

# Election Related Violence in Nigeria: Evidence Based Strategies for Prevention, Control and Mitigation

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**Abstract:** Electoral Related Violence (ERV) is a common feature of elections in some countries around the world; however it is more prevalent in developing countries. The resultant effects of ERV are similar in most settings where it is experienced. Such effects include poor democratic systems, unpopular governments and loss of lives and property among others. ERV is broadly divided into pre election, election and post election violence. This study seeks to explore the measures that can be taken towards the prevention, control and mitigation of ERV. For the purpose of this study, the mixed methods research was employed, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed in the data gathering process. A total of 500 randomly selected respondents who were employees of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were used for the study. A cross sectional survey was carried out; the respondents were interviewed and further issued questionnaires designed to gather relevant data. Data from this study showed that the male participants (68%) constituted the majority of the total respondents who participated in the study. The age distribution of respondents showed that 38% of the respondents belonged to the age bracket of 31 and 40 years, furthermore, about 71% of the respondents have witnessed various forms of ERV and only about 3% of the respondents still held some excitement about participating in core electoral activities. Results obtained from the study showed that the mitigation of ERV will mainly require a comprehensive health policy to cater for the needs of those affected by ERV. The study explored other settings where there were incidences of ERV and the measures that were taken to address it. The study further proffered recommendations on measures that can be taken to prevent, control or mitigate ERV. It recommended proper training for electoral workers, improved voter education, De-glamorization of Political Office, improved security presence and performance, control of corruption and the adoption of modern technology in the electoral process among other measures.

**Keywords:** Prevention, Control, Mitigation, Election Related Violence, INEC.

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most popular systems of government all around the world is the democratic system of government. The popularity of the democratic system of government is mainly due to the adequate representation of the citizens in the

various leadership and decision making positions and levels among other benefits. Obakhedo (2011), in explaining the concept of democracy, inferred that democracy is regarded a social system of administrating a nation-state where political parties and independent candidates vie for elective positions in a free and fair election in which the citizens are legally empowered to choose those who will run the affairs of the state within a given period. Similarly, Dye (2001) and Chitlaoarporn (2015) have pointed out that elections are used to select the most popular candidate amongst a pool of candidates fielded for the elections. A free and fair election usually ensures that the most popular candidate emerges the winner of the process as a clear representation of the majority votes cast by the voters. (Obakhedo, 2011; Dye, 2001; Chitlaoarporn, 2015).

Democracies cannot be successful without elections; this is because it is the only way leaders can be selected under the democratic system of government. For an election to be successful, it has to be free, fair and transparent to everyone involved. Powley and Anderlini (2004) noted that elections constitute one of the key characteristics of any democracy, they further explained that elections ought to be held at regular intervals as a way of changing those who occupy leadership positions as well as ensuring that leaders are held accountable or replaced if they perform poorly. In agreement, Ebiziem (2015) cited an example; "In the last 54 years, election has been held in Nigeria 13 times; intermittently as follows; 1951, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1979, 1983, 1991, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. In all these elections, representative democracy was fully exercised to determine political power. Regular election constitutes a pre-condition for representative democracy. Equally, participation, accountability, transparency and responsibility constitute the major hub in representative democracy". (Powley and Anderlini, 2004; Ebiziem, 2015)

The use of force or viciousness to compel an individual to do something against his wish is known as violence. Acts of violence mostly inflicts pain, injury or even death on the victim of the violence. In explaining violence associated the

electoral process. Honderich (2014) explains that instances where the use of violence is employed to influence the results of an election in favour of a particular individual, group or political party before, during or after elections, the violence is referred to as Electoral Related Violence (ERV). Norris (2014) opined that electoral workers are instrumental to the conduct of free and fair elections, these electoral workers are mostly in contact with other key personnel who are involved actively in elections such as security personnel, political party members and politicians among others involved in various stages of election preparation and conduct among others. The nature of the duties of electoral workers typically puts them at the forefront of the electoral process and by extension, they are also some of the most affected when there are cases of ERV. (Honderich, 2014; Norris, 2014).

In most countries around the world, various scales of ERV are experienced, however research has shown that the severity, intensity and impacts are more severe in developing countries when compared to more developed countries. Hatungimana (2018) agrees that low income and developing countries are more prone to ERV. Adekola and Olumide (2019), provide an insight to one of the reasons why lower income and developing areas are more susceptible to electoral violence, they observed that the electorates tend to sell their votes in exchange of money and other gift items to politicians and political parties thereby skewing the electoral process. Nigeria is one of the countries where ERV is experienced on a large scale. The cases of ERV in Nigeria are not peculiar to any particular zone or region. In Nigeria, electoral workers are mostly the first set of victims of ERV especially in major elections; this is mainly because they are in direct contact with the perpetrators of ERV. The United States Institute of Peace (2011) stated that in 2011, during Nigeria's major elections, over 800 lives were lost and about 65,000 people were rendered homeless within a span of 3 days, a substantial number of those affected were electoral workers. The occurrence of ERV is not restricted to any gender, race or religion. Citing an instance, Krook and Sanin (2016) stated that the 2004 elections in Afghanistan was characterised with violence, they further added that a bus conveying female electoral workers was bombed, leaving most of the workers dead or injured. This violent act was executed in a bid to discourage female participation in the polls. (Hatungimana, 2018; Adekola and Olumide, 2019; United States Institute of Peace, 2011; Krook and Sanin, 2016).

The democratic process adopts the use of political parties to field candidates during elections and the most popular candidate emerges the winner of elections. While democracy is largely popular amongst nations, it is a fact that desperate political parties have been known to use violent means to ensure the emergence of unpopular candidates as winners. Ojo (2014) noted that the use of widespread violence to cause

panic during elections has been employed as machinery to rig elections in favour of certain candidates or political parties and this practice constitutes a huge threat to democracy. Hafner-Burton et al (2012) further argues that the occurrence of ERV not only flaws the seamless transition of governments, it also acts as a truncation of a true democratic government that is supposed to safeguard the lives and property of its citizens. While the democratic system of government is supposed to reflect the leadership choices of the populace, the orchestration of ERV creates an atmosphere of fear, thereby drastically reducing the turnout of voters during elections; these chain of events eventually lead to an unpopular democratic process. One of the major determinants for a thriving democracy in a country is a sound financial status. In a situation where the financial status of a country and its citizens are sub par, ERV tends to destabilize the nation's democracy. In buttressing this point, Omotola (2010) agrees that a country with a high poverty rate is likely to have its democracy shaken and weakened by electoral violence. A combination of high poverty levels and weak institutions within a country tends to affect a country's democracy negatively. The predominance of poverty amongst the majority of a Nigeria's population greatly increases the chances of an eruption of ERV and desperation in politics.. (Ojo,2014; Hafner-Burton et al, 2012; Omotola, 2010).

The management of some types of ailments such as HIV, diabetes, and heart related diseases amongst others depends on the continuous intake of medication in various doses at intervals. The availability and steady supply of these drugs to a large extent, depends on the peacefulness and security obtainable in the country. In tracing the impacts of ERV on public health, Pyne-Mercier et al (2011) pointed out that ERV causes a breakdown of law and order in the affected areas, moreover, the insecurity is characterised by losses or disruptions in the supply schedule of these essential drugs, this, in turn, has direct impacts on those who rely on such medication for the maintenance of their medical conditions thereby leading to complications or death in some cases. Kippenberg (2008) agrees, in citing an instance, he stated that in the wake of the 2007 elections in Kenya, the post election violence that affected most of the county affected access to anti retro-viral drugs which was limited or inaccessible in some areas. Johnson et al (2014) further affirms that most developing countries have a myriad of problems facing them; one of the major problems facing developing countries is the health burden they have to contend with. They explained that most citizens have to pay for their medications which in most cases takes a substantial part of their earnings as there are scarcely enough resources to meet the health needs of citizens. The health burden of most developing countries is further increased by ERV cases thereby affecting public health in the affected areas. (Pyne-Mercier et al, 2011; Kippenberg, 2008; Johnson et al, 2014).

II. METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach was employed for this study, the data obtained were thoroughly examined to gain a better understanding into the the strategies that can be employed for the prevention, control and mitigation of ERV. The qualitative phase of the study employed the use of semi structured interviews to capture the opinions and experiences of the respondents who may have experienced ERV or know colleagues who have encountered any form of ERV. Subsequently, a cross sectional survey was carried out using the administration of a paper based questionnaire for data collection. The choice of phenomenology was used as the qualitative methodology employed for this study as it was deemed viable for examining the views and experiences of respondents that may have experienced ERV. Respondents who indicated interest in taking part in the studies were arranged within a sampling frame after which a purposive sampling strategy was used in the selection of the 500 participants. Thirteen participants were then recruited for interviews, majority (10) of the respondents recruited were male while the remaining 3 were female respondents. Majority of the participants recruited were above the age of 50 years and were well educated with most possessing a university degree, furthermore, the selected respondents also possessed significant expertise in diverse professional capacities such as administration and human resources among others. The selected respondents were chosen due to their knowledge and experience of ERV mostly acquired from the discharge of their duties. For the purpose of this study, the recorded interviews have been transcribed verbatim and consent of the participants were obtained with the aid of consent forms. A thematic analysis approach was used in the analysis of the findings of this study, relevant themes were identified, furthermore, themes that were related were grouped. For the qualitative phase, a questionnaire was designed and validated by 20 respondents, piloting showed no significant impacts on the questionnaire, the sampling frame that was used was the nominal roll of INEC staff from which 500 random respondents were chosen. After the questionnaires were administered, they were tracked to ensure that the received feedbacks were analysed. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for descriptive analysis on the data that was obtained from the questionnaires, the threshold for statistical significance was held at  $p \leq 0.05$ . In ensuring that the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained, personal and identifying details such as names and addresses were not obtained in the questionnaires. The ethical approval for this study was requested and granted by the University of Sheffield, furthermore, participants were provided with relevant details of the study prior to the commencement of the study to ensure they willingly intended to participate in the study, they were also informed that they could choose to

withdraw at any point. (Mamabolo and Tjallinks, 2010; Du Plessis, 2003; Labaree, 2009; Olsen and St George, 2004).

III. RESULTS

Demography

In order to gather relevant data for this study, 500 questionnaires were distributed among respondents, a total number of 287 questionnaires were retrieved after completion thereby indicating a 57.4% response rate. Of the total number of respondents that were involved in this study, a significant percentage (68%) were male respondents, furthermore, respondents who belonged to the age range of 31-40 (38%) constituted the largest age group recruited for this study, furthermore, about 46% of the total respondents possessed a post graduate degree while about 15% possessed diploma certificates.

The table below shows the age distribution of the respondents involved in this study.

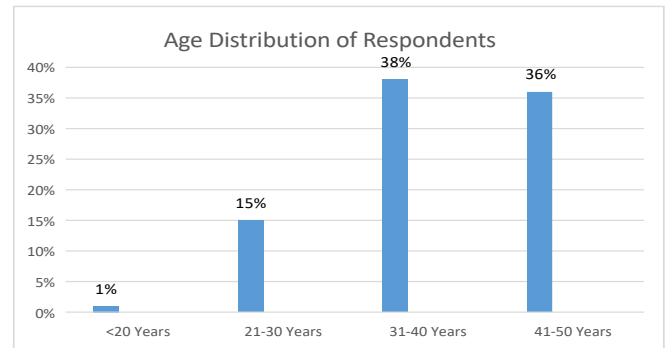


Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

The table above depicts the age distribution of respondents that were involved in this study. The graph shows that the respondents who were aged between 31-40 years made up about 38% of the respondents, while respondents below the age of 20years were the least with about 1% of the total number of respondents. The respondents between the ages of 21-30 years constituted about 15% while those between the ages of 41-50 constituted about 36%.

The table below shows the gender distribution of the respondents involved in this study.

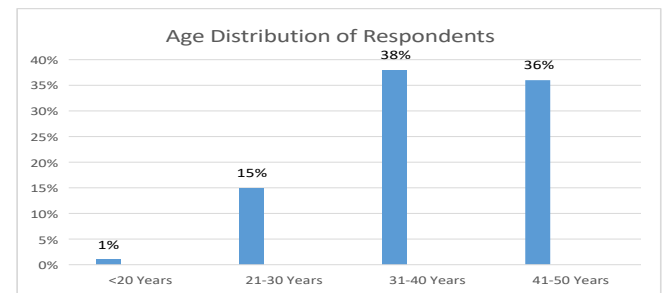


Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

The gender distribution of the respondents who participated in this study as depicted on the graph shows that there were more male respondents, constituting about 52% of the total respondents while the female respondents constitute about 42% of the total number of participants.

The table below depicts the the educational backgrounds of the respondents involved in this study.

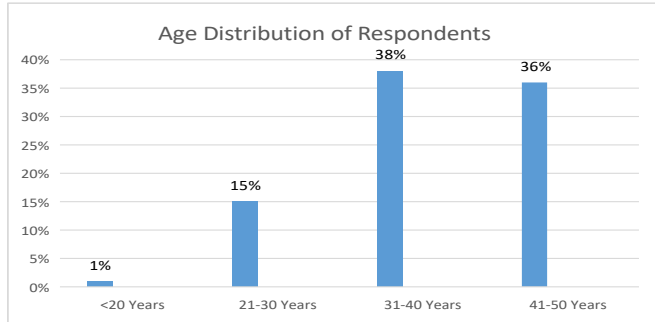


Figure 3. Educational Background of Respondents

The educational background of respondents who participated in this study as depicted on the graph above shows that about 1% of the respondents had doctorate degrees, about 38% possessed bachelors degrees while respondents who had diplomas constituted 21% of the total respondents, furthermore, about 19% of the total respondents possessed Secondary school certificates.

The table below shows the percentage of respondents involved in this study who have witnessed ERV.

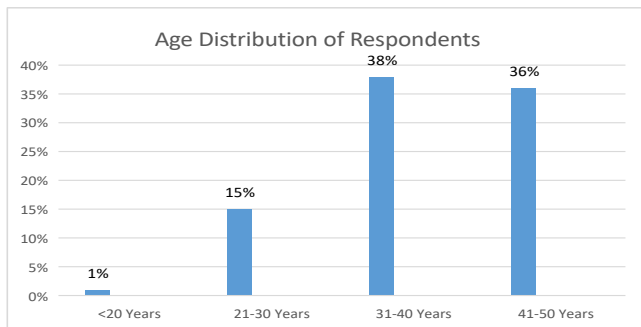


Figure 4: Respondents who Witnessed ERV

The figure 2 above shows that majority of the respondents in this study had experienced ERV. Developing strategies to reduce the rate of such violence is therefore critical in achieving free and fair electoral process in the country.

*Strategies for the Prevention of ERV*

The word prevention doesn't have a particular definition as its meanings vary depending on the context been used, Starfield et al (2008) agree that most of the definitions of prevention depict a conscious act aimed at avoiding certain occurrences or actions which can lead to loss. In public health, prevention

entails the prevention of the progress of a pathological condition. The prevention of electoral violence is aimed at completely avoiding the violence related to elections from occurring through deliberate steps and measures that could lead to the control of violence before, during or after elections. Akpedonu, Lumsdaine. and Sow (2013) have opined that successful prevention of ERV could lead to the consistent growth of democracy, and prevention of loss of life and property amongst other benefits. Studies have shown that positive reforms in a country's constitution, speedy and effective judicial electoral processes, effective conflict resolution at the grass-root level of politics and mass publicity of messages bearing peaceful electoral messages are some of the measures that can be employed to prevent ERV. (Starfield et al, 2008; Akpedonu, Lumsdaine. and Sow 2013; Akpedonu, Lumsdaine. and Sow, 2013).

Below are excerpts of the interviews taken on the views of electoral workers on electorate related violence, the sentences in quotes are the words of the respondents whose views were sought and represents their opinions on the prevention of ERV.

The 7th Respondent said: "When I was admin secretary in one of the states in the north, one senatorial candidate... He came to the office bragging, that if the Electoral Officer does not do what he wants, he will kill....he was just bragging...and the Electoral Officer collapsed ...he said he doesn't want to be Electoral Officer ...he said, Oga you don't know this man, if he says something, he will do it". (Male Participant, Security Personnel, Above 50 Years).

The experience as shown above is one of an electoral worker who witnessed a scenario where his colleague was threatened by a senatorial candidate with the aim of coercing him to do the bidding of the candidate so that the candidate wins the election by all means necessary regardless of the wishes of the electorates who are supposed to decide who wins the election and represent them. The case at hand depicts a situation that has a potential of leading to electoral violence during or after the polls, a situation that can be avoided if adequate measures are put in place to sensitize candidates on the notion that politics is not a do or die matter and that the wishes of the people trumps the wishes of the politician or party. The inability of security bodies to handle threats like this which have the potential of degenerating to violence is one of the reasons why the prevention of electoral violence is not effective.

The 2nd Respondent said: "I happened to be in Bauchi for the 2011 election, it was after the presidential elections, it didn't even happen during the elections, they had gone back to their corporers' lodge and the hoodlums attacked them and killed them, nine died on the spot, the tenth person had serious

burns...she was later transferred to national hospital where she died.” (Male Participant, Finance, Above 51 Years).

The excerpt above shows postelection violence, the respondent witnessed the killing of corps members who were involved in the conduct of an election as ad-hoc staffs. This event shows that even after the conduct of elections, the lives of electoral officers are not safe as they are targeted by political candidates or those sympathetic to them. This type of violence may be prevented through the deployment of modern technological innovations such as CCTV cameras and surveillance drones among others as well as the provision of adequate security for the election workers and proper sensitization of both electoral candidates and the public on the need to avoid ERV.

The 7th Respondent said: “Elective office has become so lucrative, someone who doesn’t have one or two shirts, when he gets elected as a counsellor or into the house of assembly, within two or three months he as a fleet of jeeps, buying choice houses in Abuja or in their state capitals...anybody who has been elected, the money is so attractive that everybody wants to come into it, even if it means killing.” (Male Participant, Security Personnel, Above 50 Years).

This respondent believes that the elective offices are very lucrative hence the die-hard interest to get in by political candidates even if they have to resort to violence to win the elections. This simply means that the financial rewards attached to elected offices should be reduced to make the offices less attractive to candidates; this move will not only reduce the desperation attached to getting into these offices but also reduce the violence that is used to influence the outcome of elections.

The 12th Respondent said: “As an electoral officer, you have to be a leader, you have to be a counsellor, and you have to be a mediator ... so on. in most cases, you have to listen, deal with the one that you can deal with what you do is that you meet with the stakeholders... the party leaders, in the presence of the security agents... you have to be seen as transparent, you tell them what the situation is on the ground and how you intend to address it.” (Female Respondent, Administration, Above 41 years).

The respondent believes that electoral workers have to be able to perform various roles that may come up in the case of discharging their duties. Adequate training of electoral officer will help prepare them to fit into their expected roles, ensure flexibility and discharge their duties effectively. This measure can go a long way in addressing the root cause of violence at the polling stations during elections.

The 3rd Respondent said: “INEC should take care of their staff welfare before they leave for the election... whatever the staff are entitled to, their claims, let INEC pay them before

they reach their station”. (Male Participant, Finance, Above 51 Years).

The respondent is of the opinion that electoral bodies should pay workers their entitlements before the elections, this will motivate workers to work with dedication and help reduce the incidents of polling workers receiving bribes from electoral candidates which sometimes leads to electoral violence.

The 2nd Respondent said: “The commission has made effort... there is provision for insurance for staff and ad-hoc workers...there some healthcare support for staff but this is mainly at the headquarters, so healthcare support needs to be extended to the state”.(Male Participant, Finance, Above 51 Years).

The respondent thinks electoral workers, especially those who work outside the headquarters should be insured and adequate healthcare provided. The move will motivate electoral workers to discharge their duties effectively and will reduce the chances of electoral violence attributed to the electoral workers taking bribes or working for candidates.

The 1st Respondent said: “I went to the director of admin and I don’t know if it is the first time that they are dealing with the matter and finally, for the first time this year they were paid... but what they were paid, I was amazed ...a mere 100 thousand ... it was at that time that this Boko Haram thing started...I was aware of many staff that were affected... I knew of someone who had her whole leg removed completely, if you compensate her with 100 thousand... I mean 100 thousand for a deformity?” (Male Participant, Administrator, Above 51 Years).

The respondent believes that the welfare accorded to electoral workers should be at par with the risks involved in the discharge of their duties. Payment of adequate welfare will create some level of satisfaction among electoral workers thereby reduce the cases of electoral officer bribery which results to manipulation and causes electoral violence.

The 2nd Respondent said: “When you say democracy is expensive, this is the cost...the people that midwife this democracy, they should be made comfortable...There should be a holistic policy on health policy for the commission staff... it should be a document that someone can carry along, not just to lie on the table of the chief executive...it can even be enshrined into the conditions of service.” (Male Participant, Finance, Above 51 Years).

The respondent believes that a holistic policy on the health of electoral workers should be drafted and made effective; this will help improve the zeal with which the electoral workers discharge their duties thereby reducing chances of the electoral workers accepting bribes and favouring certain candidates during elections.

The 6th Respondent said: “Anywhere that you find that someone feels secure and also assured that in the event that anything happens he will be taken care of, that person will give his 100 percent....It will go a long way in boosting morale and encourage staff to give their best.” (Male, Social Scientist, Above 51 Years).

The respondent is of the opinion that the provision of adequate security and health policy will spur electoral workers to perform optimally. This will also reduce the incidence of bribery among electoral workers and electoral violence.

The 8th Respondent said: “There are a lot of things that can be done, including remuneration for the job...It should give you some feeling that you are doing some work that ... and that you are willing to put in your best, because your health is more than just the physical, it includes your housing, your transportation...you know health is a holistic thing.” (Male Participant, Legal Practitioner, Above 51 Years).

The respondent feels that adequate remuneration, welfare and health policy will inspire electoral workers to discharge their duties diligently; this will create work satisfaction and may reduce the incidence of electoral results manipulations and electoral violence.

#### *Strategies for the Control of ERV*

To control simply means to have some sort or level of authority over something, someone, or situation among others, the ability to control something will enable the controller have influence over the controlled. According to the World health organisation (2016), “Control means reduction of disease incidence, prevalence, morbidity, and/or mortality to a locally acceptable level as a result of deliberate efforts; continued intervention measures are required to maintain the reduction”. The control of ERV will reduce the devastating impacts that would have been experienced as well as containing its spread. The timely control of ERV will significantly reduce the amount of lives and property that would have been lost as well as the large number of displaced people that often characterise ERV amongst other effects. Höglund and Jarstad (2010) believe that the measures required to control ERV include; reducing the influence of the ruling party or the government of the day on the electoral process, providing adequate security around polling booths during the election period, ensuring that elections are free, fair and transparent, ensuring adequate monitoring of the electoral process by local and international bodies among other measures. (World Health Organization, 2016; Höglund and Jarstad, 2010).

The 5th Respondent said: “Even the house of the Emir of Zazzau, Emir of Zaria who is the highest traditional ruler in the area was razed to the ground... he too he had to be rescued, he had to leave his palace ...people from the street just ran into his house looking for him. It was really violent

...I saw people being killed... I saw buses being set ablaze... I had to disarm myself and pretend I didn't know anything about elections, all the election materials, I jettisoned them and threw them into the bush because under no circumstance could I be found with them or that will mean the end of my life”. (Male Participant, Human Resources, Above 51 Years).

The statement above shows that the respondent was a security personnel who witnessed a show of violence at the palace of a traditional ruler. This scenario shows that security has to be beefed up during the period of elections and political hooliganism strongly discouraged with sufficient publicity of peaceful elections messages, this move will reduce the incidence of ERV.

The 6th Respondent said: “...one thing in this job of ours is that once you are perceived to be acting partially ...it is enough, you don't even have to act, perception is as good as reality when it comes to elections, if people perceive that you are going to be partial, they don't even have to wait, they will just start to castigate you...so one has to ensure transparency in everything that he does.” (Male, Social Scientist, Above 51 Years).

The respondent believes that transparency in the discharge of one's duties as an electoral official will help in ensuring that the elections are free and fair, this will help control the incidences of electoral violence as a result of the suspicion of electoral malpractice by electoral workers. the use of adequate technology as seen in more advanced countries as well as adequate education and training of electoral workers will ensure efficiency and transparency in the discharge of their duties.

The 13th Respondent said: “Education can play a big role in enhancing the capability of staff...To be more efficient in the training and this will help in withstanding the stress and risks of election...to some extent we have seen the use of NYSC has helped a lot because of their background, they are able to absorb the training and this will mean that they will follow the procedures.” (Male, Social Scientist, Above 51 Years).

The respondent reaffirms the role of education and adequate training of electoral workers will ensure that the electoral workers understand their roles and are able to discharge their duties professionally. This will help in controlling the complications that are sometimes experienced at polling stations and can further reduce the chances of electoral violence.

The 8th Respondent said: “During the 2003 elections in the north east region, I served as the electoral officer of that region...so the commissioner of police came to report that there was the possibility of violence in one particular ...the reason was that the presiding officer had added a zero to the score of a particular political party, so the agent had

thrashed him.” (Male Participant, Legal Practitioner, Above 51 Years).

The respondent here was an electoral officer who received a report of result manipulation by a presiding officer. The act of manipulation of results as depicted by the respondent is a corrupt practice perpetrated by an electoral officer, one of the implications of such corruption is ERV. For a free and fair election to be achieved, corruption in all levels especially by electoral officers has to be discouraged. This is because corruption is naturally degenerative with a myriad of problems and challenges, one of which is ERV. the use of modern technology can also prevent similar occurrences as described by the respondent as the digital storage, analysis and computation of data as regards elections will stem the incidences of ballot box snatches and similar occurrences.

Respondent 1 said: “They really need to work on literacy level... enlightenment level... people need to know what democracy is all about... what roles you need to perform on election day and after the election ... and what to expect from the people you voted in.” (Male Participant, Administrator, Above 51 Years).

This respondent thinks education is important in ensuring the conduct of free and fair elections, adequate education on democracy and the voting process will help in controlling ERV. An observation of the election process in more developed countries shows that education is one of the key factors that can help ensure free and fair elections and healthy democratic governments thereby reducing the cases of ERV and the use of mass media, social media and modern technology can help achieve the intended purposes of the educational process.

The 4th Respondent said: “It’s not really palatable... it’s not good at all, It’s terrible they’re made to compromise by threats by the politicians...they waylay them with thugs...with guns...with machetes ...some they even waylay them, kidnap them and make them do what they want.” (Female Participant, Human Resources, Above 41 Years).

The perception of the electoral worker as depicted above reflects the fear of ERV on the part of a colleague who strongly fears for his or her life, the statement shows that some electoral candidates will make use of fear and violence to ensure that the election results come out in their favour through the use of threats, thugs, kidnapping the electoral officers and coercing them to do their bidding among other means. In a situation where the elections are free and fair, availability of adequate security adherence to the rule of law, the electoral officer is supposed to be safe from the coercion of electoral candidates and are supposed to work diligently without fear of been harmed, kidnapped or even killed, this scenario show that if the right security apparatus is put in

place, ERV will be properly controlled, the electoral workers won’t cave to fear or intimidation from electoral candidates.

The 9th Respondent said: “They were swooping in to grab the materials, so I turned to the security and told them to hold on because these people were aiming for the material... they held on but they came and pressed him and even tore his uniform... then I turned round and saw a vehicle...I thought that was a rescue vehicle, we ran into it with the police and the orderly and we were saying oh thank God, you people have saved us, but before you know it , they veered off into an un tarred road...moving fast, so I said where are you going, they said, my friend shut up! ...that’s when I knew we were captive.” (Male Respondent, Administration, Above 51 Years).

The reaction captured above is that of an election worker on an election day who ran to the security operatives for safety when electoral thugs besieged the polling station but ended up been abducted. This scenario shows that the security operatives in this case were corrupt and colluding with an electoral candidate instead of ensuring the safety of the electoral workers, voters and the safety of the election process, a situation like this could be controlled with the provision of adequate technology and training that can ensure adequate monitoring of security personnel on election duties as well as effective measures employed to fight corruption.

The 5th Respondent said: “Election is a phenomenon of three ingredients, first, there must be education, people must be enlightened people should know the left from the right ...number two people should have a source of earning a living, if I am earning a living I should have a right of independent decision, not that I am earning a living through someone who is earning his living through the government and politics...so economic freedom...so as much as education is important, economic freedom is important...and also the transparency of the system, the process should be as transparent as possible so that everybody will know what is going on...in the southern part of the country, you don’t see this as much because people have a means of livelihood.” (Male Respondent, Administration, Above 51 Years).

The respondent above is of the opinion that education, financial freedom and transparency in the electoral process can reduce or even eliminate the incidence of ERV. The three factors mentioned by the respondent are some of the key factors requisite for a stable economy and democracy. the high rate of corruption currently experienced in Nigeria is one of the major reasons why systems do not work effectively, if the level of corruption is reduced, the government will be able to cater for the masses, appropriately, this will bring about a reduction in the current high poverty rate, improvement of the standard of education currently experienced and a significant

reduction in the number of ERV incidences associated with elections.

The 1st Respondent said: “The problem of violence occurs as a result of lack of enlightenment...people are not fully aware of their role ...the perception that the office is so lucrative and people want to fight and get into office... You want to win by all means...to be a senator ... a governor... so those things bring up violence and a lack of enlightenment.” (Male Participant, Administrator, Above 51 Years).

The respondent opines that adequate sensitization of the public on the true remuneration packages for electoral offices are likely to drastically reduce the amount of interest for elective offices, as this is one of the main reasons why people are willing to commit violent acts to influence election results in their favour. This move will be important in adequately controlling electoral violence.

#### *Strategies for the Mitigation of ERV*

The word mitigation indicates the reduction of the after effects of disasters and violence among other negative after effects. Weichselgartner, 2001 argues that effective mitigation is carried out by taking important and drastic actions that reduce the effects on the victims as well as taking measures that will forestall future re-occurrence of the disaster or violence. Burchard and Simati (2019) and Garber (2020) believe that mitigation of electoral violence can be significantly reduced by the effective and transparent activities of foreign observers and the judiciary. The mitigation of ERV is a very important aspect of the electoral process as it ensures that victims of electoral violence are considered in a bid to cushion the adverse impacts of ERV. One of the major mitigation strategies is setting up mitigation units in grass-roots to cater for those affected, these units also provide feedback to the authorities on the electoral problems faced by citizens as well as recommending measures that can be taken to forestall future occurrence. Another important approach is the set up of councils that will mediate between disputes as this is one of the major foundations of electoral violence (Weichselgartner, 2001; Burchard and Simati, 2019; and Garber, 2020).

The 4th Respondent said: “The trauma is so bad...there was one woman we had, I think she went for the Kogi elections and the experience she had made her vow that she would never ever go for any election activity again ... it was really bad...and there was another woman who was locked up where she was, she couldn't even make phone calls... They took her into the bush ... far into the bush, even now when she talks about it you see goose pimples all over her”. (Female Participant, Human Resources, Above 41 Years).

The respondent knows colleagues who were traumatised by various incidences of violence during elections. These situations should be better managed by the government.

Support and rehabilitation should be provided for electoral workers to help them cope with traumatic experiences which are some of the aftermaths of electoral violence.

The 5th Respondent said: “I was anxious, I was really terrified it was chilling... there was a moment I thought I would not reach my house I had even called my family to tell them that anything can happen ...because I had seen people being killed it's a mob action, in this kind of things, anything can happen.” (Male Participant, Human Resources, Above 51 Years).

The respondent above was a witness to electoral violence where people were killed. Incidences like this could be better controlled by adequate provision of security and counselling for electoral officers to help them cope with the trauma experienced from witnessing or experiencing ERV.

The 9th Respondent said: “The job ...it has been a dangerous adventure .Since the trauma, it has really affected my mental ability...I have been living with it for a while ... you know the trauma, until I was advised to seek counselling...I had been depressed, my mental ability has been at a low ebb, if it used to be 100, it had gone down to 40.” (Male Respondent, Administration, Above 51 Years).

The respondent believes that his mental health has been affected due to trauma possibly from electoral violence; this could affect his performance and productivity. The government should provide avenues where electoral workers can be adequately rehabilitated after witnessing or experiencing electoral violence.

The 1st Respondent 1 said: “I remember we were conducting an election in Maiduguri... it was at that time that this Boko Haram thing started...I was aware of many staff that were affected... I knew of a someone who had her whole leg removed completely.” (Male Participant, Administrator, Above 51 Years).

The respondent knows a colleague who had a limb amputated and others who were affected by electoral violence. Adequate rehabilitation and counselling will go a long way in helping electoral workers cope with the resultant effects of electoral violence.

The 12th Respondent said: “The psychological trauma...it affects you...a colleague that was rejected by his people due to his role as an electoral officer was under a lot of stress...and that aggravated his high blood pressure, in fact for three months, he wasn't coming to the office.” (Female Respondent, Administration, Above 41 years).

The respondent claims a colleague was traumatised from the experiences related to ERV, in this case adequate education and sensitization as well as rehabilitation may mitigate the after-effects of election experiences by electoral workers.



The 3rd Respondent said: “Your blood pressure may raise... your sugar level may be affected...but if adequate preparations are made, some of these may be prevented.” (Male Participant, Finance, Above 51 Years).

The respondent is of the opinion that appropriate rehabilitative measures may eventually reduce the effects of electoral violence on affected electoral workers.

The 1st Respondent said: “When I first joined the commission...during one of the elections, we had some problems and I think that problem affected me till today, I collapsed and at the hospital I was diagnosed as hypertensive and up till today I have become a hypertensive.” (Male Participant, Administrator, Above 51 Years).

This respondent became hypertensive as a result of election experiences; this situation can be effectively managed and mitigated through the provision of adequate rehabilitation for electoral workers post elections.

The 4th Respondent said: “You know this can affect family life... for a woman who is always lively and she goes out and experiences this, then she comes home and she’s down...she’s not herself per say...if there is any assignment again the children will say mummy don’t go... it affects the children psychologically too, because it will be like mummy you may go and not come back.” (Male Participant, Administrator, Above 51 Years).

This respondent opines that the execution of their duties can affect their family life and relationships due to the fear of electoral violence. The provision of adequate security, electoral education and rehabilitation packages are some of the measures that can be taken to reduce the incidences of ERV. Family counselling should also be considered for the families of electoral workers.

The 11th Respondent said: “There is a big need for a health policy in INEC... I just told you that people lost their arms, some people were disfigured, if there was a health policy in place and on ground... it would address this, they would not need to go through the administrative process of writing for assistance, because they don’t need assistance, it’s a must for the commission to do it ...if that policy is in place, all they have to do is to look into the policy and do it...so it’s so painful when it is not being done.” (Male Participant, Healthcare, above 31 Years).

The respondent believes that a viable health policy devoid of bureaucratic bottle necks and corrupt practices will mitigate the effects of electoral violence on electoral workers. The availability and enforcement of a viable health policy for electoral workers will also improve the willingness to conduct free and fair elections as well as reducing the after effects of electoral violence in electoral workers.

In adhering to the qualitative research paradigm, a thematic analysis was applied on the data that was drawn from the responses of the respondents which bordered on the prevention, control and mitigation of ERV. It emerged that the actions of political parties and candidates were some of the main enablers of ERV and would need to be effectively controlled for ERV to be prevented or controlled.

“When I was admin secretary in one of the states in the north, one senatorial candidate... He came to the office bragging, that if the Electoral Officer does not do what he wants, he will kill....he was just bragging...and the Electoral Officer collapsed ...he said he doesn’t want to be Electoral Officer ...he said, Oga you don’t know this man, if he says something, he will do it” (Male Participant, Security Personnel, Above 50 Years).

“The problem of violence occurs as a result of lack of enlightenment...people are not fully aware of their role ...the perception that the office is so lucrative and people want to fight and get into office... You want to win by all means...to be a senator ... a governor... so those things bring up violence and a lack of enlightenment.” (Male Participant, Administrator, Above 51 Years).

“During the 2003 elections in the north east region, I served as the electoral officer of that region...so the commissioner of police came to report that there was the possibility of violence in one particular ...the reason was that the presiding officer had added a zero to the to the score of a particular political party, so the agent had thrashed him.” (Male Participant, Legal Practitioner, Above 51 Years)

Another prominent theme that emerged was the importance of civic education on the prevention and control of ERV. The absence of viable civic, political and democratic education among the masses makes them ignorant of their rights and willing tools in the hands of the political elite that uses them to unleash ERV.

“Election is a phenomenon of three ingredients, first, there must be education, people must be enlightened people should know the left from the right “. (Male Participant, Human Resources, Above 51 Years).

“They really need to work on literacy level... enlightenment level... people need to know what democracy is all about... what roles you need to perform on election day and after the election ... and what to expect from the people you voted in.” (Male Participant, Administrator, Above 51 Years).

“Education can play a big role in enhancing the capability of staff...To be more efficient in the training and this will help in withstanding the stress and risks of election...

(Male Participant, Human Resources, Above 41 Years).

Another theme that emerged from this study was the importance of proper welfare, healthcare and psychological support systems in the healing and rehabilitation of casualties of ERV, as this will mitigate the impacts of ERV

“You know this can affect family life... for a woman who is always lively and she goes out and experiences this, then she comes home and she’s down...she’s not herself per say...if there is any assignment again the children will say mummy don’t go... it affects the children psychologically too, because it will be like mummy you may go and not come back.” (Female Participant, Human Resources, Above 41 Years)

“Your blood pressure may raise... your sugar level may be affected...but if adequate preparations are made, some of these may be prevented. “(Male Participant, Finance, Above 51 Years).

“When I first joined the commission...during one of the elections, we had some problems and I think that problem affected me till today, I collapsed and at the hospital I was diagnosed as hypertensive and up till today I have become a hypertensive.” (Male Participant, Administrator, Above 51 Years).

“The psychological trauma...it affects you...a colleague that was rejected by his people due to his role as an electoral officer was under a lot of stress...and that aggravated his high blood pressure, in fact for three months, he wasn’t coming to the office.” (Female Respondent, Administration, Above 41 years).

The findings that emanated from the thematic analysis of the respondents have shown that the actions of political parties and candidates as well as the lack of adequate political knowledge are some of the major springboards for ERV, hence, if the actions of politicians and political parties are properly checked and controlled then cases of ERV might be summarily prevented or effectively controlled. Furthermore the provision of adequate welfare and health support for those affected by ERV will play an active role in the mitigation of the effects of ERV.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Findings from this study showed that the absence or lack of viable political and civic education among the masses was one of the major factors responsible for the prevalence of ERV in the Nigerian setting, the study further showed that improved and widespread education (especially in the areas of election and democracy) will ensure that there is adequate knowledge and information available on the benefits of peaceful elections and strong democracies among the electorates and electoral candidates. Adequate education of electoral workers will ensure that they discharge their duties efficiently thereby reducing the incidences of electoral malpractice and violence at the polling booths and voting areas. Similar studies also

showed that similar problems of lack of adequate education among the masses led to an increase in electoral violence in other countries such as the Philippines and Kenya among others. Schaffer (2005) noted that in the Philippines, voter education exists and facilitates the sensitization of the electorates, helping them understand their options during elections and how important their decisions go in the election of credible leaders, he particularly noted that those that earn the least are the most volatile amongst various groupings, however the use of purposefully directed information encapsulated in the voter education reduced violence at the barest minimum in the Philippines. Similarly, Elklit (2011) agrees that proper education is important in the achievement of a free, fair and violence free elections. He asserted that the 2007/2008 Kenyan elections would have had less violence and more transparency if there was adequate civic education, especially on the part of the electoral workers, incidents such as the announcement of different figures as election results of same wards would have been avoided. He further noted that adequate training and education helps in ensuring transparency in the voting process. Providing further insight, Ballington (2002) explained that voter education is more effective if it is continuous as it helps in uninterrupted sensitization and also ensures an increased participation in the voting process. Proper orientation of the masses on the electoral process and the impacts of voter education cannot be doubted as it has a way of calming the voters, instilling confidence in the voting and democratic process, thereby effectively reducing the incidences of electoral violence. In the South African perspective, voter education was not only used in reducing violence but also helped in increasing the turnout of women for the 1994 general elections. Tadjoeeddin (2011) agrees that education is important as a tool for stemming electoral violence. He noted that in Indonesia, improved education especially in the area of voter education actually reduced electoral violence as well as resources typically lost to electoral violence. In the Nigerian context, the use of purposeful and well planned educational approaches may significantly reduce the spate of electoral violence by providing a deeper understanding of the concepts of democracy as well as the dangers of electoral violence among other important information. (Schaffer, 2005; Elklit, 2011; Ballington, 2002; Tadjoeeddin,2011).

It was established by this study that security is one of the key factors to be considered as regards the prevention and control of ERV. The study showed that the provision of proper training and retraining of security personnel has the potential of improving their modes of response as well as their conduct in times when they are required to prevent or control cases of ERV. Rao (2014) believes that during elections, there has to be a deliberate cohesion between all the security forces and an increase in security presence, the security personnel need to be well trained and prepared for contingencies during

elections, adequate measures have to be taken to ensure that the security services are independent of government and party influence to enable them perform their duties optimally, however, Pierce et al (2011) are of a diverse opinions, they believe that in most cases, the increased presence of security operatives increases the chances of violence occurring during elections. They noted that this happens in most cases where security operatives collude with certain parties or governments and act in their interest rather than in the interest of the state, they further stated that in cases like this, the state security apparatus weakens the democracy instead of strengthening it. Some of the countries experiencing this challenge include: Jamaica, Mexico and Brazil among others. Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski (2014) agrees with the views of Pierce et al (2011) on the increase of violence attributed to the increased presence of security personnel who are used by the government of the day or certain political parties or groups to do their bidding. The case of ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe using the security operatives to coerce people through the use of force, threats and killings to affect the electoral process was cited as an example of a scenario where security operatives were used to influence the voting process through violence. Wallsworth, (2015) is of the opinion that it has become commonplace in growing democracies for the government of the day to use the security operatives to stifle the opposition by threats, assassinations, imprisonment, and coercion among other means they employ to achieve their goals during elections. From the foregoing, it is clear that it is possible for governments and parties to covet the security apparatus to achieve their unpopular goals, however, the independence and separation of the security apparatus from the influence of the ruling class, government of the day or some political parties would likely improve the security situation of electoral violence prone areas . Birch and Muchlinski, (2017) believe that adequate training of security operatives will lead to them been more efficient at controlling violent situations during elections, the training is supposed to enable them address violent situations without unnecessary use of force or other measures that can aggravate tense situations during the period of elections. He also noted that the general security of the country during elections should be adequately planned to ensure that all possible outcomes are considered and management measures ready for deployment in the event of outbreaks of violence or break down of law and order during elections. In the Nigerian context, adequate provision of well trained security and a functional community-security relationship will likely prevent and control ERV effectively while ensuring a better democratic experience for the citizens. (Rao, 2014; Pierce et al, 2011; Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski, 2014; Wallsworth, 2015; Birch and Muchlinski, 2017).

The challenge of corruption is one of the major problems of most developing countries and a major enabler of ERV as

shown by the findings from this study. The corrupt practices as experienced in the electoral sector has led to inadequate funding of the electoral bodies, resulting in poor welfare conditions and increasing susceptibility to bribery among other negative effects. The rate of corruption currently experienced in the country has affected most sectors and institutions in the country. Birch (2011) asserts that in Macedonia, election malpractice which is a form of corruption led to inadequate representation, affecting the reputation of the government, causing a weak democracy, enabling other forms of corruption as well as increasing the chances of the eruption of ERV. Erdmann, Basedeu and Mehler (2007) and Lawal (2015) have argued that in some developing countries especially within Africa, corruption is one of the main enablers of ERV, this is because political parties use ERV to ensure that that their candidates are elected. They further added that political parties also employ other means such as vote buying and outright rigging to sway election results in their favour, they noted that while electoral candidates try to win elections by all means necessary, the political parties are the main culprits of vote buying and other desperate measures employed to emerge the successful party in an election. In the Nigerian context, corruption has affected the image of the country as well as weakening the veil of democracy. It is commonplace to have aggrieved electoral candidates winning court cases against sitting governors as well as widespread cases of ERV that are attributed to corruption and political party influence, this clearly shows that corruption in various forms are some of the leading causes of ERV in Nigeria. If adequate measures are adopted to fight nationwide corruption especially in the electoral sector and relevant policies implemented effectively, there might be higher chances of achieving transparent elections as well as reducing the spate of ERV during elections. (Birch, 2011; Erdmann, Basedeu and Mehler, 2007; Lawal, 2015).

The impacts of inadequate welfare for electoral workers on the disposition of their duties and responsibilities was one of the findings of this study. The study established that adequate welfare packages and similar incentives were effective as motivation for workers to perform optimally. The study also showed that independent and proper funding of electoral bodies in addition to functional training will enable electoral bodies and workers function properly without fear or favour. Amegnan, (2017) also noted that this will drastically reduce the control that the government maintains over the electoral bodies, He added that scenarios where the government of the day starve the agencies of funds as a means of influencing and controlling them to do their bidding will be avoided, this will also ensure that there are sufficient funds to cater for the welfare of electoral workers. Motivation is also important in ensuring that electoral officers discharge their duties efficiently, alluding to this, Dieleman et al (2006) agrees that motivation is a very important means of ensuring that workers

perform optimally. A study was carried out on health workers showed that if workers salaries and benefits are paid, they are better motivated to put in more effort in their jobs leaving less time for distractions, this result can also be applied to electoral workers. Zameer et al (2014) also agrees with the positive impacts of motivation as seen in the study of the impacts of motivation on the employee's performance in the beverage industry of Pakistan. He explains that incentives such as travel allowances, house allowances and medical allowances in addition to regular salaries, raises and bonuses were some of the motivational tools used to encourage staff. Others include promotions and job security. This goes to show that if proper welfare packages are in place, electoral workers would be properly motivated to do their jobs even in the face of danger. The availability of proper welfare packages for electoral workers in Nigeria will likely ensure that electoral workers receive required medical and psychiatric therapy needed to help them cope with occurrences of trauma experienced during the election. Amegnan, 2017; Dieleman et al, 2006; Zameer et al, 2014).

The poor utilization of modern technology in the fight against crime, electoral violence, monitoring of the electoral process and provision of adequate security during the periods of elections was fingered by this study as one of the reasons why ERV is prevalent in Nigeria. The adoption and application of current best practices and technologies in the areas of security and electioneering has the potential of reducing ERV within the country. The proper use of voters cards, a viable specialised software and functional electronic voting machines among other equipments could lead to proper transparency in ballot casting and collation of results of the polling centre by reducing duplication, vote collation time lines, under-age voting and other related challenges. After the voting is concluded, the results from the polling centre are electronically transmitted to the server of the electoral commission for final collation and election results thereafter. Other technologies that can be deployed for efficient and violence free elections include facial recognition softwares, fingerprint readers and video analytic with optical character recognition as well as the use of One Time Pins (OTP)s among others. Furthermore, secure and responsive websites, web and mobile applications will help in providing vital information as well as voter education for the masses, such websites should have security features such as real-time monitoring, Homomorphic encryption scheme, antiviral software firewalls, and back-up generators among others. Ahmad, Abdullah and Arshad (2015) believe that the deployment of relevant technology and the proper training of electoral workers on its workings has the potential of reducing electoral violence as well as improving processing times of votes collation among other benefits. Gerb and Diofasi (2016) argue differently, they opined that the application of technology to the electoral process does not guarantee the

absence of violence during polls, they believe that the application of biometric technology to polls does not totally eliminate the possibility of electoral fraud but could also encourage it. they also added that the use of biometric technology during elections barely leaves the individual with a form of identification as opposed to the use of voters' cards and may cost the government a lot more. Mancini (2013) agrees with Gerb and Diofasi (2016), he believes that the use of ICT to prevent or control violence is not definite as it depends on the context to which it is been applied for it to be successful or have negative consequences. He believes that scenarios should be studied closely before appropriate measures are adopted to put modern technology to use as a panacea for ERV. He opined that if used properly, technological innovations such as big data has the potential of preventing and controlling ERV in modern democracies that are prone to ERV. The use of modern technological innovations in the areas of security, voting, counting, and public education of masses on electoral processes and procedures will likely reduce violence significantly in the the Nigerian context if the right measures are adopted to ensure that relevant technologies are properly designed, deployed and integrated into the Nigerian electoral system. (Ahmad, Abdullah and Arshad, 2015; Gerb and Diofasi, 2016; Sridharan, 2013; Mancini, 2013; Kumar and Singh, 2013).

## V. CONCLUSION

The elections in Nigeria are mostly characterized by ERV, before, during and after elections. This study set out to create a better understanding of the strategies that can help with the prevention, control and mitigation of electoral violence in Nigeria. Results drawn from the study showed that for ERV to be successfully prevented, electoral workers need to be properly trained and educated as this tends to reduce the chances of them been complicit in electoral malpractice, the adequate provision of well trained security operatives were also revealed to be effective in the prevention and control of ERV. The study further showed that the provision of adequate health policies to address the after-effects of ERV may be effective in the mitigation of ERV, this could also help in improving motivation among electoral workers who are often affected by ERV as well as mitigating the effects of ERV among the victims of ERV. The study also investigated the measures that were adopted in other settings where ERV was been experienced with the main aim of drawing recommendations that could significantly reduce or totally eliminate the incidence of ERV in Nigeria.

The improvement and provision of mass political education as a tool for the prevention and control of ERV in Nigeria has the potential of preventing or significantly reducing the spate of ERV experienced in some parts of the country during elections, furthermore, the proper training, re-training and equipping of electoral workers and security personnel

involved in elections may improve their performance and professionalism with which they discharge their duties during elections. Political offices will need to be de-glamorized as a way of dissuading political parties and candidates from engaging in various forms of ERV to emerge victorious at elections. There needs to be an improvement in the general and financial welfare of electoral workers and the public at large. The adoption of modern technology in most of the stages before, during and after elections may significantly reduce ERV as it tends to increase transparency, privacy, speed, vote security among other vast benefits. Finally, the electoral laws of the country have to be properly implemented as well as all the provisions contained therein as this could have the potential of preventing or significantly controlling cases of ERV when they arise.

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