



# Strategies for Counselling against Election Violence in Anambra State, Nigeria

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## Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author CN designed the study, supervised the running of the project and revised the manuscript for important intellectual content. Author AA managed the literature searches and performed the statistical analysis. Author UH handled the discussion of the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The problem of election violence in Nigeria particularly in Anambra State has been a source of worry because of its attendant consequences on children, youths and the society at large. The youths are induced to threaten or unleash violence as a means to achieve electoral and political success. This study investigated the counselling strategies for curbing election violence in Anambra State, Nigeria.

**Methods:** Three research questions -what are the strategies for counselling against election violence?, what are the strategies for counselling against election violence as perceived by male and female counsellors? and what are the strategies for counselling against election violence as perceived by rural and urban based counsellors? guided the study. The population comprised 258 guidance counsellors in all the government owned secondary schools in Anambra State. The whole population served as the sample. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Data was collected using 15 item questionnaire developed by the researchers. The data was analysed using mean and standard deviation.

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**Findings:** Findings showed that counselling is an effective way of curbing election violence. Result showed that orientation, information, enlightenment programmes among others is strategies for curbing election violence. Election violence is a social vice that is giving the entire nation sleepless nights. Based on the findings of the study, the following strategies such as effective counselling to youths parents and political leaders at various levels of government could go a long way in curbing election violence in Anambra State, Nigeria.

**Recommendations:** Based on the findings of the study, some recommendations were made including that counsellors should organize lectures, seminars and workshops for youths, parents and politicians alike. Also re-orientation programmes should be organized for youths by counsellors in conjunction with the government on values, ethnics and morals as the general decadence in the body polity has caught up with the youths.

**Conclusion:** Election violence is a social vice that is giving the entire nation sleepless nights. Based on the findings of the study, the following strategies such as effective counselling to youths, parents and political leaders at various levels of governance could go a long way in curbing election violence in Anambra State, Nigeria.

*Keywords: Counselling; election violence; strategies; against.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Since the rebirth of Nigeria's democracy in 1999, violence of varying levels has been an unfortunate staple of Nigerian elections. Whether sponsored or spontaneous, election – related conflicts are distinctive, signifying discontent around tightly interwoven social and economic concerns. These concerns include dissatisfaction with government performance, competition for resources, inter and intra-group distrust, joblessness, and anger at an abundance of unscrupulous politicians with little respect for due process or rule of law. During election periods, underlying social and economic concerns collide with hopes and fears of change, raising tensions and the likelihood of violent competition. This is particularly true in our country, Nigeria where chronic instability, poor governance, communal disputes, gang-related fighting, and violence sponsored by power brokers foster long-standing grievances [1].

Since the return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999, the Independent National Electoral Commission has been continually faced with the challenge of conducting free, fair and peaceful elections [2]. According to [3] electoral violence in the country is primarily due to the perception of politics and political office as investment and as an avenue for the acquisition of extra-ordinary wealth through corruption which is otherwise not possible through any form of legitimate vocation and enterprise. As a result of this perception and reality, Nigerian politicians turn electioneering and elections into warfare in which violence and ethnic religious and other forms of

primordial sentiments and prejudices are employed.

Election, rather to be embraced as one of the important processes that strengthen democratic institutions and facilitate peaceful transition of power is seen as a violent means of acquiring the spoils of democracy. Thus, all the previous general elections conducted in Nigeria were marked by widespread violence, intimidation, bribery and corruption just to maintain or wrench power [4]. This heightens the potential for violence at every level of government, especially at transition periods. Also, Political elites mobilize the pool of unemployed youths, often along ethnic, religious and party affiliations as vital violent arsenals. The youths are induced to threaten or unleash violence as a means to achieve electoral and political success. The elites are responsible for arming the youths who mostly are political thugs to manipulate electoral outcomes, kidnap or kill political opponents, threaten and intimidate electorates, destroying lives and properties as electoral process are disrupted. He went on to say that these are social vices that do not augur well in the society. According to [3] social vices include immoral activities which are likely to become involved in any profitable venture or activity like prostitution, gambling, fighting, kidnapping among others. Also [5] sees it as forms of evil, wicked and criminal actions or behaviour in the society during election.

Election according to [6] is seen as the selection of a person or persons for office by ballot and making choice between alternatives. Since 2000, the Nigeria electoral and political landscape has fallen and has moved from violence to greater

violence. The magnitude of election violence has risen and political elites have often converted poverty ridden unemployed Nigerians youths into a ready made machinery for the perpetrators of election violence resulting from electoral fraud.

Generally, from the inception of democracy in Nigeria, [7] has catalogued the following forms of electoral frauds, abuses and malpractices as experiences in various electoral exercise in Nigeria. Electoral frauds are seen as any action in the electoral process that bears animal deception or a dishonest trick which deviates from the normal expectation in the electoral process especially if such action is illegal or immoral [8]. He went on to say that the recorded cases of electoral frauds include: multiple registration, hoarding of voters cards, under-age registration, destruction of voters cards, impersonation, forgery, block recruitment of agents, poor training of ad-hoc staff, employment of unqualified ad-hoc staff, non-payment of recruits as at when due, bribery to influence recruits, sponsoring of supporters to be among recruits, supply of poor quality materials as electoral materials, poor management of logistic support, inflation of accredited numbers, multiple voting, influencing voters, falsification of results, hijacking of materials, intimidation of voters/officials, collusion by law enforcement agents, incitement during campaigns, inflammatory speeches, slandering of opponents, ethnic/religious sentiments, kidnapping, illegal detention, thuggery, intimidation, bribery destruction/withholding evidence, deliberate time – wasting in election tribunal etc.

When there is massive electoral fraud and manipulations so many things result from it. for instance, violent behaviour is exhibited by aggrieved parties in form of fighting and destruction of properties. Elections are avenues for concrete expressions of the citizens' right to choose, participate and engender accountability; which are salient features of democratic government and processes. When an election is rigged, choices of the citizens are invariably annulled and the government that emerges cannot represent, protect, and effect the interest and aspirations of the people. A government that takes over power through fraudulent electoral processes cannot claim to be democratic or legitimate.

The net effect of this development can lead to apathy, leadership crisis, political violence, assassination galore, poor political culture, and

insensitivity to the needs of the people. This has been the case in Nigeria since 1999 [9].

Economically, production of goods and services is still very low, the naira currency has never appreciated against major foreign currencies like the US dollar or British pound sterling. Unemployment is still very high giving rise to all forms of ethno/religious conflicts. Armed robbery, cultism, assassination galore, strike actions by labour unions and pressure groups, are all features of our contemporary democracy. Also, Corruption, abuse of the rule of law, and perversion of justice have all become parts of our political culture [10]. Election violence has been a very big problem in Nigeria including Anambra State and the parents, counsellors, society as well as the youths who engage in this crime have had series of stress and emotional torture and if nothing is done to stop this ugly menace, it will disrupt the national developmental process.

From the forgoing, a program like guidance and counselling is needed to educate the masses especially the youths who participate in election violence to enable them shun violence. Counselling according to [11], is viewed as a process of helping individuals to understand themselves and their world. According to [12] counselling is an in-depth interaction between two or more individual with the intent of assisting the client to better understand himself in relation to his or her present and future problems. There is the need to use counselling strategies to curb election violence in Nigeria. [13,14] opine that counsellors should organize orientation programmes for youths about values and morals. Also [15] are of the view of giving information service to help the youths acquire knowledge. Therefore, the researchers want to empirically establish some strategies for counselling against this ugly menace called election violence.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, whenever election is approaching, people become scared because it has always been characterized by problems, such as; killing, thuggery, kidnapping, snatching of ballot boxes, bombing is prevalent among the youths.

These has been a source of worry to the masses, families, counsellors and the society at large. If efforts are not made to curb these ugly menace, so much death will be recorded during every election. These ugly menace can be

tackled and curbed through guidance and counselling program.

It is against this backdrop that the researchers want to empirically establish some strategies that will be used to counsel the youths against election violence in Anambra state, Nigeria.

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the strategies for counselling against election violence?
2. What are the strategies for counselling against election violence as perceived by male and female counsellors?
3. What are the strategies for counselling against election violence as perceived by rural and urban based counsellors?

## 2. METHODS

The design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey. According to [16], this design involves the gathering of data through questions and interviews from few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. This design was selected for this study because the study seeks to sample various opinions of respondents and drawn inferences based on their views. This study was conducted in Anambra State, Nigeria. People residing in this environment are occupationally known to be lecturers, teachers, traders, business men and women, civil servants and drivers. The population of the study consisted of 258 counsellors.

The researcher used the total population of 258 as the sample size since the population is manageable. [17] recommended that if the population is small it should be studied entirely; therefore the researcher used the entire population as the sample size.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers through review of related literature [13,18,14,15] and in relation to the purpose and research questions guiding the study. The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A and B, section A contains the respondent's information while section B contains the questionnaire items. A four point scale was utilized in analysing the data.

The instrument (questionnaire) was face and content validated by two experts in the

Department of Guidance and counselling. This was to ascertain the appropriateness of the questionnaire items with the problem being researched. Their suggestions were taken into consideration before copies of the questions were reproduced and used for the study. The data was collected with the help of six research assistants through direct approach. The questionnaire was filled and retrieved at the same spot. The data collected was analysed using mean. Any item with mean rating of 2.50 and above will be accepted while any item below 2.50 will be rejected.

## 3. RESULTS

In Table 1, all the respondents adopted the strategies except for item 10- Counsellors should conduct workshops for public office holder as no strategy. This indicates that, the other items are capable of changing violent tendencies in our youths.

In Table 2, result depict that male counsellors perceived all the items as strategies for counselling against election violence while female counsellors perceived all the items but item for item 10- Counsellors should conduct workshops for public office holder as no strategy. This indicates that, the other items are capable of changing violent tendencies in our youths.

In Table 3, result depict that rural based counsellors perceived all the items as strategies for counselling against election violence while the urban counsellors perceive items for item 10- Counsellors should conduct workshops for public office holder as no strategy. This indicates that, the other items are capable of changing violent tendencies in our youths.

## 4. DISCUSSION

Findings from the study indicate that out of 15 strategies that 14 were accepted as strategies for counselling against election violence. It shows that majority of counsellors in Anambra State, Nigeria maintained that organization of workshops, information services, orientation programmes should be made for youths and public office holders. This is due to the fact that knowledge is power and knowledge is gotten through information and this helps to sensitize the youths on the need to avoid any form of election violence. It was also noted from the findings of the study that enlightenment, orientation, information among others disseminated to citizens by counsellors on the

social implication of election violence and also the risk of losing one's life will help curb election violence. This finding agrees with [19], who maintained that information is structured data that causes a human mind to change its opinion about the current state of real world and contribute to a reduction in the uncertainty of the state of the system. Information is therefore a change agent that will assist the youths change their misconceived ideas and opinions.

The study further identified skill acquisition programmes, enlightenment and formal education/training among others as strategies which is effective in curbing election violence. This agrees with the study carried out by [6] and

[20]. They affirmed that education and educational programmes are the primary conduit for value formation which can bring about change in attitude of people and for formal education to help curb violence in the country, our education has to be modelled towards value inculcation and citizen education at all level of our education. Findings of the study affirms to the work of [21] that counselling is an effective way of curbing election violence.

Furthermore the study revealed that the male and female counsellors agreed with all the items even though the females disagrees with item 10- Counsellors should conduct workshops for public office holder as no strategy.

**Table 1. Strategies for counselling against election violence**

S/N	Items	Mean	SD.	Remark
1.	Violence can be curtailed through media publicity	3.63	0.49	Accept
2.	Conflict prevention programme(s) should be organized before election	3.59	0.47	Accept
3.	Proper monitoring of immediate triggers of election should be made	3.90	0.31	Accept
4.	Nigerian security forces should embark on additional training toward managing electoral processes	3.00	1.01	Accept
5.	Constant and frequent political education and enlightenment programme should be organized	2.50	1.22	Accept
6.	Special training, orientation programmes prior elections should be conducted to sensitize the various security agencies in their role in elections	3.49	0.51	Accept
7.	Youths should be empowered through civil orientation and educations to enable them understand their roles (rights and duties) in the society	4.00	0.00	Accept
8.	Professional counsellors should be involved in every stage of the electoral process	3.03	0.81	Accept
9.	Vocational guidance should be given place of priority so as to eschew violence	3.59	0.47	Accept
10.	Counsellors should conduct workshops for public office holders	2.26	0.91	Reject
11.	Orientation programmes should be organized for youths about values, ethnics and morals	3.20	0.82	Accept
12.	Organization of lectures and seminars for youths	3.49	0.51	Accept
13.	Skill acquisition programme should be organized for youths	2.90	0.55	Accept
14.	Information service should be provided to help the youths to acquire knowledge	3.35	0.63	Accept
15.	Family counselling should be organized as most violent act exhibited by some youths are result of their upbringing	3.73	0.45	Accept

**Table 2. Perception of male and female counsellors on the strategies for counselling against election violence**

S/N	Items	Mean	SD(Male)	Remark	Mean	SD (Female)	Remark
1.	Violence can be curtailed through media publicity	3.38	0.81	Accept	3.39	0.82	Accept
2.	Conflict prevention programme(s) should be organized before election	2.74	1.04	Accept	2.78	0.99	Accept
3.	Proper monitoring of immediate triggers of election should be made	2.76	0.80	Accept	3.26	0.80	Accept
4.	Nigerian security forces should embark on additional training toward managing electoral processes	3.22	0.90	Accept	3.28	0.85	Accept
5.	Constant and frequent political education and enlightenment programme should be organized	3.01	0.94	Accept	3.05	0.88	Accept
6.	Special training, orientation programmes prior elections should be conducted to sensitize the various security agencies in their role in elections	3.18	0.76	Accept	3.17	0.74	Accept
7.	Youths should be empowered through civil orientation and educations to enable them understand their roles (rights and duties) in the society	3.00	1.01	Accept	3.07	0.94	Accept
8.	Professional counsellors should be involved in every stage of the electoral process	2.90	0.98	Accept	2.89	0.95	Accept
9.	Vocational guidance should be given place of priority so as to eschew violence	2.94	1.02	Accept	3.01	0.99	Accept
10.	Counsellors should conduct workshops for public office holders	2.99	1.11	Accept	2.26	0.91	Reject
11.	Orientation programmes should be organized for youths about values, ethnics and morals	3.12	1.05	Accept	3.11	1.05	Accept
12.	Organization of lectures and seminars for youths	3.05	1.05	Accept	3.09	1.04	Accept
13.	Skill acquisition programme should be organized for youths	2.95	1.14	Accept	3.01	1.14	Accept
14.	Information service should be provided to help the youths to acquire knowledge	2.63	1.08	Accept	2.68	1.05	Accept
15.	Family counselling should be organized as most violent act exhibited by some youths are result of their upbringing	2.50	1.22	Accept	2.30	1.14	Accept

**Table 3. Perception of urban and rural counsellors on the strategies for counselling against election violence**

S/N	Items	Mean	SD(Urban)	Remark	MEAN	SD(Rural)	Remark
1.	Violence can be curtailed through media publicity	2.91	0.95	Accept	2.93	0.94	Accept
2.	Conflict prevention programme(s) should be organized before election	2.62	0.94	Accept	2.67	0.93	Accept
3.	Proper monitoring of immediate triggers of election should be made	2.68	0.92	Accept	2.72	0.88	Accept
4.	Nigerian security forces should embark on additional training toward managing electoral processes	2.21	0.78	Accept	2.92	0.95	Accept
5.	Constant and frequent political education and enlightenment programme should be organized	3.23	0.97	Accept	3.32	0.92	Accept
6.	Special training, orientation programmes prior elections should be conducted to sensitize the various security agencies in their role in elections	3.02	0.98	Accept	3.03	0.95	Accept
7.	Youths should be empowered through civil orientation and educations to enable them understand their roles (rights and duties) in the society	2.67	1.00	Accept	2.71	1.00	Accept
8.	Professional counsellors should be involved in every stage of the electoral process	2.97	1.03	Accept	2.99	1.00	Accept
9.	Vocational guidance should be given place of priority so as to eschew violence	2.93	1.03	Accept	2.94	1.00	Accept
10.	Counsellors should conduct workshops for public office holders	2.26	0.91	Reject	3.01	0.88	Accept
11.	Orientation programmes should be organized for youths about values, ethnics and morals	2.85	1.00	Accept	2.93	0.97	Accept
12.	Organization of lectures and seminars for youths	2.85	1.00	Accept	2.90	0.99	Accept
13.	Skill acquisition programme should be organized for youths	2.69	0.96		2.52	0.96	Accept
14.	Information service should be provided to help the youths to acquire knowledge	2.48	0.98	Not Accepted	2.52	0.96	Accept
15.	Family counselling should be organized as most violent act exhibited by some youths are result of their upbringing	2.58	1.01	Accept	2.89	0.57	Accept

This may be due to the fact that election violence does no one any good and the females seem to reason more objectively. Also the urban and rural counsellors agreed with all the strategies except for item 10- Counsellors should conduct workshops for public office holder as no strategy, probably because of the training acquired in all the rudiments of counselling including skills and techniques and also the influence of information technology which is observed more in the urban area.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Election violence is a social vice that is giving the entire nation sleepless nights such as kidnapping, illegal detention, thuggery, intimidation, bribery destruction/withholding evidence and deliberate time – wasting in election tribunal .When there is massive electoral fraud and manipulations so many things result from it. For instance, violent behaviour is exhibited by aggrieved parties in form of fighting and destruction of properties. Based on the findings of the study, the following strategies such as effective counselling to youths, parents and political leaders at various levels of governance could go a long way in curbing election violence in Anambra State, Nigeria.

## 6. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study the followings recommendations were made.

1. Professional counsellors should be involved in every stage of the electoral process to provide counsel for all the players in the election process.
2. Counsellors should conduct lectures, seminars, workshops for public holders on topical issues such as good leadership skills, creativity, crisis management, emotional intelligence skills among others to disabuse the minds of the youths.
3. Re-orientation programmes should be organized for youths by counsellors about values, ethnics and morals as the general decadence in the body polity has caught up with the youths.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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