

The Nigerian State and Electoral Violence: An Analysis of the 2019 Presidential General Election in Nigeria.

Obiam, Sampson Chimene

Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Abstract

The paper examined the Nigerian State and electoral violence, particularly the violence that emanated from the recently concluded 2019 presidential general election in Nigeria. Election is a key criterion for democracy and good governance to flourish in any democratic state. It allows the electorates the freedom to choose or elect candidates that will fill governmental positions in the state in a free, fair, credible and peaceful atmosphere. Unfortunately, post-colonial Nigeria has neither conducted a credible nor peaceful election. Nigerian elections have always been characterized by hate speeches, media war among contenders, politically motivated killings and assassinations, intimidations, victimizations, hijack of electoral materials, destruction of campaign billboards and property. The 2019 presidential general election did not fair better as the above-mentioned issues manifested before, during and after the election. Between 16th November 2018 and 23rd February 2019 that the presidential election was conducted, a total of 361 lives were lost as a result of election-related violence. The study sought to understand why the Nigerian State has been unable to abate the issue of electoral violence after 20 years of uninterrupted democratic rule in Nigeria. To do justice to this, the study adopted the Marxist theoretical framework. The rationale for the adoption of this theory was that it helped the study to analyse the relationship between classes within the Nigerian state, and how that relationship impacts on the dynamics of the struggle to access the power of the state. The paper relied on secondary data. The study found out that the Nigeria State has been failing to address the root cause of electoral violence, namely, poverty and unemployment. Therefore, it has failed in its primary responsibility of ensuring the security and welfare of its citizens as enshrined in section 14 sub-section 2(b) of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria. The study recommended the need for the government to sincerely tackle poverty and unemployment through educational and economic empowerment programmes that would bring about socio-economic development.

Keyword: Elections, Electoral Violence, Nigerian State, Poverty, Marxist theory.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Electoral violence is not alien to third world societies, more specifically to Nigeria. In Nigeria, electoral violence dates back to over a hundred years ago right from the time of indirect rule under the British Government to the post-independence era. Since the Nigerian State assumed self-rule status from the British government on October 1st, 1960 and its celebration of 20 years of uninterrupted democratic rule from 1999-2019, the State has been battling rampant cases of violent elections in every election year. The pre-independence Nigerian State witnessed various constitutional emergence (such as the Clifford constitution 1922, Richard Constitution 1946, Macpherson Constitution 1951, Lyttleton Constitution 1954) that introduced the elective principle and a sharing of power that was not favourable to the regions that made up the amalgamated Nigeria. The Macpherson Constitution of 1951, in particular, favoured the Northern region by giving the region 50% of political representation at the federal level. This was to the disadvantage to the Eastern and Western regions and this laid the foundation for grievances which escalated after independence (FFP, 2018). In the first general elections conducted in Nigeria in the year 1959, the country was divided into 312 constituencies while the distribution of seats among the regions shows: Northern region:174, Eastern region:73, Western region:62, Lagos region:3, and Southern Cameroon: 8 (Ujo, 2000). The post-independence elections conducted in Nigeria has always been violent. CLEEN Foundation reported that even as early as the 1940s, elections worsened communal, political, and religious violence, and this became worse after independence in 1960 (CLEEN, 2015). The Human Rights Watch (2007) has described elections conducted in Nigeria as corrupt, abusive and violent. This description to Malu (2009) is apt because it appeared that Nigerians seem to have sustained a culture of electoral violence as the 1964/1965, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 elections conducted in the country witnessed violence (Malu cited in Obakhedo, 2011; CLEEN, 2019).

Obakhedo (2011) maintained that the Nigerian state has only added to her litany of electoral violence since the inception of the ongoing democratic era in 1999. According to him, the 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections that brought President Olusegun Obasanjo and later the late President Umaru Yar'Adua to power were marred with widespread violence, fraud, and insecurity. Although, the 1999 presidential election witnessed little violence record largely because it was conducted under the military regime, the 2003 presidential election conducted by President Obasanjo government was characterized by rigging, thuggery, intimidation, manipulation of the electoral process, and politically induced killings of opponents. The violence that took place in the 2003 election set the stage for another violence in the 2007 election. President Obasanjo during the campaign for his party, the People Democratic Party (PDP), asserted that the 2007 election was going to be a do or die affair. It was indeed a do or die election as scores of people lost their lives and property. According to Campbell (2010), about 300 persons lost their lives as a result of the violence that erupted in the 2007 election. No wonder the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) stated in its post-election report that the electoral process failed the Nigerian people, while the Human Rights Watch (2007) reported that there were scores of political killings, bombings and armed-clashes between competing political groups. The report (HRW, 2007, p. 21) further posits that the poll:

cast a harsh and very public light on patterns of violence, insecurity, corruption and outright criminality that have come to characterize Nigeria's political system and on the extent to which officials and institutions at all levels of government accept, encourage and participate in those abuses.

The 2007 presidential election was rated as one of the worst elections ever conducted in Nigeria by both local and international observers of the election. The winner of the presidential election, late Umaru Musa Yaradua acknowledged that the presidential election conducted in 2007 was vastly fraudulent and thus after assuming office as President, he inaugurated an Electoral Reform Committee headed by Justice Uwais to correct the anomalies in Nigeria's electoral system.

The 2011 presidential election happened to be the best in Nigeria when compared to the one held in 2007. However, the 2011 presidential election was also characterized by violence before, during and after the elections (Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (2011, p. 55) reported that:

the 2011 general elections were marred with violence that manifested in terms of injuries, deaths, arson, assault, abduction of political leaders or their supporters, looting, destruction of electoral materials among others.

After the declaration of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan - the candidate of the PDP – as the winner of the 2011 Presidential elections by the electoral body (the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)), the northern region of the country was thrown into the state of turmoil and disorder. Provocative posts sent through the social media worsened the tensions created by ethnic and religious campaigns by followers of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari. Human Rights Watch (2011) reported that about 800 lives were lost as a result of the post-election violence. In the same way, the Human Rights Watch (2011) posited that more than 65,000 people were displaced as a result of the 2011 post-election violence. The Nigerian Red Cross Society released a slightly lower figure indicating that the violence displaced 48,000 persons in 12 states (Omenazu and Paschal, 2011).

The 2015 presidential election equally witnessed some degree of violence. The principal actors were the People Democratic Party (PDP) with Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as the flag bearer and the All Progressive Congress (APC) with Gen. Muhammadu Buhari as the flag bearer. The electoral process was characterized by hate speeches, slandering, victimizations, intimidations, killings and destruction of property. Electoral violence occurred before, during and after the election. Violence broke out during the registration period, after the winners were announced and on the main day of the elections in some sections of the Nigerian State (Campbell, 2019). Close to the 2015 elections, security challenges became worrisome most specifically in Northern Nigeria. This is largely due to the sudden rise in the dreadful activities of Boko Haram which resulted in the postponement of the election by six weeks. The CLEEN Foundation Security Threat Assessment published in March 2015 found that 15 states were on a red alert level. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in its Pre-Election Report stated that at least 58 persons have been killed even before the conduct of 2015 general elections (CLEEN, 2015). According to INEC, there were 66 reports of violent occurrence across the country. "The violence was recorded in Rivers State (16 incidents); Ondo (8); Cross Rivers (6); Ebonyi (6); Akwa Ibom (5); Bayelsa (4); Lagos and Kaduna (3 each); Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti (2 each); Katsina, Kogi, Plateau, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun (one each)" (Vanguard, April 12, 2015). The European Union Election Observation Mission reported that about 30 persons were killed on April 11, 2015, election day, as a result of inter-party clashes and attacks on election places (EU EOM, 2015). Muhammadu Buhari eventually won the 2015 presidential elections with over 15 million votes, thereby unseating the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan (Paden, 2016).

The continual electoral violence in Nigeria seems to suggest that candidates, supporters, political party members, and other electoral stakeholders participate in electoral violence from the first election held in Nigeria

to the just concluded 2019 presidential election. Some of the violent means employed by politicians and their supporters to influence election outcome include assassination of opponents, disruption of voters registration in areas where the perpetrators lack political support, destruction of campaign billboards and posters of opponents, killings, harming and intimidating electorates during election, snatching of ballot boxes, disruption of rallies and campaigns of opponents, abuse and manipulations of security and law enforcement agencies, among others. (Etannibi, 2011).

The 2019 presidential elections did not fair better, as the major contenders and their parties employed violence as a strategy to influence the outcome of the election. Many lives were lost and property were destroyed. It follows from the above that in almost every election year, since independence, electoral violence has become part and parcel of the Nigerian electoral process. Scores of people have lost their lives to electoral violence, and property worth millions of naira have been destroyed.

Despite the various studies on electoral violence in Nigeria, no study has adequately explored and holistically examined the relationship between the Nigerian state and electoral violence, and particularly on the just concluded 2019 presidential election. Thus, this study sought to understand the reasons why the Nigerian State has been unable to abate the issue of electoral violence in the last 20 years it returned to democratic rule.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

It is necessary to clarify some concepts used in this study by a way of defining and explaining in brief. The researcher intends that its readers will be able to understand these concepts from this perspective.

Election:

It is pertinent to begin here by saying that election is one of those concepts in social sciences that enjoy limitless definitions. The word “elect” implies selecting or making a decision. Ujo traced the history of election back to the history of ancient Greece and Roman societies, and also the medieval age when they choose leaders such as the Pope and Emperor (Ujo, 2012). Ujo went further to define election as a process of choosing individual or group of people to represent a larger population in the affairs of a given country, community, or nation, most commonly through voting and the process requires a given standard of acceptability in terms of credibility, freeness, and fairness of the conduct of the election (Ujo, 2012). Election is the official way of selecting someone who will govern the public, through electing or voting for that person or political party (Eulau, Gibbins and Webb, 2019). Alapiki (2004) views election as the manner of choice agreed upon by a group of people which enables them to select one or few people out of many to occupy one or more positions. This manner of choice usually involves rules and regulations designed to ensure a certain degree of fairness and justice to all participants. Election empowers electorates of a particular area and during a given period to decide who governs them. Election allows the citizens and residents of a given society to choose or elect their representatives who will fill vacant positions in government within a given period. This procedure should be carried out in a free, fair and conducive atmosphere without any form of intimidation or violence.

From the various perspectives of an election, one can generally agree that;

- Election deals with choosing of person or persons to fill governmental positions.
- Election presents the citizens or residents of a given country the choice to elect or select freely their preferred candidates to fill a position of authority in the country.
- Election brings about a peaceful and orderly transition of power from one person to another, thereby strengthening and deepening democracy in the country.

Thus, it is based on this general agreement that this study conceives election as a process whereby the citizens and residents (electorates) choose or elect candidates who will represent them in governmental positions for a given time frame, and this process must be carried out in a peaceful, free, fair and conducive atmosphere.

Electoral Violence:

There exists no universally accepted definition of what constitutes electoral violence. Electoral violence has enjoyed numerous definitions by different scholars. For the know, Schmid cited in Etannibi (2011, p. 124), violence involves direct physical hurt or harm to someone's bodily integrity (violation as in torture, rape, mutilation, beating) and ultimately live itself (killing). It can be a result of an aggressive attitude (or impulse) or instrumental behaviour meant to injure or destroy human beings to achieve a variety of ends, such as enforcing (or avoiding) dominance.

Violence to Jacquin (2017) has to do with aggressive actions from person/persons or party/parties which are imposed onto another and could, therefore, be caused by someone wanting to change a government or situation.

The United Nations observed that electoral violence is any act or threat of coercion, intimidation or physical harm perpetrated to affect the electoral process, or that arise in the context of electoral competition. When perpetrated to affect an electoral process, violence may be employed to influence the process of elections

such as efforts to delay, disrupt or derail a poll or to influence the outcome. Electoral violence can be exhibited in the following two forms; the first is that electoral violence involves acts of physical harm such as; assaults and attacks on communities or candidates, gender-based violence, mob violence and political assassinations during the election campaigns. The second is that violent acts can be targeted against objects, buildings, and structures as well as people. For instance, the targeting or deliberate destruction of campaign materials, vehicles, offices or ballot boxes may deter targeted communities and electorates from exercising their franchise in a free and fair atmosphere.

Etannibi (2011) defined electoral violence as any form of violence that is carried out to influence electoral outcomes. Egobueze & Ojirika (2017, p. 3) explained that electoral violence can be any acts of hostility or aggression either before, after or during the election process. These actions involve physically or verbally threatening people who will be voting, forcefully interrupting the election process, or even to hurt anyone who is involved in the elections.

Electoral violence connotes all forms of violence (physical, psychological, administrative, legal and structural) at different stages engaged in by participants, their supporters, and sympathizers (including security and election management body staff) in the electoral process. These forms of violence take place before elections, during elections and after elections, and could also be intra- or inter-party (Balogun cited in Obakhedo, 2011).

Electoral violence means, therefore, any act of violence perpetrated in the course of electoral conduct by individuals or groups before, during and after the election with the intent to influence the outcome of the election to the desired outcome. It may include any of the following acts; thuggery, snatching of ballot boxes, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling units, use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters or to cause bodily harm or injury to anyone connected with electoral processes.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In examining the Nigerian state and electoral violence: the 2019 presidential election in view, the study adopted the Marxian Political Economy approach as its theoretical framework of analysis. The Marxian political economy approach is most suitable for the study, as it analyses social formations and classes and their contradictory relationship. The approach is rooted in Karl Marx's social theory. The approach assumed a radical posture in the interpretation of the economic process. Its emphasis is on social classes, productive forces and social relations of production. Marx maintains that the substructure, which is the economy, determines the overall superstructure of society. Therefore, the economic base of the society determines the political, legal, cultural and other sectors of the society. It focuses on the society in its entirety through existing relations within it and essentially within the umbrella of social production. For Ndu (2001, p. 313): the Marxian political-economic approach implies an analysis of historical economic relations, given specific tools of analysis which are classes in social action. This is to say that the approach presumes that the basic premise is economic development because it considers man as he is, not as he should be, and makes the fundamental assumption that the physical needs of man come first. It is because of this that the approach gives primacy to economic activity.

In other words, the approach focuses on man and how to meet his economic needs in society. Man must eat to survive; for him to eat, he must produce. In producing, he is linked with nature –that is, land – and he also enters into a social relationship with others. There emerge the class that owns and controls the means of production, and the class that does not own and control the means of production – the former is the exploiting class and the other is the exploited class. The approach sees production as very important in the proper understanding of the development of man and society and the analysis of the dynamics between it. There is an unequal exchange in the relationship existing between these two classes (exploiting and exploited class) that result in contradictions. And society must try to manage these contradictions to avoid falling into ruins.

In Marx's view, the substructure which is the economy determines the superstructure which is the political, cultural, ideological, social, and legal systems. Following the Marxian line of thinking, Ake (1981, Pp. 1-2) argued that, once we understand what the material assets and constraints of a society are, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed, and what types of social relations arise from the organization of production, we have come a long way to understand the culture of that society, its religious system and even its modes of thought.

The Marxian Political Economy approach shows how the various parts of the superstructure are used as instruments of domination of the ruling class, and as a mechanism of oppression of the subject class. To Ake (1981) the approach explicitly analyses the economic reasons, interests, and agenda behind political and social decisions in any social formation. He maintains that members of the exploiting class, that is, the advantaged class, are usually better educated, more cultured, have higher social statuses and are fortunate, not only economically but also politically.

The relevance of this approach to the study is that it exposes the fact that the violence that has plagued the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria is as a result of the violent struggle among political actors in the

country to access and control the resources of the state. In Nigeria, the person elected president determines and controls the economic sector and other sectors of the state. Hence, the contest for the post of the president of the country is viewed as a do-or-die affair and a zero-sum game that must be won by all means. It helps the understanding of the double standard of the Nigerian political elites whose key interest is to control the commonwealth to enhance their economic interest without necessarily pursuing the collective interest of all. In the bid to capture or retain power, the ruling class uses various means which are mainly violent in nature. These political elites incite ethnic and religious sentiments among the people to ensure that their interest is further protected. According to Ake (1996), the Nigerian political environment at independence became a war front as the struggle for power became fierce and internecine. The political elites engaged in primitive accumulation of state resources. The Marxian Political Economy approach is significant based on its concreteness and comprehensiveness in looking at the society in its entirety and issues emanating from the society, more specifically on the Nigerian state and 2019 presidential election and the under tune for violence which is economically linked.

IV. THE 2019 PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

The presidential election held on February 23, 2019, is the 6th presidential election conducted in Nigeria since the return to democratic rule in the year 1999. The two major contenders for the seat of the president were: Muhammadu Buhari (incumbent President), the flag bearer of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Atiku Abubakar (former Vice-President), the flag bearer of the People Democratic Party (PDP).

Studies have shown that elections in Nigeria have for long been associated with violence, but the February 23 presidential election has added another phase to the unfortunate record. The presidential elections saw problems such as thuggery, rigging, and vote-buying, etc. The election also witnessed a voter turnout of 35.6% according to the INEC announcement. Two of the reasons for this low turnout may be connected to electoral violence leading up to the Presidential election and then, the subsequent postponement of the election from February 16 to February 23, 2019. By close observation, we saw both the state, private actors and other electoral stakeholders influencing the electoral process for their preferred outcome through disrupting voting, intimidating electorates and the officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The Civil Society Situation Monitoring Unit reported several cases of disruptions in Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Lagos, and Rivers States. Incidents of attacks on INEC offices were equally observed. For instance, the INEC office in Ijesa, Oriade Local Government Area in Osun State was attacked on Saturday, February 23, 2019. Perpetrators of the attack were reported to have burnt down the card readers and ballot papers used in the presidential election.

The Civil Society Situation Room Report (2019, p. 33) further stated that: there were 96 verified incidents, which resulted in 361 deaths between the period of November 16, 2018, and Presidential Election Day of February 23, 2019. During a period covering 104 days a daily average of 3.5 deaths of Nigerians were recorded, with an incident occurring almost every day. Incidents that resulted in fatalities were recorded in 29 of the 36 States (including the Federal Capital Territory). These incidents occurred in each of the six geopolitical zones. There was a very pronounced spike in the number of incidents as well as the number of deaths per incident as the elections approached, with incidents peaking on Election Day, 23 February 2019, and tailing off thereafter.

Further breakdown by the Civil Society Situation Room shows that the average death count per incident was four, while the north-west, north-east and north-central had death tolls that exceeded the average. In relation to absolute figures, the south-south, north-west, and the north-central zones led the pack. The south-east had the minimum figure of deaths, incidents, and the lowest death rate. An analysis of national violence and deaths during the elections show Benue, Borno, Kaduna and Rivers States as the leaders. It was equally reported that 15% to 20% of all election-related deaths occurred on election day, with pre-existing tensions prompting the clashes to more deaths. While incidents in the north were fewer, they were bloodier. Most of the violence in Southern Nigeria was mainly in Delta, Lagos and Rivers States on election day (Civil Society Situation Room, 2019).

Table 1: Electoral Violence based on Geo-Political Zones in the 2019 General Elections

S/N	Geo-Political Zones	No. of Incidents	No. of Casualties
1.	North – Central	23 incidents	111 people killed
2.	North – East	16 incidents	146 people killed
3.	North – West	20 incidents	172 people killed
4.	South – East	7 incidents	14 people killed
5.	South-South	59 incidents	120 killed
6.	South – West	36 incidents	63 killed

Extraction from Civil Society Situation Room (2019) and Compiled by the researcher, (2021).

On the state-by-state basis, the Civil Society Situation Room (2019) stated that Benue, Borno, Kaduna, Rivers, and Zamfara, ranked highest in the number of casualties recorded. Violence caused by state actors, that is, the security agencies were recorded in Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Benue, Delta, Kwara, Lagos, Plateau, and the Rivers States while incidents in the North East were few but more fatal because of Boko Haram menace.

In examining the just concluded 2019 presidential election, the Niger Delta Watch (2019, p. 4) stated that the Niger Delta region alone recorded;

116 cases of bribery, 159 violent incidents, 103 fatalities, 38 incidents of destruction, manipulation or theft of campaign materials (such as billboards and posters), 36 cases of detention, intimidation or disappearance of party candidates or supporters, 35 cases involving detention, intimidation or disappearance of voters or civil society members, 31 incidents involving delays or irregularities in voting preparations or processes, 29 riots or protests, 16 incidents of destruction, manipulation or theft of voting materials or systems, 12 incidents involving campaign misconduct or irregularities.

According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) (2019, p. 5), the 2019 presidential election faced various challenges that affected the election. The challenges observed in the election were: "INEC missteps and misconduct, deliberate denial of access to observers and media, logistical shortfalls, intentional disruption by politicians, political thugs, and party agents and intimidation of collation staff by security agents".

INEC was not unaware of the violence that took place in the election as it stated during the announcement of the result that voting was cancelled in many polling units across the country due to disruptions, such as violence, snatching of ballot box and polling officials' refusal to use the smart card reader, as well as for over-voting (National Democratic Institute/International Republic Institute Report, 2019). On Wednesday, 27th February 2019, INEC announced and declared Muhammadu Buhari of the APC who polled a total number of 15,191,847 votes as the winner of the 2019 presidential election while Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, pooled 11,262,978 votes. The other political party presidential candidates (71 of them) that participated in the election had a total of 2,159,365 votes (INEC, 2019).

The Nature and Causes of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Electoral violence has become a major impediment against the conduct of credible elections in Nigeria. The trend over the years, especially during an election year, shows that electoral violence has become part and parcel of Nigerian political culture. The Nigerian state has witnessed and condoned incidents of violent activities during electioneering, and in most cases, the sponsors and perpetrators of this ugly menace go scot-free with little or no state penalty. We hardly find in Nigeria any powerful political leader convicted for either sponsoring or perpetrating electoral violence and this has contributed to the rise of the menace. The reason for electoral violence in the state is not far-fetched. The Nigeria political elites have the primitive accumulation mentality; hence they see that state and its apparatus as a means of amassing wealth to themselves. Also, the Nigerian state has enormous resources and access to the leadership of the state gives one access to the wealth of the nation. And so, the political competitors employ every strategy and means (violence inclusive) to acquire political power that will further enhance their economic power in the long run. The access to political power enables the leader to be in the helm of affairs, determine and control what happens in both economic, political and other sectors of the country. The determination of who gets what, when and how in the Nigerian state lies in the hands of the one saddled with the responsibility of managing the wealth of the nation. Hence, to get elected, these political competitors recruit and empower some unemployed, poverty-stricken youths to perpetrate mayhem before, during and after elections. This they do influence the outcome of the election to their favour. An average Nigerian politician believes that election in Nigeria is not a free and fair process but a do-or-die affair, a zero-sum game, and a winner takes it all matter. Elections in Nigeria have always been characterized by hate speeches, media war among contenders, politically motivated killings and assassinations, intimidations, victimizations, hijack of electoral materials, destruction of campaign billboards and property, etc. Etannibi (2011, p. 124) stated that there exists widespread electoral violence in the Nigerian electoral process because the stakes are high. Hence, he identified that "the occupation of political offices offers unrestricted means of illegal acquisition of wealth and facilitates the exercise of political power with impunity. As a result, winning elections becomes a do-or-die affair".

Poverty and unemployment are root causes of electoral violence in Nigeria. According to the World Bank, a person can be said to be living in poverty if they live below the poverty line of \$1.90 which translates to ₦693.5 per day and the World Poverty Clock figure has shown that more than 91,885,874 Nigerians are living in poverty (Sahara Reporters, 2019). Whereas the Unemployment rate in Nigeria remains high as the National Bureau of Statistics has shown that unemployment has hit 23.1% in 2019. Aniekwe & Kushie (2011) and Orji & Uzodi, (2012) in their studies have revealed that most electoral violence in Nigeria is carried by poor and unemployed illiterate gangs and thugs recruited, equipped with arms, funded by party officials, political elites,

and government officials. As a result of the high level of unemployment and poverty among Nigerians, they are adversely attracted to violent crimes. Poverty breeds desperation, thus the political leaders can use that to their selfish advantage. Furthermore, unemployed young people have nothing to do at home. Hence, they are recruited by desperate politicians to engage in electoral violence (Ukwu, 2016). The electoral violence commonly witnessed in the country is often perpetuated by sets of illiterates, sometimes educated illiterate who are unemployed, financially weak and poor youths who depend on the political elites for their survival thus they easily turn political thugs for their political masters (Meadow, 2009). Adagba et al (2012), Nwagboso (2012) noted that the failure of the successive Nigerian government to address issues of poverty, unemployment and inequitable distribution of wealth among ethnic nationalities are the key reasons behind insecurity witnessed in Nigeria.

Money politics causes electoral violence in Nigeria. Chee S. in Edgar (2013) sees money politics as an electoral offense that has to do with any act of changing people's minds through the use of money and anything involving inducements, promises, and threats in the polls. In Nigeria, money is used to intimidate, manipulate and manoeuvre elections to favour preferred candidates. Ojo (2008) viewed money politics as the selling and buying of votes. It also entails the sharing of other material benefits such as foodstuffs (stomach infrastructure), T-shirts, caps, etc to electorates showing the image of candidates during the campaign. According to Niger Delta Watch (2019), the 2019 election was characterized by cases of vote-buying. The vote-buying ranged from giving money to voters during campaigns to providing free medical care, distributing free cows, provisions, configured phones, tabs, and rice. Vote buying was carried out by political parties contesting the election. Permanent Voter Cards became a commodity that can be bought by political parties and their candidates. Vote-buying in some instances result in violence. For instance, when disputes arise in the process of sharing items (especially money) to supporters they lead to violence. The Niger Delta Watch also reported that some people were instructing voters on election day to vote for a specific candidate to get their compensation. While forbidden by law, people were reportedly asked to take a photo of their ballot before it was cast to prove that they voted for the "right" candidate in exchange for money.

The role of political godfathers in Nigeria politics cannot be overlooked as regards to electoral violence. Not all candidates to political office in Nigeria can raise on their own the resources usually required to compete in the country's election, especially if they do not enjoy control over public resources, to begin with. As a result, successful candidates are often those who are sponsored by powerful individuals who are wealthy and are known as political godfathers (Ibrahim, 2003). These godfathers are not just political financiers but also individuals whose powers stem from their ability to deploy violence and corruption to manipulate the electoral process in support of their preferred candidate. In return, they demand a substantial degree of control over the governments they help bring in to power. The godfather exact direct financial returns in the form of government resources stolen by their boys in power or lucrative government contracts awarded to them. In some instances, godfathers are themselves, public officials, using their access to public funds to sponsor lower-level officials. Godfatherism is both a symptom and a cause of the violence and corruption that together pervade the political process in Nigeria. Public officers who owe their position to the efforts of a political godfather suffer a debt that they are expected to repay throughout their tenures in office.

Impunity is another cause of electoral violence in Nigeria. We find in Nigeria a scenario where electoral offenders go scot-free as a result of being covered by impunity. The arrest and prosecution of perpetrators and sponsors of electoral violence would ordinarily serve as a deterrent to others. But in Nigeria, the political class and their political loyalist relied on the use of violence to achieve political gain because the tendency of the state through the instrument of law enforcement agencies to prosecute electoral offenders is absent (Orji & Uzodi, 2012). This encourages other contenders of public office to deploy violent strategies to influence the electoral process to their favour.

The misconception of Politics is common in Nigeria. The rampant and reoccurring cases of violence in Nigeria's electoral process have made for the interpretation of electoral violence as being normal. And so, during electioneering in Nigeria, youths allow themselves to be recruited by politicians to cause mayhem (Ukwu, 2016). They are mandated to threaten voters, destroy properties, assassinate people, cause mayhem and other forms of violence to influence the outcome of the process. This is evident that most people believe that there must be violence for every election conducted in Nigeria as no election is ever conducted in a peaceful and conducive atmosphere. And so, politics in Nigeria is perceived to be a game of war among contending parties.

Finally, the issue of ethnic and religious politics in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country with three main ethnic groups and several other minor ethnic groups. There also exist two major religious groups in Nigeria; the Christian and Islamic adherents. Political contenders in Nigeria's election are representatives of these various ethnic and religious groups. Most contenders to political power in Nigeria campaign along ethnic and religious lines that most times result in violence. The Nigerian political elites employ ethnic, religious and communal sentiment when they are faced with stiff political competition for power (Orji & Uzodi, 2012). Nigerian politician turns to their ethnic and religious group to gain political advantage before and during elections. The electoral violence witnessed in some parts of Nigeria is a result of the uncontrolled ethnic and religious

sentiment shown before, during and after the elections. While ethnic and religious politics work for some politicians, those it did not work for, result in the use of violence to show their unhappiness. According to Agbalajobi, & Agunbiade (2016) the use of ethnicity in Nigerian electioneering is such that the political aspirant with a large amount of tribal influence having lost an election tend to propagate his or her supporters directly or indirectly to cause an uproar which invariably leads to violence in the community.

The Nigerian state has failed in its responsibility to address the causes of electoral violence, hence the reasons the Nigeria state seems to appear helpless in abating the issue of electoral violence in the last 20 years the country returned to democratic rule.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Electoral violence has remained unabated in Nigeria due to the failure of the Nigerian State to address the causes of electoral violence such as the issues of money politics, godfatherism, impunity, misconception of politics, ethnic and religious politics and mostly the issues of poverty and unemployment which constitutes the root causes of electoral violence in Nigeria. Hence, it is pertinent to say that the Nigerian State has failed in its primary responsibility of ensuring the security and welfare of its citizens as enshrined in section 14 sub-section 2(b) of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria as amended in 2010.

The Way Forward

Election is not a do-or-die affair and must not be regarded as such. It is simply a process of electing candidates that will represent the people in government positions and as such should be done in a credible and peaceful atmosphere. To tackle the electoral violence in Nigeria, we recommend the need for the government to sincerely tackle poverty and unemployment through educational and economic empowerment programs that would bring about socio-economic development. A special court should be established in Nigeria to prosecute electoral offenders, as that will help to curb recurrent violence during electioneering. The electoral body must truly be independent to make and enforce electoral laws and sanction any candidate or political party that exceeds the amount pegged for electioneering to reduce the influence of money politics. Finally, education is power, hence the need for political education and awareness programmes to be organized by INEC, civil society groups, and political parties. These educative and awareness programmes should be geared toward ensuring peaceful, fair and credible elections in Nigeria and also emphasis should be made on the dangers associated with electoral violence, as it will help to curtail violence elections.

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