

**ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN
NIGERIA: REFLECTIONS ON THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

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Abstract

The holding of periodic elections is one of the most important mechanisms for the realization of the objectives of democracy. Elections are therefore, closely tied to the growth and development of democratic political order. In Nigeria however, ensuring free and fair elections has historically been a major challenge. One factor or problem that has always stood in the way of conducting free and fair elections in Nigeria is electoral violence. Indeed, electoral violence represents one of the greatest challenges of many democratizing societies. This paper therefore, examines electoral violence in the 2015 general elections and its implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The paper adopts the Marxist theory of the state as its theoretical framework and argues strongly that the persistence of electoral violence in Nigeria is a threat to democratic consolidation in the country. The paper also recommends the possible remedies to electoral violence in Nigeria.

Keywords: Election, Electoral Violence, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, and 2015 General Elections.

Introduction

The concept of democracy is complex and it means different things to different people. However, Abraham Lincoln has popularly conceptualized democracy as the government of the people by the people and for the people. This powerful and historic definition implies that democracy is that type of government that is freely chosen by the people for the pursuit of the ideals, goals, aspirations, welfare, progress and interests of the people. Democracy or democratic government therefore, enables a people to govern themselves through popular participation, equitable representation, accountability, constant interactions, discussions of common issues, voting in elections and running for public office.

One of the main attributes of democracy is that the rulers are usually held accountable to the ruled by means of a variety of political arrangements, one of which is periodic elections. The holding of periodic elections is therefore, one of the most important mechanisms for the realization of the objectives and goals of democracy. According to Oguniye and Baba (2005), elections are not only meant to ensure, confirm or re-affirm the legitimacy of the governors through a regular consent but also to provide a fertile ground for democracy to thrive. The importance of election in the democratic

process therefore lies in its ability to help produce legitimate and democratic rule or government by ensuring that those in government are not just the representatives of the governed but are also responsible to them. Olaitan (2005), writes similarly that the conception of democratic government as a responsible and responsive government is not unrelated to the fact that the power of governance, through election, rests essentially with the people themselves. It is through election that the will of the people, which should be the basis of true, democratic government, is expressed. The United Nations has also rightly observed that:

... the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government. This will, shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections ... (cited in Wanyonyi, 1997:21).

In Nigeria however, rather than being a legitimizing force and a political asset, elections since independence have become a source of political instability and decay. According to Yaqub (1999), the various experiences with competitive electoral politics in Nigeria, have brought the worst in political thuggery and brigandage, unmediated and unrestrained violence characterized by wanton destruction of lives and property. This is the main reason according to him why Nigerians look up to elections in the country with trepidation. In fact, some scholars have likened elections in Nigeria to warfare (Ake, 2001; Nnoli, 1990; Adekanye, 1988). Some scholars have argued that in Nigeria the fear of election is the beginning of political wisdom (Egwu, 2003). For Ikpe (2000), electoral politics in Nigeria has been tempestuous, ruthless, and a deadly serious business.

Obviously, electoral violence poses a great problem to any democracy. Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democracy, electoral violence has remained one of the greatest challenges to the democratization process in the country. This paper therefore, examines electoral violence in the 2015 general elections and its implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The paper has been divided into six sections. Following the introduction is the conceptual clarifications. Section three is the theoretical framework, while section four discusses the historical background of electoral violence in Nigeria. Section five examines electoral violence in the 2015 general elections and its implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Section six is the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Clarifications

Two basic concepts involved in our discussion need further explanations. These are the concepts of electoral violence and democratic consolidation.

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence is a limited aspect of political violence that is usually associated with the process of elections in a democratic set up. Electoral violence can occur before, during or after elections. Possible manifestations or expressions of electoral violence include murder, arson, vandalism, abduction, assault, violent seizure and destruction of electoral materials, among others

Roberts and Obioha (2005:398), define electoral violence as “actions involving the use of force and abuse of other person’s fundamental right before, during or after an electoral contest”. Nweke (2005:386-387), sees it as “any form of physical force applied at disorganizing electoral process, destruction of electoral materials, and intimidating of electorates to vote against their wish. It includes physical force aimed at influencing electoral officials to work in favour of particular group or party or person as against an established procedure. Also, it is a harmful act targeted at causing disharmony at elections”. Ilufoye Ogundiya defines electoral violence thus:

Electoral violence includes all sorts of riots, demonstrations, party clashes, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping, etc, spontaneous or not, which occur before, during and after elections. It could be regarded as elections motivated crisis employed to alter, change or influence by force of coercion, the electoral behaviour of voters or voting patterns or possibly reverse electoral decision in favour of particular individual, groups or political party (cited in Ogundiya and Baba, 2005: 371).

From the foregoing definitions, one can see that electoral violence negates the work essence or principles of elections and democracy. This is why electoral violence has remained one of the greatest challenges confronting Nigeria’s democracy today.

Democratic Consolidation

The concept of democratic consolidation is still marred in conceptual confusion. Since its inception, the concept of democratic consolidation has remained a contested and nebulous concept. The concept obviously means different things to different people. The divergence meaning that scholars ascribe to the notion of democratic consolidation therefore depends on their different empirical viewpoints and the goals they want to achieve.

According to Schedler (1998:91), democratic consolidation originally “describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual reverse waves”. Schedler went further to argue that countless other tasks have been added to the list of conditions of democratic consolidation. Accordingly, it has come to include such divergent issues as popular legitimation, the diffusion of democratic values, the neutralization of antisystem actors, civilian supremacy over the military, the elimination of authoritarian enclaves, party building, the organization of functional interests, the stabilization of electoral rules, the routinization of politics, the decentralization of state power, the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, judicial reform, the alleviation of poverty, and economic stabilization. Diamond (cited in Zayyan, 2002:210), sees democratic consolidation as “the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation such that all

significant political actors, at both the elite and mass level believe that the democratic system is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine". For Ogundiya and Baba (2005:375), democratic consolidation "is about regime maintenance and about regarding the key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game".

Linz and Stepan (1996:5), writes that democratic consolidation has been attained when democratic processes and institutions become "the only game in town". They went further to provide a tri-dimensional perspective to the question of democratic consolidation – the behavioural, the attitudinal, and the constitutional perspectives. Let me quote them in details here:

Behaviourally, democracy becomes the only game in town when no significant political opposition seriously attempt to overthrow the democratic regime or to promote domestic or international violence in order to secede from the state ... Attitudinally, democracy becomes the only game in town when, even in the face of severe political and economic crisis, the overwhelming majority of the people believe that any further political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic procedures. Constitutionally, democracy becomes the only game in town which all the actors in the polity become habituated to the fact that political conflict within the state will be resolved according to established norms and that violation of these norms are likely to be both ineffective and costly.

Linz and Stepan concluded that with consolidation, democracy becomes regularized and deeply internalized in social, institutional and even psychological life as well as in political calculations for achieving goals. This suggests that consolidation on the one hand emphasizes that democracy must "make sense" to the generality of the people, and on the other hand, it suggests the non-existence of delegitimizing challenges, e.g., endemic and persistent socio-political crises (Ogundiya and Baba, 2005).

From all the foregoing definitions and clarifications, one can see that democratic consolidation is all about securing, sustaining, strengthening and deepening democracies especially new democracies. In this study therefore, democratic consolidation refers to the process by which a new democracy matures and deepens, such that it is more likely to continue along that direction and not to revert to authoritarianism.

Theoretical Framework

In analyzing and explaining the issue of electoral violence and democratic consolidation in Nigeria, we shall predict our analysis on some propositions emanating from the Marxist theory of the state. This theory arose in reaction to the Western liberal theory of the state which contends that the state is an independent force and a neutral observer that caters for the main interest of every member of the society. According to

the Marxist theory of the state, the state is the product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms (Lenin, 1984:10-11). As a corollary to the above, the Marxist theory argues strongly and further that the state is an instrument of class domination and that the state and its apparatuses are the main instruments for primitive accumulation by the dominant class and their foreign collaborators (Marx and Engels, 1971; Jakubowski, 1973; Alavi, 1973; Ekekwe, 1986).

According to Jakubowski (1973:41), the state which arose from the conflict between classes is as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which by this means also becomes the politically dominant class and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed. Thus, according to Marx and Engels (1971:38), “the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”. For Marxist theory therefore, the state is neither an independent force nor a neutral observer that caters for the main interest of every member of the society but rather the instrument of the dominant classes for exploiting and suppressing the subordinate classes.

The classical Marxist theory of the state has been further developed to take into consideration the peculiarity of the neo-colonial states. The peculiar attribute of the neo-colonial states can be traced to the colonial era. The colonial governments in order to secure their economic interests discouraged the emergence of a strong indigenous capitalist class. This they achieved by discriminating against African businessmen in the disbursement of bank loans, award of contracts and other business incentives. Due to the absence of indigenous capitalist class strong enough to establish hegemony over the state at independence, the neo-colonial states like Nigeria became the main instrument of economic investment and economic development.

Apart from the foregoing, the new indigenous bourgeoisie that inherited control over the neo-colonial state and its apparatuses had a very weak economic base, and hence relied on this control for its own capital accumulation. Consequently, the state and its apparatuses and institutions became the main instruments for the perpetuation of class interests and for willful alienation and self-reproduction. The unique nature of neo-colonial states like Nigeria therefore, lies primarily in the fact that it combines the function of serving as a major instrument of capital accumulation with that of being a direct instrument of class formation and domination. As Miliband (1977:109), aptly noted, “the state is here the source of economic power as well as an instrument of it; the state is a major means of production”. As a largely parasitic and unproductive class, the political class therefore, relies essentially on the acquisition of state power for survival and reproduction.

It is within the character or nature of the neo-colonial state of Nigeria that one can understand and explain the incidents of electoral violence in the country. The control of state power in Nigeria means access to wealth and influence. And conversely, the consequences of losing state power are the loss of wealth and influence. As a result of the foregoing, the struggle for the control of the state is usually a deadly serious business, a zero sum game and a matter of life or death. The political party, individuals or class in power strives to keep it by all means necessary and those who are not in control of state power do everything to dislodge those in power. One of the common strategies usually employed to achieve their respective goals is to indulge in electoral violence. This

therefore, accounts for the persisting incidence of electoral violence and fraudulent electoral practices in Nigeria till date.

Evolution of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Election as a democratic principle in Nigeria is traceable to the colonial period. Election was first organized in Nigeria in 1922 by the colonial government as a result of the pressure of the educated elites who were agitating for greater participation in the affairs of Nigeria. The 1922 election therefore offered Nigerians the first opportunity to occupy certain political offices in the country. However, the 1922 franchise was very restricted and representation limited only to Lagos and Calabar. It was also not based on the universal adult suffrage but rather based on an income-based adult male suffrage. Despite the foregoing, the 1922 franchise was a big achievement for the educated elites who were struggling for the enthronement of democracy as a pre-requisite for greater participation of Nigerians in the affairs of government.

After the 1922 elections, several elections were conducted in different parts of Nigeria to elect leaders at local, regional and national levels. It was however the 1959 general elections that paved the way for the emergence of Nigeria as a sovereign state. What is paramount for us in this section is not the nature of these elections per se but the nature of violence that characterized these elections. Nwolise (2007), writes that the Nigerian state began to experience electoral violence varying from all sphere which include physical, structural and psychological violence with the 1959 general elections that ushered in independence in 1960 in the country. Ogundiya and Baba (2005), had also noted that political violence associated with election and electoral process in Nigeria started with the 1959 federal elections designed by the British to facilitate the transition from colonial rule to independence. However, as rightly observed by Ladan-Baki (2016), electoral violence during the 1959 general elections was on a low scale and this was as a result of the presence of the colonial masters who were as at that time present to monitor the electoral events.

In order to understand electoral violence in Nigeria better, Ogundiya and Baba (2005), have broadly categorized elections in Nigeria into three, that is elections organized by the colonial government and the military in 1954, 1959, 1979, 1993 and 1999 and the ones organized by civilian regimes in 1964, 1983, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. Among these three categories, the later appears to be more violent and crises riddled compared to the former. Adamu and Ogunsanwo (1982), Kurfi (1983), Adekanye (1989), and Egwu (2003), have all argued that, like the colonially supervised elections, the 1979 general elections presided by the military was not beset by the problem of political violence. It can therefore be argued that, military regimes in Nigeria have organized relatively violent free election than civilians though such elections suffer from the problem of credibility. The logic behind this success is the excessive powers wielded by the military in coercing the citizens to operate within the bounds of the existing laws and decrees.

Extent literature (Kurfi, 1983; Egwu, 2003; Ogundiya and Baba, 2005; Nwolise, 2007; and Ladan-Baki, 2016) is indeed replete with the fact that electoral violence in Nigeria started with the 1959 general elections designed by the colonial masters to facilitate the transition from colonial rule to independence. The problem intensified with

the 1964 general elections. Even before the 1964 general elections were held, there was intense and extreme political campaign by the two major political alliances (that is the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) that contested the election. This affected the outcome of the elections which was severely marred by unethical practices and electoral violence. Ochoche (1997), describes the crisis and violence that came with the 1964 general elections as the worst the Nigerian state has ever witnessed in its history. Billy Dudley (cited in Oguniya and Baba, 2005:373), describes the conduct of the 1964 general elections in the following words:

The electoral officers were terrorized into absconding from their offices once they receive the nominations papers of governing party candidates, leaving the opposition candidates with no opportunity of registering their nomination papers. So, flagrantly was electoral procedure abused that at close of nominations some 88 out of total of 174 NPC candidates in the north had their candidature unopposed. In the West, about 30 per cent of the UNDP were supposed to have been unopposed. The situation in the east was not much different. By election day, 31 December, it was obvious the election had become nothing but a farce and the UPGA announced it was boycotting the elections ... Therefore, as envisaged by many people including the proclaimed winners of the 1964 general elections, the results was not only rejected, but the opposition especially in the western region resorted to violence to contest what they perceived as the reverse of their mandate by the ruling NPC. The situation gave birth to arson, looting, killings, massive destruction of properties and total breakdown of law and order beyond the control of the central government. Consequent upon this, a state of emergency was imposed and the then Prime Minister declared the western region as “wild-wild-west”. The intensity of the electoral violence recorded after the 1964 general elections affected the legitimacy of the newly constituted civilian authority and subsequent military intervention in Nigeria politics on January 15, 1966.

After about thirteen year of military rule, the military administration of Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo decided to hand over power to a democratically elected government in 1979. To this end, efforts were put in place to facilitate the smooth transfer of power to the civilians and the disengagement of the military from active politics. Five political parties were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission

(FEDECO) to contest the 1979 elections namely NPN, NPP, UPN, PRP and GNPP. As we have argued earlier, the 1979 general elections that was organized and supervised by the military was relatively peaceful. It was however not violent-free in its entirety. According to Ogundiya and Baba (2005), few cases of violence were recorded in some parts of the country contesting the outcome of the elections. The major issue however was the question of two third of 19 states which was resolved in favour of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the NPN presidential candidate by the supreme court on the 26th September, 1979.

The 1983 general elections was however different from the 1979 general elections. The 1983 general elections was a replica of the 1964 general elections in terms of electoral violence. The political parties that contested the 1983 elections both at the national and state levels employed all forms of electoral malpractices and violence to influence the outcome of the elections. The NPN which was the ruling party at the centre exploited and used all the means available to it to manipulate political institutions and structures such as FEDECO in its favour. This situation degenerated to chaos and mayhem in some states of the federation and subsequently formed parts of the problem that triggered military seizure of political power on the 31st December, 1983 (Diamond, 1988; Egwu, 2003; Ogundiya and Baba 2005).

The return of the military in 1983 was a step backward for the democratization process in Nigeria. The military under General Ibrahim Babangida initiated a transition to civil rule programme that was consistently truncated and finally aborted with the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election that was widely assumed to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the Social Democratic Party flag bearer. The June 12, 1993 presidential election was seen by many observers as the most transparent election in the history of Nigeria. The annulment of the June 12 presidential election resulted in confusion and chaos in the country especially in the west. The confusion that the annulment generated forced General Ibrahim Babangida to step aside and hand over power to a self constituted Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan.

The Interim National Government was short-lived as it was overthrown by the military. General Sanni Abacha who took over power from Chief Ernest Shonekan instituted another transition programme that never saw the light of the day because of his untimely death. General Abdulsalami Abubakar took over power from the late General Sanni Abacha and successfully organized a general election and subsequently handed over power to a democratically elected government on May 29, 1999. Even though the 1999 general elections were held under the supervision of the military, it also witnessed electoral manipulations and violence. According to Ladan-Baki (2016), the 1999 elections was actually a continuation of previous electoral frauds in the country. According to him, the 1999 elections were monitored by over 15,000 electoral observers from the United States based Carter Center and they concluded that the elections were marred by high level fraud and violence.

After the 1999 general elections, Nigeria has held three other general elections in 2003, 2007 and 2011 before the 2015 general elections. These three general elections also shared similar characteristics with previous general elections in the country in terms of electoral malpractices and electoral violence. According to Ladan-Baki (2016), the

2003 elections bear the same resemblance with the previous elections as it was characterized by electoral violence, manipulation and fraud. In his book titled, “*This Madness Called Election 2003*”, Odey (2003:47), observed that, “the 2003 elections were not transparent. They were not free. They were not fair. Above all people were not allowed to make their choice. Where they insisted on making their choice and so made it, their wishes were not respected as the INEC officials announced other persons for whom the people did not vote for as winners”.

For the 2007 general elections, the International Foundation for Election System (IFES) Reports (cited in Okafor, 2015), observes that there were 967 incidents of electoral violence in the 2007 elections. Cases of abduction and kidnapping, murder and killing, protests, disruption, intimidation and physical attack as well as poster defacing all featured in the incidents. Also, about 300 people were killed in the 2007 elections. Ladan-Baki (2016), writes that in the history of the Nigerian electoral process, the 2007 general elections was the worst elections Nigeria ever had. According to him, elected officials, alongside with the government agencies charged with ensuring the credibility of polls, reduced the elections to a violent and fraud-ridden farce. Apart from electoral violence, the 2007 general elections were also widely adjudged as generally flawed (Suberu, 2007, Ibrahim and Ibeanu, 2009; Onapajo, 2014). The flawed nature of the 2007 general elections forced the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the government, civil society groups and Nigeria’s development partners to initiate and implement electoral reforms. These reforms contributed largely to the success of the 2011 elections (Akhaine, 2011; Lewis, 2011; Nkwachukwu, 2014). Despite the electoral reforms that were initiated and implemented in Nigeria after the 2007 general elections, the 2011 general elections were also imperiled by electoral violence. According to Human Right Watch (2011), the 2011 general elections witnessed a scale of violence unprecedented in the country’s history, with more than 800 people killed and 65,000 displaced.

One can see from all the foregoing that the incidences of electoral violence in Nigeria are as plethora as they are frightening. Electoral violence has remained a means through which members of the dominant class and their surrogates not only impose themselves or their clients and friends on the Nigerian people but also the instrument through which they settle scores against political opponents and perceived enemies among their different factions and groups. At this juncture, let us examine the nature of electoral violence in the 2015 general elections and the implications of electoral violence on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Electoral Violence in the 2015 General Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

What was the nature of electoral violence in the 2015 general elections? What are the implications of electoral violence on democratic consolidation in Nigeria? These are the key questions we will be addressing in this section of the paper. Even before the 2015 general elections were held, there were signals and warnings that the elections will be marred by electoral violence. A report by Nigerian based non-governmental organization, the CLEEN Foundation claimed before the 2015 elections that 30 of the country’s 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja will face a reasonable level

of risk of violence during the 2015 general elections (CLEEN Foundation, 2014). A former United States ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, warned of likely large scale violence during the 2015 elections. A report published and released by the United States Council on Foreign Relations and authorized by Campbell, warned that the 2015 general elections might precipitate violence that could destabilize Nigeria (Akinloye, 2015). According to Nkwachukwu (2014), apprehensions over violence and security during the 2015 elections stem mainly from two sources: the hangover from the 2011 post election violence and the rising insecurity in the country then.

The fear of violence in the 2015 general elections was also bolstered by other reasons. One, the extant political parties were weak in ideology thereby giving room for mudslinging and campaigns of calumny during the electioneering period. Two, the antecedent of the Nigerian political system which has no reputation for electoral purity was another major reason to fear violent reactions during the 2015 elections. Three, the 2015 elections was a rematch of the 2011 elections between the incumbent, President Goodluck Jonathan (a Southern Christian) and Muhammadu Buhari (a Northern Muslim). Nigeria is an entity of diverse nationalities making rivalries and political contests intense, tempestuous and complicated. Political tensions recur with agitations for public office often between a largely Muslim north and mostly Christian south; and the presidential contest between Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan was one of such contests. Four, the confusion and chaos that came about as a result of the collection of the permanent voters cards; the threat by the All Progressive Congress (APC) to form a parallel government if the elections were rigged suggesting that the opposition was prepared for the worst; the utterances and pronouncements by key Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) members like Femi Fani-Kayode, Godswill Akpabio and Ayodele Fayose that PDP will win landslide and death wishes for the opposition candidate during electioneering; the inflammable threats by Niger Delta militant leaders like Mujahid Asari Dokubo to set the country ablaze if President Goodluck Jonathan was not re-elected by whatever means; the unjustified raid by the Department of State Service (DSS) of the All Progressives Congress (APC) data centre among other issues all fuelled the fear of violence in the 2015 elections and blurred the prospect for a free and fair contest (Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017).

The 2015 general elections in Nigeria witnessed electoral violence just like previous elections in the country. Prior to the 2015 elections, the campaign train of President Goodluck Jonathan were stoned with sachet water in Bauchi State. There was also a reported case of bomb blast and the burning of campaign buses near a campaign ground in Potiskum, Gombe State. On Tuesday, 17th February, 2015, explosion and gunfire rocked an election rally in Rivers state, killing one police officer and injuring four others while a reporter covering the event was stabbed. The violence erupted at a Governorship party rally organized by All Progressives Congress (APC) for their candidate, Dakuku Peterside in Okrika. In a press conference that same day, Dakuku Peterside accused the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) as masterminding the attack. He further confirmed that over fifty persons were critically lying injured at Casely Harrison Specialist Hospital, Port Harcourt (Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017).

The preliminary reports of electoral observers revealed that the 2015 general elections were peaceful and orderly in many parts of the country. Nevertheless, some

states recorded significant number of violent incidents. The most affected states being Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Ebonyi and Ondo States. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) 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 state (8 incidents), Cross River and Ebonyi States (6 incidents each), Akwa-Ibom state (5 incidents), Bayelsa state (4 incidents), Lagos and Kaduna states (3 incidents each), Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti and Osun States (2 incidents each), Katsina, Plateau, Kogi, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun States (One incident each) (Ndujihe and Kumolu, 2015).

There were reported cases of vote manipulation, intimidation, ballot box snatching, organized violence, withholding of sensitive electoral materials among other anomalies during the Presidential, National Assembly as well as the Governorship elections in some states of the federation. In Rivers State for example, heavy gun shots were reported in Ozuoba and Rumuolumeni in Obio Akpor Local Government Area of the state. Unknown arsonists also razed a police patrol vehicle, the house of the state commissioner for Women Affairs and INEC polling centre in Kalabari National College in the state. The INEC headquarters in Rivers state was also reportedly burnt down and about eighteen people were reportedly killed during voting in the gubernatorial elections in the state. INEC was accused by the opposition of colluding with security operatives to compromise the integrity of the electoral process in virtually all the 23 local government areas of the state. Electoral officers in almost all the local government areas were reported to have withheld the unit, ward and local government result sheets and handed over ballot papers to PDP thugs allegedly guarded by armed soldiers, police and Department of State Service Operatives. All these necessitated streets protests in the state capital, Port Harcourt by opposition supporters calling for the vote to be rescheduled (Mark, 2015; Ndujihe and Kumolu, 2015).

Despite all the foregoing, the 2015 general elections seems better than the four previous elections (1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011) vis-à-vis electoral violence and electoral malpractices. The 140 cases of electoral violence and electoral malpractices in the 2015 elections was a huge improvement over the 400 received in 2011, 1250 in 2007 and 560 received in 2003 (Ndujihe and Kumolu, 2015). The Presidential Election Petition Tribunal, which was originally scheduled to conduct its proceedings at the Abuja Division of the Court of Appeal, did not receive any case against President Muhammadu Buhari's victory. The twenty-one days deadline for filing of petition expired with none of the thirteen losing parties challenging Buhari's victory at the tribunal. It was the first time since the 1999 return to civil rule that the outcome of the Presidential election will go unchallenged at the tribunal. Olu Falae of the Alliance for Democracy/All Peoples Party joint ticket challenged former President Olusegun Obasanjo's victory in 1999. Muhammadu Buhari and other candidates challenged the victories of Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan in 2003, 2007 and 2011 respectively (Ndujihe and Kumolu, 2015).

There are so many factors precipitating electoral violence in Nigeria and they include the following: poor electoral administration, rigging of elections, ethnicity and prebendal politics, religious sentiments, poor security system during elections, political intolerance, lack of well defined ideology by political parties, chronic economic crisis,

weak institutions, poverty, culture of impunity in Nigeria, absence of institutional and legal solutions against electoral violence, hate campaigns, thuggery, abuse of power, electoral corruption and fraud, etc.

Electoral violence is obviously a major cog in the wheel of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The violence that usually characterize the electoral process in Nigeria have unrivalled potency to stifle democracy in the country. Electoral violence is therefore, the bane of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It is indeed worrisome that nineteen years after the return of the country to civil rule, for instance, that politically motivated killings, destruction of properties worth billions of naira via electoral violence, intra and inter party conflicts, lawlessness and the devastating influence of godfatherism have all continued to hunt Nigeria's democratic project. One can therefore, argue here that the violence that usually grip the Nigerian state during elections since the country's return to democracy in 1999 poses a great challenge for the survival of democracy in the country.

Ogundiya and Baba (2005), have rightly observed that perpetrators of electoral violence in Nigeria today display a high level of sophistication. This according to them is not unconnected with the country's experience with military dictatorial rule from 1983 to 1999. During this period many Nigerians had access to sophisticated weapons and ammunitions which they now use to perpetuate electoral violence in the country. The porosity of the Nigerian borders has also continued to worsen the situation further. Indeed, electoral violence in Nigerian forms part of the unpalatable legacies bequeathed to Nigerians by prolonged military rule. The long years of military rule in Nigeria led to the militarization of political and social life in the country. Attahiru Jega calls it "militarism". Militarism according to him is nurtured by deliberate military policies that subordinate civil authority and the civil society to the dictates of military values, tradition as well as idiosyncrasy. It takes firm root through the militarization of the psyche of the citizens; and is characterized by the subordination of any civilian agendas, institutions and organizations to the priorities and objectives of the military and by the use of military means and value-orientations and tactics, by civilians in social interactions in ordinary circumstances. Militarism or the militarization of the political and social life has been a major legacy of military involvement in the politics of Nigeria. It has brought about the promotion of military behaviour, grammar, and other ways of doing things which in most cases are at variance with civil and democratic values. The examples, actions and inactions of the Nigerian military while in power now condition the psyche of Nigerians quite significantly (Jega, 2007).

Despite the foregoing, what is relevant to our analysis here is the implications of electoral violence on democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Electoral violence has deep negative implications on democratic consolidation in any society. According to Ogundiya and Baba (2005), the crises of electoral violence in Nigeria has altered the affection of an average Nigerian towards the state, including the believe in the capacity of the state to protect lives and property. Accordingly, the crises of electoral violence in the country have not only affected the legitimacy of incumbent political leaders, but also the citizen's affection or believe in democracy as the best model of government. The place of free, fair and credible elections in the consolidation and sustenance of democratic process cannot be over-emphasized here. Peaceful, credible and transparent elections obviously help a

great deal in consolidating democracies. All hands must therefore, be on the deck in order to help eradicate electoral violence from the fabric of the Nigerian society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined electoral violence in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria and its implications for democratic consolidation in the country. We based our analysis on the Marxist theory of post-colonial state, and at the end discovered that electoral violence is one of the strategies usually employed by the political class to acquire and control state power for their survival and reproduction. It is obvious from all indications that electoral violence portends ills for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The persistence of electoral violence in Nigeria therefore, demands urgent attention and solutions. Given the foregoing this paper recommends the following as policy options for the realization of violent-free elections in the country.

1. There should be intensive public enlightenment, value re-orientation and continuous citizens' education by the government, INEC, political parties, civil society organizations and the mass media on the evils and dangers of electoral violence and possible punishments for offenders. Adequate arrangement efforts should be made to ensure that such enlightenment and orientation campaign reaches the rural dwellers/communities.
2. The government should put in place stiffer penalties that would be used to punish perpetrators and supporters of electoral violence so as to serve as a deterrent to others from committing such acts in the future.
3. Electoral Offences Commission should be established by the government to handle electoral related offences and accordingly dispense justice to electoral related cases as quickly as possible. The established commission should be dully backed by relevant laws to avert jurisdictional challenges. Also, the established Electoral Offences Commission should set out definite time frame to conclude election related litigations as well as entertaining election related cases on merit rather than on technicalities.
4. The political leaders and other participants in the political system in Nigeria should stop seeing politics as investment or zero sum game or a do or die affair, but should rather see politics as a means of service to the people. Going forward, there is the need to considerably reduce the allowances and remuneration of public office holders so as to discourage selfish interest from politicians as well as discourage the popular notion of politics being the easiest means of wealth accumulation in the country. Obviously, the persistence of electoral violence in Nigeria is encouraged by the attractiveness of political positions. Consequently, elective positions should be made unattractive and if possible, some of these positions should be on a part time basis.
5. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should endeavour to conduct free, fair and credible elections so as to help avert post-election violence. Also, there should be enhanced electoral monitoring by election monitoring groups. These are essential for the institutionalization of effective electoral administration for democratic consolidation in the country.

6. There should be institutional strengthening of all governmental agencies involved in elections in the country, especially the Nigerian Police Force. In order to meet with the challenges of effective policing during elections, the police and other security agencies require specialized education and re-orientation on democratic values, rule of law and due processes, electoral laws and electoral violence. The men and officers of the force should be trained on adequate but non-partisan monitoring and maintenance of peace and order during elections.
7. Lastly, poverty alleviation and job creation for the army of unemployed in Nigeria should be the pivot of government development agenda in the country. When people are hungry or unemployed, they become ready instruments for electoral violence. No amount of public enlightenment campaign against electoral violence will make any meaning to a hungry or unemployed person who feels he can make quick money by indulging in electoral violence and electoral malpractices. This is the reality and until something is done in this regard, breaking the yoke of electoral violence in the country will remain elusive.

It is our hope that the foregoing suggestions if adhered to would set the stage for the conduct of violent-free elections which would help to engender democratic consolidation and accordingly place Nigeria among powerful democracies in the world.

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