



THE EFFECTS OF WITCHCRAFT PRACTICES ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA: A CASE OF ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to assess the effects of witchcraft practices on the electoral process in Nigeria, with a case of Anambra State. The specific objectives were to explore the nature of witchcraft practices used by politicians during electoral process in Anambra State, Nigeria and to determine reasons for using witchcraft during elections among the politicians in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive research design. The study's target population was the electorate and elected leaders drawn from Anambra State in Nigeria. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires and interview guides while data was analyzed qualitatively in order to draw meanings and themes from the responses. The study concluded that despite the negative perception of witchcraft practices in the society, many politicians of diverse faith inclination do sometimes employ witchcraft in their electioneering process for varied reasons. The study recommended that there was an urgent need for an ongoing engagement by various stakeholders in Nigeria and beyond, to review and map up transformative strategies of addressing the issue of witchcraft before, during and after election in order to breed an egalitarian society and culture.

Key Words: *Witchcraft Practices, Elections*

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INTRODUCTION

Witchcraft is believed to play critical roles in World politics. This has been the case in African countries as well. Belief in the existence and power of witchcraft has a long and diverse history that cuts across cultures and traditions. Such beliefs have commonly resulted in persecution, social rejection, discrimination and violence towards those who are believed to practice witchcraft. A study by Rebecca and Edmondson (2015) revealed that newly democratizing States in Timor-Leste's were faced with tensions due to the killings or injuring of women accused of witchcraft. Besides, the study revealed that while equality and social rights were incorporated into the Constitution as fundamental governmental obligations, localized extrajudicial punishments threatened internal and external state legitimacy and highlighted the difficulties of ensuring the primacy of state-based institutions.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Gershma (2015) examined the relationship between witchcraft beliefs, a deep-rooted cultural phenomenon, and various elements of social capital. The study revealed that in preindustrial communities, witchcraft was believed to be an important cause of illness, mistrust and other antisocial traits. Furthermore, the study revealed that second-generation immigrants in Europe originating from countries with widespread witchcraft beliefs were generally less trusting. In Tanzania, Masanja (2015) examined the effectiveness of legal methods in addressing the plight of Albinos in the country following increased killing, attacks and discriminations reinforced by witchcraft beliefs about Albinos. The study revealed that people believed that albinos' body parts could be a solution against bad luck or poverty or even make someone to win elections.

In South Africa, a study by Ally (2015) explored the beliefs about witchcraft using a sample of community members and established that increased distrust amongst community members contributed to witchcraft. He further argued that witchcraft resulted in tension and interpersonal conflict thereby watering down social networks that

are vital in promoting harmony and unity in the community. In Nigeria, witchcraft is believed to create tension during elections thus scaring potential voters from turning up at the polling stations. Further, Ally (2015) indicated that community members who engaged in witchcraft considered it as a significant dimension in their lives and that they used it to cause various socio-psychological misfortunes to their enemies. This caused social exclusion and increased distrust and conflict in the community. Ally (2015) further established that the fear of bewitchment manifested in violent behavior against those who were accused resulted in breakdown of linkages and networks in the community.

Mafuzi (2014) further argues that the phenomenon of witchcraft survived the onslaught of colonialism and, western objects were incorporated by witches, sorcerers, and witch-doctors or diviners in their paraphernalia, as these were believed to have the capacity to enhance their practice thereby boosting their prestige and social standing amongst their colleagues. In Cameroon and Ghana, Shelagh (2014) conducted a comparative study to find out how witchcraft-related violence could be addressed through the discipline of political science. The study established that in the two countries, witchcraft was a form of power and no actor could successfully address witchcraft-related violence or reduce the sense of spiritual insecurity which was associated with it due to logical constraints.

In Nigeria, Waapela (2016) associates witchcraft to underserved electoral victories and corrupts practices that have bedeviled the country for a very long time. He indicates that witchcraft practiced by the Nigerian elites in the various ethnic groups in Nigeria is the cause of docility among Nigerians in the face of corruption. He identifies common occult practices used by political elites for their vested interest to include; acts of divination, magic, prophecy and witchcraft.

Statement of the problem

Election is the hallmark of any democracy and serves as the basis for collective decisions towards self-governance (Sisk, 2017). Sisk adds that during elections, members of the public are presented with an opportunity to exercise their civic duty through voting. Furthermore, Sisk (2017) points out that the exercise of voting should be devoid of any form of malpractice, coercion or any undue influence. Thus, the elections should be free, fair and credible.

However, many electoral processes in Africa are marred by electoral cheating and misconduct involving bribery, violence and in some instances practices such as witchcraft (Eboiyehi, 2017). These practices seem to scare people as a result of power acquired from such influence such as witchcraft. In Nigeria, Casimir, Omeh and Ike (2013) contend that electoral violence in Nigeria is caused by electoral cheating and manipulation of figures and data to deny the rightful winners their popular mandates given to them and certified by the electoral process. It is an attempt to willfully compromise the integrity of the electoral process or system to achieve unmerited individual win for a political party candidate through the falsification of the electoral figures, numbers, data or process. Electoral cheating is the organized strategy or programs of individuals and or political parties to get desired results of an electoral process either by hook or crook. It is the number one cause of electoral violence before, during or after elections (Casimir, Omeh & Ike, 2013).

However, while electoral cheating particularly the one emanating from witchcraft remains extremely difficult to detect, only a few studies have attempted to examine the role of witchcraft in electoral cheating in Nigeria. It is in a bid to address this gap that this study investigated the effects of witchcraft practices on the electoral process in Nigeria using the case of Anambra State.

Study Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To explore the nature of witchcraft practices used by politicians during electoral process in Anambra State, Nigeria.
- To determine reasons for using witchcraft during elections among the politicians in Anambra State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Witch-Cult

The witch-cult theory was pioneered by German scholars Karl Ernst Jarcke and Franz Josef Mone in the early nineteenth century. According to the theory, witch trials of the Early Modern period were an attempt to suppress a pre-Christian, pagan religion that had survived the Christianization of Europe. According to its proponents, the witch cult revolved around the worship of a Horned God of fertility whose Christian persecutors referred to as the Devil, and its members participated in nocturnal rites at the witches' Sabbath in which they venerated this deity.

Various scholars have advanced philosophical, sociological and psychological arguments to make sense of this phenomenon. According to Idowu (1973), witchcraft emanated from early structure of African Traditional Religion. He claims that witchcraft forms part of the spiritual beliefs of Africans and features prominently in the pre-Christian and Islamic religion particularly in explaining and unraveling the problem of evil. Witches were people who could send their spirits to harm or destroy other persons' bodies, minds or estate. The author suggested that these spirits left the bodies in form of birds to meet with other witches in forests or in open places before embarking on the occult operations such as attacking, extracting and devouring the bodies of their victims (Idowu 1973). Besides, Mbithi (1975) advanced Idowu assertion by indicating that the belief of witchcraft was part of African religion. He pointed out that witchcraft powers were 'inborn',

'inherited' or 'acquired' by a person. Mbithi suggested that witches used 'incantations' and various magical objects which they buried in the ground, on the gate or in the farm of the victim. He further indicated that witches use familiar things such as insects or animals which they send to harm the victim.

A study by Parrinder (1958, 17) compared European and African witchcraft and established that while there was a widespread interest in witchcraft in Europe and America, the manifestation of witchcraft belief in Africa was a critical issue. The author indicated that in Europe, witchcraft was characterized by gathering in "Assemblies, covens and Sabbaths" and that European witches operated as wandering souls and engaged in night-flying and in other occult activities using animal familiars such as black cats, rat or fowl (Parrinder 1958, 37). Further, the author links the development of cannibalism, black mass and devil worship to European witches. According to Parrinder (1958) European witchcraft beliefs were similar to African except that names such as devil, covens and Sabbath, and perverted Christian practices such as black mass and baptism were missing in African witchcraft.

Parrinder (1963) also noted, "A man is killed by an animal, but the animal may be a witch in disguise, or he was acting under the influence of a spell. Rainfall may ruin one field and not another. The rain is the agent, but witchcraft is seen as the cause." Once sickness or misfortune strikes, the first question that people ask is why this has happened. Certainly there are many potential witches, but they have to be actuated by hatred or jealousy. The sufferer of misfortune begins to think of those who might have a grudge against him, either for some offense or through envy at his achievement or success. It therefore follows that witchcraft is often suspected among a person's closest acquaintances. It is natural that those we know best are the ones with whom there may be the greatest friction. Hence accusations of witchcraft are often leveled

against close relatives and rarely against those who live far away.

The study by Evans-Pritchard (1937) on witchcraft in Africa gave insight into the sociology and cultural history before and during colonization. He argues that before the coming of the colonial masters, witchcraft had been part of the culture and beliefs of the people and that witchcraft became a discourse of power in the communities in which it was present as both conceptualization and action. Sexual jealousy of a new co-wife was often assumed to be inspiration for the use of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard, 1937). Like Azande, the igbos' believe that every witch has a physical substance, witchcraft, existing in his other body that allows the soul to engage in errands to harm their fellow beings. The Azande conceive of the witchcraft substance as a "round, hairy ball with teeth" which is passed on from parent to child, with all the sons of a male witch and all the daughters of a female witch being witches (Evans-Pritchard, 1937). Since witchcraft substance is organic, the Azande believe its existence can be determined through a post-mortem examination. While the Igbos believe that witches have witchcraft substance, wherein lies their mysterious powers, they do not believe that it can be inherited (Messenger, 1959).

According to Omoyeni, Oyetade and Omoyeni (2015), in the pre-colonial Nigeria, several ethnic groups had different cultures and customs and embraced witchcraft as a consultative medium of getting explanations to incomprehensible phenomena within their areas. The authors further advance that because people were unaware of the causes of diseases and other natural phenomenon; they consulted with supernatural groups or witches for explanations. Omoyeni, Oyetade and Omoyeni (2015) indicate that Nigerian communities especially the Yoruba and Igbo speaking tribes and people in the Southwest and Southeast were known for the worship of Esu (the devilish supernatural). The authors further indicate that Yoruba and Igbo speaking tribes believed that witchcraft was created by God (the goodness supernatural) to maintain

balance in the world system. The coming of Christianity and the spread of Islam in the modern time seemed not to have any significant impacts in the belief system of Nigerians in witchcraft (Omoyeni, Oyetade & Omoyeni, 2015).

Strengths of Witch-Cult Theory

The Witch-cult theory is important because it traces the history of witchcraft to historical beginnings. In other words, the theory claims that satanic cults had existed in previous centuries, and that witches did indeed practice satanic rites.

Weaknesses of Witch-Cult Theory

The theory of witch cult has been faulted because it is based on mere assertion thus lacking solid evidence. The theory of witch-cult is based on an assumption that the language of accusation could be matched to a real phenomenon, rooted in the past, but still affecting the present.

Relevance of Witch-Cult Theory

The theory of witch-cult was relevant in the study because it provided the foundation of witchcraft practices from time immemorial. In addition, the theory was relevant because although many people probably assume that witchcraft is just a mere superstition, some elements of it could influence electoral process.

Empirical Literature Review

In England, Elmer (2016) studied witchcraft, witch-hunting, and politics in early modern England. Data was collected to form a mass of new evidence extracted from a range of archives, both local and national with the aim of establishing the rise and decline of belief in witchcraft, alongside the legal prosecution of witches, to the wider political culture of the period. The study established that witchcraft and witch-hunting continued to play a prominent role in English life despite being increasingly contested by ideological opponents to the religious and political experiments of the period.

A study conducted by Gallup (2010) found that belief in magic was widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa, with over half of respondents

personally believing in witchcraft. Those who believed in witchcraft felt that they had less control over their own lives. People who believe in witchcraft often feel victimized by supernatural forces.

In Kenya, a study by Nyabwari and Kagema (2014) examined effect of magic and witchcraft on social, economic, political and spiritual development. The study used descriptive research design and secondary data as well as the theory of social change by Lauren Fitzpatrick (1976). The study revealed that some of those caught or suspected to practice witchcraft are Christians. The authors link this scenario to an inadequate teaching of Africans before being introduced to Christianity particularly on mystical happenings like death, accidents, loss of wealth, sickness and failures. Nyabwari and Kagema (2014) further indicated that due to the generosity of Africans, they dropped their social, -religious and cultural practices to join Christianity with a hope of practicing faithful Christianity which they thought could address their heart demands. They further indicate that African Christians in spite of their commitment to Christianity feel insecure in their personal, physical, health and property safety.

In Zimbabwe, a study by Chireshe, Chireshe and Shumba (2012) examined and documented the evidence of witchcraft and social life in Zimbabwe. Data was collected from published literature as well as interviews. The study established that beliefs in witchcraft were deeply rooted in Zimbabwe. Equally, witchcraft was associated with power/politics, economic activities and sexuality. The study concluded that since witchcraft was an occult practice, it was by nature secretive and thus difficult to substantiate empirically in most cases and this is why witchcraft beliefs are usually expressed in rumors and allusions.

In Uganda, Allen (2015) associated witchcraft to political assassination in the country. Using secondary data, he illustrates cases of strange murders that occurred in northern Uganda where blood is said to have been removed from the

victims including tales of child sacrifice and terrifying witchcraft. Allen (2015) points out to an election where a culprit of various crimes ended up being elected. The study concluded that elites use various strategies such as witchcraft to establish and maintain their public authority. In Ghana, Adinkrah (2015) discussed witchcraft and violence based on his research among the Akan. He argued that witchcraft beliefs were entrenched in Ghana and the ideas were transmitted through the family, school, mass media, proverbs and other agencies of lifelong socialization. He claimed the family perpetuated witchcraft narratives because family members invoked the idiom of witchcraft to explain misfortunes and tragedies such as infertility, mental illness, death and other misfortunes. The author maintained that witchcraft phenomena constituted sources of gossip and rumor among school children. He suggested that media publications were suffused with witchcraft ideas and were places where Ghanaians learnt about witchcraft beliefs, stories and practices (Adinkrah, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive design. It targeted the electorate and elected leaders drawn from Anambra State in Nigeria. Multistage sampling method was used in determining the sample size of the study. The first stage involved selecting the electorate while the second stage involved selection of political leaders. In the first stage, the researcher used stratified sampling and divided Anambra State into 11 stratum whereby each stratum represented a federal constituency. From each of the 11 stratum, the researcher randomly

selected 35 electorates to represent the sample size of the study and thus the sample size of the study was 385 electorates. The second stage that involved selection of political leaders utilized purposive sampling technique. Thus, a total of 3 senators and 11 federal representatives were selected to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select political leaders, who were few in number and thus sampling all of them was considered appropriate. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires and interview guides. The data was analyzed qualitatively in order to draw meanings and themes from the responses.

FINDINGS

A total of 385 questionnaires were administered to the electorate while 14 politicians were targeted for interviews. The results from the return rate of research instruments showed those 367 electorates and 11 politicians respondents. This represented 95.3% response rate for the electorate and 78.5% response rate for politicians. In overall, the response rate for the study was 94.7%. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2012), a response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and reporting while response rate 60% is good and a response rate of above 70% is excellent. This means that in our case, the response rate was excellent.

Nature of Witchcraft Practices Used During Elections in Anambra State

This section discusses the first objective of the study whose aim was to find out the nature of witchcraft practices used during elections.

Table 1: Whether Politicians are involved in Witchcraft

Whether Politicians use witchcraft	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	245	66.8%
No	76	20.7%
Not Sure	46	12.5%
Total	367	100.0%

According to table 1, majority (66.8%) of the respondents indicated that politicians were involved in witchcraft, 20.7% denied that politicians were involved in witchcraft while 12.5% of the respondents were uncertain as to whether politicians were involved in witchcraft for political gain. This finding corroborates with Omoyemi, Oyetade and Omoyeni (2015) who indicate that Nigerian communities especially the Yoruba and

Igbo speaking tribes who occupy largely south west and south east respectively, were known for the worship of Esu (the devilish supernatural). The authors further indicate that Yoruba and Igbo speaking tribes believed that witchcraft was created by God to maintain balance in the world system. The Igbo tribe constitute of 98% of the total population in Anambra state.

Nature of Witchcraft used in Elections

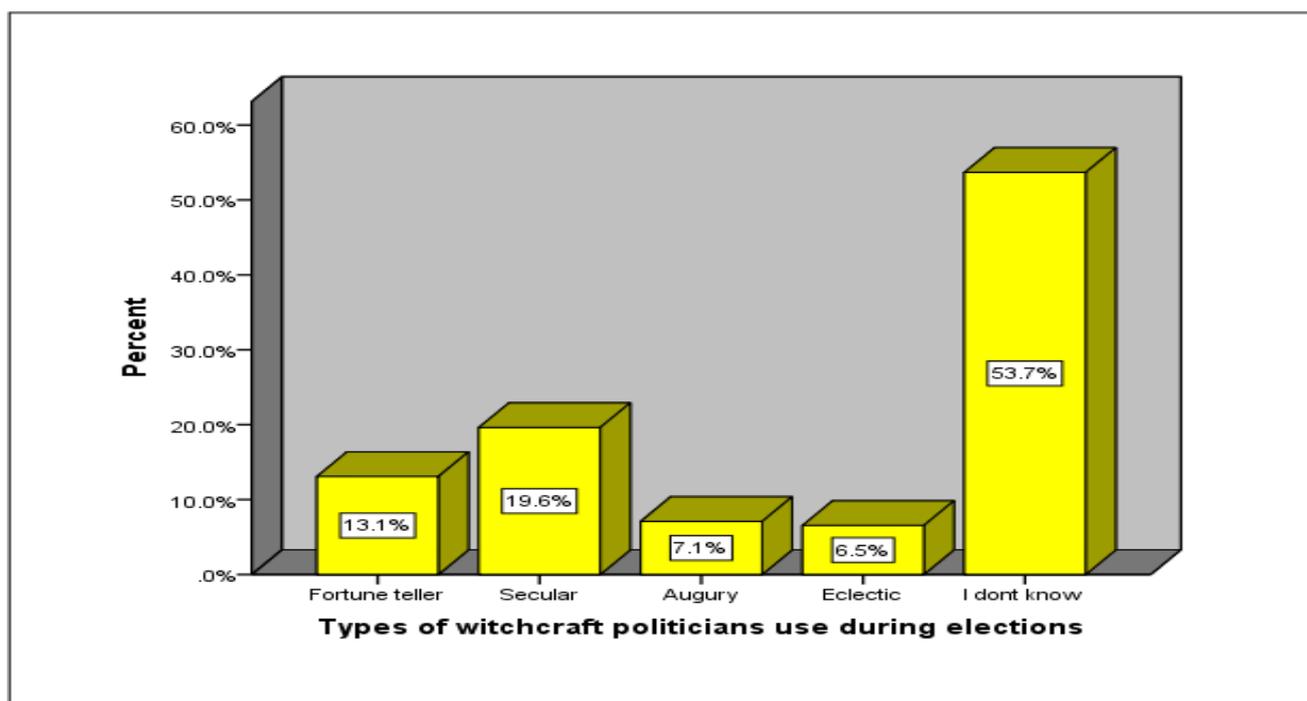


Figure 1: Type of witchcraft used by politicians during elections

As shown in figure 1, the study found that politicians used various witchcraft practices during elections. Majority (19.6%) of the respondents indicated secular practices followed by fortune teller practices (13.1%), augury practices (7.1%) and eclectic practices (6.5%). The finding was consistent with Waapela (2016) who identifies common occult practices used by political elites for their vested

interest in Nigeria to include; acts of divination, magic, prophecy and witchcraft. Specialists such as diviners, herbalists, magicians, priests/priestesses, prophets, and witch-doctors possess the knowledge and understanding of these practices and also help people to benefit from them for bad or good (Waapela, 2016).

Nature of Leaders who engage in Witchcraft during Elections

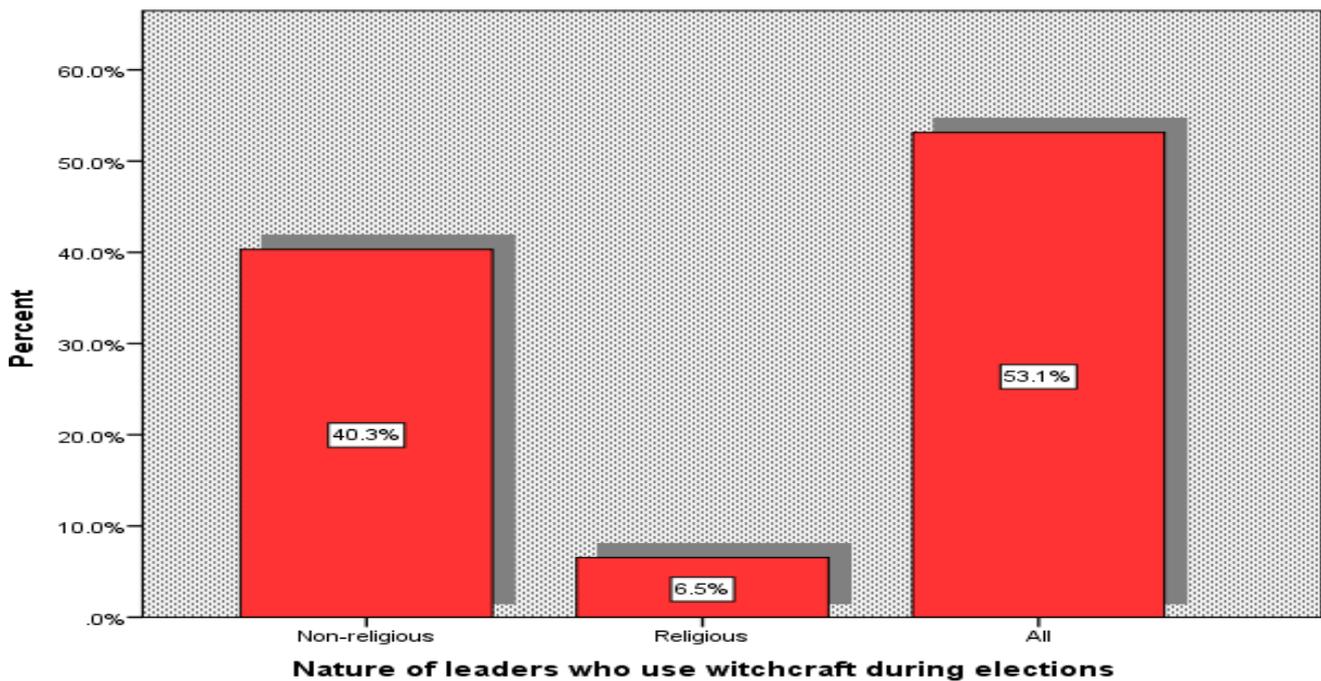


Figure 2: Nature of leaders who engage in witchcraft during elections

As shown in figure 2 majority (53.1%) of the respondents, all leaders regardless of their religious affiliation engaged in witchcraft during election. At the same time, 40.3% of the respondents indicated that politicians who engage in witchcraft are non-religious (secular) while 6.5% of the respondents indicated that politicians who engage in witchcraft during elections are religious (those who belong to one religion or the other). This finding is consistent with Waapela (2016), who associated witchcraft with undeserved electoral victories and corrupt practices that have bedeviled the country for a very long time. He indicates that witchcraft practiced by the Nigerian elites in the various ethnic groups in Nigeria is the cause of docility among Nigerians in the face of corruption. He identifies common occult practices used by political elites for their vested interest to include: acts of divination, magic,

prophecy and witchcraft. Besides, Nyabwari and Kagema (2014) examined effects of magic and witchcraft on social, economic, political and spiritual development and established that some of those caught or suspected to practice witchcraft were Christians. The authors link this scenario to inadequate teaching to Africans before being introduced to Christianity particularly on mystical happenings like death, accident, loss of property, sickness and failure.

Reasons for Involvement in Witchcraft by Politicians during Electoral Process

This section discussed objective two of the study whose aim was to determine the reasons why politicians engage in witchcraft in order to win elections.

Level of Witchcraft Involvement by Politicians

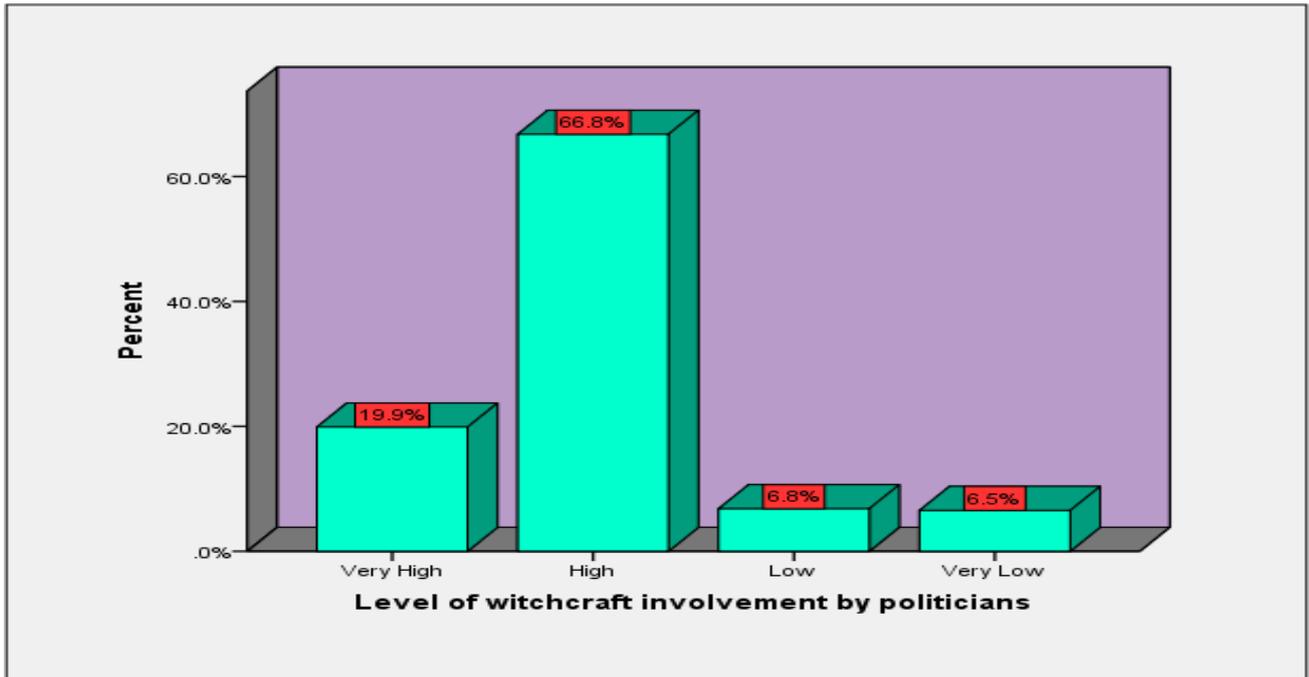


Figure 3: Level of witchcraft involvement by politicians

As shown in figure 3, the study established that witchcraft involvement among politicians was very high by 66.8% and high by 19.9% while 6.8% and 6.5% of the respondents rated witchcraft involvement among politicians as low and very low respectively. According to Makulilo (2010), since politics is dominated by witchcraft, therefore people with albinism's killings are associated with

politics. Petrus (2012) emphasizes that, access to magic powers seem to be a prerequisite for an individual's ability to legitimate political influence. For instance, in some elections it was reported that witchdoctors were officially employed to provide magical spells to politicians to help them win votes in the elections.

Reasons for Engaging in Witchcraft by Politicians during Elections

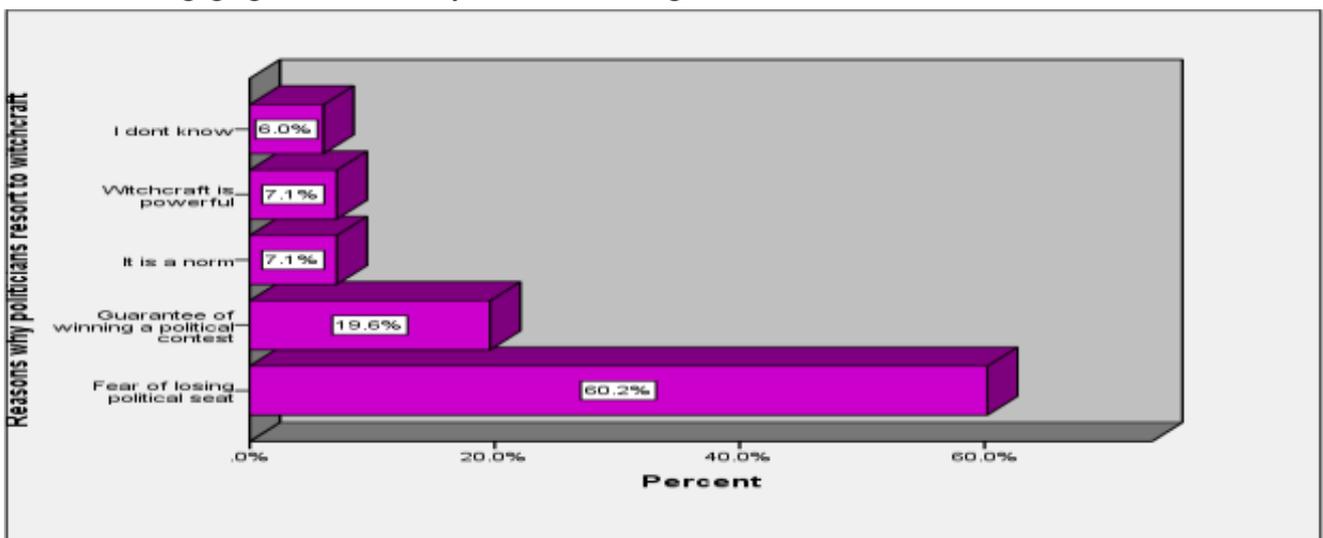


Figure 4: Reasons why politicians engaged in witchcraft

The study established that fear of losing a political seat was the biggest reason why politicians engaged in witchcraft (60.2%). Again, the study found out that some politicians engaged in witchcraft because it guaranteed them winning a political seat (19.6%) while some politicians engaged in witchcraft because it was a norm (7.1%) and as to whether witchcraft was powerful (7.1%). Historically it is believed that traditional leaders in Africa relied on divination and mysticism (Mutiba, 2011). Witchcraft has played a role in rebellions, fighting wars, gaining independence and is often seen at election time (BBC, 2005). Therefore, witchcraft belief is abundant among politicians who are perceived to use it to bring them luck needed to win in elections at all levels (The Voice, 2012). Since African politics is mainly characterized by irregularities, power struggles and authoritarianism, selfishness and greediness dominates minds of politicians who want to be in power for personal gains (Maxwell, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the course of this work, the researchers were able to explore and harness valuable data on the effects of witchcraft practices on the electoral process in Anambra State of Nigeria. From this research, it was discovered that despite the negative perception of witchcraft practices in the society, many politicians of diverse faith inclination do sometimes employ witchcraft in their electioneering process for varied reasons. It was discovered that the services of witch doctors are readily available and also, easily accessible; with promise of influencing the outcome of a given election. This is what attracts persons of diverse religious and academic background to indulge in the practice. Given that the practice somewhat flows from the traditional cultural belief system of the people, the above facts are not too surprising; and may have encouraged some level of legal recognition of the practice

Witchcraft is a complex, controversial and mysterious issue and some understand it as a social vice; others consider it as a religious, a scientific, a dubious practice which causes pain, suffering and all sorts of evil. The concept of witchcraft continues to elicit debate among various stakeholders over its applicability in electoral processes in various. Based on the study, witchcraft has been applied to influence people's perceptions, opinions and beliefs towards electoral processes across the world. Although witchcraft practices have existed in the entire history of human existence, it has evolved over the modern times and become a worldwide phenomenon and prehistoric art that politicians use to win elections.

Africa, in comparisons with other continents of the world, is economically backward. In this regard, witchcraft as a manifestation of traditional worldviews clearly is a major factor retarding Africa's economic development. Similarly, the economic backwardness facing many African Nations can largely be traced to the fact that the prevailing notions of the occult discourage people from assuming personal responsibility and, rather, lead them to attribute good or ill fortunes to factors outside themselves (Leistner, 2014).

The elections are competitive processes that require fairness, transparency and equity. There is an urgent need for an ongoing engagement by various stakeholders in Nigeria and beyond, to review and map up transformative strategies of addressing the issue of witchcraft before, during and after election in order to breed an egalitarian society and culture. This will in turn bring about trust by the citizens in the electoral process and in their leaders. The fear of reprisals arising from such elections should be addressed if the country needs supportive and cooperative citizenry in the development process.

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