

## **VOTERS' SUPPRESSION AS A NEW FORM OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: A REVIEW OF THE 2023 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION IN LAGOS STATE**

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### **Abstract**

This study reviews the use of voter's suppression as a new form of electoral violence during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria. The paper draws upon existing literature on electoral violence as well as data from previous elections. The research methodology involved a qualitative approach, in which the data were analysed using content analysis. The study identifies various forms of voter suppression employed by political parties, including the use of propaganda, intimidation, manipulation of voting processes, use of ethnic/tribal sentiments and the casting of false votes among others. It also discusses the effect that voter suppression has on the electoral outcome, and its implications for democracy in Nigeria. The study found out that the prevalence of voter suppression in Lagos during the election was higher than any other states in Nigeria and even more than witnessed in previous years and that it had a significant impact on the election outcomes. The findings of this study provided an insight into the root causes of voter's suppression in Nigeria, and the role of political parties in manipulating the electoral process. The paper also contributes to the wider literature on voter suppression and its role in electoral violence in Nigeria. The study recommended legislative reforms to create mechanisms for timely investigations of allegations of voter's suppression; and to ensure effective punishment of those involved in the perpetration of such violence. Additionally, the study emphasises the need for electoral bodies and the general public to be educated on the importance of exercising their right to vote without fear or intimidation.

**Key Words:** Voters' Suppression, Electoral Violence, Democracy, Legislative Reforms, Ethnicity.

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### **Introduction**

Election-related violence has been an unavoidable occurrence in Nigeria's electoral history and democratic transition since the country's independence in 1960 (Diamond 1988; Hamalai et al., 2017; Joseph 1991; Omotola 2010; Osaghae 2011; Oyediran et al., 1997; Maier 2000; Oyewole & Omotola, 2021). This electoral violence, which frequently manifests physically in the form of ballot box stuffing and voter suppression. Voter suppression, as a new form of electoral violence, appears to have become more common in Nigerian elections according to recent studies. The suppression of voters has serious consequences for democracy, not only in Nigeria but also globally. Indeed, the fundamental tenets of democracy are violated when eligible voters are excluded from exercising their right to vote freely and without intimidation. Voter suppression also have serious

consequences for democracy since it undermines the essence values of equality, fairness, and representation.

Suppression of the voters has numerous effects on democracy. First of all, it violates the idea of equal representation since marginalized groups of people could encounter unequal obstacles that keep them from voting on the day of election. As a result, there is an imbalance in political power and the voices, and interests of marginalised people are diminished, making democracy less inclusive and representative. Second, the integrity and validity of elections can be damaged by voter's suppression and intimidation. Public trust in democratic institutions and elected politicians declines when voters believe that the electoral process is unfair or rigged. This can further erode the principles of democracy by causing dissatisfaction, apathy and a diminished desire to vote in subsequent elections.

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Additionally, suppression of the voting process can also prevent societal inequalities from changing. They might make already-existing social and economic inequities worse by reducing the political influence of excluded groups. In such circumstances, it is possible that elected politicians (leaders) do not give those communities significant policies adequate consideration or attention. Voter suppression also has long-term consequences on policy outcomes. For instance, when certain groups are tactically deprived of their right to vote, their distinctive perceptions, concerns and needs are not adequately represented in the decision-making process. This can result in policies that do not address or prioritise the interests of these marginalised communities thus perpetuating social and economic disparities.

Furthermore, existing literature have examined the issue of voters' suppression within the enactment of electoral laws which tends towards what Betral & Douglas (2018) referred to as tightened registration rules, reduced convenient voting opportunities and required voters to show specific types of identification in order to vote. However, it is interesting to note that attention is gradually shifting from the already known forms of electoral violence and intimidation to a new form which involves forced inhibition of voters from exercising their franchise during elections. Scholars, political observers and analysts have argued that this trend is common amongst developing democracies as the developed ones have advanced in technology to guarantee the voting right of their citizens. Nigeria is typical example of a developing democracy.

Furthermore, numerous studies have been conducted on the causes, characteristics, consequences, and control of election violence and voter intimidation in Nigeria (Diamond 1988; ICG 2014; Omotola 2009, 2010b; Onapajo 2014; Oyewole & Omotola, 2021). Similarly, Oyewole & Omotola (2021) used a spatial-based methodological approach in their empirical study to identify Lagos state as one of the most recorded incidents of violence in the 2019 general elections. This present study makes case of the voter's suppression experienced in Lagos during the 2023 elections in the state. The focus Lagos state subnational elections are important for many reasons. First, most studies on elections and associated violence in Nigeria have focused almost exclusively on national/ federal elections at the expense of subnational elections (Bekoe, 2011; Bratton, 2008; Onapajo, 2014). Secondly, the focus on Lagos stems from its cosmopolitan nature and the emergence of a third force political party, Labour Party (LP) which gave the ruling party, All

Progressive Party (APC), a run for its money during the elections. This made suppression of voters witnessed in Lagos State to be more pronounced than anywhere in Nigeria.

In addition, the 2023 general elections in Nigeria witnessed massive incidences of voters' suppression. For instance, in Lagos State, tribalism, hate speech laced with violence were employed as tools by supporters of a particular political party to suppress voters from a section of the country thus inhibiting them from voting for the candidates of their choice. This eventually culminated into low voter turnout witnessed during the governorship election held March 18, 2023 in Lagos State.

According to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), prior to the election, Lagos State has the highest number of registered voters with a total of 7,060,195 voters. Premium Times (2023), reported that Lagos State recorded a voter turnout of 1,155,678 voters out of 7,060,195 registered voters. This translates in percentage term to what it referred to as an abysmal 19% voter turnout amid reports of violence and voter suppression. It is in this regard that, this paper examines voters' suppression as a new form of electoral violence in Nigeria using the March 2023 governorship election in Lagos State as basis of discussion.

### **Problematism of Voter's Suppression during the 2023 general election in Lagos State Nigeria**

Voters in all democratic settings are germane to the electoral process as they are critical agents in the completion of any electoral cycle. For instance, without the voters, candidates of various political parties seeking to be elected into positions in government cannot fulfil this aspiration. It is in this regard that, this paper observes pejoratively, the intensive emasculation of voters in Nigeria contrary to what obtains in advanced democracies. For instance, voters in Nigeria are often threatened and coerced to vote for a particular political party during elections. Political parties engage the use of political thugs as arrow head to achieve these anachronistic tendencies. For instance, the March 18, 2023 governorship election in Lagos State serves as reference to drive home this assertion.

Prior to the elections, foot soldiers of the ruling political party began to fly the kite of ethnicity, threat and coercion with the mantra of attributing the ownership of Lagos to a particular tribe (Yoruba). For instance, Lagos is cosmopolitan, the Labour Party is perceived to be largely Igbos and this led to attacks on some of its members in Lagos. Some APC

members like Musiliu Akinsanya (a.k.a, M.C Oluomo), threatened Igbo voters in Lagos State. He was the Chairman of Lagos State Parks Management Committee (LSPMC), a Lagos State agency and an associate of the President-elect, Bola Tinubu. Before and during the election day, MC Oluomo threatened Igbos who will not vote for the party to stay at home. According to him, 'We have begged them. If they do not want to vote for us, it is not a fight. Tell Mama Chukwudi, if you do not want to vote for us, sit down at home' (Titus & Ogundiya, (2023) (in Press); Daily Trust, 2023).

This move triggered fear and apprehension into the minds of voters who were not of Yoruba extraction. Voters who dared the consequence and boldly came out to exercise their voting right on election day were molested and harassed. This, according to a voter during the election lamented that 'I had to run out, they destroyed the side mirror of my car...(sic) they brought out knives and wanted to stab me' (The Africa Report, 2023). While yet another voter in the Oniru area of Lagos re-echoed the same experienced that 'thugs threatened those who were not indigene and do not want to vote for APC to returned home immediately' (The Africa Report, 2023). This majorly contributed to recorded low voters' turnout which eventually dovetails into suppression of voters. It is against this premise this paper seeks to review the use of voter suppression during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria, and to investigate ways that its use could be discouraged.

### **Historical Context of Voter's Suppression in Nigeria: An Overview**

In Nigeria, voter suppression remains a problem over several decades. For instance, the British government adopted various policies that limited Nigerians' political rights during the country's colonial history, which lasted until 1960. These policies restricted access to education, required voting by property ownership, and denied some ethnic groups political participation.

Furthermore, after gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria witnessed periods of military rule interspersed with civilian administrations. One of the earliest instances of electoral violence in Nigeria occurred during the Second Republic in the 1980s. The 1983 general elections were marred by widespread violence, including arson, assault, and ballot box snatching. The outcome of the elections resulted in significant political tension, contributing to the military coup that followed. During this time, voter suppression tactics such as voter intimidation, violence, ballot stuffing, and manipulation of

election results were prevalent. These actions aimed to control the electoral outcomes and maintain the power of the ruling elite.

In the same manners, in the 1990s, Nigeria witnessed a series of controversial elections that were characterised by violence and political unrest. For instance, the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, which many believed to be free and fair, led to widespread protests and civil disobedience. This event, together with subsequent elections, saw clashes between supporters of different political parties, resulting in loss of lives and destruction of property (Olowojolu, 2015).

Similarly, from the 2003 to 2007 general elections, Nigeria experienced a succession of elections during this period that were marred by widespread voter suppression. Instances of voter intimidation, coercion, and violence occurred along with allegations of ballot box snatching and rigging. These practices eroded trust in the electoral process and raised concerns about the legitimacy of election results (Human Rights Watch, 2007; Animashaun, 2008).

It was argued that the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria witnessed a significant amount of electoral violence. There were reports of clashes between supporters of different political parties, leading to the loss of lives, destruction of property and disruption of the electoral process in some regions of the country (Harwood & Campbell, 2010). Human Rights Watch (2011) estimated that 800 people died as a result of the post-election violence. In a similar vein, Human Rights Watch (2011) claimed more than 65,000 individuals were forced to leave their homes as a result of the post-election violence in 2011. In 12 states, the violence resulted in the displacement of 48,000 persons, according to Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) (Omenazu & Paschal, 2011; Olowojolu et al., 2019).

Similarly, the 2015 Presidential election was another period marked by incidents of electoral violence in Nigeria. There were instances of attacks on political rallies and campaigns, attacks on polling units and clashes between rival political factions. These acts of violence resulted in casualties and disruption of the electoral process in certain areas. It was reported that 30 people were killed on Election Day, April 11, 2015, according to the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM, 2015). These deaths were reportedly the consequence of attacks on election polling units and clashes between opposing parties. While the 2019 Presidential election were

also marred by incidents of electoral violence. Reports of clashes between rival political groups, destruction of election materials and attacks on electoral officials were observed in different regions. These incidents affected voter turnout and overall confidence in the electoral process. It was reported that over 626 killed during 2019 Nigeria elections (Premium Times, 2023).

From the 2019 general elections till date, Nigeria has made some progress in addressing electoral violence since the early 2000s. However, challenges still persist; instances of voter suppression which include voter intimidation, the disenfranchisement of certain groups through inadequate distribution of voter registration cards, violence during elections, and the manipulation of electoral processes became prevalent during 2023 governorship election especially in Lagos State. One can stress here that several factors contribute to the prevalence of electoral violence in Nigeria. These include a history of political, ethnic, and religious divisions, high levels of poverty and unemployment, ineffective law enforcement, and the prevalence of political thuggery. Additionally, the competition and tensions during elections are made worse by the winner-takes-all character of Nigerian politics, where political power and its associated rewards are concentrated in the hands of a small number of people.

However, efforts have been made by the Nigerian government, Civil Society Organizations (CSO), and international bodies to tackle voter suppression. These efforts include the introduction of electoral reforms, voter education campaigns, and the use of technology for transparent voter registration and results collation, and the deployment of security personnel during elections. Promoting equal access to the voting process, ensuring the protection of citizens' rights, and preventing voter suppression remain ongoing goals in Nigeria to establish a more inclusive and democratic electoral system.

### **Theoretical Debates on Voter's Suppression**

Scholars of electoral studies have developed various theories as to the cause of voter suppression and electoral violence. However, this paper finds relevance in Sigmund Freud's (1892) Suppression Theory. According to him, it is a voluntary form of repression which constitutes the conscious process of pushing unwanted, anxiety-provoking thoughts, memories, emotions, fantasies and desires out of awareness. In this regard, to suppress is to push an unwanted, anxiety provoking thoughts and desires out of awareness. This applies to how voters in Lagos State, especially those that belonged to the

opposition, were suppressed during the election so as to water down their eagerness to vote. This, by implication, took the awareness of an active participant in the electoral process out of their consciousness. This theory explains why voter suppression almost always result into low turnout of voters on the day of elections.

The study also finds expression in Dollard, et al (1939) in Gbervbe (2018). According to him, aggression is always the consequence of frustration. Employing the psycho-dynamic explanation of catharsis, Dollard, et al (1939), argued that if one experience frustration, this leads to aggression. As they further argued, aggression is a catharsis release of the build-up of frustration. According to them, if the individual is prevented from achieving a goal by some external factors, this will lead to aggression. This theory explains why violence were recorded in the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State as loyalists of opposition parties who were bent and desperate to exercise their voting right but were prevented and resisted eventually had to engage in violence combating which led to the escalation of the violence. The frustration/aggression theory therefore remains relevant in the quest to providing explanation to voters' suppression as a new form of electoral violence in Nigeria.

### ***Voters' Suppression as a New form of Electoral Violence: Conceptual and Literature Review***

Electoral violence is a form of political violence which is linked to the process of choosing leaders and/or representatives through voting (Oyewole & Omotola, 2021). Accordingly, Oyewole & Omotola (2021) highlighted in their studies that there are two contexts in which electoral violence is observed. The first approach saw electoral violence as a subset of actions inside a larger political conflicts. In this situation, the trend of inter-ethnic violence and the election-related security environment receive a lot of academic attention. As a result, an increasing number of research (Cheibub & Hays, 2017; Goldsmith, 2015; Salehyan & Linebarger, 2014) have investigated the relationship between election cycles and armed conflicts in Africa. The second approach describes electoral violence as the highest-level kind of electoral fraud, which includes clandestine efforts to shape election results, such as vote buying, ballot tampering, and interference with the registration process (Hoglund, 2009). The Nigerian constitution defines electoral violence as the direct or indirect use of threat or force with the intent to prevent a candidate from running for office or to compel a person to support or refrain from supporting a

candidate during the campaign, to vote or refrain from voting during the election, and on the basis of a decision made during these periods thereafter. These provisions are found in Sections 96 and 131 of the Nigerian Electoral Act (2010) (Federal Government of Nigeria 2010; Oyewole & Omotola, 2021).

In this case, electoral violence encompasses any violent act that occurs before, during, or after elections. In Nigeria, this can involve physical altercations, property destruction, or even loss of lives. Electoral violence can be driven by various factors, including political rivalries, ethnic tensions, or frustration with perceived electoral fraud. It not only poses a threat to citizens' safety but also undermines public confidence in the electoral process, leading to decreased voter participation and legitimacy concerns.

Electoral violence, as it was, constitutes a major bane to the growth and development of any democracy. Whereas, absence or a mitigation of it, contribute immensely to records of stability witnessed in advanced democracies such as, USA, Britain, Germany, Australia, France, among others. Its prevalence in developing democracies such as Nigeria, have accounted for the fragile status being attached to it. Aluko (2022), conceived electoral violence as an ill wind that blows any democratic process no good. This is largely because, electoral violence rather than advance the course of democracy, result into democratic reversals and deconsolidation. Igbuzor (2010), in Egobueze & Orjirika (2017), saw electoral violence from the prism of any act perpetuated in the course of political activities including pre, during and post-election periods, and may include any of the following acts; thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral process. From this conception of electoral violence, discerning observers can easily deduce that it is cancerous to any democratic setting.

According to Bekoe (2012), Harish & Toha (2019), Høglund (2020) in Birch, et al (2020), electoral violence is levied by political actors to purposefully influence the process and outcome of elections and it involves and it involves coercive acts against humans, property and infrastructure. Instruments of electoral violence have always been deployed to manipulate outcome of elections in developing democracies. Harry & Kalagbor (2021), in Aluko (2022), referred to electoral violence as any threat of

attack or attack meted out against persons or groups of persons in relation to an election before, during and after the election. As they further posited, it is usually an organised action carried out by the political elites (politicians), their supporters or hired thugs/gangs to unleash terror on opponents in the course of electioneering activities, which in many cases, lead to loss of lives and destruction of properties. In this regard, this paper align with this conception of electoral violence whereby party loyalists are used to harass, intimidate and emasculate voters so as to reduce the rate of turnout on election day.

Albert (2007) in Harry & Kalagbor (2021), conceived of electoral violence more broadly. According to him, electoral violence referred to all forms of organised acts or threats – physical, psychological and structural – aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a politician, stakeholders before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying or otherwise influencing an electoral process. This definition is no doubt, all-encompassing and total as it captures every aspect of electoral violence in which suppression of voters comes in as aspects of physical, psychological and structural forms of violence.

Voter suppression, on the other hand, refers to any deliberate attempt to prevent certain individuals or groups from exercising their right to vote. It is a tactic used by some individuals, organizations, or governments to limit the political influence of particular demographics or communities. In Nigeria, various forms of voter suppression have been reported over the years. These include the manipulation of voter registration lists, inadequate distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), intimidation and harassment of voters, and the deliberate disenfranchisement of certain regions or demographic groups among others. These practices disproportionately affect marginalized communities, further deepening social inequalities and compromising the integrity of the electoral system.

However, voter suppression is not new even in advanced democracies as there had been instances where the most developed ones have had to struggle against racism and discrimination in their electoral system. An example that readily comes to mind is the United States (US) democracy where for a very long time, black voters have been suppressed and denied the right to vote. A recent event in this regard was the 2013 Supreme Court ruling which decimated the Voting Right Act. According to Lerner (2023) in her work titled, Democracy is on life Support: The

Organisers fighting Voter Suppression in US south, argued that after the 2013 Supreme Court ruling decimated the Voting Right Act, advocates are working round the clock to ensure the ballot is accessible to all.

It is interesting to note that the apex court in the US supported by its ruling, the denial of voting right of some voters in the south. This clearly indicates that that voter suppression is not peculiar to developing democracy. However, the dimension which makes voter suppression in the developing democracy different from the developed ones is in the area where apart from experiencing the suppression of the right of voters, violence during elections becomes another big challenge confronting the developing democracies of which Nigeria is a typical example.

In this regard, Punch (2023), reported that thugs in large numbers invaded Adejare Polling Unit in Ilasa, Oshodi/Isolo Local Government Area of Lagos State to disperse voters who were waiting for officials and ad hoc staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission to begin voting for the ongoing governorship and state assembly election. As it further reported, an eye witness who doubled as a party agent was driven out of his assigned polling unit by suspected All Progressive Congress (APC) thugs after confirming that he was an agent of the opposition party. One can therefore not be surprised, the low turnout recorded during the gubernatorial election in Lagos state.

Rhodes (2023), in his essay titled, Nigeria's Struggle for Democracy: A Glimpse into Lagos Gubernatorial Elections of 2023, observed that the Lagos Gubernatorial Elections held on March 18, 2023 were meant to be a shining example of the revitalised Nigerian Democratic process. Instead, they became a dark reminder of the struggles the country faces in its pursuit of true democracy. According to him, "the elections were marred by violence, intimidation, and voter suppression with Nigerians witnessing a blatant attack on their democratic rights". This ugly trend is no doubt a rape on democracy as eligible voters were denied of their rights.

Daily Post (2023), in its work titled US Condemns Voter Suppression in Lagos, ready to sanction perpetrators, observed that the United States Mission in Nigeria has reacted to the disturbing events recorded during gubernatorial and state assembly elections on March 18. According to this report, the US Mission expressed deep concern over violent voter intimidation and suppression that took place in Lagos, Kano and other States. As it further reported,

the American embassy said the use of ethnically charged rhetoric before, during, and after the gubernatorial election in Lagos was particularly concerning. The observations emanating from the US embassy in Nigeria lend credence to the earlier submission where voter suppression was said to have taken the toga of ethnicity and tribal jingoism in Lagos State.

Voters' suppression is embedded in Albert (2007) conception of electoral violence as this can take the form of threat and vituperations against followers of opposition parties thus lowering their disposition and morale towards active participation during elections especially in the area of exercising their franchise. This instrument became handy in Lagos State during its 2023 gubernatorial election, the outcome of which form the basis for low voter turnout on the day of election.

This paper identifies voter suppression as a new form of electoral violence. According to Oduola (2023), voter suppression refers to deliberate measures and tactics deployed to hinder eligible voters from participating in the electoral process. These measures and tactics can be categorised under the following headings; the use of hate speech, whipping up of tribal sentiments, threat to unleash violence on voters, among others. All these are geared towards suppressing voters from coming out to exercise their civic responsibilities on the day of election.

As he further argued, this can take various forms, including voter intimidation, deliberately placing hurdles in the path of voter registration, inadequate access to polling stations, and the manipulation of the delineation of electoral boundaries. Out of all these forms, this paper finds relevance in voter intimidation to suppress voters. This involves using threats, physical force, or other forms of coercion to discourage individuals from voting or participating in the electoral process. Acts of violence can create a climate of fear and insecurity, preventing eligible voters from exercising their rights. It also occurs as intimidation tactics can also involve the disruption of electoral processes, such as the destruction of ballots or the obstruction of polling stations.

Voter suppression pose significant challenges to the democratic process and the principle of free and fair elections. It undermines the fundamental rights of citizens to participate in the political affairs of their country and have their voices heard. When voters are intimidated and coerced, it creates an atmosphere of fear and undermines the legitimacy and credibility of elections. Voter intimidation can come in the form of

threat issued by foot soldiers of a particular political party to sympathisers of major opposition so as to discourage them from participating actively in voting process. As said earlier, there may also be an appeal to tribal sentiments so as to win sympathy vote against the opposition. These were made manifest before and during the March 18, 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State. Little wonder the violence which greeted the 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State and the attendant low turnout of voters.

This paper identifies this development as a new form of electoral violence which is different from hitherto known forms such as structural and direct violence. In this regard, voters' suppression can be classified as a combination of psychological violence and direct violence which ultimately produce undesirable outcome ranging from physical abuse, damage to property and thus, low voter turnout.

Consequently, voter suppression undermines public confidence in the electoral process. Election results are seen with scepticism and cynicism when voters believe that their votes are being purposefully suppressed or obstructed. This decline in popular confidence in democratic institutions has the potential to harm social harmony and the political system's overall performance.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, voter suppression is an emerging problem in Nigerian elections, and its use in the recent gubernatorial elections, especially in Lagos State presents a serious risk to the integrity of the electoral process. In other words, voters' suppression as a new form of electoral violence is gradually gaining prominence in Nigeria's electoral process. It is interesting to note that the political elite cannot be exonerated because they have been fingered as the arrow-head responsible for the recruitment of political thugs who are used as ready tools to suppress opposition parties and their supporters especially the voters. The consequence of this misdemeanour has always been loss of interest by this category of voters. Those who are bold and daunting among these voters are often subjected to torture, pain and agony through the instrument of violence. This ugly emerging trend cannot be allowed to fester if democracy must thrive in Nigeria. Urgent steps must therefore be taken by the electoral management body and the security apparatuses to nip this in the bud. This paper has provided a comprehensive review of voter suppression in the context of the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State, Nigeria, and has identified a number of

possible strategies to discourage and combat its use in the upcoming elections.

### **Recommendations**

To safeguard democracy in Nigeria, it is crucial to address voter suppression and intimidation through various means. From the foregoing, findings on the implications of voter's suppression on democracy in Nigeria will suffice. This paper identifies the following recommendations; Firstly, there is the need for a review of Nigeria's electoral acts where there will be provision for adequate and commensurate punishment to be meted out to perpetrators of voters suppression during elections. In this regard, the National Assembly must rise above partisanship to enact laws that will improve/enhance Nigeria's electoral system.

Secondly, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) must be seen to be truly independent by dealing decisively with any errant political party found guilty of crossing the red line of voters' suppression during any election. Furthermore, the security agencies have big role to play in ensuring that the peace at polling stations are not breached by unscrupulous elements. In this regard, political thugs must be checkmated and prevented from carrying out their nefarious activities.

Thirdly, there is urgent need to increase public awareness and civic education so as to empower citizens and inform them about their rights and responsibilities as voters. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) must be alive to its duties and responsibilities as agent of mobilisation, public enlightenment and political education. This agency of government must penetrate the grassroots and spread the message of detribalisation, moral rearmament and nationalism. This, it can do by organising village square meetings, town hall meetings and the use of electronic and social media to reach the vast majority of Nigerians. These messages should be translated and relayed in local languages so that no citizen is excluded.

Fourthly, citizens must resolve never to cooperate with suppressors of voters. In other words, these criminal elements must have no hiding place in the society. Citizens must volunteer to become informants of the electoral umpire by exposing these misfits before they carry out their heinous act. Additionally, international organizations, civil society, and the media have a responsibility to monitor elections, report any instances of voter

suppression or intimidation, and advocate for fair and transparent electoral practices.

Finally, the government must dissociate itself from any act that can derail the electoral process and thus the entire democratic edifice. This it can do by making policy pronouncements against acts of voters' suppression and strengthening the security architecture to deal with any breach of peace before, during and after any election. All hands must therefore be on the deck to ensure adequate protection of voters during electioneering. This will go a long way to give confidence and the enabling environment for voters to exercise their franchise thus enhancing the growth of Nigeria's democracy. Overall, voter's suppression endangers democracy's virtues of fairness and diversity. In order to guarantee that everyone has an equal opportunity to exercise their right to vote and actively engage in forming their government, Nigerians must be diligent in identifying and countering the techniques of voter suppression which are almost always inimical to sustainable growth and development of democracy.

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