate. According to Rasak and Garuba (2017), women naturally are allergic to violence of any form and since men make use of them, women cannot compete favourably well with them in the political battlefield. One of the reasons why women did not feature prominently in the just concluded 2019 elections was due to insecurity that pervaded some parts of the country. Non- prosecution of perpetrators of political violence who are supported financially by those in government has made it difficult to curtail the abnormality and seems to have become an acceptable norm. The implication on the electoral system is that there will be exclusion of a group of people who can make impactful contribution to democratic development.

A political environment characterised by insecurity tends to perpetuate gender inequality in the electoral process as an insignificant number of women make inroad into politics. For instance, only 62 (4%) women were elected in to public offices in 2019 general elections across board. A great decline was experienced in the number of women that participated in the electoral process in 2019 as a result of insecurity that pervaded the political system. The six female presidential candidates who joined the political race stepped down primarily because of the violent nature in the body polity. The militarisation of the electoral process right from party primary causes intimidation to women folk. Winners can emerge through the use of violence which prevents women from being part of the problem solvers in the society. As accentuated by Agbalajobi (2016), electoral violence is a major cause of low participation of women in politics in Nigeria. The inability of the government at all levels to make adequate security provisioning engenders gender inequality in the electoral process. The basic responsibility of government is to ensure human security is guaranteed and that is why there is a paradigm shift from state security to human security. An electoral process characterized by insecurity will not guarantee sanctity of the outcome, hence, unacceptable government which perpetuates state violence against the masses will be enthroned.

Conclusion

Insecurity has constituted a serious challenge in perpetuating low participation of women in the electoral process in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, insecurity has negatively impacted women participation in the electoral process over the years. Insurgency in the North East, herdsmen terrorism in the North Central, militancy and ethnic nationalism in the South-South and South East coupled with electoral violence have been security issues preventing women from actively participating in the electoral processes in Nigeria. Insecurity perpetrated at the domestic level, security agents, political parties/ thugs, and other violent non-state actors continuously affect women and constitute barriers to their engagement in the electoral processes. Right from the family setting, women experience physical and psychological violence which affect their self confidence in participating in the political process. This is further reinforced by the violent political environment which degrades the dignity of womanhood and rob women of making positive impacts in the public arena. Any woman who has been abused, rejected and dejected will not have the confidence to compete favorably with men in any electoral process. Therefore, there is need for an atmosphere of security that will enhance human dignity particularly those of the women. This requires a collective responsibility on the part of the government, non-governmental organizations, citizens and security agents to ensure that peace reign supreme in the country so that every Nigerian, every woman, will be secure to make contribution towards building a democratic society. In order

to guarantee human security, a multi-sectoral approach needs to be adopted by the government and all stakeholders. Attentions must to be paid to economic, environmental, religious, political, etc., factors that engender insecurity in the country.

The Way Forward

There is no doubt that insecurity affects socio-economic development in Nigeria which also perpetuates low women participation in the electoral process. Security provisioning as a matter of fact is not the sole responsibility of the government, it is indeed a collective duty for state and non-state actors. However, this should not prevent the government from seeing it as a primary responsibility to protect its citizens. It is high time government at all levels rose up to their responsibilities. Since government is the chief security provider, there is need for state of emergency to be declared in the sector; by training, retraining and equipping all security agencies with capacity building to tackle every security challenge in the country. Acts of terrorism perpetrated by the Boko Haram insurgents and herdsmen need total elimination for the country to have peace. President Mohammed Buhari should wake up from slumber and deploy more human and material resources in flushing out terrorist elements in Nigeria.

The Government needs to exercise the political will to fish out ‘spoilers’ or ‘conflict compradors’ among the security agents and government officials benefitting from insurgency taking place in North East and North Central, Nigeria. There are indeed invisible hands behind the throne fueling acts of criminality against humanity perpetrated by the insurgents in the two regions. If they are not fished out and prosecuted, insurgency will continue to fester and political terrain will become much more militarised and women will not have the boldness of participating in the electoral process.

Any political environment that experiences insecurity will not make progress democratically because where there is no peace, democracy cannot thrive. One of the basic tenets of democracy as a representative system of government is social inclusion but when there is insecurity, a large number of people will be deprived of participating in the process, particularly women. It becomes very important that all state and non-state actors see it as a collective responsibility to ensure security of lives and property.

There is need for more security agents to be deployed to curb every act of hooliganism, thuggery and political brigandage that scare electorate, particularly women away. In all polling areas there is need for adequate security measures to be put in place to protect the citizens performing their civic responsibility. Security agents should be non-partisan in order to ensure adequate provisioning of security during electioneering campaigns, voting and counting of votes. There have been situations where the security agents looked away while the political thugs snatched ballot boxes after unleashing violence on the electorate. Cases also abound where security agents collaborated to perpetrate acts of violence in order to disenfranchise people particularly women during election. It is not also a hidden fact that in the electoral process, security agents are used by the incumbent government officials to perpetuate physical violence against women who are considered to be in opposition. Any acts of violence committed by the security agents should be prosecuted to serve as a deterrent in any election.

At the party level, a zero-tolerance should be developed against victimisation of women who desire to participate in the political process as voters or candidates. Therefore, legislation should be formulated and implemented at the party level to criminalise any acts of thuggery or violence perpetrated against women. Also, electoral acts/laws should see political violence perpetrated against the electorate particularly women as a crime against humanity and should be treated as such. To an extent militarisation of electoral process will be drastically reduced which will positively impact on the number of lives lost during election period and also more women will have confidence in participating. As a matter of fact, party primaries, to be specific,

should be conducted in the atmosphere devoid of chaos to give room for more women to participate and make their positive impacts in the process.

Curbing violence against women in electoral process will take a measure of tackling the structural and systemic factors and this will involve engaging politically with the institutions particularly political parties and parliaments that are complicit in perpetuating violence against women (O'Connell, 2018).

In order to allow women to participate in the electoral process in Nigeria, there is need for electronic governance to be explored and utilised in the area of conducting elections. Electronic voting enables citizens to vote conveniently whether from workplaces, homes or in any part of the country provided there is internet connectivity. The essence of this is women in particular will not be easy targets and victims of electoral violence. A militarised political process scares women away, hence, gender inequality in the electoral process holds sway. Not only will the provision of electronic governance ease the government of cumbersomeness in the conduct of its daily affairs, it will give room for inclusivity and responsiveness to women category. Although, cost implication and adoption in the local areas may constitute challenges, but there can be political education and awareness creation at the grassroot level for electronic democratic practices to be employed for conduct of election and ease of governance.

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