

UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERNS AND DIMENSIONS OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

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Abstract

The ability of a country to successfully conduct non-violent elections is a crucial indicator of the consolidation of its democracy and a necessary condition for free and fair citizen participation. Unfortunately, democratization is rarely a smooth path. The competition and contestation characteristic of the entire electoral process can, in the extreme, result in the electoral violence that we have seen in many countries, Nigeria inclusive. This paper explores the nature and dimensions of electoral violence in Nigeria with the aim of providing useful insights on the phenomenon in order to curb democratic set-backs. The methodology involves the use of secondary data that were thematically analysed. The paper establishes that a proper understanding of electoral violence must among others, view it to include all acts or threats; physical, psychological or structural violence carried out purposively to intimidate or harm a political actor and effect a change in the electoral process. It is separated from other forms of political violence by a combination of timing and motive. In Nigeria, Electoral violence has the capacity to impinge on the electoral process and threaten democratic stability. Government and other important stakeholders must ensure a comprehensive security, institutional and necessary electoral reforms as well as diligent implementation of such policies aimed at curbing electoral violence.

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Electoral Violence, Nigeria