

Electoral Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the effects of electoral violence on the democratization efforts and democratic consolidation in Nigeria since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999. The nation's elections, at all levels of governance, are characterized by violence. Violence mar as high as 70 percent of Nigerian elections resulting in deaths, destruction of properties, maiming, etc. Successive governments have made frantic efforts to institutionalize and consolidate democracy in the country, embarking on various electoral reforms with little or no result with respect to curbing electoral violence. Thus, the main objective of this study is to show that the high rate of electoral violence witnessed over the years has weakened and discredited the democratic consolidation drive of the Nigerian state. The theoretical framework adopted in this study is the "State Fragility Theory". However, the author's modified version of "State Compromise Theory" was used to analyze the nature, character and reasons for electoral violence in Nigeria and its effects on the institutionalization of democracy in the country. The study used both primary and secondary data. The primary data were mainly drawn from mainly the authors' observations during elections, over the years, while secondary data were drawn from existing literature on the subject matter. The study revealed that the pervasive violence at different elections has greatly discredited and emasculated democratic governance in the country. Violence has become both physical and cathartic. It manifests in form of wanton shooting by political thugs to intimidate voters and electoral officials, so as to snatch election materials, disruption of voting, vote suppression, cancellation and annulment of elections in opposition strongholds, etc. The paper concluded that, to ensure the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, election management bodies must adopt an electoral system that drastically reduces congregation of people at a voting point(s) so as to reduce violence. Some of the recommendations are that election management bodies should deploy appropriate technology to reduce congregation of people at a voting point, transmission of results should be done electronically to minimize human involvement, contacts error and manipulations.

Keywords: Electoral violence, Democratic consolidation, Fragility, System, Thugs, Suppression.

INTRODUCTION

The desire to have a governance system that gives the people the opportunity to take control of the leadership recruitment processes necessitated the clamour for democracy across the world, since the declaration of Fundamental Human Rights at the Paris Summit by the United Nations General Assembly at its Third Session on 10th December, 1948 as Resolution 217 by the then 58 members nations of the organization. This clamour for the institutionalization of democratic governance is strongly supported by international organization and development agencies in the believe that democracy, wherever it is practiced, would guarantee equity, peace and justice and ultimately good governance (Harry, 2008). Essentially, democracy is seen as the panacea for mis-governance by world leaders hence their insistence on the consolidation of democracy in the United Nations member states.

Elections are central features in every democracy. This is because of the moderating and mitigating effects elections have on the process of political recruitment and in ensuring stability in society. Elections enable the citizens of a country to choose from among contestants those they would want to lead them. As Ashindorbe (2018) has argued, elections are significant and crucial pillars in the democratic process since they emphasize the principles of political or popular participation, accountability, legitimacy, justice and rule of law. Indeed, election, when it is free, fair and credible, achieves all these principles and guarantees peaceful transfer of political power as well as political stability.

Historically, elections in Nigeria are replete with violence in the pre-independence and post-independence eras, as witnessed in the 1964, 1983, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections. Essentially, electoral violence had been adduced to be one of the reasons for the collapse of the First and Second Republics in Nigeria. Political thugs and gangs were used to rain violence on opponents, thereby leading to political unrest and eventual military takeover, thus truncating efforts at democratic consolidation. The nature and character of electoral violence in the pre and post 2011 general elections as well as the political violence in the build up to the 2015 elections occasioned the prediction by many world leaders, especially Western leaders that Nigeria will cease to exist after the 2015 general elections. Such was the threat of electoral violence to the corporate existence of Nigeria and consolidation of democratic governance in the country. The 2019 general elections were also characterized by massive electoral violence across the country. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to show that widespread electoral violence witnessed over the years has weakened and discredited democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Essentially, the study will attempt to provide answers to questions such as: why do politicians involve in electoral violence? what is the nature of electoral violence in Nigeria?, what are the effects/impact of electoral violence in Nigeria? And how does electoral violence affect democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

ELECTION AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

Election

Democracy connotes a form of government in which the people periodically choose those who will govern them at the different levels of governance. It is through elections that citizens choose their representatives. It presupposes the exercise of a choice among alternatives and constitutes a veritable and popular means of recruitment of political leadership and determination of issues and policies in democratic societies (Kalagbor, 2001).

Election is an act of choosing by vote the candidates of one's choice for a position, especially political office(s). According to Schumpeter (1988), election is a device for filling an office or post through choice made by a designated body of people, the electorate. Similarly, Nworji and Nworji (2004) describe election as the process of electing qualified candidates into an existing vacant political post following the democratic processes. It is basically a formal decision making process by which a population chooses an individual or group of individuals to hold public office on their behalf for a specific tenure. To Ashindorbe (2018), it refers to the process of selection by votes of a person or persons from among competing candidates for a position, especially a political office. Presenting a broader perspective to the concept, Nwolise (2007) defines election as:

The process of selecting the officers or representatives of an organization or group by the votes of its qualified members. Such an election may be in a university seeking a Vice-Chancellor, a corporate organization choosing a chairman, a political party conducting its primaries to choose its standard bearer for a presidential contest, a nation wanting to choose its president, or an international organization selecting its secretary general.

In simplistic terms, election is a democratic process to choose the peoples' representatives to participate in the governance of a country. As Natarajan (2018) has argued, in a democracy, and only in a democracy, that election gives citizens an opportunity to give their assent or denial to the way the government has been working. Herein lies the accountability principle democracy offers to the people in the sense that political leaders are periodically called to give account of their stewardship through the ballot. It is believed that in a democracy those in government stand for the welfare, well-being and aspirations of the people (Natarajan, 2018). Natarajan (2018) further asserts that, "if the people are satisfied with the performance of those in government at the next election they express their satisfaction by voting to return their representatives or where they are not satisfied they vote them out of office. In a democracy the right to vote during elections is the main way the citizens of a nation influence the decisions about how their country is governed. Therefore, to win an election politicians have to persuade the people to support them. It is for this reason election is very importance. Commenting on the importance of elections, Brown (2003) cited in Wallsworth (2015) posits that "elections provide legitimacy through direct popular participation, and in turn, legitimacy creates capacity for effective governance". Other importance of election are, it is used to check and control the activities of government; through it voters alternate between being the rulers of the polity and subjects of the government, and, by the act of voting the people demonstrate that sovereignty belongs to them, acting as master to select their government to come (Harry, 2014).

The modern method of election, which consists of public choice of government officials, did not emerge until the beginning of the 17th century when the idea of representative government took hold in North America and Europe (Gibbins, Eulah and Webb, 2009). Since then elections have been the usual mechanism by which public offices are filled in modern representative democracies.

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence, on the other hand, refers to any threat of attack or attack meted out against persons or group of persons in relation to an election before, during and after the election. It is usually an organized 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. Fischer (2002) cited in Wallsworth (2015) sees electoral violence as “any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay or to otherwise influence an electoral process”. Similarly, Birch and Muchlinski (2018) describe “electoral violence as coercive force, directed towards electoral actors and/or objects that occur in the context of electoral competition – can occur before, during or after elections and it can target a variety of actors including candidates, activists, poll workers, election observers, journalists and voters.” In the same vein, Sisk (2013) defines electoral violence as “acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetuated to affect an electoral process or that arises in the context of electoral competition.”

What is clear from all the views expressed above is the fact that electoral violence is dangerous to the peace, security, good governance and political stability of a country. It deprives electorates the right to freely choose those who will govern them by subverting “the will of the people”, which is central to democratic tenets and systems of government. Sisk (2013) asserts that electoral violence is orchestrated to affect an electoral process by influencing the process of elections, such as efforts to delay, disrupt or derail a poll and to influence the outcomes; this is done mainly to influence or in the determination of winners in competitive races for political office or to secure approval or disapproval of referendum questions.

To Albert (2007), electoral violence refers to “all forms of organized act 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. While this definition is very close to the other definitions proffered earlier, it stands out with the type of electoral violence it added to the definition thereby broadening the coverage of its articulation of what constitutes electoral violence.

From Galtung and Albert’s views of electoral violence, Ashindorbe (2018) identified three dimensions of electoral violence to include: physical electoral violence, psychological electoral violence and structural electoral violence. To him, physical electoral violence involves all kind of bodily attacks politicians and their supporters rain on one another at party conventions, during campaigns, during elections and when elections results are released most of which culminate in fatalities. Ashindorbe describes psychological electoral violence to be a situation of siege and uncertainty that is created in the minds of the citizens of an impending danger that may occur to them as a result of their participation in the electoral process. This is also known as Cathartic violence, which is tension created in the polity such that apprehension pervade the society, for many citizens and potential voters do not know what might happen during and after the elections because of the rhetoric and utterances of politicians. The third dimension is the structural electoral violence, which Ashindorbe asserts manifest in form of exclusionary and discriminatory policies and practices prevalent in the electoral process. A good example is the outrageous fees required to obtain nomination and expression of intent forms by intending aspirants within political parties which makes it very difficult, if not impossible, by many to be excluded from the electoral process, particularly, those who do not have the financial capacity to satisfy the requirements. Another manifestation of structural electoral violence is the creation of logistic bottle-necks, sometimes deliberately built into the electoral process with

the intention of circumventing the rules and subvert the will of the electorate in connivance with some politicians, officials of the election management body and security agencies (Ashindorbe, 2018).

DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

Democracy

Western social scientists have traced the origin of the concept, democracy, to the ancient city states of Athens, which are in modern day Greece. Scholars who belong to this school of thought assert that the term “democracy” was coined in Ancient Greece in 5000BC (World Bank Encyclopedia, 2006). It has been argued that the tenets and practice of democracy was later transmitted to other parts of the world including Nigeria, through colonialism (Harry, 2008). The view that democracy has its origin from Athens in Greece was strongly debunked by African Scholars like Alex Gboyega, Leo Oyewale and Sule Kano. According to them, in many pre-colonial political systems in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, there were contextual manifestations of the principles and practice of democracy, as was witnessed in the city states of Athens. Thus, democracy, at least in its contextual sense, is not alien to Africa and Nigeria. Some pre-colonial political systems that experienced democracy were the Igbos, Tivs, Yorubas, Kalabaris and Ibibios among others. What then is democracy?

Like many other concepts in the social sciences, democracy has been given different meanings and definitions by different scholars to emphasize their understandings of the practice. To Lijphart (1999), the differences in understanding and views of democracy are largely connected to ways different democratic societies are organized and run. Ake posits that irrespective of the differences in definition, the meaning of democracy is uncharacteristically precise. To him, democracy means “popular power, rule by the demos”. In other words, it is a political system where the people vote for government of their choice, its decisions, such as questions of whether to approve or reject laws or policy proposals, etc. It follows therefore that popular or mass participation in the governance processes is a major ingredients in a democracy. Another key element of a democratic system is consultations before major decisions are reached. It is, perhaps, for this reason a one-time United States President, Abraham Lincoln in 1863, in an address at Gettysburg, defined democracy as “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. What is clear in this definition is the fact that in a democracy the government is constituted from among the people for themselves to serve their collective interests or carry out their wishes (Harry, 2008). Essentially, in a democracy the rights of the people are usually guaranteed through constitutional provisions and there is the availability of independent judiciary to secure these rights. Whereas free, fair, credible, open and non-violent elections are critical ingredients of representative and constitutional democracy, other principal elements of democracy are: respect for the rule of law, multiple political parties, free and objective media, independence of the judiciary; majority rule and minority rights, political equality and popular consent by the people. With respect to Africa (which includes Nigeria) Ake (1996:132) prescribes the kind of Democracy which Africa needs to include a democracy in which the people have some real decision making power over and above the formal consent of electoral choice which, among others, should include a powerful legislature and decentralization of power to local democratic institutions; a democracy that places emphasis on concrete political and socio-economic rights and not abstract political rights; a democracy that recognizes collective right together with individual rights, such as the rights of ethnic groups, sub-nationalities and communities and a democracy of incorporation or inclusiveness which makes

provision for representation of youths, women's groups, labour unions and other mass organizations in the legislative organs of government.

Democratic consolidation

Democratic consolidation, on the other hand, refers to all efforts geared towards eradicating or reducing threats to a newly instituted democratic system of government so as to allow it to grow to maturity for a sustained period and deliver on the dividends of democracy, such as improving the quality of life of the citizens. According to Schedler (1998), "originally the idea of democratic consolidation was meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, which was to achieve durability of the regimes or of expanding their life expectancy for a long time and of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression". Similarly, Grassi (2011) described democratic consolidation as "the process of defining and firmly establishing the essential characteristics of the structures and norms inherent in a democratic regime". Considering the essential characteristics and norms for the consolidation of democracy in a society, Schedler (1998) provided a list of conditions that are imperative for the attainment of democratic consolidation. To him the conditions include:

Popular legitimation, the diffusion of democratic values, the neutralization of anti-system actors, civilian supremacy over the military, the elimination of authoritarian enclaves, party building, the organization of functional interests, the stabilization of electoral rules, the routinization of politics, the decentralization of state power, the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, judicial reform, the alleviation of poverty and economic stabilization.

Similarly, democratic consolidation or a consolidated democracy can also be used to designate a democracy which is unlikely to breakdown or collapse despite strain, stress and challenges facing it or as Okon and Udoudo (2010) put it: "consolidation of democracy simply means the entrenchment or upholding of values of democracy". It is measured by the extent to which a country has regular free and fair elections, genuine contestation over selection of leaders, citizenship participation in the electoral process, etc. (Uya, 2008). Linz and Stephen (1996:11) have listed five mutually inclusive supportive conditions for a consolidated democracy in addition to the existence of a state to include: the development of a free and lively civil society; a relatively autonomous and valued political society; the rule of law to guarantee citizens' freedom and enforcement of their rights; an effective, efficient and dynamic state bureaucracy and a strong, productive and progressive and prosperous economy (economic society).

In addition, Grassi (2000) posits that economic reforms and expansion are necessary conditions that help in the sustenance of democratic regimes. To him, "economic expansion reduces the conflicts resulting from inequality or other social cleavages and accordingly mutes tendency to political alienation, polarization and destabilizing social violence."

In simplistic terms, a country can only be said to be democratic "when democracy becomes routinized, institutionalized and normalized to the extent that acting outside its tenets and practices or desecration of democratic norms is both unappealing and disadvantages for every politician and other political actor in the polity" (Gorokhovskaia, 2017). Contrary to popular belief, Gorokhovskaia (2017) has observed that, durability of democracies do not appear to exempt or insulate them from a degradation in the quality of their democracy. It follows therefore that democratic consolidation is not necessarily about how long the democratic

regime has lasted, but how well are the depth of the tenets, practices and processes of democracy or how well do politicians and political actors uphold or observe the democratic principles in the society. Simply put, what are the behaviour, attitude and disposition of political office holders and the citizenry towards the democratic culture of “one man one vote”, rule of law, protection of human rights and peaceful co-existence?

NIGERIA’S DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

The Fourth Republic was heralded on the 29th of May 1999 after about 26 years of military rule (1983 – 1999). By 1999, of the country’s 39 years of independence, it had been under military rule for 29 years, thus making the return to civil rule a joyous one both for the citizens and the international community. Since then, the country has been under various civilian administrations. The question is: What has been Nigeria’s democratic experience since 1999, especially with respect to elections and electioneering activities?

Nigeria’ democratic experience since 1999 has been characterized by both positive and negative outcomes, with the negatives far outweighing the positives. Starting with the positives, for the first time, Nigeria has witnessed 21 years of uninterrupted “democratic” governance and administrations from 1999 to 2020. The First Republic lasted for about six years (1960 to 1966), while the Second Republic lasted for about four years (1979 to 1983), and the Third Republic which was inchoate lasted for about three years (1990 to 1993). Second, under the Fourth Republic, Nigerians witnessed one democratically elected government handing over to another democratically elected government for the first time too. Finally, for the first time too an incumbent was defeated in a presidential election by an opposition party’s candidate. All these were positive outcomes in the democratic consolidation efforts of the country.

Unfortunately, what is being practiced in Nigeria cannot truly pass for a democracy anywhere in the world. Many observers have described the form of government in Nigeria since 1999 as mere “civilians rule” because Nigeria is practicing democracy without democrats. According to Honourable Patrick Obahiagbon, the form of government, Nigeria have had since 1999 could be best described as “Kakistomobocracy”, which refers to a system of government in which leaders emerge by forcing themselves on the people with disregard to the tenets of democracy and rule of law and are mainly interested in looting state treasury. This is closely related to the form of government Plato described as “Timocracy”, which is a government in which ambition for honour, power and military glory motivates the rulers (Harry, 2017).

Indeed, the democratic experience since 1999 is fraught with so many undemocratic tendencies and practices. For instance, section 221 of the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, (as amended) provides that only political parties could present candidates for elections into elective offices. However, all the political parties suffer from the problem of internal party democracy. Selection of party candidates always results in serious fight among party members to the extent that in the 2019 general elections, the All Progressives Congress (APC) could not present candidates for all available elective offices in Rivers and Zamfara States. The intra-party conflict or violence is not limited to APC only, but it cuts across all the political parties in the country.

Furthermore, the country has also witnessed widespread political party sponsored thuggery and gangsterism (Harry, 2008). Party thugs, usually heavily armed, are often sent to disrupt

campaigns of opposition parties in areas under its control, disrupt electoral process, abduct electoral officials during elections, chasing away supporters of opposition parties, etc, are all common occurrences in the country. These most often lead to violent clashes between opposing parties in many states across the country resulting in loss of lives and destruction of properties. There are also instances where the government in power especially at the centre used the security and coercive apparatus of the state at its disposal to promote its political interests including perpetration and perpetuation of electoral violence in order to manipulate and determine electoral outcomes in its favour and those of its preferred candidates, within or outside its party.

In addition the country has witnessed wanton cross carpeting by politicians from one party to another, an indication of lack of a clear ideology in the party politics of the country. Hence, it is not surprising to see a candidate elected as a member of the supposedly “conservative” People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and in next the three months he/she has jumped ship to join the supposedly “radical” APC in the legislature or executive. This creates political visionlessness and directionlessness in the polity.

The country has also experienced high profile political killings like those of Marshall Harry, A.K. Dikibo, Bola Ige, Dipo Dina, a Governorship candidate in Ogun, Engineer Funso Williams, a Governorship candidate in Lagos, the Personal Secretary to the former Edo State Governor Comrade Adams Oshiomhole in 2012, etc (Harry, 2018). All of these put a dent of the country’s democratic experience.

Obviously, the electoral processes in Nigeria have been characterized by so much fraud and other irregularities thereby denying the people the right to genuinely choose who will govern them. Essentially, it has been perpetuated by the election management body, that is, officials of the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) and their security collaborators. For example, it is not uncommon to see the police providing cover for politicians to rig elections through ballot stuffing, vote-buying, manipulation of elections results, falsification of elections results, deliberate non-utilization of card-readers in some states, etc. These have negative consequences for the consolidation of democracy in the country.

Lastly, it is important to note that the judiciary has also had its ups and downs in the Fourth Republic. For instance, there have been quite a number of landmark judgments in the country delivered by the judiciary, particularly under Justice Alfa Belgore and Justice Idris Kutigi as Chief Justices of Nigeria (CJN), which have demonstrated that the judiciary is “the last hope of the common man”. Interestingly, during this period the Supreme Court delivered landmark judgments in *Attorney-General of Lagos State v. Attorney-General of the Federation* (2004), when it held that the President of Nigeria had no legal right or power to suspend or withhold the statutory allocation due or payable to Lagos State. In *Obi V INEC* (2007), the Supreme Court ordered Dr. Andy Uba to vacate the office of the Governor of Anambra State with immediate effect to enable Dr. Peter Obi to exhaust his term of office. Other cerebral cases include the return of Rashid Ladoja and Joshua Dariye as governors of Oyo and Plateau States respectively, after their unlawful impeachments (Harry, 2008). The judiciary under these justices gave Nigerians hope in the drive towards democratic consolidation.

However, many observers have agreed that the gains made by the judiciary since the return to democracy has been reverse by Justice Mohammed Tanko since ascension to the office of CJN in 2019 and as the head of the Judiciary. Recently, it has been observed that the courts are serving as the major determinants of who wins election rather than the people through ballots as declared by INEC. Also, there are many controversial and inconsistent decisions of the Supreme Court in its ruling on election results and outcomes. The most controversial and inconsistent judgment being that of the Imo State Governorship election held on the 9th of March 2019. In one judgment the Supreme Court ruled that Uche Nwosu was the bonafide candidate for the Action Alliance (AA) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) in the 2019 Imo State Governorship Election and was disqualified for flying the flags of two political parties in the same election. By this Judgment Senator Hope Uzodinma was not a candidate at the 9th March, 2019 Imo State governorship election. However, two weeks later, the same Supreme Court held that Senator Hope Uzodinma was the winner of the 9th March Governorship Election in Imo State as a candidate of the APC. Such controversial and inconsistent judgments have negative consequences for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Indeed, many now doubt the judiciary in its capacity to deliver justice in the polity and that is recipe for disaster.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted the “State Fragility Theory” which the authors modified as “State Compromise theory” to discuss the nature, character and reasons for electoral violence in Nigeria and its effects on the consolidation of democracy in the country.

The State Fragility Theory gained prominence in the mid-1990s among the international development agencies such as the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to explain the reasons for the development challenges in the developing countries. The argument is that a state is considered to be fragile in terms of the functionality of the state. The emphasis is on the weakness of its capacity and/or will (the policies, governance and institutions) to perform a set of functions (Van der Borgh, 2008). To Ferreira (2015) state fragility attempts to establish the functions of the state and the properties that it needs to exhibit in order to fulfill these functions. The main properties of a well-functioning state are capacity, authority and legitimacy; hence the main assumption of the theory is that a state is fragile due to:

(1) Lack of capacity – that is weakness of the state to perform its functions of providing basic public services for the citizens and attendant consequences this has for internal stability; (2) Legitimacy – that is, where the state becomes a repressive autocracy and has lost support of the people and (3) authority – that is, a situation where the state has no control and is unable to provide security for its citizens.

To Eke and Oghoator (2018), electoral violence occurs because the state is weak and has failed in the effective discharge of its responsibilities to the people or when it does not respond to popular demands. However, the state compromise theory as modified by the authors hold that electoral violence do not occur because of lack of capacity, authority or legitimacy, but the state is complicit in perpetuating electoral violence to support the government in power. Therefore, it is not uncommon to observe the use of “Federal might” to deliver candidates during elections in Nigeria.

The theory of “state compromise” is relevant for this paper on electoral violence and democratic consolidation because it points to negative effects of complicit acts of the state in the country’s

drive towards consolidation of democratic governance. For democracy to be consolidated security agencies and electoral officials' collaborations with the ruling party, state sponsored thuggery and gangsterism to disrupt voting in opposition strongholds and cancellation of votes by INEC in opposition areas must stop be nipped in the bud.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted both secondary and primary methods of data collection; hence it is both qualitative and quantitative. The secondary data were drawn from textbooks, journal articles, magazines, discussion programmes, newspapers facsimiles etc. On the other hand, the primary data were drawn from the authors' observations during elections over the years as participants in the electoral processes and information gathered from their interactions with a cross section of other citizens who are also participants and observers of elections in the country. Content Analysis and Descriptive Statistics such as percentage distribution were used to facilitate proper understanding and analysis of effects of electoral violence on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In successive elections in Nigeria, the three strands of electoral violence earlier discussed, which had been clearly captured in literature, were witnessed by the authors as well as other observers who the authors interacted with in the course of this study. These acts of violence hamper free, fair and credible elections and serve as hindrance to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This study will attempt to provide answers to certain questions. For the avoidance of doubt, these questions are:

1. Why do politicians involve in electoral violence in Nigeria?
2. What is the nature of electoral violence in Nigeria?
3. What are the effects/impact of electoral violence in Nigeria?, and
4. How does electoral violence affect democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

Reasons for Electoral Violence in Nigeria

A number of reasons have been adduced to be responsible for the seemingly unending electoral violence in Nigeria, particularly since the commencement of the Fourth Republic. First, some observers have argued that, Nigeria, being a low income country with the attendant high level of poverty, occupation of public office has become the surest way of generating wealth or becoming rich, hence the high incidence of electoral violence. Thus, it is not surprising to see an individual, who was a near pauper, becoming rich overnight once elected or appointed into a public office.

Second, it has also been observed that some political leaders in the country encourage electoral violence both in their conducts and utterances. For instance, leaders give instructions to their followers to deliver their polling units or wards by capturing electoral materials, through vote-buying, and compromising electoral officials, etc. Such acts encourage electoral violence. Similarly, the President, Muhammadu Buhari, was alleged to have said in 2011 that if he did not win the presidential election "the monkeys and the baboons will swim in their blood". This led to widespread carnage in some northern states after he lost the 2011 presidential election. Many electoral officials, including National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members on election duties were killed in cold blood in a post-election violence. Also, former President Olusegun Obasanjo had once described the 2003 election as one of "do-or-die". This so called politics of

“do or die” is a recipe for disaster as every candidate makes it a must to win, thereby making election a war-like situation across the country.

Third, many observers believe that the politics of “winner takes it all” is a major motivator to electoral violence in Nigeria. Most often, those who contest for elective positions do not do so for service to the people but for their enrichment and aggrandizement. Essentially, the reason for violence during elections is state capture for plunder of state resources to the exclusion non-party members. Reflecting on the senseless bloodletting that had characterized electioneering activities in this country, Majeed (2019) posits that the electoral processes have steadily degenerated into criminal franchise of power grab and state capture for self-service and self-aggrandizement. As Ochulor (2011) puts it:

Many Nigerian politicians have this spoils-view of politics and political activities. That to a large extent accounts for the abuses in government offices we daily experience in this country... for most Nigerians, politics and political power are about the national cake... and whoever has the national cake is he who has the support of people. The negative impact of money in the political process has marginalized competent Nigerians with vision and leadership credentials. It has created a class of mediocre rulers who succumb to corruption and undemocratic practices (p.267).

Lastly, there is the culture of impunity that pervades our body politics such that those who perpetuate electoral violence, because most often, it is executed in favour of the government or ruling party, are never brought to justice. Since there is no punishment for such bad behaviour, there is no deterrent. Rather such individuals who maim, kill and destroy properties during elections are rewarded with appointments, contracts, etc, thereby encouraging younger ones to jump on the bandwagon.

Nature of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Preponderance of views with regards to the nature and character of electoral violence in Nigeria suggest that it is very pervasive and cuts across all the states of the federation in varied degrees. It was argued that, unlike fine wine that gets better each passing day, in Nigeria, electoral violence gets worse in every circle of election, as politicians device new approaches to electoral violence.

Election observers, including the authors and many others the authors interacted with in the course of the study, were of the view that, most often acts of electoral violence in Nigeria were state sponsored in the sense that security agencies controlled by the government deployed for election duties usually turn a blind eye when thugs unleash terror on voters and opposition parties supporters on election day. This view is consistent with the findings of Wallsworth (2015), when he considered it plausible that in Nigeria, electoral violence is occasioned by government's repression of potential political competition.

In addition, arrests and detention of opposition parties' leaders on the eve of election by security agencies have become a common phenomenon and this gives credence to the earlier assertion of state sponsorship of electoral violence in Nigeria. A viral video on social and mainstream media showed how military officers ransacked the residence of some PDP Leaders before and during the 2019 general elections in Rivers State. Furthermore, on March 15, 2019,

the spokesperson of INEC, Mr. Festus Okoye reportedly accused soldiers of intimidation and unlawful arrest of election officials in Rivers State following the 9th March, 2019 governorship election in the state. This led to the initial suspension of the collation of election results and the subsequent investigation of the incidence. Similarly, the killing of Dr. Ferry N. Ggberegbe, a PDP Collation agent at Bori collation centre, by Security men suspected to be men of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), for preventing them from snatching election result sheets to manipulate the 9th March, 2019 governorship election in favour of the African Action Congress (ACC) governorship candidate in Rivers State proves state compromise and state sponsorship of electoral violence in Nigeria.

There is also the threat of use of violence in what has become popularly known as the use of “federal might” to intimidate members of opposition parties and their sympathizers among the voters. Most often, the politicians who threaten fire and brain-stone during elections usually take their children and loved ones to safe havens, including overseas to escape the impending danger. Another dimension of electoral violence is what Ashindorbe (2018) called “structural violence”, which involves “the logistic bottle neck sometimes deliberately built into the electoral process with the intention of circumventing the rules and subverting the will of the people with the active connivance of some politicians, officials of the election management body and security agencies”. Thus, it is not surprising to see INEC declare election results irrespective of the flaws in the process, especially, if it is in favour of the government of the day. Essentially, electoral violence in Nigeria may also take the form of disruption of voting process, vote suppression; vote cancellation, annulment of election in opposition stronghold, etc. It is important to note that security agents who refuse to compromise their stand are beaten up by party thugs with impunity or transferred by higher authorities. Some good examples are the manhandling of a Deputy Commissioner of Police, Kola Okonola in Brass Local Government Area in Bayelsa State during the 2019 Presidential election. He was beaten up by thugs. The Commissioner of Police, Mohammed Wakili, who refused to allow rigging at the 9th March 2019 governorship election in Kano was transferred abruptly for not carrying out “lawful” instructions.

Violence in its multifaceted manifestation is so palpable during elections that most Nigerians describe politics as a “dirty game” in that it involves brutal force by political actors to capture state power at all cost. Indeed, it is the violent and bloody nature of the Nigerian electoral processes that made the former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to repeatedly say, during the 2015 general elections, that his ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian.

Impact of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Elections play crucial roles in politico-socio-economic development and political stability of a country. The participants and authors observed that electoral violence has various consequences and/or effects on the political system. For instance, it was revealed that electoral violence discourages the electorate from participating in the electoral processes and this lead to apathy and low voters’ turnout. No doubt, Nigeria has witnessed steady decline in voters turn out in successive elections. Below are data for Presidential elections voters’ turnout from 1999 to 2019.

Table 1: Voters Turnout in Presidential Elections 1999 – 2019

Election for	Date for Election	Total Vote Cast	Total Registered Voters	Turn out Percentage
President	20 February, 1999	30,280,052	57,938,945	52.26%
President	19 April, 2003	42,018,735	60,823,022	69.08%
President	21 April, 2007	35,397,517	61,567,036	57.49%
President	16 April, 2011	39,469,484	73,000,000	54.07%
President	28 March, 2015	29,432,083	67,422,005	42%
President	23 February, 2019	28,614,190	84,004,084	37%

Source: Constructed from Election Guide, Democracy Assistance and Election News (2020) www.electionguide.org/countries/101/158/ and Yaga Africa Report 2019

The table above shows that voters' turnout declined in every next election, from 57 percent of total number of registered voters in 2007, to 54 percent in 2011, 42 percent in 2015 and 37 percent in 2019. Thirty-seven (37) percent was the lowest even though the number of registered voters was the highest in 2019. Many observers have attributed the low turnout to high incidence of violence that characterized electioneering activities in the periods leading up to the election proper. The study by Collier and Vincent (2014) cited in Wallsworth (2015) found violence to be responsible for low voters' turnout during elections. Many voters interacted with categorically stated that they no longer go out to vote during elections because of widespread violence.

Also, electoral violence brings to question the legitimacy of a government that emerged through a violent electoral process. When government emerges through violence prone elections, often times, it does not represent the will of the voters and here lies the legitimacy question. As Kerr (2009) has argued, it is crucial for elections to be seen as free and fair; because when elections are perceived to be free, fair and credible, it makes the electorate to be "more satisfied with democracy, more supportive of the ruling government and even members of the losing political party are more likely to accept defeat". It follows, therefore, that when the people do not see elections to be free, fair and credible, they tend to reject the authority of the government that emerged from such process.

Furthermore, electoral violence leads to destruction of lives and properties. Elections in Nigeria result in killing and destruction of properties and this seems to be on the increase with every circle of election. For instance, Human Rights Watch disclosed that in 2003, elections were marred by fraud as well as serious incidence of violence that left at least 100 people dead and many more injured. Similarly, the dead toll in 2007 elections was put at 300 people. In addition, Human Rights Watch (2011) noted that the presidential election in 2011 divided the country along ethnic and religious lines. In northern Nigeria, following the 2011 Presidential election, electoral violence resulted in demise of over 800 persons. According to the Report, the violence started when it became clear that Muhammadu Buhari had lost, his supporters took to the streets and towns in the North to protest alleged rigging of the polls. In 2019, available data put the dead toll at 626 people.

One of the areas where electoral violence led to destruction of lives and properties during the 2019 Presidential election was Abonnema in Rivers State. Eye witnesses account have it that after a soldier was killed on election day soldiers shot at residents killing an unknown number

of people. The witnesses assert that shooting began when arm wielding political thugs, covered by the soldiers, were carting away electoral materials from INEC Office to the displeasure of members of the opposition parties, who became provoked, protested and violence ensued. Such account could be found in many other locations across the federation.

Electoral Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Democracy encourages popular and mass participation in the governance processes beginning with involvement in the electioneering activities. Indeed, popular participation is a hallmark of a democratic system. Electoral violence discourages popular and mass participation, which is very critical in the consolidation of democracy. Electoral violence is antithetical to democracy for it is a subversion of the will of the people because in violence prone elections, results, very often, do not reflect the pattern of votes at the elections. Commenting on the importance of popular participation in the consolidation of democracy, Alapiki (2004) asserts that democracy remains the most popular and fascinating form of government to all people and government throughout the world because of its emphasis on the right to political participation through elections. With the increasing spate of violence in every circle of election, Eke and Oghoator (2018) opined that the consolidation of democracy in the country through the conduct of free, fair and credible election has remained an illusion. Also, democracy is considered to be the best form of government by many international organizations and development agencies because of the accountability principle embedded in its practice through periodic elections. Basically, when the people are dissatisfied with the way a government discharges its functions, the accountability principle implies that they would be able to demand that the government live up to its responsibility or change the government at the next election. However, in Nigeria, this is usually not the case because elections are characterized by widespread violence. In such circumstance, the governments will not be accountable since they do not necessarily need the votes of the people to be elected into power. This negates the democratic consolidation desires of the country. Furthermore, it creates lack of fate in the democratic process, and government as being capable of delivering on the “dividends of democracy”. It is not therefore uncommon to hear certain people in the country wish for military takeover of government, describing the violence through which most civilian governments emerge under the present democratic dispensation as equal to or worse than a government that came to power through a coup d’état. The above factors pose serious challenges to the consolidation of democracy in the country.

CONCLUSION

The imperative of the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, Africa’s most populous nation, need not be over-emphasized. Indeed, Nigeria has experimented with democracy for over 20 unbroken years since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999. However, democratic culture has not been firmly rooted in the polity largely due to the fact that the country is practicing democracy without democrats. There is a very high prevalence of electoral violence in every circle of election since 1999 and the violence is obviously on the increase, thereby discouraging popular and mass participation in the democratic system. No doubt, a free, fair, transparent, and credible and periodic election is the hallmark of democracy. Electoral violence lead to voters’ apathy or low voter turnout and this weakens democratic structures, institutions and discredits governance anywhere in the world. Therefore, the conclusion of the paper is that, for consolidation of democracy to take firm root in Nigeria, the election management bodies must adopt an electoral system that drastically reduces the gathering of people at a place that is polling units, so as to reduce violence. It is believed that when voting is not done by people

coming together in their numbers on a particular day, incidences of violence would be reduced to the barest minimum in the country. In other words, the necessity to amend the Electoral Act and other relevant laws to introduce e-voting as well as strengthen these entire electoral processes will go a long way to reduce electoral violence and guarantee sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be broad-based electoral reforms that would make the card-reader the only means of accreditation of voters during elections all over the federation.
2. The election management body (INEC) should deploy technology to reduce congregation of people or voters at a voting point. This will reduce drastically the possibility of hijack of electoral materials, both sensitive and non-sensitive materials, that often leads to violence.
3. Also, manual computation and transmission of election results should be discouraged and in its place electronic transmission of election results be approved by law to be the only means of transmission of results from the polling units to the INEC data bank (server). This would minimize human involvement, human error and manipulation at the different collation centers before the final announcement of results.
4. Where elections are characterized by violence results should not be accepted and announced. Rather, perpetrators of the violence must be made to face the law and be punished accordingly.

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