

Political Campaign and Human Rights Violation in Rivers State, Nigeria, 2013-2021

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Abstract: Human Rights Abuses ranging from torture and kidnap to disappearance of persons and political assassinations, among others, have become a recurring decimal in Rivers State politics in recent times. These, in most cases, are perpetrated by the Law Enforcement Agents deployed to the campaign grounds as well as unknown uniform gunmen who exploit the proclivities of the Law Enforcement Agencies to inflict harm on the citizens on campaign and off campaign grounds. Extant literature shows that while scholars have examined how variables like warring cult groups, unknown factions from the both conflicting parties, etc, have engendered Human Rights Abuses in Rivers State, there has not been any systematic scholarly effort directed at exploring the nexus between the dynamics of political campaigns and Human Rights Abuses in the State within the period of 2013 to 2021. This study, therefore, undertakes to interrogate this linkage. The paper utilized the Social Conflict Theory as a framework of analysis, while also adopting the Ex-post facto research design. The Documentary method and content analysis were deployed for data collection and data analysis, respectively. The study found that the militarization of political campaigns and the excessive use of other Security Agents undermined Human Rights by exacerbating their Abuses in Rivers State, Nigeria. Appropriate punishment of officers and politicians who sponsor election-related violence is therefore recommended.

Keywords: Election campaigns, Abuses, Hate Speech, Election Violence, Law Enforcement Agencies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Random explosions of Human Rights abuses in contemporary Nigeria have become so daring and threatening to the security of lives and properties. These very acts of Human Rights abuses from different sources, ranging from incidences resulting from the activities of warring gangs, confrontational opponents to the activities of the law enforcement agents among others have affected the smooth democratization process as expected in Nigeria. The unprecedented wave of violence unleashed by human rights abuses in Nigeria have brought about a state of insecurity, the loss of confidence on the government as it affects the essence of governance among others. Some states have been implicated in the unleashing of these abuses on the masses at a large scale, some of these states include those of the north east, southeast, among others. On different occasions, the Nigerian state have been implicated in the abuse of human rights, ranging from the abuses done in the course of counter-insurgent operations, abuses done in the course of arrest, during elections among others. These abuses have defiled all attempts by the government to minimize its effects and seriousness in the country.

In view of this, the human rights abuses as observed in Rivers State are one that has pitched a height that their effects and impact cannot be neglected or overemphasized. Different groups at different occasion have been found to have perpetrated these human rights abuses in Rivers State but the one with the loudest of impact are the ones resulting from elections and political campaigns, especially between warring gangs or henchmen of political aspirants in the state (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Innocent citizens have been found to be victims of an open fire, other forms of armed confrontations, physical confrontations with bottles, machetes, and explosives among others. This has limited the mobility of the citizens and their participation during such gatherings as they witnessed *ab initio* (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Rivers State citizens who were on their way home from work have been found lying dead on the street on a cool afternoon, some queuing on roadside clinics and hospitals on account of the activities of warring gangs among others. Families have been on the neck of the social media, the press among others trying to seek explanations as to why their loved ones were murdered in cold blood and still nothing has been done by the state to overcome, reduce or prosecute the situation in Rivers State (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Dozens of Rivers State citizens were found lying dead on the street within a six week period beginning from July 1st, 2008 and many injured. Some of these victims were caught in crossfire between and among gangs or groups of rivals in elections, and political campaigns among others and others specifically targeted on purpose (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Some people were attacked on transit within the city and others injured as they try to exit the environment of violence as problems ensued. A young girl and her guardian were reported murdered on their return from a church service in the morning and another incidence leaving a bread seller and the colleague dead on duty (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Furthermore, the insecurity resulting from violence in Rivers State, spread to other communities and villages in the state. Communities like Ogbogoro were affected immensely on an armed confrontation between groups which led to the murder of many, raping of many girls and children and other violent crimes (Human Rights Watch, 2008). The human rights abuses in rivers state could be traced to the aftermath of the 2007 election that was assumed to be rigged by some Rivers State politicians who deployed their boys during the election to enable them rig the election. This resulted in a clash between

the politicians involved in the election (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Rivers state since 1999 has been implicated in elections stolen openly and voters systematically intimidated into acquiescence as it is generally observed in the Nigerian landscape since the inception of democracy in 1999, which accounted for the murder of over 100 thousand persons till the 2007 elections (Ebere & Chloe, 2009). The government of Rivers State at different points has not shown any reasonable sense of responsibility through necessary policy processes and deployment actions by through the military in the fight against human rights abuses. This very act of human right abuses is one that has sunk even lower than the dismal norms in the state. These abuses according to reports were found to have been done by public officials who in their quest to seize power adopt any means possible to realize their objectives (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

According to the publication made by the Human Rights Watch (2008), the fortification and supply of these instruments and personnel that propel human rights abuses could be traced to the excess supply of funds and the buoyancy of the economy of the state. That position is derived from Rivers' status as the heart of Nigeria's booming oil industry. Rising world oil prices in recent years have flooded Rivers State's treasury with a budget larger than those of many West African countries. Overtime, the squandering through corruption and the mismanagement of funds have been implicated in the depletion of the state's funds which is indirectly used for the funding of their gangs for the purpose of elongating their stay in office

Hence, the Rivers state's funds have not just been mismanaged but have been used to sponsor violence and insecurity which end up jeopardizing and inflicting injuries and abuses on the masses as ordered by the ruling part or politicians. Politicians in the past, prior to the 2003 elections were found to have lavishly funded criminal gangs that aided the rigging of the election in favour of the People's Democratic Party (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Human Rights Watch (2008) posited that to reduce human rights abuses in Rivers State, the government has deployed the military led Joint Task Force (JTF), a combined force of the police, the military, and the State Security Service (SSS) personnel in the fight against human rights abuses in the last decades. The JTF has to a large extent succeeded in the curtailing of human rights abuses in Port Harcourt and some communities around it that were gravely affected by abuses from gangs, political thugs among others. They have since managed to maintain a degree of relative and fragile peace, though they have not managed to stamp out gang violence altogether.

Notwithstanding the prosecutorial activities by the government to quell human rights abuses in the city, violations of human rights have against all odds on the increase. The personnel of the JTF has been implicated in the violations of human rights abuses ranging from the shooting of unsuspecting civilian with no justification, cases of the unlawful detention and beating as

well as torture of innocent citizens, the looting of individual homes of the citizens, the raping of girls and women among others. Reports show that the activities of the JTF have been politicized and high jacked by politicians who use these people to achieve their nefarious ends (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Sustained observation has shown that periods of election and political campaigns in Rivers State almost always lend themselves to human rights abuses, like the beating of suspected opponents praise singers, the limitation of the rights of movement around the environs of the campaign; attempt to destabilize the campaign by opponents among others. These activities have resulted to the murder of innocent citizens, kidnappings, injuring of innocent citizens etc. The military and other security agents deployed for security purposes in a political campaign are most times biased and used as instrument for the perpetration of human rights abuses and violations in the state (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

In the light of the above, therefore, the study interrogates how the excessive usage of security agents and militarization of political campaigns has exacerbated human rights violations in Rivers State between 2013 and 2021.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Social Conflict Theory as first developed by Karl Marx. Conflict in a social context is defined according to Boulding (1963) as a competitive situation in which parties are conscious of the incompatible goals and aspirations as well as their potential positions and therefore wishes to pursue them even at the expense of the other party. The inevitability of conflict is not in doubt as parties or people cohabiting seek to achieve their objectives which are part of their social being in a social setting, even without the considerations of the weaker parties. Hence, such are always ready to do anything to achieve their goal.

The term conflict has no generally acceptable definition as scholars have viewed it from a contexts, involving values and beliefs, fears and suspicion, interests and needs, attitudes and action, relationship and network (Brockutne, 2001 cited in Hwedie&Rankopo, 2012). Dagne (2013) posited that conflicts are a normal part of human interaction and are rarely completely resolved or eliminated, but can be managed by such measures as negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration. Similarly, Montagu (1968), conceived of conflict as a condition of disharmony in an interaction process and usually occurs as a result of clash of interest between the parties involved in some form of relationship.

Social conflict theory presupposes that human behaviours, in a social context, result from the pursuit of common goal by the two or more competing groups, individuals, among others. The theory has its root in the works of Karl Marx in the 1980s. Marx conceptualized the human society in terms of conflicts which may lead to full blown violence between social classes, perhaps from owners of potential means of productions, political candidates who are contesting for an important seat in government, and even among the proletariats (working class

who may be fighting to gain recognition, promotions and higher wages). It is pertinent to posit that the competing individuals and gangs possess unequal power, though they are in pursuit of a common objective. This disparity in their capacity does not only account for their influence, but also proportionality of the terror they are capable of unleashing in the polity.

Social conflict is such a one that the contending parties are a conglomerate of individuals, groups, organizations, communities, crowds implicated in conflict situation. The social conflict perspective is a derivative of group conflict. However, a conflict situation can exist without any awareness. The social conflict theory according to Chris (2014) uses diverse human behavior, such as educational practices that either sustain or challenge the status quo and cultural customs regarding the elderly, and criminal behavior. It is a tool that adopts the social environment as its laboratory to scientifically analyze the general conflict among human in the polity (Coser, 1956). Coser (2006) observed that the Social Conflict Theory rests on the following central assumptions:

1. The probability of goal attainment for one party decreases as the probability of the other increases.
2. Social conflict constitutes a struggle over values or claims to status, power, scarce resources, in which the aim of the conflict group are not only to gain the desired value, but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals.
3. Social conflict involves a lot of social disorders and phenomenon: class, racial struggle, religious, communal conflict; riots, rebellions, harassments, demonstrations, attack at personality, protest gatherings, among others.
4. Social Conflict theories involve competition in any way possible between and among the warring or contending groups.

II. APPLICATION OF THEORY

The social conflict theory is fundamental to the inquiry into the nature of electoral campaigns and human rights violation in Rivers State. The nature of human rights violations meted out to innocent citizens during elections campaigns find expression on some of the central thesis of the theory of Social Conflict. For instance, 'the probability of goal attainment for one party decreases as the probability of the other increases' presents an overture suggesting that the election campaign period is one where there are more than one group, individual, or institutions fighting to gain or achieve a common objectives. Their pursuit of this common objective conditions them to take up whatever means possible to achieve their objectives. Hence, the probability, tendency, and propensity of the realization of the goal by one party decreases even as the propensity of the other party increases depending on the power, strength and capacity they possesses as well as the application of the right instrument for the realization of their objectives.

The theory will help to ascertain in accordance with the last tenet of the theory as stated above (Social theories involve

competition in any way possible between and among the warring or contending groups) whether the nature of election campaign as observed in literature and reality involves some level of competition. This process involves a lot of struggles that could be pursued in any way possible even at the expense of the other party. These groups involved can go at any length to make sure that their objectives are realized. Just as it is seen in every competition, the only constant thing is interest. Hence, the competing parties are always in pursuit of their own objective without observing what the other is doing and to the detriment of anyone who wishes to obstruct their moves. The political attempt of the All Progressive Congress to take over power from the People's Democratic Company after 16 years of leadership was a real case of group competition. The All Progressive Congress did everything possible to make sure they trap power not minding who is offended or appeased.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted both the survey and documentary methods of data collection. It relied on key informant interview (KII) in obtaining first-hand information. The documentary method relied on secondary sources, where materials like text books, Newspaper, government publications, research papers, journal articles, among others were consulted for data gathering. The study was conducted in Rivers States, one of the six (6) states in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The state is divided into twenty three (23) Local Government Areas, with Port Harcourt as the Capital city.

With respect to sampling technique, the study adopted Non-Probability sampling technique and the subjects were selected through purposive sampling method. A total number of 6 experienced persons were selected for the study. These included chieftains from three major political parties in Rivers State, namely; PDP, APC and KOWA. Some of these were former LGA Chairmen and former Chiefs of Staff who served in the capacity of Party Agents at LGA level, while others were politically conscious men and lawyers all whom served their parties as agents in the 2015 and 2019 elections.

Similarly, the purposive sampling was employed to select both the sampled locations and the respondents, and criteria for selection were availability at the time of the fieldwork, involvement in party politics and conduct of elections, and willingness to participate in the study. Thus, of the 23 LGAs, seven (7) were selected. These are LGAs with the highest cases/incidents of violence and human rights violations, namely: Obio/Akpor LGA; Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA; Ahoada East LGA; Andoni LGA; Ahoada West LGA; Khana LGA; and Etche LGA. Enlightened and active officials of popular political parties participating at various levels as party agents were purposively selected for the key informant interview (KII).

Heavy Security Forces and Unlawful Arrest during Election Campaigns

The resultant effects of the last election campaigns in Rivers State that were raped, disorganized and nearly thwarted by

warring gang groups who may have been paid to disrupt the election campaign, the activities of private security agents who specifically were assigned by the candidate to foist the party's choice candidates on the masses, the storming of the campaign ground by paid hoodlums among others have all contributed to a greater fortification and dynamic strategies by the party to avoid a repetition of the vicious cycle of intimidation and insult by way of involving law enforcement agents or the military in the internal election campaign of the state.

From the *Vanguard* (2019), it could be averred that the reason for the involvement of the military or security operatives in election campaign was due to heavy violence that dogged the previous election campaigns in the state, especially the ones that were held by the opposition party in Rivers State. Incidences of assassinations that were originally meant for the flag bearer were also considered and expounded upon as one of the major issue that led to the involvement of the military in election campaign in Rivers State.

Furthermore, the offshoot contentions from the foregoing analyzed that high profiled government officials recruited fake Nigerian Army personnel to disrupt the election campaign of the opposition party even to the extent of overawe of his opponents and security on the Election Day (*Vanguard*, 2019). This is manifested in the knitting of political thugs with the military regalia and armed with the military hardware as well for the essence of impersonating the Nigerian army sent by the state to monitor campaign activities and perpetrate various crimes in furtherance of the will of their political fathers (*Vanguard*, 2019).

It is important to note that due to the extant security problems that has clouded Rivers State, the involvement of the law enforcement agencies are inevitable as their presence would curtail or reduce to the barest minimum the harm and problem witnessed in the previous years during election campaign. **Table 1** contains some law enforcement agents involved in election campaigns in Rivers State since 2013.

Table 1: Security Forces Deployed during Election Campaigns in Rivers State

Security Agencies	Whether they are armed or not	Weapons	Remarks
Nigerian Army	Heavily armed with mounted machine guns in the area of activity	Machine gun, AK-47, knife	They are implicated in the use of force and intimidation to force compliance during election campaigns.
Nigerian Police Force	Armed with personnel scattered around the area of activity	AK-47 rifles, light rifles, Grenade	The Nigerian Police has a track record of high propensity to bribery and corrupt which makes it easy for some of these armed men to go through them to perpetrate human rights abuses.
Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps	Some of them were armed while others were not	Light rifles, AK-47	they have been found to mete out corporal punishments to citizens
State Security Service	They are armed	Knife, AK-47, light rifles	Use of force and intimidation to force compliance during election campaigns.
Unofficial security guards	Not all of them were armed	Knife, light rifles and other harmful instrument of security	Their operation in any area in almost untraceable to any law enforcement agencies and hence could be adjudged anonymous.

Source: Compiled by the researcher from Fundforpeace.org.2016.

The table above reveals that indeed there exists the presence of military deployment during election period and campaign periods in Rivers State. This point was corroborated by one of our interviewees, a barrister and APC party agent in Ahoada West LGA who advised that “the use of heavy security forces around campaign grounds should be minimized and should not be encouraged as it leads to high level of intimidation”. He went on to aver that he feels “disappointed when security forces molest and abuse electorates and it discourages me from coming out to vote on the Election Day”. The above statement suggests that electoral seasons and campaign seasons in Rivers State have something to do with the deployment of heavy security operatives, which comes along with some irregularities during elections in Rivers State. Furthermore, another of our interviewees, a former Local Government Council Chairman and PDP Agent in 2015 & 2019 elections, acknowledged the heavy presence of military operatives during campaign in Rivers State. He added that “the use of heavy security forces around campaign grounds points to the fact that the democratic

process is not transparent and always influenced” and that this “discourages people from participating”.

Responding to the question on the deployment of military operatives during elections in Rivers States, another of the key informants interviewed, a lawyer and party agent of KOWA Party, submitted that “the use of heavy security forces around campaign grounds is good for security reasons but also very intimidating for voters”. She “feels agitated because it should not be so in a democratic system”. The foregoing was further corroborated by the views of the Chairman of PDP in Ahoada East LGA when he stated that “the use of security forces around campaign grounds is a measure to enforce law and order, as well as to forestall any untoward development that may lead to loss of lives and properties”. Also he would have us know that “it is quite embarrassing for security forces to molest and abuse electorates / Party faithful during campaign. This has very negative effect on the outcome of the electoral process.

Furthermore, the traces of military presence in Rivers State during elections were further corroborated by the response of the current Chairman of PDP in Ward 9, Obio/Akpor LGA and former Chief of Staff of Obio/Akpor LGA. He recognized during the interview that there exists the presence of heavy military operatives around campaign grounds in the state, when he stated that “Security forces around campaign grounds are used to prevent breakdown of law and order”. He also brought to our notice that “It is unfortunate that they allow themselves to be used by rival political parties to abuse and disrupt opponents’ campaigns”. This view was further corroborated by the interview response of the Party Agent for the APC in 2019, a Ph.D holder, who acknowledged that “Security forces around campaign grounds are used to maintain peace and order; it is to the interest of everyone”. He regrets that “It is unfortunate and indeed a gross abuse of human rights”. The above interview reports reveals that there exists the presence of heavy military operatives around campaign grounds during electioneering campaigns in rivers state and also during election.

Furthermore, the deployment of security operatives in election campaigns in Rivers State was real considering the cases of violence seen in the previous campaigns of the three dominant political parties in Rivers State; the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the All Progressives Congress (APC), the Labour Party

(LP) (Akinnaso, 2014). Following from the above, it is safe to say that election campaigns in Rivers State have involved security agencies which act as guard men in the exercise thereby securing the place from intruders and warring groups that may seek to disorganize the serenity of the election campaign. However, literature has it that these security agencies have in current times gone beyond the enabling rules that involved them in Rivers State election campaign (Akinnaso, 2014). Their activities have incorporated human rights abuses and violations ranging from unlawful arrest, detention among others which is in contradistinction to the essence of their involvement. Some of them were used by high profiled politicians in the state to attack the campaign of their opponents (Vanguard, 2019).

Some of the violence on human rights done in Rivers State was perpetrated by warring gangs who were suspected to be supporters from any of the opposition parties in the state. These adversaries exploit the militarization and presence of the law enforcement agents to perpetrate these crimes. This gives credence and significance to the fact that they come on uniforms accepted or perceived to belong to any of the law enforcement agencies in Rivers State. **Table 2** contains list of election campaigns done in Rivers State, detailing arrest by law enforcement agents since 2013.

Table 2: Selected Election Campaigns in Rivers State, detailing Arrest by Law Enforcement Agents since 2013

S/N	Name of Political Party	Location of the Campaigns	Security Forces Deployed	Number of Arrests Recorded	Date	Sources
1	People’s Democratic Party	Yakubu Gowon stadium, port Harcourt	Nigerian police force, The Nigerian Army, private Security Operatives etc.	3	June 16, 2018	Channels Television. May 17, 2018
2	People’s Democratic Party	Phalga in Rivers State	Nigerian police force, The Nigerian Army, private Security Operatives etc.	Not recorded	November 2, 2018	DezMayorz. November 2, 2018
3	All progressive Congress	BoriKhana Local Government, Rivers State	Nigerian police force, The Nigerian Army, State Security Service, private Security Operatives etc.	6	December 6, 2016	Channels television. December 6, 2016
4	All progressive Congress	Botached rally in Port Harcourt	Nigerian police force, The Nigerian Army, State Security Service, private Security Operatives etc.	20	January 19 th , 2019.	Channels television. January 20 th , 2019.
5	All progressive Congress	Esimaka stadium, port Harcourt.	Nigerian police force, The Nigerian Army, State Security Service, private Security Operatives etc.	4	January 25, 2015	Premium Times January 25, 2015
6	All progressive Congress	Okirika National School Field	Nigerian police force, The Nigerian Army, State Security Service, private Security Operatives etc.	4	February 11, 2019	Channels Television. February 11, 2019
7	People’s Democratic Party	Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State	Nigerian police force, The Nigerian Army, State Security Service, private Security Operatives etc.	4	June 18, 2015.	Sahara reporters, June 18, 2015.
8	All progressive Congress	AdokiyeAmasiemaka stadium, port Harcourt	Nigerian police force, The Nigerian Army, State Security Service, private Security Operatives etc.	Not recorded	January 6, 2015.	Sahara reporters, January 6, 2015.

Source: Compiled by the researcher from Fundforpeace.org.2015.

According to a news report by Channels (2013), during a campaign in Port Harcourt on the September 12, 2013 in

preparation for the 2015 elections where Police officers who were identified as officers from the state Criminal Investigation

Department (C.I.D), came to the campaign ground to disrupt the campaign process, embarrassing both politicians and journalists. It is on record that they arrested some innocent citizens who came for the election campaign. They went further to dismantle the flag after claims of promoting law and order in the terrain and to prevent campaign violence resulting from clashes between competing powers or parties in Rivers State (Channels,2013).

The campaign violence in Rivers State got to it height in 2015 which coincided with the fierce political competition and confrontation between Governor NyesomWike and RotimiAmaechi Channels (2013). Since then, insecurities including unlawful arrests by the law enforcement agents have been rife, especially during election campaigns. Law enforcement agents in Rivers State have been spotted arresting innocent citizens in the state during or immediately after election campaigns due to the direct confrontation of armed militias, warring gangs or political thugs on the campaign ground. The direct perpetrators of this disruption are hardly arrested while innocent citizens often go in for it Channels (2013). Those warring gangs before the notice of security agents often disappear into the thin air, only to transfer the burden and consequence of their activities to the citizens who came to grace the election campaign Channels, (2013).

To further corroborate the above claims of unlawful arrest and detention of innocent citizens in Rivers State during election campaigns, our respondent, an APC party agent in Ahoada West LGA, averred with dismay that “it is now a normalcy in Rivers State and Nigeria in general for opposition parties to harass and intimidate citizens during political campaigns; this instills fear in the minds of the electorates”. He however cleared that “Ordinarily, LEA do not give reasons for an arrest however, where the arrest is unlawful it should not be condoned. Where such a citizen acts in a manner that amounts to threat or mishap, then it is a legitimate reason to arrest”. The above claims supporting the existence of unlawful arrest and detention by law enforcement agencies were further confirmed by another of our interviewees, the former Local Government Council Chairman, for PDP Chairman and PDP Agent in 2015 & 2019 elections. He stated that, “in Rivers State, the party that controls the Law Enforcement Agency uses it as act of show of force to intimidate their opponents before the elections proper”.

Furthermore, information elicited from one of the respondents who happens to be alawyer and the party agent of KOWA Party during the two elections, revealed that there exist unlawful arrest and detention of citizens in Rivers State, when he stated that: “In Rivers State, the security forces are used as agents of intimidation during campaigns and election, especially in cases of violence and where people are seen with weapons”. The above claims show the presence and existence of unlawful arrest in Rivers State during electioneering campaign, while detailing the conditions that could lead to such advances by law enforcement agencies. This was further supported in the course of the interview bythe Chairman of PDP in Ahoada East LGA. He observed that “in Rivers State, unlawful arrest of citizens during political campaigns has become one of the tricks

politicians use to weaken the opponents, especially in areas where they feel the opposing political party has high support”. He went on to remark that it is not the duty of LEAs to unlawfully arrest innocent citizens, emphasizing that “the LEA roles are well spelt out during elections and political campaign, which basically is to maintain law and order, and anything outside this is mere overzealousness of the LEA”. The foregoing is a testament that campaign seasons in Rivers States,in most cases, are accompanied by high level of unlawful arrest and detention by LEAs in the state.

More so, responses gathered from our interview acknowledge the heavy presence of unlawful arrests and detentions by security operatives during campaigns in Rivers State. According to another of the key informants interviewed, aPDP chairman in a Ward in Obio/Akpor LGAand former Chief of Staff in the same LGA, “in Rivers State, rival political parties use it as a strategy to win strongholds of opponents”. He further stated that “the LEA roles have the right to enforce arrest if they have cogent, convincing and verifiable reason against a citizen in order to maintain peace during campaigns”. This is a clear pointer to the fact that the occurrence of unlawful arrest and detention by law enforcement agents in Rivers State exists. This was further corroborated by a response realized from theparty agent for the APC and an academic Doctor. He insists that “it is a gross abuse of human right to arrest and detain party faithful during electioneering campaign, except there is violation of extant laws”. It is clear from the above response that unlawful arrest and detention in Rivers State during electioneering campaign is gradually becoming a norm in the politics of Rivers States.

Some arrest were done as well during election campaign which were not done on the election ground but have some level of proven connection with the Nigerian Police as it affects suspects who interrupted political campaign in Rivers State. **Table 3** shows such occurrence in Rivers State.

Table 3: Campaign Related Arrests carried out Off-campaign Grounds by the Law Enforcement Agencies in Rivers State

S/N	Nature of Arrest	Law Enforcement agencies involved
1.	20 Persons suspected to be gang groups influenced by political supporter to cause havoc during elections campaigns in Rivers State.	Nigeria Police Force
2.	Arrest of PDP supporters by the Nigerian Police in 2013. The number of the arrested suspect was not mentioned	Nigeria Police Force
3.	3 arrested suspects assumed to have perpetrated a crime during election campaign in rivers state on October 5, 2013	Nigeria Police Force
4.	4 persons arrested by the JTF	Joint Task Force (JTF)

Source: Compiled by the researcher from Fundforpeace.org.2016.

The arrest as shown above is a clear indication that those suspects arrested exploited the presence of law enforcement agents as well as their porosity to perpetrate their attack on the innocent supporters of any of the political party they are loyal to.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the excessive usage of security agents and militarization of the electoral campaigns have exacerbated Human Rights violations in Rivers State between 2013 and 2021. It is on record that the Law Enforcement Agencies like the Nigerian Police, Nigerian Army, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, members of State Security Service, and unofficial security guards, among others, are deployed to election/campaign grounds. These Security Agencies are often heavily armed with guns and other harmful security instruments. What this means is that these Security Agencies are sometimes implicated and used by the big shots in Rivers State or rather the opposition party to perpetrate Human Rights Abuses and violations on the masses in a bid to distort the smooth flow of the Political Campaign. Some of the Human Rights Violations include extra-judicial killing/murder, unlawful arrest and detention, torture among others.

This shows that Human Rights in Rivers State have gone through so much disrespect and unaddressed circumstances which is one of the motivations that triggered this study.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the above findings, therefore, the study puts forward the following recommendations for policy implementation:

1. An institutional and corporate check on the excesses of Law Enforcement Agencies in Rivers State in a bid to minimize the rate at which Human Rights Violations are committed in Rivers State.

Officers who are implicated in such act as well as politicians whose political interest they serve should be severely and adequately punished according to the extant laws of the State.

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