2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS, POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF LAGOS STATE EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT
This paper investigated nexus between the 2023 general elections, political violence and national integration in Nigeria, focusing on Lagos State's experience. The study specifically examined the factors that promoted political violence during the 2023 general elections and its implication on national integration in Lagos State Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted while self-structured questionnaire was utilised to elicit data from 215 respondents. The data were analysed with mean and standard deviation. The study discovered that several composite factors such as politics of sentiment and entitlement (Emilokan - it is my turn - mantra), excessive monetised politics, religiosity, ethnicised politics and power shift syndrome, among others, promoted the political violence witnessed during the general elections in Lagos State. Equally, the study revealed that political violence witnessed in Lagos State during the 2023 general elections further wrecked havoc on the already cracked and disunity relationship among the ethnic groupings residing in Lagos State as the elections breed sentiment, disunity, distrust and threatens friendliness, tolerance, economic activities and democracy in the state. The study concluded that political violence witnessed during the 2023 general elections distorts peaceful co-existence of the major ethnic constituents in Lagos State and further widen gap of promoting national integration in the State and Nigeria at large. It was recommended among others, that the stakes of the elections should be made less attractive so as to give room for patriotic citizens to participate in the political process and curb do-or-die elections.

Introduction

Nigeria was made up of different societies, empires, and kingdoms that were independent at the time of colonial conquest. Due to the inclusion of various ethnic groups, ethnicities, and religions as a single unit, the country became more diversified. The divide and rule colonial strategy further solidified the diversity of the ethnic nationalities and groupings that comprise the nation. Ethnic, religious, and local/geographical consciousnesses were therefore developed (Abdullahi & Usman, 2021). In order to reduce the negative effects of these distinctions in these countries and the risk of disintegration they indicate, national integration is crucial (Imhonopi & Onifade, 2013). Instead of seeing themselves as naturally belonging to an ethnic group or religion, integration encourages people to regard themselves as citizens of a nation first. These integrating measures may be social, political, economic, or cultural (Faluyi, 2022).

As a result, Nigeria's successive administrations have implemented several national integration efforts to maintain a sense of national community. These include, among other things, the adoption of the federal system of government, constitutional conferences, the creation of states, formulas for allocating tax revenues, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the federal character principle, the quota system, the requirement that political parties have a national outlook, and the rotating presidency. These actions have not significantly improved federal stability because racial and religious tensions still exist in the nation (Falade & Falade, 2013). This is because Nigeria's federalism is highly centralised, with the presidency holding a disproportionate amount of power. As a result of political parties, ethnic groups, and religious organisations concentrating their emphasis on this office, Nigerian politics is severely polarised. Ethnic and religious groups believe that having a president who belongs to their community will help them (Faluyi, 2022).

Political violence has become entrenched in Nigerian politics ever since the country's independence as a result of this polarisation. But in Nigeria, both among the electorate and at the level of the leadership, political violence has killed the spirit of true national unity and political involvement (Okafor & Okafor, 2018). The concerns surrounding the political and electoral processes, which span from the party primaries' conduct through electioneering campaigns to the actual conduct of the elections and the announcement of election results, may be related to violence and the infringement of people's rights (Abah & Nwokwu, 2015). Political processes in Nigeria have, thus, since independence turned out to be a severe political liability, producing serious political unrest and endangering the sustainability of corporate life in Nigeria rather than serving as a means and a process of exercising legal political rights (Olowojolu et al., 2019). Therefore, in view of the foregoing background, this study examines the 2023 general elections, political violence, and national integration in Nigeria with a concise study of the Lagos State experience.

Statement of the Problem

Like other numerous nations, Nigeria has a diversified population that includes a variety of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious groupings. Whether this plurality will ultimately disintegrate through conflict or in another way depends on how it is managed. In keeping with the aforementioned, the attempt to manage state power and resource distribution has resulted in conditions of polarisation, exclusion, and winner-take-all. Some of them have led to minority agitations, civil wars, secessions, and other types of conflict like political violence in an effort to seize control of state power (Faluyi, 2022; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Politicians have used paid youngsters to compel and threaten rivals before, during, or just after election periods as a result of the polarisation of Nigerian politics (Isah, 2019). This has led to political and electoral violence becoming an increasingly common party strategy. Due to political violence, voters are scared and intimidated out of choosing candidates and platforms, and men with good intentions, knowledge, and character are scared out of participating in democratic processes (Mbaveren, 2013). This, together with ethnicised political processes, increases the divide between the various ethnic groups that make up the nation. This was the case during the general elections of 2023 in Lagos State and other regions of the nation, where ethnically charged, overly commercialised, and sentimental politics orchestrated political violence in various parts of the state and threatened the nation's national integration issue. Thus, this study examines the 2023 general elections, political violence, and national integration in Nigeria, with a focus on the Lagos State experience.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the 2023 general elections, political violence and national integration in Nigeria, focusing on the experience of Lagos State. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

i. to examine the factors that promotes political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State, Nigeria.

ii. to analyse the implication of political violence during the 2023 general elections on national integration in Lagos State Nigeria.

Research Questions

i. What are the factors that promote political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State, Nigeria?

ii. What is the effect of political violence during the 2023 general elections on national integration in Lagos State, Nigeria?

Literature Review

Concept of Election

Many scholars of all orientations have conducted extensive research on elections as a crucial component of the democratic process (Yagboyaju, 2011). Elections are the way by which the populace exercises their sovereign right to decide who will represent them in government and what the country's political, social, and other goals should be. This essentially means that democratic elections are a chance for the populace to express their sovereignty through the ballot in order to give their government legitimacy, renew it if required, or revoke the power to rule (INEC, 2011). In contemporary political systems, voting for one's favored politicians or parties in a competitive way is expressed as a popular strategy of obtaining governmental power (Uduma & Emerole, 2015).

Elections are the official procedure of choosing a candidate for public office or by voting for or against a political proposition. Making a distinction between the form and the content of elections is crucial. When voters do not have a true choice between at least two options, the election's substance is absent even while the electoral forms are present (Eulau, 2022). Elections are often described as the procedure by which the adult citizens select the person who will represent them in government (Afolabi, 2018). By voting for a candidate or political party whose platform and platform best reflect these objectives, the people can express their political and socioeconomic aspirations and choose their representatives (Ukachikara & Elechi, 2019).

The concept of election can thus be expressed by the aforementioned viewpoints on it as the method by which representatives of the people are chosen for the legislative and executive branches of government at all levels of government in the nation. Elections enable people to pick their leaders and hold them accountable for their deeds while in office.

Understanding Political Violence

Scholars from several fields of study have examined violence of various types, such as political violence, from various angles. Therefore, any threat, intimidation, or attack perpetrated with the goal to taint the electoral process is considered political violence (Nuka et al., 2015). It was also considered to include all organised actions of physical, psychological, and structural threats that were intended to intimidate, hurt, or blackmail a political stakeholder before, during, or after an election in order to decide, delay, or otherwise influence the outcome (Nwolise, 2007).

Political violence has been described as electoral-related violence, such as coercive acts, threats of physical damage, and coercive threats with the intent to disrupt or impede an electoral process. When these actions are taken, they have an impact on the electoral process either directly or indirectly. For example, they may cause voting to be disrupted or the results of the elections to be delayed or overturned (Onimisi & Omolegbe, 2019). Furthermore, political violence was conceptualised by Ekstein (cited in Omale & Meshach, 2020) as:

> The use of threat or physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and damage to property and whose objectives, choice of targets, victims, surrounding circumstances,

> implementation and effects have political significance that tends to modify the behaviour of others in existing arrangement of power structure that has some consequences for the political system (p. 5).

For the purposes of this study, political violence is defined as any form of violence that is displayed before, during, or after an election. Examples of political violence include politically motivated ballot box snatching, murder, kidnapping, and armed attacks against opponents, election participants, and election officials, as well as the setting on fire of polling places, collation centers, and offices in an effort to sway the results of the election (Akinyetun et al., 2021).

Conceptualising National Integration

Different scholars and perspectives have assigned different meanings to the idea of national integration. The national question, also known as nation-building, national unity, cohesiveness, or national loyalty, entails agreement on the boundaries of the political community and the character of the political regime (Liddle, 1970, cited in Otite, 2000). Simply put, this refers to the formation of consensus among a state's constituents over the degree of unity and political system and institutions they aspire to. It is also a method of bringing a society together that tends to transform it into a peaceful metropolis, based on a hierarchy that its citizens perceive as equally peaceful (Duverger, 1976). This suggests that integration fosters oneness, which facilitates easy interaction between the participants in the given society based on some established standards of fairness (Aliyu et al., 2023).

National integration is the development of a cohesive and clear national identity and awareness in a mixed society where all citizens are given an equal opportunity to realise their full potential and members are given a sense of belonging, regardless of where they come from, which increases the likelihood of creating firmer loyalties that displace parochial loyalties to ethnic cleavages (Onyibor, 2016). People become connected via national integration, both dominant and subordinate groups developing a sense of belonging that allow them to live in peace with their basic human rights equally respected (Taylor, 2017).

National integration, which is self-imposed, enhances national unity and solidarity while minimising socio-cultural disparities or inequities. People bond emotionally and intellectually. A national identity is supreme when there is a sense of unity within variety. In Nigeria, national integration refers to the free, equitable, and balanced association of the various ethnic, racial, religious, economic, social, and political groupings on matters of national concern (Akinyetun, 2020).

In keeping with what has been said thus far and for the purposes of this study, national integration simply refers to the peaceful coexistence or cohabitation of individuals of many ethnicities within a sovereign body. It is the process of bringing together the various ethnic groups within a nation in order to foster a strong feeling of shared identity, understanding, nationalism, and patriotism for the welfare of their country.

Theoretical Framework

The Cultural Pluralism Theory (CPT) serves as the framework for the study. Cultural pluralism was first used in 1915 by Horace M. Kallen, who envisioned a nation of European multi-ethnic nations living within an American civilisation and using English as a common language with the goal of establishing a democratic federal republic that is made up of various nationalities that cooperate voluntarily under common institutions. Gunnar Myrdal, Tamotse Shibutani, Milton M. Gordon, and Robert Blanner are a few of the proponents of this approach (Pantoja et al., 1976).

Beyond socio-economic justice, cultural pluralism also addresses how various nations can live side by side in a state of mutual respect inside the same country (Pantoja et al., 1976). The fundamental tenet of the cultural pluralism hypothesis is that several nations may coexist in a multiethnic country. The cooperation between various nations would improve and bolster the sense of oneness within the country. As a result, every ethnic group has the right to take part in governing the nation without fear of intimidation, injustice, or exclusion (Abdullahi & Usman, 2021).

This theory is pertinent to this study because it describes how cultural diversity has coexisted in Nigeria despite fierce political and economic struggle, animosity, and the exclusion of some

ethnic groups by other ethnic groups. The need for access to state wealth, which provides a means for resource accumulation at the expense of the majority, is what drives the strong political struggle within the setting of Nigerian political economy (Abdullahi & Usman, 2021). Therefore, many strategies are employed to mobilise support during the process of the struggle for power. These include, among others, political/electoral violence, excessive monetalisation of politics, coupled with ethnic, religious, and regional or geopolitical considerations. However, this situation worsens ethnic tension and impedes the process of cooperation among the diverse ethnic nationalities in the country.

Nature of 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

General elections in 2023 were unlike any other elections held in Nigeria since the founding of her fourth republic. First, unlike previous presidential elections, which were primarily contested by two parties, the 2023 election was largely a three-way contest between the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), its longtime rival the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which presided over the country from 1999 to 2015, and the Labour Party, which until recently was not a significant player. Having served the maximum of two terms permitted by the constitution, President Muhammadu Buhari is ineligible to run. Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the APC, a former governor of Lagos state (1999–2007), Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, a former vice president (1999–2007), and Peter Obi of the Labour Party, a former governor of Anambra state, are the three front-runners (2006-2014). The New Nigeria People's Party's (NNPP) former Kano state governor Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, a fourth candidate, is also running but doesn't appear to represent a major national threat. However, there is a remote chance that none of the three candidates will garner the 25% of votes needed in two thirds of the states for an outright victory, which might result in the nation's first-ever run-off election (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Second, the polls included improvements in accordance with the provisions of the new election law, the Electoral Act of 2022. These include the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System, which transmits election results electronically from polling places to the INEC Result Viewing Portal and verifies voters' identities using both fingerprint and face biometrics. In theory, these instruments should assist prevent unregistered voters from casting ballots and prevent data manipulation, which was a major cause of vote rigging in previous elections, from being transferred to state collation centers and INEC headquarters in Abuja. And because of this, INEC Chairman Mahmood Yakubu declared that the 2023 elections would be the “best ever” for the nation (Omolaoye, 2022).

Young people participated more in this election than in previous ones, many of whom were first-time voters. INEC reported that 7.28 million, or 76% of the new registrants, are between the ages of 18 and 34, up from 51% in 2019. Numerous causes have contributed to the increase in youthful voters. For instance, many young people got involved in politics in October 2020, protesting against police brutality and feeling empowered to demand better government (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2020). Many young people (particularly in southern states) are motivated to vote against the two major parties because they believe they are mostly to blame for the nation's problems. Labour’s Obi is vowing to do just that (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Overview, Causes and Effects of Political Violence in Nigeria

In Nigeria, political violence is frequently seen. It is the intentional use of force to further particular political goals after independence and even after 1999 up till the most recent general elections in 2023; Nigeria's political and electoral experiences have been marred by political violence, leaving behind tragic memories. In actuality, the country's political climate is rife with violence. Examples include the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections, which were characterised by unprecedented political violence and extensive fraud. The political climate in Nigeria was severely harmed by the political unrest in 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023, which resulted in the deaths of many people and the destruction of property worth billions of Naira (Aliyu *et al.*, 2023; Abah & Nwokwu, 2015).

Undoubtedly, the political system of the country has both internal and external contradictions that fuel political violence. A number of political crises are sparked by the political divisions within the ruling class. The

inclinations and drives for political violence become an unavoidable reality in social engineering since politics is connected to the acquisition of power and the distribution of resources, even though violence in Nigerian politics occasionally appears to be gratuitous and to have a redeeming quality (Kolade, 2007). Political violence typically has multiple causes, but the fundamental ones are largely rooted in strained historical ties and other types of divisions within the Nigerian population, which frequently translate into violence through a variety of catalysts (Omitola, 2011; Anifowose, 1982).

A culture of political violence is promoted in Nigeria by variables such as perceived political and economic marginalisation, religious divisions, boundary conflicts, marginalisation of minorities, high rates of corruption, poverty, and illiteracy, among others (Ogboji et al., 2022; Raji, 2016). Additionally, societal unrest, dispute resolution, and dissatisfaction are all risk factors for political violence in the nation. Theism's influence on Nigerian politics contributed to a further escalation of the political environment's violent culture (Omale & Meshach, 2020).

The Nigerian federation's complexity and the difficulties brought on by its operational diversities are among the reasons of political violence. The severe centralisation and concentration of much power at the federal level, which has resulted in reciprocal hostilities amongst many ethnic nations to control such power, is not unrelated to the negative tendencies of the Nigerian federation and its activities. The initial issue of structural inequalities and unequal competitive abilities for the control of national resources among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria has continued to be exacerbated by the mutual suspicions. As a result, Nigeria's federal structure has gradually been reduced to a tool for redistributing resources to satisfy the claims of various parties. However, anytime there is an election contest, the ensuing political rivalry for access to these riches frequently escalates into bloodshed, as any region that wins the election controls and has the power to transfer the pool of resources to anyone it pleases (Ogboji *et al.*, 2022; Raji, 2016).

Political violence in Nigeria is orchestrated by a lack of realistic natural identity. The nation is made up of tribal and ethnic groupings that speak 700 different languages and have populations ranging from a few thousand to millions. There are about 389 ethnic groups in Nigeria, and if one digs deeper into the country's history, they will find that the country is made up of sub-national groups with no overarching desire for integration or unification. As a result, the relationships between the various ethnic groups in the nation are hostile and filled with hatred (Otite, 2002). However, they were made clear by the sheer volume of violent clashes that were documented between 2015 and 2019 during the political process (Chukwuma et al., 2018).

Additionally, political unrest in Nigeria is sparked by high unemployment rates. In the early years of the Fourth Republic, as state firms are privatised, unemployment among displaced workers and young people without a college degree or with a full set of skills rises. Nigeria had 61 million people in the labor force in March 2003, and the country's overall unemployment rate was 10.8% (Nwokoma, 2005). Politicians benefit from the persistent lack of economic opportunities by being able to mobilise unemployed youngsters for ostentatious and selfish goals. The information at hand points to the possibility that unemployed teenagers are converted into trained militant cults and hired to intimidate, harass, and kill political opponents (Omale & Meshach, 2020).

Political violence is also sparked by the anger of the majority of exploited Nigerians who have been excluded from the power struggle due to the way political appointments are made in favor of those who are already in a position of power, leaving the vast majority in poverty (Madu, 2002). Because they believed that violence was the only option to draw attention to such economic and political marginalisation, people have used political violence as a manner of resolving disputes and expressing their anger with the administration (Raji, 2016).

Unfortunately, political violence is known to have diminished the vital unity in the strategic operational organisation and the extremely essential positive defensive group sprit (Esprit de corps) among the rank and file of the security agencies that were sent to combat electoral crimes. As many peacekeepers sent to maintain peace during political processes frequently tactically back their kits and kin in the crisis, boosting tribe allegiance far above their formal devotion to the military authorities, there are typically incidents of divided loyalty to the military authority. The sophistication and quantity of weapons and ammunition used by political thugs also indicate a plausible level of

the proliferation of light and sophisticated weapons in Nigeria, and this unsettling development raises concerns about the nation's national security. Security forces struggle to isolate and stop political violence because of the widespread and careless use of weapons, especially when that violence is committed in the name of an ethnic group (Anweting & Ogar, 2018).

Political violence instills a sickening fear in the minds of the populace and generates the sense that elections are akin to war. This casts a very negative light on Nigerian politics and the electoral process. Additionally, it contributes to the voters' growing disdain for democratic administration due to allegedly rigged elections. This could impede the emergence of a democratic culture and a sense of national identity among the populace, both of which are essential for the country's democracy and national integration to last (Njoku, 2010).

Additionally, political violence creates a climate of social unrest. This could lead to intergroup disputes that could destabilise the nation and consequently stifle democracy. Indeed, it poses a serious threat to Nigeria's democratic values and national cohesion. Political violence is encouraged by the inborn motivations of those vying for public office to profit themselves, further tearing the fabric of Nigerian unity apart (Omale & Meshach, 2020). Political unrest runs the possibility of escalating into violent and deadly inter-communal clashes, further dividing the nation and accelerating its collapse. Even while ethnic militias and misguided individuals frequently hijack such disputed elections to forward their covert purpose of planned annihilation and elimination of their perceived political rivals, political differences occasionally serve as the catalyst for such bloodshed (Ogar et al., 2018).

Methodology

This study is quantitative and evaluative. Data for the study were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Extant literature and data gathered through close-ended questionnaire were relied upon. Lagos State of Nigeria constituted the study area and the study population comprised all residents of Lagos State. The study population comprised males and females of eighteen years and above who have are constitutionally qualified to take part in the political process in the country. Survey methods were employed for data collection. Questionnaire titled Political Violence and National Integration Questionnaire (PVNIQ) designed by the researcher was the instrument used for data collection in this study. A total of 215 responses were gathered through Google survey. Quantitative method of data analysis was adopted. The quantitative data collected through PVNIQ were analysed using descriptive means and standard deviation.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data are presented using mean and standard deviation and the decision rule is that any mean score of 2.0 and above was regarded as agreed while any one below 2.0 regarded as disagreed.

Research Question I: What are the factors that promoted political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Factors that promoted Political Violence during the 2023 General Elections in Lagos State, Nigeria

S/N	Issue Raised	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Politics of sentiment promotes political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria	215	3.31	1.005
2	Politics of entitlement (*Emilokan* - it is my turn - mantra) instigates political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria	215	3.33	0.890
3	Excessive monetised politics, religiosity and ethnicised politics enhances political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria	215	3.29	0.968

4	Power shift syndrome/rotational presidency gives rise to political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria	215	3.32	0.923
5	Landlord versus tenancy citizens' issues and entitlement (Lagos is no man's land sentiment) encourages political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria	215	3.27	0.957

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 1 presents the responses gathered on the factors that promoted political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State, Nigeria. The first item in the table has the mean of 3.31 which signifies the respondents' agreement that politics of sentiment promotes political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria. Second item in the table has the mean of 3.33 which implies the respondents' agreement that politics of entitlement (*Emilokan* - it is my turn - mantra) instigates political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria. Third item in the table has the mean of 3.29 which denotes the respondents' agreement that excessive monetised politics, religiosity and ethnicised politics enhances political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria.

Fourth item in the table has the mean of 3.32 which denotes the respondents' agreement that power shift syndrome/rotational presidency gives rise to political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria. The fifth item in the table has the mean of 3.27 which signifies the respondents' agreement that landlord versus tenancy citizens' issues and entitlement (Lagos is no man's land sentiment) encourages political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria. The higher level of closeness of the standard deviations of the five items in the table connotes that all issues raised above constituted the factors which promoted political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Research Question II: What is the effect of political violence during the 2023 general elections on national integration in Lagos State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Effect of Political Violence during the 2023 General Elections on National Integration in Lagos State, Nigeria

S/N	Issues Raised	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
6	Political violence negatively affects and deteriorates the peaceful co-habitation of different tribes during the 2023 general election in Lagos State Nigeria	215	3.41	0.932
7	2023 general elections breed sentiment, disunity and violence among different tribes resident in Lagos state Nigeria	215	3.30	0.960
8	Political violence witnessed during 2023 general elections promote distrust and intolerance among ethnic groupings resident in Lagos State Nigeria	215	3.28	0.965
9	Political violence during the 2023 general elections threaten unity, friendliness, tolerance, economic activities and democracy in Lagos State Nigeria	215	3.46	0.879
10	2023 general elections promotes political violence that distorts peaceful co-existence of the major constituents of the Lagos State, thereby drifting the state into anarchy and disintegration	215	3.38	0.822

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 2 presents the responses gathered on the effect of political violence during the 2023 general elections on national integration in Lagos State, Nigeria. The first item in the table

has the mean of 3.41 which signifies the respondents' agreement that political violence negatively affects and deteriorates the peaceful co-habitation of different tribes during the 2023 general election in Lagos State Nigeria. Second item in the table has the mean of 3.30 which implies the respondents' agreement that 2023 general elections breed sentiment, disunity and violence among different tribes resident in Lagos state Nigeria. Third item in the table has the mean of 3.28 which denotes the respondents' agreement that political violence witnessed during 2023 general elections promote distrust and intolerance among ethnic groupings resident in Lagos State Nigeria.

Fourth item in the table has the mean of 3.46 which denotes the respondents' agreement that political violence during the 2023 general elections threaten unity, friendliness, tolerance, economic activities and democracy in Lagos State Nigeria. The fifth item in the table has the mean of 3.38 which signifies the respondents' agreement that 2023 general elections promotes political violence that distorts peaceful co-existence of the major constituents of Lagos State, thereby drifting the state into anarchy and disintegration. The higher level of closeness of the standard deviations of the five items in the table showcases that political violence witnessed during the 2023 general elections has negative effects on national integration in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The data obtained on the first objective of this study, which focused on the factors that promoted political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State, Nigeria revealed that several composite factors such as politics of sentiment and entitlement (*Emilokan* - it is my turn - mantra), excessive monetised politics, religiosity, ethnicised politics, power shift syndrome/ rotational presidency coupled with landlord versus tenancy citizens' issues and entitlement (Lagos is no man's land sentiment) promoted political violence during the 2023 general elections in Lagos State Nigeria. This finding is in complement the assertions of Omale and Meshach, (2020) in their study where they asserted that high rates of corruption, poverty, illiteracy, high unemployment rates and lack of realistic natural identity trigger political violence in Nigeria.

The data obtained on the second objective of this study, which centered on the effect of political violence during the 2023 general elections on national integration in Lagos State, Nigeria revealed that series of serious magnitude of political violence witnessed in Lagos State during the 2023 general elections further wrecked havoc on the already cracked and disunity relationship among the ethnic groupings residing in Lagos State. Therefore, this further natively affected the quest national integration in country. This finding complements the assertions of Aliyu et al. (2023), Anweting and Ogar (2018) and Njoku (2010) on the effects of political violence to Nigeria's development, democracy and unity in their respective studies on political violence in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the 2023 general election, political violence, and national integration in Nigeria with a concise study of the Lagos State experience. It discovered that the political violence witnessed during the general elections in Lagos State was a product of several composite factors such as politics of sentiment and entitlement (*Emilokan* - it is my turn - mantra), excessive monetised politics, religiosity, ethnicised politics, power shift syndrome/ rotational presidency coupled with landlord versus tenancy citizens' issues and entitlement (Lagos is no man's land sentiment), among others. Equally, the study revealed that high magnitude of political violence witnessed in Lagos State during the 2023 general elections further wrecked havoc on the already cracked and disunity relationship among the ethnic groupings residing in Lagos State. This is due to the fact that 2023 general elections breed sentiment, disunity, violence, distrust and also threatens friendliness, tolerance, economic activities and democracy in the state. Therefore, this study concluded that the 2023 general elections witnessed high dimension of political violence that distorts peaceful co-existence of the major ethnic constituents of the Lagos State, thereby drifting the state into anarchy and further widen gap of promoting national integration in the State and Nigeria at large.

However, based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were offered:

i. The political offices through salaries and other benefits, which encourage unhealthy competition and political violence, should be reduced drastically. Also, the stakes of the elections should be made less attractive so as to give room for patriotic citizens to

participate in the political process and curb do-or-die elections.

ii. Government should give adequate attention to the contending issues surrounding the citizenship problem, indigene and settler syndrome, and federal character principle, among others, so that Nigerians will have a sense of belonging in their country.

iii. Politicians should develop an attitude that will promote national integration and patriotism before, during and after political process rather than employing divisive mechanisms to promote their interests.

iv. Government should ensure the adequate implementation of several laws like the Public Order Act, Nigeria Police Act and the Electoral Act of 2022 which contains penal sanctions for such malfeasance of political violence and also curb the impunity that emboldens perpetrators of political violence.

v. Security agencies should be well trained, professional, not sentimental or bias in their duty and adequately equipped to tackle security issues during elections in different parts of the country. This will make it easier for Nigerians to live, work or be posted to any part of the country.

vi. The Nigerian government should embark on more enlightenment programmes on unity. This should be done at all levels. The curriculum of schools should be reviewed to educate students at all levels on patriotism and inter-cultural relations.

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