

# **Electoral Risk Management: A Panacea to Electoral Violence in Nigeria**

**By**

**Oduntan, Alani Abdulsalam**  
PhD Political Science, Afe Babalola University  
Email: [iania1964@gmail.com](mailto:iania1964@gmail.com)

**Prof. Azeez Ademola**  
Department of Political Science, Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria  
Email: [ademolaazez@abuad.edu.ng](mailto:ademolaazez@abuad.edu.ng)

## **Abstract**

In the Nigeria polity, electoral violence has constituted a major feature of the electoral process. Ballot box snatching, thuggery, gunshots, etc. have almost become the norm during elections in Nigeria. This paper adopts a theoretical approach in proffering solution to this menace plaguing the Nigerian electoral system, by identifying violence as a critical factor that engenders risk in election in Nigeria. It seeks to do so by suggesting the implementation of electoral risk management tools and institutionalization of the Electoral Risk Management by the Election Management Body in Nigeria (INEC). According to this paper, the use of this tool will engender peaceful and credible elections in the coming years, especially in the forthcoming general election in 2023.

**Keywords:** Electoral violence, electoral risk management, peaceful and credible elections

## **Introduction**

Over the years, Nigeria as a polity, has been marred by several instabilities – political, economic, religious, etc. This may be due to the overlapping religious, regional, and ethnic divides existing in the country (Campbell, 2010). The lopsided view of ethnocentrism and religious sentiments possessed by political elites in the country have in no small way contributed to the perception of the masses as regards the rotation of power in the Nigerian polity. Desperate and power-drunk politicians often make use of ethnic and religious sentiments in addition to financial rewards to influence the voting decisions of the masses especially the uneducated and unemployed in their favour during elections. And in the event the outcome of such elections does not turn out in their favour, they resort to violence. This violence is referred to as electoral violence.

Electoral violence, according to Albert (2007), includes any type of coordinated threats aimed at frightening, hurting, or blackmailing a political actor or opponent before, during, or after an election with the goal of determining, delaying, or influencing the political process. With this definition in mind, history has proven that the Nigerian politics and electoral process have suffered the whips of electoral violence over the past decades. This creates the impression that the Nigerian electoral process might be headed towards a cataclysmic collapse if there is no framework designed to properly manage the risks posed to the process.

This impression creates a sense of urgency in developing a framework called electoral risk management (ERM) that can help establish credible and peaceful elections. The presence of this framework could be likened to a violence-proof mechanism that totally eradicates or

drastically reduce the possibility of electoral violence manifesting before, during or after elections. The presence of this framework poses a threat to electoral risks and violence and thereby strengthens democracy in the polity.

It is only an irony that a tool as potent as the ERM seems almost absent in scholarly literatures. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is dearth of scholarly article that addresses the issue of ERM in the literature. Hence, it is the aim of this study to fill this gap by giving scholarly opinions on it. Also, this study seeks to use ERM as a tool to proffer solution to the issue of electoral violence which has been plaguing the Nigerian electoral system for several decades. Concluding this study would provide the Nigerian electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with a better idea on how to manage every instance that constitutes electoral risks and prevent electoral violence in the forthcoming coming presidential election in 2023.

## **A Brief History of Electoral Violence in Nigeria**

Subsequent to the first electoral violence in 1964 which led to the first military coup on 15th January, 1966, several electoral violence experiences have manifested at different times in the Nigerian state. At the election that took place in 1979 which brought in Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the president, it was reported that the election was characterised by electoral malpractices and irregularities which triggered post-election violence. After the Shagari's administration, the military again took over in the person of General Muhammadu Buhari in 1983. His regime which lasted for just two years was succeeded by General Ibrahim Babaginda who was willing to transfer power from military to civilian rule. In doing so, a general election was organised in 1993, which is believed to be freest and fairest election ever in the history of Nigerian politics. This election was won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola who was a member of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). But the result of the election did not go down well with the military junta. This made General Babaginda to annul the election. The annulment of the election was greeted with stiff opposition that led to political unrest resulting in the sudden demise of Chief M.K.O Abiola.

To abate the current tension in the country at that time, General Babaginda relinquished power to Chief Ernest Shonekan who ruled for only three months after which power was taken again by the military in the person of General Sani Abacha on November 17, 1993. General Abacha ruled Nigeria for five years until his demise on June 8, 1998. This made General Abdulsalami Abubakar who was the next in rank to become the head of state on June 9, 1998. The emergence of General Abdulsalami made transition from military rule to civilian rule very easy and void of military intervention. On May 29th, 1999, democracy came into Nigeria with General Olusegun Obasanjo (retired) being the first president under a democratic government in Nigeria.

In practically every state of the Federation, his government orchestrated the 2003 election, which was marred by irregularities and violence. After his administration, President Umaru Yar'Adua emerged who openly rejected the 2007 election that brought him to office, calling it a "flaw." President Jonathan oversaw the 2015 General Election, which, like the previous one, was marred by violence. In 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari came into power and oversaw the election in 2019 which had about 626 killed as reported by a news outlet (Sanni, 2019). The foregoing gives an introductory presentation and brief history of electoral violence in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Framework

### *Risk*

Risk is an essential term in many scientific domain, but there is no agreement on how to define and interpret it (Aven, 2011). Some definitions focus on probabilities, while others are focused on expected values, uncertainty, and aims (Sotic & Rajic, 2015). According to Vaughan (1989), risk is a circumstance in which there is a probability of a negative deviation from a planned or hoped-for outcome. Rosa (1998) from her perspective defined risk as a scenario or occurrence in which something of human worth (including people themselves) is put in jeopardy and the outcome is unclear. It is simply anticipated harm (Campbell, 2005). Risk is also referred to as perils which the individual is objectively exposed at any time (Pfeffer and Klock, 1974), while Risk is described by Williams and Heins (1989) as the variation in the outcomes that could occur over a specified period. In other words, if only one outcome is possible, the variation and hence the risk is zero. If many outcomes are possible the risk is not null. From the above, it connotes the uncertainty attached to risk. In the same vein, Aven and Renn (2009), emphasised that risk refers to the unpredictability and severity of an activity's occurrences and repercussions (or outcomes) in relation to anything that humans value. It should be noted that risk does not imply that the outcome may be adverse but the outcome may not be predictable which means they are not known in advance (Doherty, 1985). Consequent upon the foregoing definitions, risk can be said to be the likelihood or probability of a negative event happening instead of the desired positive event especially when it centres on inability to predict an event or outcome. This means that risk is a possible event that may occur built in the abstract consciousness of an individual or corporate body. Hence it remains a state where losses are inevitable.

### *Electoral Risk*

Having surveyed the literature, there seems to be a dearth of the conceptualisation of electoral risk. Nonetheless, Hubscher and Sattler (2016) conceptualised the term from their perspective as the possibility of political parties being replaced in power if people are unsatisfied with government policies (Hubscher & Sattler, 2016). Wenzelburger (2011) and Afonso, Zartaloudis, and Papadopoulos (2015) in their studies consented to the foregoing definition by asserting that electoral risk is caused by politics of special interest politics, in which electorally significant society groups who are badly affected by austerity measures withdraw their support for the government. However, this definition seems not to really address what electoral risk is about.

Alihodzic (2016) sees elections as complex undertakings which face numerous risks in organizing them. Such risks are linked to the legal, operational, technical, political, security, and other aspects of electoral processes. When risks become certainties, the consequences can be serious in well-established as well as transitional democracies.

Vincent, Alihodzic and Gale (2021) expatiated that risks to electoral processes have the same quantum of impact both on young and mature democracies. They described feasible risk factors that permeated the electoral process as the following; electoral malpractice, foreign interference, disinformation, election-related violence, illicit election funding, insufficient funding and Information and Telecommunication Technology (ICT) mishaps. Where these risks have materialized, they have impacted negatively on the citizens' trust in elections and exposed weaknesses in democratic institutions

Electoral risk as discussed in this study refers to the possibility of the electoral process being disrupted by negative and harmful behaviours of individuals or groups. It is simply the

likelihood of violence taking place before, during or after the electoral process. Any possibility of negative occurrences manifesting as a result of the electoral process could be referred to as electoral risk. International IDEA (2016) asserted that the electoral process is a complex one and due to its complexity, there is a high possibility of the manifestation of several mishaps such as misplaced election materials, electoral malpractice, malfunctioning equipment, poor time management, lack of funds, etc. These mishaps constitute electoral risk.

### ***Electoral Risk Management***

As earlier mentioned, scholarly works on electoral risk management is very scarce in the literature. This implies the scarcity of scholarly conceptualisations. However, in this section, electoral risk management would be conceptualised. Williams and Heins (1989) define risk identification as "the process by which a business systematically and continuously identifies property, liability and personnel exposures as soon as or before they emerge.

Mitchell and Harris (2012) described risk management as building and strengthening resilience which involves establishing systems that incorporate the range of risk management options such as risk reduction (preventing hazard/ shock, reducing exposure and vulnerability), Transfer or share risks, being better prepared and responding and recovering effectively. It also requires certain institutional capacities to enable a range of risk management options to be pursued in ways that recognize resilience as a process that is inherently centered upon. From this description, it can be understood that election risk management is the ability to build resilience against election hazard and vulnerability of some electoral actions and inactions.

Some of these electoral risks center on some shortcomings in the statutory provisions of electoral management body such as: flaws in nomination process, omission of party logo in the printing of ballot papers etc. Any attempt at neglecting such risk may be colossal to the damage of the electoral process. Therefore, it entails a careful training and continuous oversight with the establishment of Election Risk Management Tools which are helpful to address those situations that pose risks to the electoral process.

Electoral risk management is defined as a systematic framework put in place to ensure peaceful and credible elections. It does that with the aid of an instrument called Electoral Risk Management tool (ERM tool). The ERM tool is a multi-purpose tool aimed primarily at organizations responsible for conducting credible and peaceful elections, such as electoral administration bodies and security sector agencies (International IDEA, 2013). It is not only the foregoing that are users of the tool; but also, those who are interested in supporting the body responsible for conducting peaceful and credible elections like the academia, civil society organisations, and international organisations (United Nations, European Union, etc.).

### ***Violence***

Violence has been seen from various perspectives by many scholars due to its multidimensionality. According to Isiaku, Obatta, and Nweke (2020), violence refers to the act that causes damage, injury or death by the use of physical force. In the view of Hamby (2017), violence is the planned, threatened, or real use of physical force or power against oneself, another person, or a group or community that results in or has a high chance of ending in damage, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. It is any act committed against humanity that causes or inflicts suffering, whether physical, mental, psychological, or psychosocial, in order to humiliate, demean, or ridicule individuals or structures. From these definitions, it is seen that any act intentionally performed that is detrimental to the mental, social and physical wellbeing of one's self or another, is referred to as violence.

The violence that has occurred in the Nigerian polity as a result of elections not favouring given political classes at different times cannot be overemphasised. Since the transfer of power from the colonialists to Nigerians, electoral violence has almost become a norm during election periods. History has it that, electoral violence manifested in post-colonial Nigeria for the first time in 1964 (Isiaku et al., 2020) and thenceforth has become a common feature in the Nigeria electoral practices.

### ***Electoral Violence***

Till recent times, there is still no universally accepted definition of electoral violence in the literature. The concept seems to enjoy varying definitions by various scholars as it appeals to them. According to Etannibi (2011), it is defined as any sort of violence used to influence electoral outcomes. It is also being referred to any act of hatred or aggression committed before, during, or after the election process (Egobueze & Ojirika, 2017). In the words, Obiam (2021), reiterated that electoral violence has to do with any act of violence performed in the course of electoral conduct by individuals or groups with the purpose to influence the election's outcome to the desired outcome before, during, or after the election. Consequently, electoral violence can be seen as any form of violence that occurs as a result of the electoral process.

### ***Electoral Risk Management; a Panacea to Electoral Violence in Nigeria***

As seen in the introductory part of this paper, electoral violence is not alien to the Nigerian political sphere. With this in view, it is only imperative for INEC in collaboration with the federal government to implement a system that can bring an end to this chronic malady that has plague the electoral process in Nigeria. This system is the electoral risk management system or tool.

The electoral risk management tool has the potency of preventing the occurrence of electoral violence in the nation. Its goal is to help users better recognize, assess, and manage electoral risks. The ERM tool may help users gain a better understanding of electoral risk factors, gather and evaluate risk data, develop preventative and mitigation measures, and track the outcomes of their activities. The tool is made up of three components that work together. These components are: knowledge resources, analytical instruments, and prevention and mitigation. Knowledge resources component is concerned with an electronic library containing a wide range of factors that are responsible for electoral violence. These factors are derived from various research works, election reports and other significant publications. Also, these factors are categorised into two groups – internal and external. The factors are internal if they are exclusive to the electoral context. That is, issues that spring up as a result of loopholes in the electoral process. Examples include: poor electoral administrative rules, favouritism by the electoral body, problematic voter registration, loss of sensitive materials, etc. On the other hand, external factors are those that occur outside the electoral context but intensify during elections. Examples are: high unemployment rate, presence of thugs hired by contesting politicians, gender-based discrimination, violence, etc.

Analytical instruments component on the other hand, includes three major parts; data entry, data presentation and risk and action register. Data entry is an interface that allows for the entries of chosen factors, dates and regions where electoral violence has occurred in times past. Data presentation is concerned with the display of data in numeric values, trend charts, etc. While the risk and action register makes it possible for the user to create alerts and prescribe prevention and mitigation actions.



The prevention and mitigation actions, talks about the action steps one has to take to prevent or mitigate electoral violence. Here, three areas have to be taken into consideration and they are: enhanced electoral management and justice, enhanced electoral security, and improved peace infrastructure.

The use of the ERM tool helps the electoral body (INEC) identify possible factors responsible for electoral violence based on past occurrences in different geographical locations of the country. As a result of this evaluation, the electoral body is empowered with the necessary information to prevent the occurrence of potential violence in subsequent elections.

#### ***Attributes of ERM Tools as Panacea to Electoral Violence***

1. It is fit for purpose and tailored to meet the prevailing risk situation
2. All election staff need to be able to understand plausible risks, recognize impending signs and take action or alert those who need to act. It is the risk management framework that details the processes that ensure that risks are managed systematically as opposed to being ad hoc and uncoordinated, or leaving loopholes.
3. While using ERM tools, the EMB can decide to implement it holistically, trying to cover all aspects of its management processes, or through incremental steps focusing on priority areas first (Alihodzic 2016). Also, risk management responsibilities can be assigned to selected or specialized staff. In either case, the risk management framework needs to detail what the risk management process will look like, what the responsibilities will be and how the process will be supervised. Anticipating that the initial process will likely advance over time, an EMB should entrench flexibility to adapt to new circumstances.
4. The EMB's top leadership and managers must consistently apply risk management perspectives to all decision-making processes

#### ***Benefits of ERM for Election Management Body***

The introduction of Electoral Risk Management Tools by the EMBs to the electoral process comes with enormous benefits such as

1. improved ability to identify, evaluate and manage threats and opportunities;
2. improved accountability and better governance;
3. better management of complex and shared risks;
4. improved financial management;
5. improved organizational performance and resilience;
6. confidence to make difficult decisions; and
7. decreased potential for unacceptable or undesirable behaviours such as fraud and harassment

## **Conclusion**

Electoral violence does not have to be a common feature in the Nigerian electoral process if the regulatory body (INEC) can implement the electoral risk management framework. This framework helps the body and other stakeholders identify causes of past electoral violence occurrences in various regions of the country and alert INEC and other stakeholders on actions that can be taken to prevent or mitigate electoral violence in future elections. Therefore, it is recommended that in the forthcoming presidential election in 2023, INEC should ensure that the ERM tool is used so as to have a credible and peaceful election.

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