

Killing to Rule: An Analysis of Electoral Violence and the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria has been plagued by numerous teething problems in her march towards greatness. From long years of military dictatorship to insurgency and terrorism, the country has continued to grapple with the issues and problems of development. There was hope that with the return to civil rule in 1999 most of these problems would have abated, but 20 years after this has not been the case. One of the pluralities of problems that bedeviled the nation and which it has to contend with is electoral violence and irregularities. Since 1999, politicians have turned elections into theatre of war and successive elections had been worse than the previous ones with the exception of 2011 general elections deemed to have been the most credible although pockets of post election violence were still recorded in the Northern part of Nigeria. The 2015 elections did not fare better even when it is adjudged to have been free, fair and credible by both local and international observers. This paper examines the problem of electoral violence in Nigeria with focus on the 2015 general elections. It adopts a qualitative method with reliance on secondary sources of data and argues that although there was relative sanity in some parts of the country during the exercise, the elections recorded some casualties in states like Akwa Ibom and Rivers. The paper discusses electoral violence in Nigeria generally, and concludes that electoral violence has remained a sour taste in Nigeria's bid for democratic consolidation and sustainability.

Keywords: Killing, Rule, Electoral Violence, Elections, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The electoral process in Nigeria has not only become a battle field and a theatre of war but one which fits the description of former President Obasanjo's "do or die affair". As a matter of fact, politicians and their supporters have turned elections into war where contestants and even those sympathetic to their cause are not sure of living to witness the outcome of the elections in which they played some prominent roles. Political office seekers are equally not interested in the number of deaths but in capturing political power by all means. From the "Wild Wild West" of 1964 to the "land and moon slide" of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in the Second Republic, up to the Peoples Democratic Party's magic in the fourth republic and beyond, electoral contests have always been enmeshed in blood bath, arson, killings and maiming of opponents either by thugs or the supporters of a particular candidate or party or by security agencies sympathetic to

the ambition of some candidates. Elections were first organized by the colonial government in Nigeria in response to the pressures of the nationalists who were agitating for greater participation in the colonial government. The adoption of the elective principles in 1922 however gave Nigerians the first opportunity to occupy certain political offices. Though, the franchise was restricted and representation limited, it was an achievement for the nationalists who were struggling for the enthronement of a democratic order as a prerequisite for greater participation of the people in the process of government (Moru, 2004).

Several elections were held in different parts of the country after 1922 to elect leaders at national, regional and local levels. However, according to Enojo (2013, p.158), it was the 1959 general elections that paved the way for the emergence of Nigeria as an independent country. Since then, various elections have been

conducted either in transition from one civilian government to another or in transition from a military regime to a civilian government. Again, from the elections of 1964 to that of 2015, one issue tends to be recurrent, and that is the issue of irregularities and violence. In fact, the politicians have turned the contest into a standard norm in which lives must be lost for them to assume power. Thus, from independence to date, electoral violence in Nigeria has improved in sophistry just as the politicians and their cohorts have remained resolute in this destructive enterprise. According to IFES Reports (2007), there were 967 incidence of electoral violence in the 2007 elections. Cases of abduction and kidnapping, murder and killing, protest, disruption, intimidation and physical attacks as well as poster defacing all featured in the incidents. Similarly, 300 people were killed on incidences related to the 2007 elections. Equally, deadly election related and communal violence in Northern Nigeria following the April 2011 presidential voting left more than 800 people dead in what has come to be seen as one of the worst post election violence in Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2011). With the benefit of hindsight, the CLEEN Foundation after a painstaking research in its “Third Security Threat Assessment” came up with the projection that electoral violence is most likely to occur in 15 Nigerian most volatile and high security risk states during the 2015 general elections (Frank-Collins, 2015, p.2). The above scenario paints a vivid picture of the problem of electoral violence in Nigeria and energizes us to examine and analyze the nature and character of election violence in Nigeria with special reference to the April 2015 general elections in the country. This paper argues that the electoral violence that gripped the Nigerian state since the country’s return to democracy in 1999 and the aftermath of the 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections, has posed a great challenge not only for the sustenance of democracy but the survival of the Nigerian state. We proceed with some theoretical issues on electoral violence in Nigeria; highlight the linkages between election violence and democracy before discussing the incidences of election violence witnessed in the 2015 elections.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

The State and Electoral Violence in Nigeria

A state perhaps in the most common context is seen as an organized political community within

a definite territory that possesses sovereignty. In this context, the state possesses such attributes as a government, population, a defined territory and sovereignty, and is recognized in international law as a legal entity. However, a state may also refer to that political organization comprising the individuals and institutions authorized to formulate public policies and conduct the affairs of a country. Here the state is seen as a system comprising the executive, legislature, judiciary, police, military and other key institutions that co-ordinate the daily affairs of a country. Thus, while the former describes a fixed and somewhat permanent entity, the latter conception of the state is one that is particularly fluid and dynamic. For the purposes of this paper, the state is particularly seen from the latter perspective since electoral violence (as shall be demonstrated later) is a phenomenon perpetuated by the youths working in tandem with the elected officials of the state (Moveh, 2008:4).

The linkage between the state, youth and electoral violence in Nigeria cannot be clearly understood outside the context of the nature and character of the Nigerian state. As Okolie (2005, p.434) notes “Social science literature is replete with several strands of thoughts and explanations on the persisting and deepening incidence of electoral fraud in Nigeria’s body politic however, these explanations appear to melt in the boiling pot of the character and parasitic nature of the Nigerian state. That state power in Nigeria has largely been used as an instrument of personal, sectional, class or primordial agenda is well documented. This informs why Ake (1996, p.4) for example notes that the immensity of state power and its proneness to abuse with impunity had in the past ruled out a politics of moderation and mandated a politics of lawlessness and fight for appropriation. Similarly, Ibrahim, (in Frank-Collins, 2015, p.47) notes that the Nigerian state has a patrimonial character where in the distinction between the public and private domains is blurred and power which has become a major source of wealth is personalized. As largely unproductive and parasitic group the dominant class in Nigeria relies essentially on the acquisition of state power for survival and reproduction. Thus, the state in Nigeria, as in Marxist analysis has remained a veritable and potent instrument for the domination, deprivation, suppression and alienation of the many by the very few who control state power. Its post colonial character of an overdeveloped

superstructure in comparison with its economic base has ensured as Miliband, (in Okolie, 2005, p.435) notes, that the state is the source of economic power as well as an instrument of it. This inevitably results in a high premium attached to political power, making politics a zero sum game. Indeed, the persistence of deficient and unresponsive electoral system in Nigeria is largely a product of a low level of autonomy of the Nigerian state: a situation which makes it possible for the political leadership to use the instruments of the state to commit acts of criminality and unmitigated electoral fraud resulting in the imposition of unpopular and unelected candidates on the people (Okolie, 2005, p.436).

Electoral Violence and Democracy

It is stating the obvious that election occupies a prime position in any democratic government. This is so because it does not only offer a government the unique opportunity for legitimacy, but also serves as a transitory process in stable democracies. In fact, it is this line of thinking that has informed the submissions of such electoral scholars like Abubakar Momoh, Victor Egwemi, Adigun Agbaje, Shola Omotola amongst numerous others that the significance of free and fair elections as a critical element of democracy cannot be overstated. Besides, in a liberal democracy, electoral process always gives room for the formation of political parties which are expected to possess some basic characteristics like political ideology, sincere political manifestoes, party discipline, and strong internal democracy among others (Abimbola and Adesote, 2012). However, competition among political parties is seen as part and parcel of democracy because it helps to strengthen the quality and level of their service to the people. It is when politics is not being played according to the acceptable democratic principles that it degenerates into unprecedented violence,

Electoral violence has become a major problem in the democratization process in Nigeria. The country operates a liberal democratic system of government officially since 1999 when the military disengaged from politics, a development which ushered in the Fourth Republic in the country. A basic feature of such a system of government is the recognition of the views of other political parties. This is why opposition parties are accorded special recognition and protection in such a system. Thus, any government that suppresses the views

of others is on the way to authoritarianism. Some examples of best practices are relevant here. In the United States of America, the Republican Party and Democratic Party have existed side by side for a long time, alternating as ruling and opposition parties respectively. The same situation is obtainable in Ghana, between the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party. A democratic political culture argues Enojo (2013:166), is based on reconciliation and compromise and not violence. For him, political parties are the institutions through which these objectives are to be realized. Another requirement of a democratic system of government is the promotion of a peaceful atmosphere for the people, through political parties to compete for elective offices. He concluded that electoral violence is dysfunctional to democratic politics as it restricts political participation.

Fischer (2002) defines electoral violence as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced “protection” blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination. This definition was modified by Megan Reif (2012) as cited in Majekodunmi and Adejuwon (2012) where electoral violence is defined thus:

Any spontaneous or organized act by candidates, party supporters, election authorities, voters, or any other actor that occurs during an electoral process, from the date of voter registration to the date of inauguration of a new government, that uses physical harm, intimidation, blackmail, verbal abuse, violent demonstrations, psychological manipulation, or other coercive tactics aimed at exploiting, disrupting, determining, hastening, delaying, reversing, or otherwise influencing an electoral process and its outcome.

Also Igbuzor (2010) sees electoral violence as:

Any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post election period and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other process, or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with the electoral processes. In its very simplistic form, electoral violence is the use or threat of physical act, carried out by an individual or individuals

with the intent to cause injury or death of persons before, during and after election.

However defined, the issue of electoral violence is as old as mankind. In fact wherever there is political competition, there is bound to be an element of electoral violence. As observed by Anifowose (1982), violence or threat of violence is a universal phenomenon. Individuals and groups throughout history have in one form or another resorted to violence or its potential use as a tactic of political action. Violence has been used by groups holding power, and by those seeking to gain power or even in the process of seeking power. It has also been pursued in the defense of order, by the privileged, in the name of justice, by the oppressed, and in fear of displacement by the threatened. The genesis of electoral violence is related to the nature of politics where Hobbes argued that “there was war of all against all” in a state of nature (or situation of total violence). A political community is established to save mankind from the violence of a state of nature. A political community when established is not free of conflicts some of which are violent. Politics is expected to manage the conflicts which vary from one political system to another. Hence, no political system has succeeded in eliminating political violence (Enojo, 2013, p.166).

On the other hand, election is the cardinal principle of democracy though not a sufficient determinant of democracy, but remains the primary indicator for democratic governance. Election is about competition on how leaders are selected by voting (and/or by appointment/nomination; howbeit, consensually), to govern the society. Competitive electoral democracy which is by voting as articulated by Joseph Schumpeter (in Frank-Collins, 2015) is an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions. It is a method by which the individual acquires the power to participate in decisions by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples vote” (Ighodalo, 2006). Thus election defines and determines what democracy is all about. Election empowers the “citizen-electorates” to decide who governs. And whoever is elected to govern is expected to meet the expectation of the electorates who initialed the mandate to govern. Therefore, the success of acceptable election is based on the existence of autonomous electoral management body, capable of conducting free, fair and credible elections. Here lies the synergy between democracy and election.

Historically, the use of violence (pre and post) in elections is not peculiar to recent and emerging democracies in developing world in general and Africa in particular. For example, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries England and America, there were documented cases of electoral violence where force and intimidation were used as a tactical means of winning elections (Seymour & Frary, 1918). One basic fact remains that violence in elections has always been a major threat to the sustenance or stability of democracy. With respect to African continent, new democracies especially since the 1990s which was termed as the third wave of democracy have been confronted with series of electoral violence that had resulted in the killing, death and displacement of many innocent lives. Examples of this are noticeable in the cases of Zimbabwe 2000, 2005, 2008, Zanzibar 2005, 2010, Kenya 2007 among others (Chaturvedi 2005, p.189).

As a matter of fact electoral violence thrives more in liberal democracy such as we have in Nigeria. This is because democracy in its pure form tends to allow for the expression of public opinion, respect for the rule of law and fundamental human rights of citizens as well as tolerance for constructive criticisms from opposition, civil society and pro-democracy groups. In Nigeria, the long years of military rule had some restrictions on the conduct of citizens particularly with regards to violent conduct because of the fear that the military had the capacity to contain violence unlike democratic regimes. It follows naturally that politicians, party supporters and even thugs could go to length to cause mayhem, killing and maiming people without recourse to the laws of the land in democratic dispensation. Besides, electoral offenders in the country are treated with levity even when it involves the loss of lives which has laid down laws that can take care of such offences. What happens is that most of such offenders are handed over to their principal once they appear in the police station where are held. To date, there is no single conviction by a law court of any electoral offender since the inception of the current democratic dispensation even with the escalating incidence of electoral violence. A case in point is that of Akwa Ibom State in 2011 which led to the setting up of a presidential investigation panel, in which nothing has come out to date. So the linkage between electoral violence and democratic states particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa lies in the escalation of violence given the level of

impunity and immunity associated with some political office holders and the coverage they give to their supporters and cohorts.

In the view of Enojo (2013, p.167), Nigerian politicians are responsible for promoting, arming and funding electoral violence. Unfortunately, there is no politician who has ever admitted supporting or organizing electoral violence. They always speak from both sides of the mouth as even those caught red handed will go to any extent to deny their guilt. To him, one of the pre-requisites of electoral violence is that thugs must be hired and paid handsomely; sophisticated weapons used by thugs are bought by politicians. Thugs need highly placed and well connected people with enormous resources to rescue them when caught and even after every operation. That is why it is very difficult to prosecute electoral offenders.

Again, there is no doubt that electoral credibility is sine qua non to peaceful elections. Sadly, over the years this is one major area our elections are deficient in. The introduction of electronic registration and use of card readers for the 2015 election gave Nigerians hope for credible elections. This is the first time that technology would be used for conduct of elections in Nigeria as against the manual process in previous elections, which is subject to election fraud.

The introduction of electronic voters registration and accreditation was an improvement on the manual use of voters register on many fronts. For instance, the electoral umpire, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), was able to give Nigerians the exact figures of registered voters and number of Permanent Voter's Card collected because records were captured electronically. This, to an extent made malpractices difficult. The use of manual methods made this impossible in previous elections due to human errors and inadequacies, providing opportunities for reckless rigging.

Finally, it must equivocally be stated here that electoral violence can develop if the electoral umpire or management body is not impartial, transparent and unbiased. It is on record that most elections in Nigeria manifest the opposite of these traits from INEC, a development which has severally led to the burning of their buildings and even vehicles during and after elections. The case of the re-run election in Ekiti state remains a case in point. In fact, it is this issue of the integrity of the electoral umpire that has given room to the need for the appointment

of a person with a high level of integrity such as Professor Atahiru Jega as chairman of the Commission. It is also believed that his newly appointed successor, Professor Mahmood Yakubu is cut in similar mould and would be able to uphold and sustain if not surpass the good records of Professor Atahiru Jega, the outgoing chairman.

Electoral Violence and the 2015 Elections

The 2015 general election is one that Nigerians will not forget in a hurry. Preceding the elections were vehement threats by politicians, political parties and interest groups. It was on this premise that many prophets of doom predicted that the 2015 elections will plunge the country into severe anarchy that will threaten, if not destroy her unity. Expectations were that the country would burn but somehow, Nigerians have instead managed to form a stronger bond. Nigerians have a history of political apathy but the 2015 presidential election recorded the highest number of electorates' turnout in Nigeria's history. Nigerians had never witnessed so resolute electorates who came out "en masse" to perform their civic obligation, undeterred by the many odds.

This determination is best captured in the words of President Buhari when he commended Nigerians for coming out to vote against all odds in his inaugural speech. The President stated inter-alia: "you stood in the sun, in the rain and even in the dark..." Nigerians did far more than standing, they brought out their generator sets to power the gadgets used by electoral officials and volunteered to use their cars to light up the polling units defying the fear of vandalism. For the first time we witnessed impressive civility, patience and discipline even in highly volatile regions and the heavy use of sophisticated gadgets and social media in monitoring the elections. It is no more news that the 2015 elections were so far the most peaceful. There were pockets of violence but it became a huge leap in our political history in which election violence has been a major enemy of our democratic consolidation since the post colonial era.

Similarly, the orderliness, statesmanship and the interest generated by the presidential elections were a departure from what obtained at the state level during the gubernatorial elections. Rivers and Akwa Ibom States became a recurrent decimal in this respect. Prior to the elections, the campaign train of President Johnathan of the PDP was stoned with sachet water in Bauchi

State. This was in addition to the burning of campaign buses, and a case of bomb blast near a campaign ground in Potiskum, Gombe State. Sporadic gunshots at APC members were also reported in Rivers State allegedly by PDP thugs. INEC's assessment however revealed that the elections were peaceful and orderly across the country. Preliminary reports of electoral observers also revealed that the elections were peaceful and orderly in many parts of the country.

Besides, allegations of widespread rigging trailed the outcome of elections in Akwa Ibom State. The main opposition APC, called attention to cases of ballot box snatching, organized violence, withholding of sensitive electoral materials among other anomalies during the presidential and National Assembly as well as the governorship elections in the State. The Lagos State chapter of the PDP and some sections of the public also accused the APC of manipulating the electoral process in the State. Cases of infraction on the electoral law were cited in Rivers State where sixteen people were reportedly killed (Ndujihe and Kumolu, 2015). The INEC headquarters in Rivers state were reportedly burnt down and two people were killed during voting in the gubernatorial elections. The opposition, which alleged massive rigging, put the figure at "scores". This necessitated street protests in the State capital, Port Harcourt by opposition supporters, calling for the vote to be rescheduled (Mark, 2015).

Prior to the 2015 general elections, there were grounds for violence before, during, and after the 2015 elections. Candidates challenging the outcome of the polls in various parts of the country have enumerated some of the various ways the elections were manipulated to buttress this point. These include the non-conduct of polls in some polling units and blatant writing of election results, as alleged in Delta, Akwa Ibom, and Rivers States, wrong compilation and computation of results, as alleged in Delta, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, and Imo States, snatching of ballot papers and boxes, as reported in much of the South-South and South-East States, preventing people from voting, as alleged in Rivers State, denying would-be voters their PVCs, as reported in Ogun and Lagos States, under-age voting in Kano, Kastina, and much of the Northern States, and inflation of election results as alleged in Akwa Ibom, Delta and Rivers States etc. Allegations of under-age voting were also reported in Jigawa, Kaduna, Gombe, Bauchi, and Kogi States. Under-age

voters were allowed to vote in clear contravention of the Electoral Act, even as voting allegedly took place late into the night (Ndujihe and Kumolu, 2015).

Nwabughio, (2015) reported that in the South-South and South-East, particularly Delta, Rivers and Akwa Ibom, no proper election took place. Result sheets were allegedly confiscated and results fabricated, giving PDP unimaginable votes, while allocating paltry figures to the APC to portray it as non-existent in the two zones. There were allegations of widespread vote manipulation, violence, intimidation and ballot box snatching. The card reader reports also unearthed monumental fraud perpetrated in virtually all the states in the zones. For example, the election petition for Delta State reveals voters discrepancies. While announced voter accreditation was put at 1,017,796, the actual card reader accreditation report shows only 709,700. The votes allocated to PDP governorship candidate (724,680) alone exceeded the accredited voters as recorded by the card reader report. The same scenario played itself out in Akwa Ibom, Abia, and Rivers states.

The situation in Rivers State was so bad that the government of Governor Rotimi Amaechi had to set up a Commission of Inquiry to look into the cases of electoral violence which engulfed the state before and during the 2015 elections. According to Chika Odinkalu, who doubled as the Chairman of the Commission of Inquiry and that of Nigeria's Human Rights Commission, the commission received reports of 83 incidents of destruction of property, including acts of vandalism and arson. Seven of the incidents occurred before the election while 77 occurred during the election.

A total of 275 different violations involving killings, injuries to persons or destruction were reported to the Inquiry. Also, 236 alleged perpetrators were identified in testimonies, while 120 people were named, 116 were unidentified. "The evidence suggests a significant incidence of internal displacement resulted from political violence in many parts of Rivers State," Mr. Odinkalu said. "The Commission of Inquiry also received evidence which strongly suggested that sexual violence was part of the arsenal of political violence in some areas." He noted that many of those who testified before the commission appeared genuinely afraid for their lives, some declined to show up, while some withdrew after being threatened.

Mr. Odinkalu criticized the attitude of security institutions in Rivers State to the work of the commission, adding that it tended to corroborate several witnesses' allegations that they were mostly indifferent to acts of political violence in the state. At the commission's inaugural sitting on May 4, Patience Adube narrated how her husband, Christopher, was killed at their home in Obrikom, ONELGA (Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area). Mr. Adube, a former caretaker chairman of the local government, and his three sons were shot to death on April 3. His son-in-law, Ikechukwu, and one of his security men were also fatally wounded as gunmen invaded his residence. Mr. Odinkalu stated that the difficulties encountered by the commission paled into insignificance beside the ordeals of some of the victims of the violence. Several witnesses who testified before the Commission of Inquiry accused the former First Lady, Patience Jonathan, of having a hand in the series of violence recorded during the polls (Ezeamalu, 2015).

Prior to this, Governor Amaechi had earlier witnessed one of the scenes of electoral violence at the course of the electioneering campaigns. He was campaigning for candidates from the All Progressives Congress (APC) in an area of Port Harcourt when gunmen opened fire on his convey. At least two people were injured in the attack in Obio Akpor, which is home to governorship candidate Nyesom Wike of the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). Amaechi's office blamed the attack on the PDP opposition party in the state (Winsor, 2015, p.2).

This was the latest in a string of violent incidents in the build-up to the 2015 elections, which had left dozens of people dead, in the run-up to Nigeria's hotly contested general elections which was held on Saturday March 28 and April 11, 2015 respectively. In 2015, at least 58 people died in 61 incidences of election violence across 22 states, according to a February report from the National Human Rights Commission, Nigeria's human rights body. Reacting to a possible conflagration during the elections Odinkalu noted thus:

The world believes that Nigeria is going to eat itself up Because we are going for an election, we must show we can do things differently. We don't want our election administrators killed, we don't want our voters killed, and we don't want our politicians killed (Winsor, 2015, p.2). The above observation notwithstanding, Nigeria still

did not witness a violent free election in 2015 as numerous evidences have shown.

As an acknowledgement of the widespread violence which engulfed the elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) promised to investigate cases of the violence against polling units, the commission's officials, voters and election materials during the elections. The Commission in a statement made available to newsmen vowed that the electoral umpire will do everything within its powers to prosecute the culprits, just as it urged aggrieved persons or groups to seek redress at the tribunals. According to the statement, many parts of the country remained relatively peaceful during the elections, but some states including Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ebonyi and Ondo states recorded a significant number of violent incidents. INEC's records show that there were 66 reports of violent incidents targeted at polling units, the Commission's officials, voters and election materials. These were in Rivers State (16 incidents), Ondo (8), Cross River and Ebonyi (6 each), Akwa Ibom (5), Bayelsa (4), Lagos and Kaduna (3 each), Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti and Osun (2 each), Katsina, Plateau, Kogi, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun (1 each) (Daka, 2015, p.4).

Elsewhere in the North Eastern part of Nigeria, violence became the order of the day during the presidential and other polls. The situation became more complicated because of the role of the insurgents, Boko Haram which prior to the elections had caused thousands of death and internally displaced persons (IDPs). During the presidential election, suspected Boko Haram militants killed at least 41 people in Maiduguri, Northeast Nigeria, causing others to flee the polls. And thousands in the oil-rich South protested the alleged killings of opposition campaign workers and voting irregularities. In another clime, the All Progressives Congress (APC) opposition party said 55 of its members were killed in election violence in Rivers state while, one person was killed during a massive protest by supporters of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Ekiti State (Winsor, 2015, p.6). Earlier before the elections, CLEEN Foundation, a non-governmental organization that promotes public safety, security, and access to justice, in Abuja listed 15 states as the most volatile with high security risk during the forthcoming 2015 election. The organization in its report titled 'Third Security Threat Assessment', noted that the security situation in the country could be seen as a reflection of the

failure of the Nigerian state to protect its citizens. The states listed as most volatile were Nasarawa, Plateau, Benue, Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba, Kaduna, Zamfara, Rivers, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Ekiti and Osun. Three of these states, Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe were under emergency rule due to the activities of the terrorist Boko Haram group. Some others like Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna, and Zamfara have recently witnessed killings of hundreds of people by unidentified armed men, as well as through communal and ethno-religious violence. The latest being the killing of over 100 people in a Zamfara community by unidentified gunmen on motorcycles (Ibeh, 2014, p.2).

These documentations would not be complete without mentioning the role of the security agencies in the whole issue of electoral irregularities and violence. The Police and other security forces have been roundly accused of being abused national institutions since 1999. For example, officers and men of the Police Force have been accused of crass partisanship, turning the force into the enforcement arm of the ruling party, wantonly used to tilt and occasionally thwart the will of the people or generally act in ways that negate its constitutional mandate of maintaining law and order like shielding those who engage in violence. As the 2015 elections drew near, men of the Force were accused of providing security cover for the Odua People's Congress (OPC) members who tormented motorists and wreaked havoc on the streets of Lagos while campaigning for President Jonathan's re-election. The alleged role of the police in the Ekiti and Osun States gubernatorial elections in 2014, were indicators of the extent the institution has been dragged into partisan politics. Officers of the force have been accused of being major actors in the manipulation of electoral outcomes and violence that characterized elections especially in Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Sokoto, and Gombe States (Daudu, 2015).

It was in this spirit that Sulaiman Abba's order directing Nigerians to vote and immediately vacate polling units during the 2015 elections was widely contested by Nigerians, as illegal directive to please the powers that be. Hence, voters simply ignored the order, voted and stayed behind to make ensure that their votes counted in a number of polling units including Bauchi State where voters defied curfew imposed by the State government. Ndujihe and

Kumolu (2015) reported that the grievances in Taraba State included the allegation that soldiers deployed during the March 28 elections frightened and intimidated voters allowing for malpractices. It was alleged that rather than ensure fraud-free elections, the army were used to rig the elections in favour of the PDP. The deployment of soldiers in Wukari, Takum and other communities openly threatened voters. At the end of the supplementary election in the state, the APC still alleged that the electoral process was fraught with violence, massive rigging, ballot snatching and abuse of the card readers in substantial parts of the state by the PDP (Ndujihe and Kumolu, 2015)

Soni Daniel (2015) reported that most security men wanted to deliver victory at all cost for those who paid them and by extension protect their jobs. Hence, the penchant for the snag: 'obey the last order or comply with the order from above', a situation, which manifested in security agents aiding and abetting electoral fraud and violence just to maintain the status quo. A handful insisted discharging their responsibilities dispassionately and in the nation's overall interest to the displeasure of their respective bosses. This perhaps explains the widely reported insinuations on the circumstances surrounding the summary replacement of Suleiman Abba suspected of proving too difficult to the ruling party, as Inspector General of Police. Abba was accused of not being sensitive enough by posting a police officer suspected to have sympathy for the opposition in Rivers State. The PDP insisted on having Hosea Karma to provide security for the conduct of the elections since he was thought to have good knowledge of the riverine State more than any of his colleagues. The attempt by Abba to foist Kayode Ogunshakin on the State for the election alongside three other AIGs and 2800 policemen merely infuriated the ruling party and quickened Abba's ouster from the force. While Ogunshakin was allegedly forced to leave Port Harcourt for Calabar in the early hours of the Election Day, other officers and men could not dare the superior firepower of the militants and thugs deployed to Port Harcourt metropolis by the politicians throughout the duration of the election (Daniel, 2015). The rest is now history as even the governorship Election Petition Tribunal have annulled the election in Rivers State while Akwa Ibom had the elections cancelled in some local governments of the state with a re-run

ordered within ninety days as a result of irregularities.

CONCLUSION

This paper has painstakingly analyzed the issue of electoral violence as it concerns the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. It discovered that the above documented cases of electoral violence in the 2015 general elections notwithstanding, Nigeria indeed has proved to the world that something good can come out of Africa. The expectations were that the country will be torn into pieces by the outcome of the 2015 elections but this has paled into insignificance as the country has instead become a model for not only Africa but the entire world to know that Africa has a lot to offer that is worthy of emulation by the entire world.

It is equally a good omen for Nigeria's electoral umpire, INEC that it could conduct an election that is widely acclaimed and acknowledged as being successful and credible in spite of the fact that the campaigns were enmeshed in hate speeches, derogatory remarks, and attacks on personality as well as slanderous documentaries.

It must as well be acknowledged that the cases and magnitude of electoral violence in the 2015 elections were far less than those of the previous ones and most importantly the conduct of the then incumbent President in accepting defeat and congratulating the winner deserves commendation and gives room for the thinking that the 2019 elections will be better.

In concluding this paper, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that the survival of democracy in Nigeria cannot be viewed solely from the prism of electoral violence and the conduct of the 2015 elections by INEC.

The principal bane to the survival of the democratic process or put in another way the survival of modern Nigeria is the effect of the activities of the political class on the institutions and infrastructure that sustain our national life. Consequently, it is intended in this discourse to suggest to the new leadership in Nigeria the steps and agenda it should take having regard not only to the electorally induced problems, which in itself is substantial but also as it relates to institutional problems of leadership and governance that have afflicted Nigeria from time immemorial. For free, fair and credible elections in 2019 and beyond, we offer the following recommendations. Firstly, there is greater need for strict adherence to the letters of the electoral laws in the country particularly as

it concerns electoral offences. It has become very worrisome that as massive as electoral irregularities and malpractices including killings have been in the country over time, there has never been any trial and conviction of any offender even when there have been cases of arrest and detention of culprits. This show of lack of respect for the dignity and lives of citizens should no longer be tolerated and the various agencies of government responsible for curbing these excesses should wake up to their responsibilities. The way and manner that perpetrators of electoral violence go scot-free is increasingly becoming a national embarrassment. We therefore suggest that a special court or tribunal, the Independent Electoral Tribunal be set up specifically for the handling within a stipulated time frame of electoral offences since there could be some possible delays arising from the lack of time and space to speedily dispense with electoral offences after elections by the regular courts. Similarly, as the perpetrators are punished so should the sponsors of such horrendous acts be brought to justice. The present situation where only the direct perpetrators are arrested and later released even to their sponsors without any mention to them does not and cannot support violence-free elections in 2019 and beyond in the country. Both the perpetrators and the sponsors must be punished in accordance with the dictates of the law.

Secondly, government should revisit the Justice Mohammed Uwais' committee report and see how it can implement its recommendations especially the need to establish the Centre for Democratic Studies that will help our young and new breed politicians to study the doctrine of leadership, political tolerance and resilience. The Centre should also collaborate with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to enlighten Nigerians to eschew violence before, during and after elections. Enlightenment campaigns must be intensified so as to educate the people on the dangers of violence as well as discourage them from such. Part of that enlightenment should include the need for the people to petition the International Criminal Court (ICC) in glaring cases of electoral violence sponsorship and perpetration.

Thirdly, there is need for the respect of the fundamental human rights of Nigerians by both government and its security agencies. This should also be blended by the respect for the rule of law at all times, a development which

will make it imperative for all to be answerable to the law irrespective of sex, status, religion or ethnic origin. A situation where different laws are applicable to different people on the same offence does not augur well for the management of the legal and justice systems in the country.

Fourthly, bearing in mind that the bulk of electoral violence are perpetrated by the youths, the issue of youth unemployment should be rigorously addressed. While commending the current youth empowerment programmes in the country such as the Sure-P, the Graduate Entrepreneurial Scheme (GES) by the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) among others, one is tempted to state that these are not enough for a country with over 70 million unemployed people. Thus any little amount given by the perpetrators of electoral violence to these idle youths is enough to ginger them into action.

Finally, with the passage of time since the April 2015 elections, the scores of deaths of those who were killed for political gains may have been forgotten by all but their closest relatives. But the impunity which has so far protected the perpetrators should not be accepted by anyone concerned about democracy and human rights in Nigeria. The Nigerian government should take immediate steps to provide justice to the victims and their families. The first step is to launch thorough and independent investigations into all reports of political killings carried out during the elections, and to bring to justice those responsible.

The election tribunals are currently hearing complaints and grievances from various parties in the aftermath of the elections, but these have focused mostly on the accusations of fraud, rigging and other electoral irregularities. If they are able to function independently, these election tribunals could provide an important channel for redress in cases of fraud and other malpractices, but are not a substitute for criminal prosecutions for acts of violence perpetrated against Nigerians.

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