

Political Violence and the Sustenance of Democracy In Nigeria

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Abstract: Nigeria since independence in 1960 has grappled with the problem of consolidating her hard earned democracy. From the post colonial period, elections conducted in the country have been consistently marred by irregularities and unprecedented electoral violence which had undermined our democratic experiments and in extreme cases threatened the corporate existence of the country. This study is therefore an attempt to evaluate the impact of political violence on the survival of Nigerian democratic experience. It equally examines the predisposing factors that fuel electoral violence before, during and after elections in the country. The research work is qualitative as data for this study were got mainly from verified secondary sources such as articles from reputable journals, publications from independent bodies, newspapers, conference and workshop papers. The above sources was supplemented by structured interviews granted to the researcher by political actors and electorates alike, which was designed specifically on the basis of the subject matter. It was found that political violence in Nigeria is as a result of poor orientation on the part of political actors on the purpose for the acquisition and consolidation of political powers. Put differently, politicians perceive elective positions as avenues to skew public wealth for personal aggrandisement, hence politics is seen as a zero sum game; a do or die affair. It is on the basis of this startling revelation that the study recommends for value reorientation among political actors so that Nigerian politics could be played in the spirit of sportsmanship and with a high sense of decorum. This, it is expected, will help in no small way to eliminate electoral violence and consequently enthrone sustainable democracy devoid of irregularities in the country.

Keywords: Political Violence, Democracy, Election.

I. Introduction

There is no doubt that democratic rule has gradually swept across the countries of the world. Initially, the western countries were at the forefront in the spread of the message of democracy and the benefits which any country that adopts its tenets stands to gain in governance. Abraham Lincoln, a one-time American President, defined democracy as “the government of the people by the people and for the people”. His definition captures the meaning of direct democracy which was in operation in the Greek City States where average adult citizens assembled at the city centres to deliberate and possibly reach acceptable consensus on crucial local and national issues necessary for their collective survival.

However, with the upsurge in population and complexities that now characterize the modern state, direct democracy was no longer feasible. Direct democracy was replaced with representative democracy. It is on the basis of this perspective that democracy is seen as the “social system of administering a nation state where parties and independent candidates compete for elective positions in a free and fair election atmosphere, and which citizens are legally empowered to choose those who will run the affairs of the state in a given period” (Obakhedo, 2011:99).

Representative democracy provides ample opportunity for citizens at regular intervals to select those who will steer the ship of governance through periodic credible elections. By election we mean the process of selecting leaders or representatives of the people through the votes of eligible electorates. Elections by and large are expected to be competitive, free and fair both substantively and procedurally, and in which the ability of the elected representatives to exercise decision making power is subject to the rule of law and usually moderated by a constitution that emphasizes the protection of the rights and freedom of individuals (Wikipedia, 2009). Credible elections guarantee the sovereignty of the people who, in the true sense of the word, hold the destiny of political contestants in their hands. Moreso, free, fair and credible elections bestow on government the legitimate authority to, on the one hand, initiate and implement policies while on the other hand, empower the citizens to hold governments accountable for their actions and/or inactions. Credible elections devoid of irregularities and violence are therefore crucial for sustainable democratic governance, political stability and national development (Uguru, 2015).

However, inspite of the centrality of peaceful, credible, free and fair election and the legal cum constitutional machinations put in place to enthrone credible election process, experiences overtime have shown that elections in Nigeria have been riddled with violence. According to Obakhedo (2011:100), “the contest

normally put the toga of violence because some politicians usually want to cut corners.” Desperate politicians who vie for various positions flout with impunity laid down electoral laws and other enshrined codes of conduct simply to achieve their inordinate political ambitions. Elections in Nigeria have been generally described as a do or die affair, where every contestant tries at all cost to undo his perceived political rivals. Consequently, cases of arson, high profile killings of opponents, maiming of unsuspecting electorates, snatching of electoral materials and general destruction of properties always becomes the order of the day. In other words, anarchy and chaos reign supreme. Abbass (2008:2), aptly captured the political atmosphere of Nigeria in election seasons in the ensuing words:

Conflict ridden situations have historically featured in all elections conducted in Nigeria since the 1950s. Hence, issues surrounding the electioneering processes potentially relate to violence and violation of the rights of individuals. Thus, rather than serve as a means and a process of exercising legitimate political rights, elections in Nigeria have since independence, turned out to be serious political liability, causing serious political turmoil and threatening the survival of corporate Nigeria.

Thus, whenever election periods draw near, there are usually palpable fears engulfing the well meaning citizens of the country over the serious dangers that may trail the processes. This is because there are always cases of high incidence of political thuggery and uncontrollable violence characterized by wanton destruction of lives and properties; elections in Nigeria can best be described as warfare (Ake, 2001; Adekanye, 1989; Nnoli, 1984 cited in Abbass, 2008). Hate speeches that cast aspersions on political opponents have now become a recurrent decimal especially during the period electioneering campaigns. All these ugly developments, have been implicated to have collectively undermined our hard earned democratic experiments and equally threatened the foundation of Nigeria.

It is against this background that this research work becomes germane to evaluate the impact of political violence on the sustainability of Nigerian democracy. For ease of understanding, this study is divided into the introduction, followed by the conceptual analysis. This third segment dwell on the theoretical foundation on which the study is anchored, the fourth segment traces electoral violence in Nigeria. This is followed by the forms of electoral violence; predisposing factors for electoral violence; measures to curb electoral violence for sustainable democracy in Nigeria and finally the work was drawn to a conclusion.

II. Conceptual Analysis

At this segment of our discourse, we are going to elucidate on the underlying concepts that form the corner stone of this research exercise. The key words that are to be operationalized include- election, political violence and democracy.

Election: Election, no doubt, is one of the defining features of representative democracy. It paves way for citizens who are within the voting age in a country to exercise their franchise in determining who govern them. Casting of votes during election is a powerful weapon to either select those contestants adjudged to have good tract records or vote out those leaders who fail to fulfill their campaign promises.

However, Dye (2001), defined election as a major instrument for the recruitment of political leadership in democratic societies; it is the key to effective participation in a democratic dispensation and the means through which people give their consent to government. Roger (1982), sees election as the process through which electorates choose by voting officers either to act on their behalf or to represent them in an assembly with a view to governing or making administration. To Heywood (2000), election is a device for filling an office or post through choices made by a designated body of people called electorates. Election simply means the process through which eligible electorates cast their votes in order to choose from among political contestants that vie for various elective positions for the purpose of sound leadership, quality representation and good governance.

Political Violence: African democracies have unarguably been associated with violence even with slightest provocation (Bangbose, 2012). But that does not suggest that it is only peculiar to African countries; it is seen as a universal phenomenon. In this study, political violence and electorate violence are used interchangeably. By violence we mean the illegitimate or unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will or desires of others (Kolawole, 1988). Political/electoral violence means all forms of organized acts or threats- physical, psychological and structural geared towards intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying or otherwise influencing an electoral process (Nwolise, 2007 citing Albert). In a comprehensive sense, political violence is the use or threat of physical act or a considerable destructive use of force carried out by an individual or a group of individuals within a political system against another individual or a group of individuals and/or property within a political system for the purpose of causing injury or death to persons and/or damage to property and whose underlying aim, choice of target or victims, surrounding circumstances and effect have political significance, that is designed to modify the behaviour of others in the existing arrangement of power structure; or directed to a change in politics, systems

and territory of government (Honderich, 1989; Anifowose, 1982; Edigin and Obakhedo, 2010). From the foregoing, it could be stated that political violence is the use of force or threat of it to change the voting behaviour pattern of electorates during election. It may be physical, emotional, psychological and otherwise with the sole intent to intimidate and harass voters to change their minds before, during and after voting.

Democracy: According to Abbass (2008), democracy is a system of government elected by persons, on periodic elections. It is the system of government which creates room for electorates to periodically make informed choices about the numerous political contestants to be recruited to administer the generality of the people. Democracy is succinctly captured in the following lines:

Meaningful and extensive competitions among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) for all positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular elections, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded and a level of civil and political liberties, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation (Diamond et al 1988:xvi).

The most obvious principle of democracy is the unfettered freedom available for people to effectively participate in the governance of all affairs that have direct bearing on them through periodic, free, fair, credible and transparent elections. This therefore, serves as a means for the change of government or recall of a representative by electorates whose actions and inactions are far from people's expectations. Democratic ethos give meaning and bearing to the maxim that power belongs to the people and that legitimacy of authority is derivative from the sovereignty of the people (Abbass, 2008).

III. Theoretical Explication

Since the major thrust of this discourse is on political violence and sustenance of democratic rule in Nigeria, the study is anchored on the Political Economy theory propounded by Karl Marx in 1859 which is based on dialectical materialism. The theory is concerned with the material or economic aspect of society. In the words of Abbass (2008:4), dialectal materialism is premised on the issue of man's inherent motivations for economic pursuits and needs. Man, in social relations, oftentimes demonstrates desperate quest and strenuous struggle to wrestle power, control and maintain political power at all cost which lends credence to the suitability of the theory.

It has to be emphasized that the political system in any given state corresponds as well as reflect the economic phenomenon and structure in the said country. Also, the political substructure of the political system determines how the state organizes and reproduces itself for the desired change. Thus, Marx argued that the main cause of conflict or violence in all known societies is economic issues. There is therefore a significant relationship between the symbiotic relations existing between people in the production process and the nature of the political struggle to win political positions so as to determine the allocation of resources in the economy.

Abbass (2008), maintained that the political economy theory to the study of electoral violence in Nigeria is most appropriate in capturing the salient issues bequeathed to us as a country by imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism through forceful integration of Nigerian economy into the mainstream of global circuit of production. He argued that above phenomenon has among other things snowballed into the structural underdevelopment and dependency of the country and the setting up of institutions that are at variance with our value systems.

The relevance of the theory lies in the fact that the fierce struggle or violence to secure political power in Nigeria is hinged on the fact that such power is a sure means for the allocation of national wealth. Opportunities to occupy political positions provide the leaders with the mandates to dictate or determine the direction of economic activities. However, experiences overtime have revealed that the quest to acquire, control and consolidate this power is not usually borne out of the patriotic desire on the part of the leaders to effectively allocate the national wealth to areas of need among the sectors of the economy to guarantee overall national transformation. Rather, the fierce battle to win elections and control state apparatuses is basically to exploit the situation for personal economic aggrandisement and gains. Thus, in order to emerge victorious at the polls, the politicians resort to violence, unleashing mayhem to crush any perceived real or imagined obstacles (opponents) on their ways to success. Consequently, people whom they want to lead are killed in their numbers and properties worth billions of Naira are destroyed with impunity. Desperation for political power degenerates into political violence which has been identified as the bane of democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Democracy and Electoral Violence in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective

Democracy as a term is coined from two Greek words: “Demo” and “Cracy” meaning “people” and to “rule.” This means a system of government which involves people in their governance (Ndo, 1997). Democracy can be perceived as the system of government under which the people exercise their governing power either directly or indirectly through representatives of theirs, periodically elected to carry on the machinery of government. From the above conceptualization, we can easily understand that election is a significant feature of democracy due mainly to the fact that people can no longer participate directly in the governance of their country.

However, election in Nigeria in terms of origin was introduced by the colonialists. Infact, election was unheard of in Africa until the advent of colonial rule. Although pre-colonial administrations were democratic in the way and manner they governed themselves but their political cum administrative systems were devoid of election and electoral processes. Which by implication, means that there were no periodic elections where the indigenous people could exercise their franchise to elect their leaders.

Specifically, the Clifford Constitution of 1922 brought the elective principle into the Nigerian politics which made provision for voting in Lagos and Calabar. In spite of the restrictive nature of the principle, elections were devoid of violence. It was argued that electoral violence in the Nigerian body polity was traceable to the colonialists who resorted to the manipulation of elections on the basis of ethnic lines. For instance, in 1951 election in Kano, the colonial administration made frantic effort to frustrate northern allies of southerners opposed to the candidates of Emirs. These allies suffered various forms of discriminations as they were not given free hand to hold public meetings; intimidation and victimization of the highest order were meted out to them. In the words of Nnoli (1980), colonial manipulations of elections led to the poisoning of relations between the north and south with the resultant effect of a consequent increase in the social distance between members of their populations. Since then onwards, elections in Nigeria have been characterized by violence. The constitutional reforms of Richards of 1946 added more salt to the injury as it divided the country into the North, the East and the West. This, however, provided the springboard for fierce struggle to acquire political power among the three major ethnic groups. Thus, pockets of political violence along ethnic lines were first witnessed in 1952 when Azikiwe was defeated in the Western Regional House of Assembly and he eventually rushed back to the East where he displaced Chief Eyo Ita and became the premier of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun later known as the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). In 1959 general elections, there were cases of electoral violence where lives were lost and properties were destroyed.

However, scholars are in agreement that the real political violence emerged in 1964 federal elections. Nigeria at independence in 1960, opted for a parliamentary system of government similar to that of the British political system. Incidentally, the first post independence elections organized by the Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa/President, Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1964 and 1965 were alleged to be characterized by widespread complaints of fraud, violence and intimidation (Osaghe, 1998). Protests that followed the regional elections which in some several areas degenerated into violent exercise in competitive rigging resulted in widespread violence and inter-communal rioting that claimed more than 200 lives (Anifowose, 1983; HRW, 2007). As a result of the unprecedented casualties recorded, in January 1966, the military struck and the Nigerian nascent democracy was truncated.

From 1966 to 1979, Nigerian government was under military administration. In 1979, the military government handed over power to another civilian government headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). The election was relatively peaceful since it was midwived by the military. The Shagari led government organized a civilian to civilian transition elections in 1983, but just like the First Republic elections, they were massively rigged through violence in connivance with the election management body, Federal Election Commission (FEDECO) and security agents (Obakhedo, 2011). The military intervened immediately in Nigerian politics on 31st December 1983 to restore law and order and to protect lives and properties. The military held sway in the leadership of the country after several attempts to return the nation to democratic rule. According to HRW (2007), cited in Obakhedo (2011), between independence in 1960 and 1999 when democratic rule was restored in Nigeria, the country produced only two elected governments and both were overthrown in several military coup de' tats before completing a second term in office. Specifically, Nigeria's military ruled the country for nearly 30 years of its 55 years of independence, excluding the three months of short lived interim national government.

Since 1999 when democratic rule was restored in the country, politicians appear to have failed to make attempt to deepen and strengthen democratic principles in the country. Rather, sad memories of electoral violence in the past have been re-enacted. For instance, the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015 elections have been marred by widespread fraud and unprecedented political violence. The electoral processes of the 1999 elections were similar to those of the 1979 elections as they were supervised by the military. Nevertheless, both local and international observers reported widespread irregularities in the polls with electoral fraud in favour of one or the other candidates. Olu Falae, who was a joint candidate for both the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All People's Party (APP) expressed his displeasure over the conduct of the election but failed to pursue his

appeal against the declaration of Obasanjo as winner of the Presidential elections to the supreme court (Olukoshi, 2000).

The Obasanjo's administration organized a transition election in 2003. Political violence at this period took a disproportionate shape; there were incidences of political assassinations. The president in early 2002 warned that politicians were raising private militias that could make the elections bloody and indeed, the election turned out to be bloody. "In November 2002, disturbances broke out in Kaduna State with high profile killings with clear political undertone" (Bamgbose, 2012:211). In the same vein, Obakhedo (2011:105) reported that "the 2003 elections were more pervasively and openly rigged than the flawed 1999 polls, and far more bloody." There was "abundant evidence of large scale rigging, fraud and intimidation in many parts of the country" (Lewis, 2003:142). From the above development, Nigerians were forced to form an orientation that no election could be organized by a civilian government without conspicuous corruption, brazen electoral malpractices and violence capable of destroying lives and properties with reckless abandon.

However, the stage was set for the 2007 elections which domestic and foreign observers described as the worst in Nigeria's history ranking among the worst conducted anywhere in the world in recent time (HRW's interviews with voters and observers on the April 2007, elections). Nwolise (2007), stated that when the 2007 election was drawing near, President Obasanjo told surprised Nigerians, other Africans and the world at large that the 2007 elections would be a "do or die affair." Available evidences had it that the 2007 elections were most deadly and frightening in nature. The illegalities and sundry violence that featured prominently in the 2007 elections were succinctly captured by international monitors in the following lines:

The 2007 state and federal elections have fallen short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections. They were marred by poor organization, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural irregularities, significant evidence of fraud, particularly during result collation process, voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal conditions for contestants and numerous incidents of violence. As a result, the elections have not lived up to the hopes and expectations of the Nigerian people and the process cannot be considered to have been credible (Adebayo and Omotola, 2007:207).

Though, the 2007 elections have come and gone their sad memories have continued to hunt our collective sensibilities. Thus, voter apathy has continued to increase astronomically as eligible electorates are afraid of effective participation in electoral process lest they become victims of political disturbances and violence.

Although, previous elections such as 1999, 2003, 2007 have been accused of unprecedented fraud and widespread violence, Nigerians have consistently demonstrated strong commitment to deepen democracy in the country by going to the polls in 2011 to elect their leaders. The elections started with the release of election timetable which was later re-adjusted for convenience. However, concerted efforts were made to drastically reduce electoral violence to the barest minimum. One of such moves was a meeting of the 36 state governors of the federation which was chaired by the chairman of then Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF), Bukola Saraki held on 8th February, 2011 at Abuja where the governors signed an undertaking. The pact was to among other things ensure free, fair, credible and transparent electoral process in the upcoming elections; to do their best to ensure that the elections were devoid of any form of manipulation, thuggery, violence, rigging and any other form of underhand tactics.

Despite the lofty goals of the undertaking, political violence featured prominently in all the elections. There were cases of electoral violence across the Nigeria's six geo-political zones. The electoral violence started with ruinous campaigns as violent clashes ensued among supporters of different political parties which led to the demise of several people while many sustained injuries of various degrees just nine days to the general elections (Bamgbose, 2011). In Ondo State for instance, no fewer than three people were reportedly shot dead in Obanla area while about four people were injured in a violent clash that took place at Iro Street between supporters of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the ruling Labour Party (LP). The sundry irregularities and electoral violence that characterized the Ondo State election prompted the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) to petition the election tribunal seeking for the rerun of the polls. The party claimed in the petition that the election was marred by violence, unprecedented irregularities, voter intimidation and various instances of ballot snatching in two riverine councils of Ilaje and Ese-Odo which make up the constituency (Bello, 2011). Oladoyinbo, Nwaoko and Olukoya (2011), reported that Ogun State even before the election was in a state of confusion arising from the presentation of controversial lists of candidates by the state to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) - Adetunji Olurin and Gboyega Isiaka. Thus, in the course of campaigns no fewer than two people were killed in a clash between supporters of the gubernatorial candidate of the Labour Party (LP) and commercial motorcyclists.

States in the South-South zone equally witnessed various degrees of electoral violence in the period under review. In Akwa-Ibom State, political campaigns took a destructive dimension as both Ikot Ekpene and Uyo were turned into political war theatres. There were violent confrontations between supporters of the PDP and ACN. Consequently, the presidential campaign office of Goodluck Jonathan/Namadi Sambo located at

Abak Road was set on fire. Also, 127 number Peugeot 307 salon cars and 157 number Keke NAPEP tricycles belonging to the state government were reduced to ashes. About 120 other vehicles belonging to prominent citizens of the country were burnt at different areas. With swift response of the security agents, no fewer than 51 suspects were arrested in connection to the crimes in Uyo, the state capital (Akpan-Nso, 2011). The story was the same in Cross River State; there were reported cases of politically motivated killings. Meanwhile, at Ugep there were series of violence in which some people sustained various degrees of injury, cars were destroyed and guns were freely used to harass and intimidate electorates who came out to perform their civic responsibility. The violence got to a point that one of the aspirants to the House of Representatives, Mr. Patrick Okomiso and the incumbent member, Chief Bassey Ewa were arrested. It was alleged that they were behind the ugly political development.

The South-East of the country presented the same picture. For instance, at Izzi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, suspected thugs loyal to a particular political unleashed terror at St. Stephen's Catholic Church, Iziogo. It was reported that the cause of the violence was that an ANPP chieftain and senatorial candidate for Ebonyi North senatorial zone, Engr. Fidelis Nwankwo went to St. Stephen's Catholic Church on Sunday in company of his associates, senator Ucha, the ANPP gubernatorial candidate and Emma Uguru, the House of Representatives candidate for Izzi/Abakaliki federal constituency. Immediately after the service, as they set out their movement back home, some thugs descended on them and inflicted various degrees of injury on some people. Although no life was lost, the thugs broke into the home of a catechist, burnt his motorcycle, destroyed his yam barn and inflicted matchete cuts on one person. The total number of motorcycles destroyed on that day was put at five (Sobechi, 2011). Reports from Enugu State had it that attacks were targeted at opponents of the state government. There were reported cases of sundry attacks ranging from disruption of political meetings, destruction of posters and billboards of political opponents. The bottom line was to truncate the political ambition of the new comers so that the incumbent governor who was seeking for re-election would retain his seat.

In the North-West geopolitical zone, political violence assumed a frightening dimension. In Kaduna State, violent protests greeted the declaration of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as the president elect at the polls. Reliable reports had it that scores of people were killed while properties worth billions of Naira, including churches and mosques were set ablaze. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) headquarters and houses belonging to People's Democratic Party's (PDP) stalwarts were destroyed by rampaging youths. Kafanchan, Zonkwa and Zaria were not spared as several numbers of people were reportedly killed while Baptist Church was set on fire by irate youths alleged to be supporters of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) (Akhaine, 2011). In Zamfara State, thousands of irate youth went haywire in Tsafe Local Government Area of the state where they vandalized dozens of shops and set three churches ablaze. The major roads in the state were barricaded and bonfires were made which led to the disruption of vehicular movements. About 47 suspects were arrested in connection to the violence.

The North-Eastern Nigeria appeared to be worst hit by the electoral violence. For instance, at Gombe State, no fewer than 17 people lost their lives during post presidential election violence that erupted. The acting head of clinical services and training of the Federal Medical Centre, Gombe, Dr. Ali Shaliza reported that 71 patients of post election violence were brought to the hospital. The mayhem unleashed by irate youth after the declaration of winners of the election led to about 300 casualties attended to by the Red Cross (Sabiou et al, 2011). According to Bamgbose (2012), 10 youth corps members who served as election umpires, a Divisional Crime Officer (DCO) and a police woman were killed in Bauchi State following the protest that greeted the announcement of presidential results. However, about 4,500 people were displaced as the supporters of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) unleashed mayhem on the residents of the state. In a nutshell, there were cases of blood letting, killing of innocent souls, destruction of properties that ran into billions of Naira. But the most agonizing aspect of the electoral violence in the period under review was that the series of violence reached at an alarming rate immediately after the declaration of former President Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of the polls which is a clear demonstration that ethnic politics is still present in the sensibilities of Nigerians especially among Nigerians of the northern origin.

The 2015 General Elections in Focus

It was with the above ugly political scenario that Nigeria marched into another political transition in 2015. Nnonyelu (2015:2), stated that "there were palpable fears and anxiety across the length and breadth of the country as to the possible scenario that the nation will find itself after the 2015 general elections." However, in the build up to the elections which were rescheduled to hold on 28th March and 11th April, 2015, all the candidates of political parties contesting the presidential election signed a peace pact committing themselves, their followers and parties to a code of conduct contained in the Nigerian Electoral Act of 2010. It was the expectation of every Nigerian that they would remain peaceful in all their activities before, during and after the elections. In addition, a National Peace Committee was constituted headed by His Excellency, General

Abdulsalami Abubakar (Rtd). It has been argued that the committee was critical in mediating differences between the political parties as well as building confidence in the electoral processes. The committee persuaded presidential candidates to sign two peace accords in the build up to the polls. The aspirants made pledges to shun violence and ethnic based campaigns and also promised to accept the results of the election. Notwithstanding the above concerted effort to ensure peaceful elections in the period under review, there were however, some reported cases of PVC (Permanent Voter Card) snatching at different wards in the course of permanent voter card distributions in Ebonyi State. Oginyi (2015), reported that a staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission lost his life at Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State while over 3,366 permanent voter cards (PVC) were snatched by hoodlums suspected to have been sponsored by desperate politicians in the political race. Confirming the incident which took place in February, 2015, the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) in the state, Dr. Lawrence Azubuike gave details of the ugly development in the following lines:

No less than 3,366 PVCs have been snatched from INEC staff in the field. In Eka Awoke Registration Area of Ikwo Local Government Area, hoodlums forcefully snatched 302 PVCs from INEC staff distributing the cards. At Igbeagu III in Izzi Local Government Area on February 3, 2015, 3064 PVCs were similarly snatched from those on distribution duty. In Ohaukwu Local Government Area, INEC staff was violently attacked in the course of distributing the PVCs, however no card was snatched.

However, about 14 political parties participated in the presidential elections with only two main dominant parties, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC). Despite the pledge of the dominant parties and their supporters to play by the rules, the elections were not without some pockets of violence. But compared to other previous elections democratically conducted in the country, the 2015 general elections could be described as relatively peaceful. Nevertheless, in the course of the presidential campaigns, former President Goodluck Jonathan's campaign trains were pelted with stones at Katsina State when he (Dr. Goodluck Jonathan) and his entourage paid a courtesy call to the family of his late boss/principal, Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua, in the area. Also, during presidential campaign rally of PDP in Bauchi State, the youth who were earlier on in peaceful mood suddenly turned angry before the arrival of the former president (Dr. Goodluck Jonathan) and his entourage. In their rampage, they destroyed canopies and other campaign materials. The FCT (Federal Capital Territory) Minister, Senator Bala Mohammed received the worst embarrassment of his life as he was pelted with sachets water in the middle of his speech. The attackers/irate youths were alleged to be supporters of the main opposition party APC since they were shouting "Sai Buhari," "Sai Baba Buhari." The same incidence repeated itself when the presidential campaign train went to Yola, the capital city of Adamawa State. However, inspite of the above developments which were pointers to trouble days ahead, the Presidential and National Assembly elections went on successfully with pockets of localized violence across the federation. Specifically, there were reported cases of electoral irregularities especially in Rivers State which prompted the irate youth alleged to be loyal to APC to demonstrate on major streets of the state. The high point of the protest was the touching of some parts of the INEC office in the state. In Imo State, the state governor, Rochas Okorocha alleged that the electoral materials were hijacked by the ruling party, PDP in order to manipulate elections in favour of its candidates. Again, there were alleged cases of underage voting across the states in the northern region.

According to Clean Foundation (2015), the March 28th Presidential and National Assembly elections have been hailed in many quarters as being largely peaceful and free from post election violence. It maintained that the relative peace was attributed by some people to the laudable decision of former President Goodluck Jonathan to concede defeat even before the official final results were announced, while others attributed the outcome to the public commitment made by key political contenders to accept in good faith the outcome of the elections and their charge to their supporters to remain peaceful.

Nevertheless, some levels of violence were recorded during the April 11 Gubernatorial and Houses of Assembly elections. The CDD (2015), in its preliminary reports stated that there were significant incidences of shootings, protests, arson and fatalities recorded in most geopolitical zones of the country. For instance, election was suspended in Essan Polling Unit 004 in Dokota Ward of Gbako Local Government Area, Niger State as a result of unrest. The reports added that two people were killed when violence erupted in Eku Community, Ethiopia East of Delta State. In Afikpo South Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, thugs reportedly intercepted sensitive materials meant for a polling unit in Oso Ward 2. Also in Ebonyi State, there were reported cases of the killing of six persons in the wake of the election. The chairman of PDP in Ishielu Local Government Area, Emeka Nworie, was reportedly killed by suspected political thugs. Two people were also killed in Ikwo Local Government Area following a clash between the supporters of the PDP and Labour Party. Recounting the political irregularities that featured prominently in the general elections in Ebonyi State, the former Executive Governor, Chief Nwancho, Martin Elechi CON on a radio and television address stated that there were sporadic shootings in Ndufu Alike Ward of Ikwo Local Government Area with intent to scare away potential voters, thus facilitating the snatching of election materials and the falsification of election results in favour of the political

party that organized such mayhem. He went further to disclose that there was excessive use of violence, leading to infliction of bodily wounds, such as battering of human heads and limbs which was the case in Izzi Local Government Area. He also informed the surprised public there was outright shooting and killing of an innocent person in Ameka Ward in Ezza South Local Government Area. Even as he pointed out that Effium Community in Ohaukwu Local Government Area was not spared of the ugly brazen political development (Oginyi and Izuegbu, 2015). In Lagos State, elections were marred by apathy in most areas. Nevertheless, two corpses were found in Oshodi and along Apapa-Oshodi Road linked to the polls. There were cases of allegations and counter allegations of conspiracies directed against the two dominant parties. In Rivers State, heavy shooting was reported in Ozuoba and Rumuolumeni in Obio Akpor Local Government Area. Soldiers were said to have moved into Buguma in Asari Toru Local Government Area where two persons were feared killed by shooting allegedly by thugs. In Bauchi State, a councillor for Gizaki/Badagari Ward, Mr. Musa Daniel, was beaten to death by angry youth while on election duty. In Abia State, there were reports of alleged hijack of ballot papers at Ihechiowa in Aro Chukwu Council Area, World Bank Primary School in Umuahia. Also, the governorship candidate of All Progressives Grand Alliance in Abia State, Dr. Alex Otti called for the cancellation of the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections in the state alleging that the elections were marred by armed thugs suspected to be loyal to PDP who allegedly invaded polling units, shooting sporadically and snatched ballot boxes. It was also reported that in Edo central, suspected thugs invaded some polling units in Ewohinmi and cartered away ballot papers (Vanguard, 2015). In all, widespread irregularities and unprecedented political violence prompted the declaration of Imo, Abia and Taraba gubernatorial election results inconclusive. Thus, a rerun was scheduled to determine the true winners of the elections.

From the foregoing cases of irregularities and high level violence that have become regular feature of the Nigerian democratic transition, we can see that our political actors have not demonstrated strong resolve and commitment to consolidate and deepen the course of democracy in the country. Elections in Nigeria have not made a clear departure from the kind of elections we witnessed in the First Republic which were characterized by rancour, acrimony, ethnocentrism, parochialism, violence and sundry irregularities. The disturbing aspect of the 2015 general elections was the unbridled use of hate speeches against opponents during electioneering campaigns. Most of the speeches at campaign rallies were unarguably not issue based, rather they were more or less directed towards character assassination of the opponents. All these ugly situations on regular basis threaten our hard earned democracy.

Forms of Electoral Violence

Electoral violence is seen as the use of threats or force whether physical, psychological and structural to intimidate, harm, blackmail an electorate before, during and after an election in an attempt to influence the outcome of the electoral process. In dissecting the forms of electoral violence, Nwolise (2007:159) identified three dimensions of electoral violence. Table 1 below illustrates the dimensions of the violence.

Table 1 Components of the three Dimensions of Electoral Violence

Dimension	Components
Physical	Physical assault on individuals during campaigns, elections and when election results are released. Assassination of political opponents or people perceived as a threat to one’s political ambition. Burning down of public or opponents houses or cars. Shooting, shoot outs. Killing of individuals. Partisan harassment by security agents, arrests, forceful dispersal of rallies or shooting, wounding or killing of people. Kidnapping and hostage taking Bombing of infrastructure. Forceful disruption by thugs of political and campaign rallies. Destruction of ballot boxes and ballot papers from polling agents. Armed raids on voting and collation centres, and snatching of ballot boxes and papers from polling agents. Free for all fights.
Psychological	Threat against and harassment by security agents of opponents of the ruling regime or party which create political apathy. Shoot on sight orders that breed fear in voters. Terror inflicted by political assassinations which make people scared to participate in politics or elections. Publication or broadcast of abusive, insulting or intimidating materials or advertorials. Threat of life through phone calls, text messages, etc.
Structural	Coercions of citizens by government to register or vote. Exclusionary acts and policies. Unequal opportunities for political parties and candidates. Deliberate changes in dates, venues, or times of events to the disadvantage of others. Partisan delimitation of electoral constituencies and location of polling booths. Excessive fees for collecting party nomination forms. Unfree campaigns. Reliance on money and brute force instead of moral integrity and competence.

Restraints imposed on voters. Use of the incumbency factor to give undue advantages to some candidates. Announcement of false or fraudulent results.
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Source: Nwolise (2007:159).

Without mincing words, Nigerian electoral environment is awash with such identified forms and components of electoral violence. This is believed to be largely responsible for voter apathy in electoral activities. In the country, investigations reveal that the number of voters that always present themselves to cast their ballots during elections are usually very infinitesimal compared to the total number of registered voters. To them, it is better to steer clear of politics in order not to fall victim of electoral violence. And this situation does not speak good of Nigerian democracy because a large number of people do not make their voices heard in the selection of their leaders, hence lack the moral justification to force them to be accountable and responsive to their needs. Moreso, voter apathy is also blamed on the inability of the people's votes to count. Majority of Nigerians argue that the series of electoral violence witnessed during elections make nonsense of their voting pattern because such ugly incidences influence electoral success to contestants who might not be the popular choice of the people.

Predisposing Factors for Electoral Violence

Critical investigations into the incidences of electoral violence in Nigeria expose some factors that trigger electoral violence. These are situations that on regular basis fuel various levels of violence which are inimical to our democracy. The factors include among others:

- a. Lack of Fairness and Transparency in the Electoral Process** – This has been identified as the major cause of pre-election violence in Nigeria. A situation where electoral processes at any stage is shrouded in secrecy or the parties that fielded in candidates for elections are not carried along as expected could be an invitation to political violence. For instance, it has been observed that the ruling party takes undue advantage of their privileged position to select their party members and supporters to serve as INEC adhoc staff. The implication of the foregoing is that those adhoc personnel strive strenuously to scuttle the whole electoral processes in favour of their party. Incidentally, other political parties that feel threatened that such irregularities could mar their electoral success always mobilize their army of supporters and thugs to protest the perceived injustices. This situation nosedives to political violence.
- b. Non Credibility of the Electoral Body** – A situation when the electoral umpire is perceived either through its actions or inactions to have reneged from its constitutional duty of ensuring impartial administration of the electoral process could spell doom in the country. Non-credibility question arises whenever the electoral umpire (INEC) is seen to be romancing with the ruling or a particular party or certain high profile political figures to either manipulate election results in their favour to the exclusion other parties or contestants. In this circumstance, electoral violence will no doubt erupt as other secluded parties or contestants could incite their members and supporters against the electoral body.
- c. Ineffectiveness of Law Enforcement Agencies** – The lack lustre disposition of Nigerian law enforcement agencies is a major contributory factor to turbulent elections. It is no longer news that Nigeria is acknowledged to have best legal frameworks but her predicament appears majorly to be non-enforcement or poor enforcement of those rules. Essentially, we have Electoral Act designed for the purpose of guiding the conduct of everyone before, during and after elections; it is rather unfortunate that these rules are oftentimes flouted with impunity even at the watchful eyes of the security agents. In extreme cases, police aid and abate the rigging of elections as well as intimidate voters which implies that the institution set up to protect the electorates usually turn against them. This ugly phenomenon is blamed on lack of political will on the part of the government of the day to religiously ensure enforcement of laws especially electoral laws.
- d. Inordinate Political Ambition** – Politics in Nigeria has been perceived as a gold mine where any aspiring billionaire should venture to satisfy his quest for wealth. This has been unarguably responsible for the huge number of persons who go into politics in the country. Thus, in order to achieve their ambitions they go extra miles to truncate the rules of the game so as to succeed at all cost. This explains why politicians keep and maintain armed thugs who are deployed as ready instruments to wreck havoc on perceived political opponents before, during and after elections.
- e. Ethnic Politics** – The history of political development in Nigeria is replete with ethnic politics. For instance, the First Republic's political parties were formed along ethnic lines, hence NCNC was seen as an Igbo party, NPC was perceived as the northern party aimed at the propagation of the interest of the north and Action Group (AG) started as a Yoruba cultural organization known as the Omo Oduduwa. Scholars are in agreement that strong ethnic attachment was a machination of the colonialist aimed at dividing and ruling the indigenous people of Nigeria. According to Bamgbose (2012:217), the colonialists who ruled us in the past poisoned the minds of Nigerians against Nigerians. This colonial mentality is still much around us. That explains why whenever a given southerner emerges victorious in presidential elections the north

boils which nosedives to violence with numerous human lives and properties lost in the process. The 2015 general election which was popularly adjudged to be free and fair without post election violence was not all that free and fair based on some evidences or irregularities that trailed the process. Rather, it was considered free and credible because General Mohammed Buhari (Rtd) who is a northerner won the election. God forbid, if Goodluck Jonathan had won the election, violence of alarming magnitude could have engulfed the country. It was alleged that there were stories of young northerners telling Christians that they were lucky because had the election gone the other way, they would all be dead.

- f. Unemployment** – This is one of the main contributory factors to electoral violence. Politicians have found it expedient to impoverish a large number of youth so that they will become for them willing tools to unleash mayhem during election periods. Some of the unemployed youths also go into politics with the sole aim to cause confusion since politicians and political system are not after their welfare.
- g. Juicy Nature of Nigerian Politics** – Way back in the past, political offices or positions did not attract huge money, hence the unwillingness of people to run into politics in droves as obtainable today. As it stands now, politics is now a lucrative business with huge financial attachment such that Nigerians appear to have difficulty in pursuing other professions other than politics. Currently, according to Audu (2010:1), “the 109 senators receive N4,066,212,458.00, the 360 members of the House of Representatives receive N11,496,523,333.00, the 36 State Houses of Assembly received N17,129,465,597.00 while about 600 councillors receive N74,766,456,000.00 per annum.” The juicy nature of the positions prompts people to go into politics with negative mindset to kill, maim and destroy lives and properties to secure, perpetuate and consolidate political power.
- h. Corruption** – A large proportion of Nigerian population is corrupt; they do not adhere to rules and regulations serving as guides to the conduct of any government business. Most of the regular staff and the adhoc staff of the electoral umpire see their appointments as great opportunity to enrich themselves especially during election periods. They, in most cases, connive with desperate politicians after financial inducements to manipulate election figures in their favour. The outcome of this phenomenon is always a burning anger on the part of the electorates who perceive the result of the elections as not reflecting their choices. Thus, they resort to violence to vent their bottled anger as well as express their displeasure. Cases abound where adhoc staff on the field sell ballot papers to the highest bidders which are clear cases of electoral irregularities.

Towards Curbing Electoral Violence for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria

Our democratic experience in the Fourth Republic is the longest in the annals of Nigerian political history. We have enjoyed uninterrupted democracy for 16 years. Although, a lot of forces, especially electoral violence have threatened Nigerian democracy but our resolve as a nation has always seen us through various political transitions whose predictions portended grave danger. It has to be emphasized that a worst democracy is better than the best military regime. This is because the fundamental rights of individuals are grossly trampled on through the suspension of the constitution and subsequent promulgation of decrees and edicts by the military regime. Infact, military rule is an aberration.

Thus, to safeguard and guarantee sustainable democracy the following policy measures become imperative: -

Politics of bitterness and rancour should be abhorred by all Nigerians in its entirety. We should not see politics as a do or die affair. There should be mass mobilization of the citizens to perceive politics in the spirit of sportsmanship; a game of “winners and losers.” Politicians should shun violence when they loose election to avoid breakdown of law and order. That is why former President Goodluck Jonathan GCFR deserves encomium for his patriotic zeal to deepen the root of democracy in Nigeria through conceding defeat even before the official final results were announced by the INEC.

There is also dire need to educate our people on the dangers of ethnic politics. It was ethnic politics that cost us our first and second experiments of democracy in 1966 and 1983 respectively. It has been blamed for the unprecedented violence that usually greet announcement of election results especially when the elections fail to produce candidates from our ethnic origin. We should shun ethnic politics and adopt good track records, personality, experience, training, ability of contestants etc as criteria for selecting them during election periods. This idea is germane as it is capable of dousing post election tensions or violence.

There should be a legislation that immediately nullifies results from polling units where verified cases of electoral violence are recorded. The regulation will go a long way to instill sanity and decorum during periods of voting (election) as hoodlums and hooligans and their sponsors would steer clear of violence so that results in their constituencies may not be nullified.

Political positions should be made financially unattractive. This call becomes necessary especially now we have experienced the volatility of the crude oil price. Huge sums of money should be cut from the overheads of the elected and appointed politicians and the proceeds channelled to the diversification of the economy.

Government should intervene with every sense of commitment in both agricultural and manufacturing sectors, which are seen as the drivers of the economy. When this is perfected, politics will become unattractive. It will only attract those who have the patriotic zeal to run for political positions for the purpose of enhancing the wellbeing of their fellow country men.

Families, schools, mosques and churches have great roles to play. All these institutions should inculcate in their members the need for love, unity, sanctity of human life and peaceful co-existence. These virtues are central to the sustenance of Nigerian democracy.

Government at all levels should invest in critical sectors of the economy in order to create jobs for the teeming population of young people who are churned out from institutions of higher learning on yearly basis. It is a well known maxim that “an idle mind is a devil’s workshop”. Therefore, the youths should be meaningfully engaged to avoid being used as thugs during elections.

There should be a special court created to try election related offences such as rigging, snatching of ballot papers and boxes, intimidation and harassment of electorates who are on ground to discharge their civic duties, etc. No individual irrespective of his connection or background arrested in connection with any election related violence should be let off the hook; the law should take its rightful course. There should be no sacred cow.

Corruption cases related to election should be equally handled by the proposed court as the culprits should be forced to face the full wrath of the law. The need for this special court is informed by the lacklustre nature of the regular court which creates room for lawyers to hold onto frivolities to delay delivery of justice. The special court should be smart and fast in its operation so that within two to three months, election related matters are dispensed with.

Our institutions such as the security architecture and election management body (INEC) should be overhauled and strengthened so as to be in a better position to perform their constitutionally assigned functions without fear or favour. This singular recommendation requires strong political will on the part of the leadership of the country to ensure its realization.

Finally, Nigerians should be given adequate orientation to always seek redress in the court of law instead of taking laws into their hands. Violence should not be matched with corresponding violence because such situation is capable of throwing the country into flames.

IV. Conclusion

Nigeria is a heterogeneous, poly ethnic, and multi-religious society (Usman and Abba, 2010; Salawu, 2010). Its diversity rather than being a source of strength is its major weakness as political elites since colonial periods have tried to manipulate ethnic and religious identities to feather their nests and gain underserved advantage in the scramble for the national cake (Nnonyelu, 2013). As a result, our electoral process has been marred by irregularities, frauds, and alarming violence which pose serious threat to the survival of Nigerian democracy. It is therefore the position of this paper that our politicians should demonstrate patriotism by giving peace a chance especially during election periods. There is need for consensual democracy or inclusive governance as well as a level playing ground to political contestants for peace to reign so that our democracy will grow and develop to an enviable height. Put in another way, there is need for value re-orientation for the survival and sustenance of Nigerian democracy.

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