

Review of: "Winner-takes-all Majoritarian System and Irregularities in Six Election Cycles in Nigeria, 1999 – 2019"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

General comments

This research addresses an interesting issue that could contribute to the strengthening of knowledge of democracy studies in Africa and the world.

The focus on political violence as an integral strategy of the electoral process is very interesting, however, this aspect seems to be under-exploited in the article.

The article would benefit from major modifications before publication. In particular, it would need to be reorganized, some parts need to be synthesized and the literature review, analytical framework and methodology need to be strengthened.

The nature of the data analyzed should be directly announced in the introduction and abstract, as well as the method of data collection and the reasons why these data are relevant and what their limitations are.

It would also be important to add to the literature review 1) theoretical approaches to political regimes and democratic studies and 2) the presentation of studies already done on these aspects in Nigeria or in other comparable case studies. For example, references to Fjelde and Höglund may be too frequent: it would be needed to diversify the sources used. It would also be important to strengthen the analytical framework and better explain how it helps to analyze the data mobilized.

For the reorganization of the article, the first two sections could be largely synthesized and enriched with a better contextualization of the state of knowledge of the phenomena analyzed in Nigeria, as well as a strengthened and better highlighted analytical framework. Finally, you could also tighten and synthesize the presentation of your data to give more space to the discussion and analysis, which are for the moment not very perceptible and do not really answer the research question.

Specific comments :

Abstract:

The research question and approach are well formulated/presented.

Need to better present the data and what the research brings in relation to the existing literature.

Be careful not to make value judgments as : "deplorable state of democracy in Nigeria".

Be more synthetic.

Introduction:

There are nuances to be brought to the idea of " Electoral systems play a fundamental role in shaping how elections are organized and also inform the operations of election management authorities (EMAs) both in established and struggling democracies. In the former like the United States, France, and Mongolia, these systems are facilitated by an enabling electoral environment, strong democratic institutions and high-level citizens' political awareness." As recent events in the United States (the capitol assault) or in France (the "yellow vests" crisis) show, these phenomena refer to fragile democratic models and institutions constantly threatened by authoritarian drifts (securitizing process - Copenhagen School). All the more so as for France, quoted in the article, the "high-level citizens' political awareness" can be particularly questioned because of the constant progress of abstention during previous elections.

It would be more relevant to talk about institutional and constitutional power-sharing systems rather than to contrast between strong and weak democracies.

It would also be relevant to present several references on comparative political systems that could serve as a basis for reflection on the specificities of the Nigerian electoral and power-sharing system and what it implies in your analysis.

Some of the electoral irregularities are also observed in the "strong democracies" contrasted with Nigeria, and some of these irregularities, in France in particular, are an integral part of political life and the organization of election campaigns, both local and national. (see Bargel Lucie, « Les « originaires » en politique. Migration, attachement local et mobilisation électorale de montagnards [France] », *Politix* 1/2016 (n° 113), p. 171-199)

" There are also cross-national studies on electoral systems in young democracies. By increasing the stakes of electoral contests, these studies are a testament that majoritarian systems herald more cases of violence than countries with proportional representation or mixed systems": what are these studies and what do they say about their implications and limits? Note 6 refers to only one study, what are the others?

« Scholars observe that the incidence of electoral violence in semi-democratic settings has become a reinforcing tool for other forms of manipulation. Others contend that electoral irregularities may be a plausible reaction to poor electoral integrity.⁷ » : More details and clarifications would be relevant.

« This environment is devoid of a clear strong institution that mediates group competing interests. Again, the country is sharply divided along ethnoreligious and multicultural lines, with a high level of suspicion and mistrust that always defies national cohesive efforts. Again, the country is sharply divided along ethnoreligious and multicultural lines, with a high level of suspicion and mistrust that always defies national cohesive efforts. Because Nigerian MES has maintained the exclusionary winner-takes-all electoral benefits in a highly divisive environment, election periods in Nigeria is usually characterized by tension and intense power struggle. Most times, there are claims by politicians or their ethnoreligious

groups for their turn to rule. Issues relating to character, competence and capacity are relegated to the background. » : references would be helpful to support your comments.

« Violence usually erupts when these individuals/groups feel excluded in the power equations. » : A reference would be necessary.

The introduction lacks the announcement and explanation of the data analyzed and the methodology of the research (not to be confused with the theoretical framework).

Understanding majoritarian systems

The first paragraphs seem too disconnected from the object of study and contribute little to the analysis. It would be preferable to deepen the comparison between the implications of different democratic systems in African contexts or other "young democracies" case studies.

« But the danger is that the MES model usually encourages the development of political parties and party politics based on clan, ethnicity, or region on which campaigns and policy platforms of the parties are based. » : This statement could be support with a reference to the literature.

Understanding electoral irregularities in Africa with a specific focus on Nigeria

« The continent is further bedeviled by other challenges that include 'smart' African politicians that had outsmarted modern digital technology to manipulate the electoral process » (As in several global north democracies, p.e. the Cambridge Analytica scandal ».

« For instance, during the period of anti-colonial struggle in some developing societies, some anti-colonialists like Frantz Fanon view violence as a positive decolonization strategy to give the oppressive colonial masters a taste of their own medicine.²⁵ By this argument, an act of violence consequently begets violence. Violence, therefore, becomes a desired retaliatory strategy to the first act of violence. Thus, political actors who are victims of violence do not agree that the use of violence during elections is wrong, but rather an effective retaliatory strategy in politics employed to counter actual or perceived acts of violence. Electoral irregularities have become a recurring feature of many "micro" elections in less consolidated democracies » : I am not sure how Fanon's statement about colonial violence and independence struggles relates to the justification of electoral violence. But it is an interesting argument which can be developed to strengthen the analytical framework.

« Fjelde and Höglund focused on electoral systems and violence and compared some sub-Saharan African countries with majoritarian rules and others without them. The study found that countries with majoritarian rules were at greater risk than those without them. It suggested that violence should be especially likely when large ethnic groups were excluded from power, especially within the context of substantial economic inequality. » Again, you need to diversify the literature and strengthen the analytical framework.

Majoritarian Presidential Federalism in Nigeria

« Nigeria operates a tripartite federal system that involves the federal, state, and local governments respectively representing the first, second, and third tiers of government. These tiers are embedded in a separation of powers into distinct but coordinating three arms: executive, legislative and judicial. According to Sections 231 and 271 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended), the occupants of the executive and legislative offices emerge through elections while the judicial officers are appointed by the executive and confirmed by the legislature.³⁶ In this system, however, the executive arm of government, especially at the federal level is the most powerful Nigerian institution. » : this information should be presented earlier in the article.

« Pertinently, the Nigerian president and state governors have extensive executive powers over appointments, revenues, and budgets. Other executive functions are under legislative supervision subsumed into the oversight functions of the legislature. These appointments are subject to confirmation by the Nigerian Senate and SHAs (see Sections 250, 256, and 271 of the Nigerian Constitution). Experience has shown that the Senate and SHAs rarely go against the executive on these statutory assignments. The occupants of the executive have statutory power to assent to or veto bills or laws passed by the legislatures. Again, the executive dominates the legislative and judicial arms and controls major state institutions like ministries, departments, and agencies, as well as military and paramilitary organizations as provided in Sections 86, 126, 154, and 198 of the Nigerian Constitution.⁴¹ They control the appointments and remunerations of government functionaries like ministers (commissioners in states and supervisory councillors in local governments) and ambassadors. They also appoint chairmen/directors general and members of boards and governing councils of government institutions. Finally, the executive arm controls the finances and budgetary provisions in the Nigerian federal system. The Nigerian executive leaders – president, 36 governors, and 774 council chairmen – are individually elected in a single-member electoral constituency » : this passage is may be superfluous.

« As earlier noted, the foundation of digitalization of Nigeria's electoral process was laid in 2011 with the biometric registration of voters, though this created the problem of multiple registrations. The digitalization project was further deepened with the deployment of biometric devices like smart card readers and permanent voter cards » :

should perhaps cover a more important place of contextualization.

Methodology

It is somewhat problematic to begin the presentation of the methodology halfway through the article. It may be necessary to reduce and synthesize the contextualization and strengthen the analytical framework.

It would also be necessary to announce the methodology in the abstract and introduction.

« Although contemporary social sciences emphasize the identification of causal factors using experimental research designs, this quest does not displace the essential usefulness of other research procedures. Causal analysis is also predicated on an accurate and systematic description of reality by raising pertinent questions on the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, the study leverages the information explosion and its availability on demand that characterizes contemporary times. The choice of this methodology lies in its strict adherence to the scientific rigors and research

procedures, which involve systematic collection, organization, description, and interpretation of textual, verbal, or visual data.⁴⁴ This provides the platform to access documented research findings that emanate from mixed research strategies from reliable individual and institutional authors » Synthesize and be explicit: get to the point by first naming the methodology used.

« Accordingly, materials for this study are sourced from secondary data and they comprise books, book chapters, journal articles, media and election observer reports, and official and legal documents, embellished with direct observations of Nigerian elections between 1999 and 2019 » : Specify the method of data collection, key research words, identification of sources, limitations of the research methodology, etc.

« The search is embedded on a systematic method using the Google Scholar search engine and keywords related to elections, electoral irregularities, election-related litigations, and voter apathy premised on quoted Boolean Operators like 'and', 'or', and 'not' in Nigeria and beyond » : This method focuses on the analysis of existing literature and less on secondary data (newspapers, blogs, social networks, media, reports, institutional documents etc).

Empirical Verification and Discussion

« Thus, instead of serving dual purposes in Nigeria, elections have frequently become violence-ridden and this vitiates the democratic essence of free, fair, and credible elections. Between the periods when Nigeria gained 'nominal' independence in 1960, with two elected governments and an aborted democratic process, and in 1999 when the present fourth republic began, the problem of election-related violence involving gruesome bloodshed was not really a big issue.⁴⁹ The Carter Centre's final report on the 1999 presidential election observed: "There was a wide disparity between the number of voters observed at the polling stations and the final results that have been reported from several states. Regrettably, therefore, it is not possible for us to make an accurate judgement about the outcome of the presidential election".⁵⁰ However, the report did not expressly capture any incidence of bloodshed and election litigations as obviously witnessed in subsequent election cycles beginning from 2003 (see Figure 1 and Table 1) » : This passage seems to be closer to contextualization than to analyzed/collected data.

This section contextualizes well and illustrates well the electoral violence and its recurrence in Nigeria. But more contextualization than data mobilization and analysis.

Winner-takes-all Majoritarian System and Election Litigations in Nigeria

Winner-takes-all Majoritarian System and Voter Turnout in Nigeria

Conclusion :

« It noted that politics in Nigeria is played based on social Darwinist evolutionary postulation – the survival of the fittest. This resulted in Nigeria's chequered democratic experience measured in terms of consistent incidence of electoral violence leading to loss of lives and destruction of property, contentious election outcomes leading to election-related

disputes, and constrained voter participation leading to confidence crisis and voter apathy. » : not really developed in the analytical framework.