

Electoral Violence: The Bane of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria.

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Abstract

Nigeria's experience with elections and democratic governance dates back to the colonial period. However, the democratic history of the country, since independence, has been riddled with an abysmal record of flawed elections, which have, in most cases, resulted in electoral violence. This, on some occasions, had foisted on Nigeria a military interregnum, which often acted as a stopgap to continuous democratic governance in the country, resulting in the First, Second, Third and Fourth Republic experiences. Although the ongoing Fourth Republic has spanned a period of two decades of uninterrupted democratic experience, democracy in the country is still far from being consolidated. Every election conducted has been a subject of contention between opposing political parties, with many of them leading to electoral violence. This is one of the significant challenges hindering democratic consolidation in the country. The objective of this research was to explore the reasons why electoral violence persists in Nigeria and how it could be minimised. The research found that the enormous wealth bestowed by political position on state officials creates room for crude politics of desperation, prompting political gladiators to engage in an unbridled quest for power, including the unleashing of violence on political opponents, to win elections. The study made some recommendations that could help the country escape the political quagmire. Qualitative research methodology was used in the gathering and presentation of data.

Keywords: *Democratic Consolidation, Democracy, Elections, Electoral Malpractice, Electoral Violence, Conflict.*

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Introduction

Democracy is a familiar concept which different scholars and political practitioners have defined in various ways. Nevertheless, a central theme that cuts across the plethora of definitions is the fact that democracy is a system of government that is people-centred. It is synonymous with people's rule. This attribute is derived from the literal meaning of "democracy", which is a combination of two Greek words, *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). Hence, the concept is understood as a form of government which allows the people to have a say in governance through the electoral process. In other words, it is a system of government that provides citizens with participatory opportunities to choose their leaders among political aspirants through periodic elections. That is why Ajayi (2006) posits that democracy is a form of government which guarantees the electorate's happiness because it gives people the power to choose their representatives, who in turn would be answerable to them. Therefore, any nation that claims to be practising democracy and at the same time deprives the people of the opportunity to select their representatives through free and fair elections is not really practising democracy.

Scholars in the field of political science are of the view that establishing democracy is one thing and consolidating the nascent democracy is another thing. A transition from an authoritarian regime to civilian rule or a mere conduct of an election to fill the various political offices in a country is not synonymous with an established democracy or democratic consolidation. A nascent democracy might be weak, fragile, vulnerable, inefficient, and fragmented, and may need to be strengthened, deepened, and made vibrant, stable, and efficient. It may need to be guarded against either a reversal to authoritarianism or a possible gradual erosion. This is a process which is referred to as democratic consolidation.

Bunbongkarn (2007) defines democratic consolidation as 'making a new and fragile democracy secure, extending its life expectancy beyond the short term and making it immune against the threat of possible reversal to authoritarianism. According to Myerson (2006), democracy is consolidated when it is made to work so effectively that voters can keep candidates in line by the threat of removal from office, and when politicians believe that their chances of staying in office are greater when they behave in a principled rather than corrupt way.

Diamond describes it as a process which involves behavioural and institutional changes that normalise democratic policies and narrow their uncertainty (Diamond, 2015). Democratic consolidation entails behavioral, attitudinal and constitutional elements. Behaviourally, a democratic rule in a territory is consolidated when no significant national, social, economic, political or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to create a non-democratic regime or turning to violence. Attitudinally, a democratic regime is consolidated when a substantial majority holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life in a

society. Constitutionally, a democratic rule is consolidated when governmental and nongovernmental forces alike, throughout the territory of the State, become subjected to, and habituated to, the resolution of conflict within the specific laws, procedures and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process.

This implies that, in a consolidated democracy, politicians would not resort to extra-judicial or violent means to resolve disputes that may arise during the electoral process. They would not engage in any act such as electoral violence that may give the military an excuse to intervene and snatch power from their political opponents. From the foregoing, it is clear that democratic consolidation requires a robust and strengthened democratic system which can guarantee the sustenance of the basic fabric upon which democracy rests, such as the electoral system.

As a matter of fact, an election has been defined as the lifeblood of democracy. It is seen as a significant and crucial pillar upon which liberal democracy rests. Election is so central to democracy that some scholars opine that it is the real essence of democracy. There can be elections without democracy, but there cannot be democracy without elections. Therefore, a nation cannot claim to be democratic without free, fair and credible elections. Election underscores the principles of political participation, accountability and legitimacy, which are the concomitant ingredients of democracy. It has been widely asserted that the level of democracy attained in any country depends significantly on its ability to conduct free, fair and credible elections (Ekundayo, 2016). This is so because elections offer citizens not only the opportunity to choose their preferred leaders but also to effect change in elected officials as they deem fit. For these reasons, political scientists have affirmed that elections are one of the pivots and main fulcrums around which the wheels of democracy and democratic consolidation revolve.

However, a state may conduct regular elections for several years, even after a transition programme and yet may not have a credible election that is generally accepted as free and fair by the citizens and international community. This has been a serious challenge confronting democracy in Nigeria since it attained political independence in 1960.

Nigeria has always had a turbulent experience with elections. The country's political atmosphere has always been highly charged and combustible right from the independent era, and that has negatively impacted the growth and development of democracy in Nigeria. The inordinate and unbridled quest of the political gladiators to win election at all costs has always made them engage in all sorts of election malpractices and violence, such as thuggery, ballot stuffing, ballot snatching, connivance with security agents and electoral officers and other forms of rigging, either during party primaries or general elections. These have robbed the country of free, fair and credible elections, thereby making every election a subject of contestation.

This made Edet (2015) posit that election violence has remained a constant feature in Nigeria's political landscape. For instance, election rancor was one of the immediate factors responsible for the collapse of the first civilian government in 1966. It was also the widespread post-election violence, especially in the South-Western part of Nigeria, that partly provided the rationale for General Mohammed Buhari's military coup, which spelt the end of the Second Republic in 1983. Similarly, the controversy over the 1993 presidential election brought an end to the Third Republic's life span and led to Nigeria reverting to a full-scale military authoritarian regime.

Although the ongoing Fourth Republic, which commenced in 1999, has enjoyed 25 years of uninterrupted civilian administration. Suffice it to say, nonetheless, that all the general elections held so far have been marred by malpractices, corruption and violence, which even dwarfed the previous electoral violence experiences. Linz and Stepan (1989) state that democracy as a system of government entails healthy competition between parties for all the elective positions of governance, devoid of violence. Where election is always marred by violence, consolidating democracy may be a mirage. This research, therefore, set out to examine the implications of electoral violence on the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Literature Review on the Concept of Electoral Violence

According to Fisher (2002), cited in Edet (2015), "electoral violence is an organised act that seeks to determine, delay or otherwise influence the electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced protection, blackmail, destruction of property or assassination. Similarly, Yoroms (2015) describes electoral violence as violence that takes place during elections in fragile democracies, resulting from the failure to meet the rising expectations of the electorate. Judging from the typical characteristics of the electoral process in Nigeria, one may explain this further by saying that electoral violence results from specific actions of the incumbent party, which sometimes engages in some activities to frustrate the opposition party or candidates. It is common knowledge that when frustration reaches an intolerable stage, it leads to aggression, and the consequence of aggression, in most cases, is violence.

Igbuzor (2011) sees electoral violence as any act of violence undertaken in the course of political activities, which include pre, during-election and post-election periods. For him, such acts include thuggery, use of force to disrupt political gatherings or voting and use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters, opponents, as well as causing bodily harm to any persons involved in the electoral process. According to Ugo (2012), electoral violence is the use or threat of physical force or action carried out by an individual or individuals with the intent to cause injury or death to persons before, during and after an election. This led Diamond (2015) to assert that elections experiencing a high incidence of violence can suffer from low voter turnout, lower registration, and candidate

resignations, which directly impact the inclusiveness and representativeness of the polls and, consequently, the legitimacy of the democratic government. Bayeju and Adesomoju (2019) state that electoral violence is any act of aggression, thuggery, and other similar acts that are displayed during the electoral process. They view electoral violence as any form of violence that arises before, during and after an election.

Nonetheless, it is only a narrow conception of electoral violence that limits electoral violence to the physical and direct attacks which result from the electoral exercise. Electoral violence can take the form of physical violence, psychological violence and emotional violence. Acts of physical electoral violence involve the use of lethal weapons or the carrying out of physical attacks on persons and property. Psychological electoral violence takes the form of the climate of siege and ambiguity that is created in the psyche of citizens about what could happen to them as a result of their participation in the electoral process. Structural violence comes in the form of exclusionary or discriminatory policies, which are part of the electoral process. It also includes the logistical bottleneck, which is intentionally built into the electoral process and can be used arbitrarily to suppress the will of the people when the need arises. (Omotola, 2010).

The various dimensions of electoral violence are shown in the table below

Physical violence	Electoral violence	Psychological violence	electoral violence	Structural electoral violence
Assassination of political opponents or people perceived as a threat to one's political ambition		Fear resulting from political assassinations makes people scared to take part in politics		Creation of unequal opportunities for political parties and candidates
Assault on individuals during campaigns, rallies and elections		Publication or broadcast of insulting, abusive or intimidating materials		Arbitrary delimitation of electoral constituencies or the location of polling booths.
Burning of public buildings or cars		Threat to lives through intimidating calls or messages		Charging excessive fees for the collection of party nomination forms to exclude the poor from contesting public elections
Arson and destruction of the party secretariat and campaign billboards of rival parties		Deployment of excessive security operatives		Preventing people from engaging in voter registration
Kidnapping and hostage taking		Brainwashing of voters or intimidating them to vote against their conscience		Enacting exclusionary acts and policies
An illegal arrest or forceful dispersal of a political gathering		Deliberately causing panics at voting centres to intimidate voters		The use of the power of incumbency to influence the smooth conduct of elections.

Destruction of ballot boxes and papers is intended to weaken the stronghold of political opponents.	conspicuous display of small arms and light weapons to intimidate political opponents	
Armed raids on voting and collation centres		
Snatching of ballot boxes to manipulate election results.		
Negative and inciting statements by political actors		
Free for all fights.		

Source: Nuka et al,(2015)

Causes of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Electoral violence in Nigeria can be attributed to several factors, which range from the constitutional provision of ownership of all natural resources by the federal government to the prevailing widespread poverty. Hence, electoral violence can be attributed to factors such as poor electoral administration, manipulation of election results, religious sentiment, political intolerance, poverty, hate campaign speeches, culture of impunity, weak institutions, over-centralisation of state wealth and power, winners-take-all kind of politics, and lack of confidence in government agencies (Fasan, 2019).

Electoral Violence in Nigeria in Retrospect

The history of elections in Nigeria dates back to 1922, when the Clifford constitution introduced the elective principle to the nation. The elective principle was initially limited to Lagos and Calabar, as these were the only cities with a concentration of educated elites who were politically conscious at the time. Nigeria witnessed another election in 1946 when the Richards Constitution created three regions out of the country and established Regional Assemblies. Elections were held in the Northern, Western and Eastern regions to elect people into the Regional assemblies. Furthermore, elections were conducted in the country in 1951 and 1959. The 1959 elections ushered Nigeria into independence in 1960. Nigeria's elections have been marked by crisis and ferocious turbulence since the general election of 1964. Sadly, there has never been an election in Nigeria since 1964 that stakeholders have generally accepted as free and fair. The only election that witnessed less controversy among the political elite was the Presidential election, which was held on June 12, 1993. Even at that, the election was annulled by the military government under the pretext of electoral malpractices. The annulment of the election also led to a series of violent protests in different parts of the country. This made Edet (2015) posit that electoral violence has remained a constant feature in Nigeria's political landscape. Ajayi (2006) also opines that violence and the subversion of the will of the people have been a constant theme in

Nigeria's history since independence, contributing to the collapse of previous attempts at entrenching a democratic system of governance.

Not long after Nigeria's independence, the alliance between the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) collapsed, and each of them sought new coalitions with other existing political parties. The NCNC found a new partner in the Action Group (AG), and they became the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). The Northern People's Congress (NPC) teamed up with the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in an alliance which led to the formation of the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) (Aroge, 2012).

The highly charged and combustible political atmosphere occasioned by the unbridled and inordinate quest by the new coalition to win elections at all costs made the political gladiators deploy violence as a necessary tool in the electoral contest. The supporters of the two major political parties in the country at the time, the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), were at each other's throats over a series of allegations of irregularities that marred the 1964 general elections. Meetings were summoned where the two political parties reached a consensus to facilitate free, fair, and credible elections. This notwithstanding, the NNA, being the party controlling the federal government, influenced the arrest, abduction, incarceration and harassment of the candidates and members of the opposition parties. UPGA demanded the postponement of the election, and when the request was not granted, it decided to boycott the election, but the election was still held. The political anarchy that followed the scenario manifested in various forms (Gboyega et al, 1989).

The acrimonious and bitter campaigns that trailed the 1964 general elections were also replicated in the 1965 Western regional election. In 1965, the supporters of UPGA and NNA engaged in an orgy of violence, which manifested in what is popularly referred to as 'Operation Wetie' in the Western Region of the country. It was a scenario in which individuals and properties were soaked with petrol and set ablaze. Hundreds of lives were lost while property worth millions of naira was destroyed in the debacle. The humongous violence made the then Western region of Nigeria be labelled 'Wild-Wild West'. The crisis also culminated in the reversal of democracy as the military seized the reins of governance on 15 January 1966. The military takeover eventually prepared the ground for the civil war, which plunged the country into a stupendous crisis between 1967 and 1970 (Tamuno, 1991).

In 1983, the ruling party at the national level (National Party of Nigeria, NPN) used its power of incumbency to engage in massive rigging of the presidential and gubernatorial elections held across the country in favour of its own candidates (Egwu, 2007). This was more pronounced in the southwestern states of Oyo and Ondo, which were believed to be the stronghold of the opposition party, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). That

sparked off an orgy of violence by the opposition party, especially in the two aforementioned states. Several lives were lost in the mayhem that followed. There were instances when the entire families of some politicians were gruesomely murdered in Ondo State. Cars, houses, shops and other properties of the notable supporters of the NPN were also burnt or destroyed. Moreover, the headquarters of the electoral body, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) in Oyo and Ondo states, were burnt (Egwu,2007). Violent protests and clashes were also recorded between the supporters of the UNPP and NPN in Bornu state. In Niger state, members of NPP and NPN clashed, while factions of the PRP and factions of the GNPP engaged in violent conflicts in Kaduna and Gongola states, respectively. Many lives were lost in the clashes that erupted in these states as well as other parts of the country. The post-election chaos and acrimony that engulfed the nation then set the stage for the second military incursion into politics in Nigeria, which lasted a period of 16 years.

The military government of General Ibrahim Babangida, which ruled the country from 1985 to 1993, planned to transmit power to the civilian administration. After changing the date of transition on several instances, the government bowed to pressures mounted on it from many quarters and organised a piecemeal transition programme. The presidential election, the last in a series of elections culminating in the final transition of power to civilian administration, was held on June 12, 1993. According to Aroge (2012), it was an election in which religious bigotry, political intolerance and ethnic chauvinism, which had been haunting Nigeria since its political independence, were undermined as the electorate turned out massively to vote for the candidates of their choice without any molestation. Both the local and international observers adjudged the election to be the freest and fairest election in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the election was declared inconclusive and later annulled by the ruling military government even as the electoral umpire was in the process of announcing the results. The military hierarchy premised its action on alleged electoral malpractices, which were never substantiated. However, the record of the results announced by the electoral body before the annulment, along with other unofficially announced results collated at the various collating centres, adjudged Chief Moshood Kashimawo Abiola, the presidential candidate of the Social Democratic Party, as the winner of the election.

The majority of people in the Southern part of the country believed that the annulment occurred because the election result was not acceptable to the military hierarchy and the Northern oligarchy, which were not willing to relinquish power. A widespread protest greeted the announcement of the military government's decision, especially in the Western part of the country. Angry protesters openly confronted the security agencies, including soldiers who were drafted to quell the protests. It also led to a very serious political debacle in Nigeria for a couple of years until 1998, when General Abdusalami Abubakar instituted another well-intentioned transition programme. Several lives were lost, and properties worth

billions of naira were destroyed in a series of protests that trailed the years of political turmoil.

Electoral Violence in the Fourth Republic

The military government remained at the helm of Nigerian affairs from 1984 to 1999. After 16 years of an unbroken military regime, Nigeria was once again returned to civilian administration in 1999. The 1999 elections, which were organized and conducted by the Military Junta to return Nigeria to civilian administration were dogged with series of malpractices as attested to by the local and international observers including the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), the Carter Center, National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), and the EU (Omotola, 2010). The election was monetized as moneybags hijacked the process and engaged in vote buying. The election witnessed other forms of electoral malpractices, allegedly, with the connivance of the electoral umpire and the transitional military regime. The country witnessed pockets of protests regarding the credibility of the elections, the most notable being the litigation filed by the defeated candidates, who challenged the results of the election. However, relatively little violence was recorded because the people were careful not to do anything that would give the military an excuse to prolong their stay in power.

Another general elections were held in 2003. The elections were also marred by numerous malpractices, which resulted in violent reactions in some quarters. Human Rights Watch reported how some politicians from the ruling PDP then mobilized and founded armed groups to rig elections in the Niger Delta region of the country. In the western and Northern parts of the country, too, desperate politicians recruited and equipped thugs with dangerous weapons, which they used to terrorise ordinary citizens and political opponents in a bid to stuff or steal ballot boxes. Elections were not held in some polling booths, yet the electoral commission declared results purportedly won by the ruling PDP there. The actions of the corrupt politicians and their sponsored thugs and the consequent reactions of the electorates during the pre- and post-election period in 2003 led to the death of about 100 people (Albert, 2007).

2007 was another general election year in Nigeria. The incumbent President of the country, then Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, allegedly described the election as 'a do or die issue' for him and his party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). This came after he had ostensibly failed to manipulate the constitution to have another term in office (Omotola,2007). His outburst set the stage for different acts of brigandage and violence. A report submitted by the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) cited in Nyam (2015) notes that there were 967 incidents of electoral violence during the 2007 electoral process. These included acts of abduction of political opponents, violent protests, disruption of elections, intimidation of voters, hijacking of ballot boxes, destruction of billboards, defacing of posters, physical attacks on voters, killing of innocent voters and murder of political opponents. In Daura, the home town of one of the strong presidential aspirants, General

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Muhammadu Buhari, the supporters of the All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP) engaged in violent protest when they discovered that electoral officials had delivered only half of the number of ballot papers that should have been brought to the local polling stations there. The irate youth of the town perceived this as a deliberate attempt by the ruling PDP to reduce the number of votes that Buhari could garner from his home base and thereby frustrate his presidential ambition.

Similarly, neither INEC staff nor electoral materials were available at several polling booths in Balanga and Yamaltu Deba local government areas of Gombe state. Voting took place in some polling stations in Gombe town. Nevertheless, in six polling stations, voting commenced about 4 p.m. and ended at 5 p.m. Only 130 voters could cast their votes within the one hour of the exercise, while hundreds of voters were disenfranchised (Nyam, 2015). However, the official result sheets that arrived at the collation centre claimed that more than 900 votes were cast (within the one hour) and the ruling PDP got 876 of the votes. The different acts of malpractice sparked off violent reactions in different places. About 300 people lost their lives in the process. Different observer groups declared the 2007 elections as the worst elections conducted in Nigeria so far. According to Ladan-Baki (2016), the elected officials, alongside the government agencies, gave the responsibility of ensuring the credibility of polls, reducing the 2007 elections to a violent and fraud-ridden farce.

As a matter of fact, the winner of the 2007 presidential election, late President Musa Yar'Adua, publicly admitted that the 2007 election, which brought him to power, was fundamentally flawed, and this led his government to inaugurate an electoral reform committee for the purpose of ensuring better elections in the future.

The worst election-related violence in the present political dispensation took place before and after the 2011 election. Igbuzor (2011) observes that the buildup to the election witnessed violence in many parts of the country. For instance, on March 3rd 2010, some unidentified people drove by the campaign rally of PDP in Suleja, Niger state and detonated a bomb which killed 13 people and left scores of people wounded (Yusuf, 2011). Several bombings, killings and clashes were also recorded at many political rallies. In January 2011, a gubernatorial aspirant, Modu Gubio and six of his supporters were assassinated in Borno state. The threat of violence was on the increase in hotspots like Bauchi, Bornu, Yobe, Plateau, Abia, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states as the 2011 elections drew closer. As a means of curbing the ravaging violence, the federal government established a new army division called "82 Division", which was deployed across the nation to calm election-related violence (Yusuf, 2011).

Despite the various measures put in place to douse tension, the announcement of the then incumbent President and the presidential candidate of the PDP, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, as the winner of the

presidential elections degenerated into sectarian and ethnic bloodletting across the Northern states. Muslim rioters who believed that the presidential aspirant of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC)-Muhammadu Buhari, was robbed of victory in the election, embarked on a three-day violent protest in 12 Northern states like Adamawa, Bauchi, Bornu, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states. Angry mobs burnt down homes, vehicles, shops and properties of the strong members of the ruling PDP as well as traditional rulers who were perceived to have supported the ruling party, regardless of whether they were Christians or Muslims.

The riots also turned into a sectarian crisis. In the Muslim dominated areas of Northern Kaduna, several Christians were killed. On the other hand, mobs in the predominantly Christian communities in Southern Kaduna engaged in reprisal attacks against the Muslims living within them (Nyam, 2015). In some places in Northern Nigeria, Southerners were targeted and killed. Some members of the National Youth Corps Service who were from Southern Nigeria were killed in Bauchi state, while the police station where they were taking refuge was burnt. Churches, mosques and markets were also razed to the ground in several Northern communities. For instance, a leader of the Igbo ethnic group in the Northern town of Kafanchan told Human Rights Watch that 11 Igbo residents were killed while 224 of their houses and about 800 of their shops were burned in Kafanchan alone. The total number of deaths recorded all over the country at the end of the carnage was about 800, while property worth billions of naira was destroyed (Muhammed, 2011). The 2015 general election was not in any way free from electoral violence. Complaints of bloated voter registration, destruction of party secretariats and campaign billboards of rival parties, disruption of political rallies, the use of small arms and light weapons, bomb explosions, and negative and inciting words were some of the pre-election violence that portended danger. In addition, the campaign train of the incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan, was pelted with sachet water in Bauchi State (Nuka et al, 2015). In Potiskum, Gombe State, reported cases of bomb blasts near campaign grounds and burning of campaign buses were recorded. On February 17th, 2015, an explosion and gunfire disrupted an election rally organised for the gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC) in Okrika, Rivers state, leading to the death of a police officer while a reporter covering the event was stabbed. The gubernatorial candidate of APC in the state, Dakuku Peterside, held a press Conference on the same day, during which he pointed an accusing finger at the PDP for orchestrating the attack. He further claimed that about 50 people were critically injured and lying ill at Casely Harrison Specialist Hospital, Port Harcourt (Nwachukwu, 2018).

The National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria claimed that 58 deaths were recorded within 3 months in the various pre-election violence that occurred across the country. (Olupohunda, 2015). The high death toll and threat of violence were occasioned by an ethno-regional sense of

entitlement to power, which was evinced during electioneering campaigns. The people from the Niger Delta region and some other parts of southern Nigeria believed that the incumbent President, who hailed from their region, deserved a second term and must continue in office. This caused inciting and inflammable threats by some Niger Delta militant leaders such as Mujahid Asari Dokubo who purportedly threatened to set the country ablaze if the then incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan was not re-elected by whatever means (Nuka et al, 2015) On the other hand, the majority of the people in the Northern part of the country were of the view that power must return to the North after the incumbent President violated a supposed zoning formula for power rotation between the North and South, following the death of his former principal in office (Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua). The volatility of the situation led a former United States ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, to warn of likely monumental violence during the 2015 elections. A report released by the United States Council on Foreign Relations also warned that the 2015 general elections might precipitate violence that could threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria (Obiam et al, 2022).

Similarly, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) claimed that there were 66 reported incidents of violent attacks targeted at polling units, INEC officials, voters and election materials on the election day. Sixteen cases were reported in Rivers state, 8 in Ondo state, 6 in Cross River state, 6 in Ebonyi state, 5 in Akwa-Ibom state, 4 in Bayelsa state, 3 in Lagos state and 3 in Kaduna state. Enugu, Ekiti, Jigawa, and Osun States recorded two incidents each, while Katsina, Plateau, Kogi, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun States had one incident each. (Omede and Ngwube, 2022)

The announcement of the election result made the political atmosphere of the nation highly charged, like a time bomb ready to explode. However, the reciprocally aggressive stance was only resolved when the incumbent President (Goodluck Jonathan) made a telephone call to Muhammadu Buhari, his primary challenger, to concede defeat and congratulate him on winning the election. (Ude, 2015) The telephone call, popularly referred to in Nigeria as the "Golden Call," doused tension and averted a repeat of the bloodbath that characterised the 2011 presidential election. This led some scholars to adjudicate the 2015 election as the best election in Nigeria after that of June 12, 1993

The 2019 general elections were not without their challenges with regard to electoral violence. Civil Society Situation Monitoring Unit reported election disruptions in Ebonyi, Abia, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, and Lagos States. The report also showed that there were 96 confirmed incidents of violence which led to fatal casualties before, during and after the Presidential election. These spread across 29 out of the 36 states of the federation. A state-by-state presentation of the data by the Civil Society Situation Room shows that Abia, Delta, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Lagos, Zamfara, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Borno, and Rivers states witnessed the highest number of casualties (Omotola, 2019). Nearly all

the election observer groups that monitored the 2019 general elections reported widespread violence. The final report submitted by the European Union Election Observers Mission claimed that about 145 people were killed in election-related violence in 2019. However, the Civil Society Situation Room reported that about 260 politically motivated deaths were recorded since the beginning of the electioneering campaigns that led to the 2019 general elections. The dead included the people shot by security agencies, political thugs, and unknown assassins. The Joint International Observation Mission confirmed this, the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute. The New York Times, whose report was published in the Vanguard, also stated that the Election Day violence alone led to the death of 39 people across Nigeria in 2019, aside from the hundreds of people who were seriously injured (Fasan, 2019)

There were also instances of attacks on INEC offices. For instance, two weeks before the Presidential election, three INEC offices in Anambra, Abia, and Plateau states were razed. That led to the destruction of hundreds of PVCs, electoral materials and smart card readers for over 100 polling units. The INEC office at Ijesa, in Oriade Local Government Area in Osun State, was also attacked on Saturday, February 23, 2019, where card readers and ballot papers used in the presidential election were burnt (Obiam et al, 2022). The EU election observers also put it on record that there were various kinds of intimidation of INEC officials in 39 local government areas across 20 states in the country. The attacks included the abduction of INEC staff, compelling them to issue collated results under duress, and the unlawful arrest of INEC staff by security agents, among others.

The 2023 general elections also witnessed widespread violence. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), over 200 violent cases (with 100 fatalities) involving party members and supporters were recorded in the 12 months preceding the elections (ACLED,2023). A civil society organisation called the Kimpact Development Initiative reported that a total of 238 cases of violence and 28 deaths were recorded during the 2023 general elections (Olorokor, 2023). Ninety-eight of the total violence occurred during the presidential elections in February, while 140 violent cases were recorded in the Governorship and State House of Assembly polls. The violent incidents took place in several states of the country, but the most affected states were: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Benue, Imo, Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, Nasarawa, Osun and Taraba states. Among the notable people killed in the period preceding the 2023 elections were the PDP candidate for Ideato North and South Federal Constituency, killed in Akokwa in Imo state, a former PDP leader killed in Ohafia in Abia state, and a leader of the Labour Party killed in Kaura LGA in Kaduna state.

In Kano state, intra- and inter-party tensions turned deadly in places like Kano metropolis, Rano, and Gwale Local Government Areas. In Osun state, the two dominant political parties in Nigeria, APC and PDP,

engaged not only in a battle for survival, but also a test of popularity with the electorate. That made the 2023 elections volatile in the state. There were several cases of destruction of billboards, attacks on party offices, incidents of mob violence and harassment of candidates contesting in the elections.

INEC offices and staff members were also attacked in many places before the elections. Another ACLED report stated that there were 44 violent incidents which involved INEC offices and staff. Most of the attacks against INEC facilities and staff members took place in the South East region, especially in Imo, Enugu and Anambra states. Several protests carried out by voters in Enugu and Anambra against the perceived manner of operation by the INEC turned violent.

Similarly, in 2025, the recently conducted bye-elections across 12 states in the nation were not violence-free. About 288 thugs were arrested by the police at Ghari, Bagwai and Shanono Local government areas of Kano state on August 16th, 2025. Dangerous items recovered from them included: 1 pump action rifle, five locally made guns, 94 long sticks and clubs, 18 cutlasses, 16 swords, 18 knives and 23 arrows as they tried to disrupt elections in the aforementioned constituencies (Ojelu et al, 2025). The table below indicates some of the notable Nigerians who were killed at various times on election-related issues.

Evidence of Political High Profile Murder in Nigeria

Date of incidence	Name of Victim	Status of victim	Nature of Violence	State of Origin of Victim
March 5, 2003	Marshall Harry	National Vice Chairman of ANPP	Killed in his residence in Abuja	Rivers
27/7/2006	Engr. Funsho Williams	PDP governorship aspirant in Lagos State	Allegedly Murdered by political enemies	Lagos State
14/8/2006	Mr.Ayo Daramola	PDP aspirant in Ekiti	Allegedly Murdered by political enemies	Ekiti state
14/9/2007	Segun Awunesi	Former CSO to Gov. Olusegun Agagu (Ondo State)	Murdered by Political enemies	Ondo State
2008	Engr. Eman Ekpenyong	PDP Stalwart	Murdered in his business premises	Akwa Ibom
2008	Mr. Mathias Ekpenyong	PDP Stalwart	Murdered in his business premises	Akwa Ibom
21/11/2009	Charles Nsiegebe	Political Associate of Gov.Ameachi of Rivers State	Shot dead in the Street of Port Harcourt	Rives State
25/1/2010	Otunba Dipo Dina	AC Governorship Aspirant in 2007	Murdered around Ota	Ogun State
August 2010	Ayo Omorogbe	AC Chieftain and House of Rep. Aspirant	Murdered in his residence in Benin	Edo State

19/3/2013	Dr. Chuddy Nwike	National Vice-Chairman of the ACN (APC) and a former 1st Deputy Gov. Anambra State	Kidnapped and later murdered together with two others	Anambra State
November 2013	Mr. Foluso Ogundara	Ardent supporter of Opeyemi Bamidele, a governorship Aspirant in Ekiti State	Murdered at a meeting of Bamidele "support group	Ekiti State
February 2, 2016	Monday Eleanya	Former House of Assembly Member in Rivers State	Killed on his premises	Rivers State
June 22, 2017	Olumide Odunayo	APC Stalwart in Ondo State	Kidnapped and later found dead	Ondo State
March 2019	Temitope Olatoye	Member, House of Representatives	Shot during an election-related violence	Oyo State
Jan, 2020	Ndubuisi Emenike	Senatorial Candidate in Imo State	Shot dead	Imo State
May 2021	Ahmed Gulak	Former Special Adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan	Killed in Imo State on his way to the airport	Adamawa State
May 2022	Okechukwu Okoye	Anambra State House of Assembly member	Kidnapped and killed	Anambra State
December 15, 2022	Christopher Elehu	Labour Party Candidate for Imo State House of Assembly Election	Killed in his house	Imo State
February 22, 2023	Oyibo Chukwu	Senatorial Candidate of the Labour Party	Killed while returning from a campaign	Enugu State

Source: Partly adapted from Nuka et al. 2015

The above analysis, as well as the table, indicate how volatile electoral matters have been in Nigeria. One does not need a prophet to tell him that democratic consolidation can never be achieved in a nation where this kind of orgy of violence is a common occurrence.

Effects of Electoral Violence on Democratic Consolidation.

Democracy is consolidated when a weak, vulnerable and inefficient democracy is strengthened, made stable, vibrant, efficient and accountable. According to Diamond (2000), democratic consolidation is the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation. Beetham (1994) states that democratic consolidation is a complex process involving numerous factors, such as strong commitment to it by the elites in society. The elite include top decision makers, organisational leaders, politicians, top government officials, intellectuals, leaders in the private sector, and opinion shapers. Democratic consolidation may be impossible if these elites lack confidence in it or are not committed to it through actions that could undermine it. Przeworski (1991) also believes that democracy is consolidated when the major political players recognise a sufficient common interest in establishing electoral procedures and subsequently

see that their interest in adhering to the rules of the game outweighs the cost to them. This situation could not be attained by a nation such as Nigeria, where the political elite have little regard for the rule of the democratic game by sponsoring electoral violence due to desperation. Their primary concern is winning elections, which is why electoral violence is a common denominator in the country. Although Nigeria has been conducting periodic elections since 1999, the regular conduct of elections is not synonymous with democratic consolidation.

Electoral violence has produced immense negative implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It has changed the attitude of an average Nigerian towards participation in elections. Acts of electoral violence, such as ballot box snatching, political thuggery, attacks on voters, kidnapping of party supporters, voter suppression, and clashes between party supporters, create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. Hence, apprehension or anxiety often deters many electorates from visiting polling stations to exercise their civic duty. Some observers of the political trend in Nigeria since 1999 have noted an abysmal downward slope in voter turnout.

Year	No. of Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Percentage
1999	57,938,945	30,280, 052	52.26%
2003	60, 823,022	42,018,735	69.08%
2007	61,567,036	35,397,517	57.49%
2011	73,528,040	39,469,484	53.68%
2015	67,422,005	29,432,083	43.65%
2019	82, 344,107	28,614,190	34.74%
2023	93,469,008	24, 377,450	26%

Source: Dataphyte. <https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/nigeriadecides-nigeria-records-only-26-72-voters-turn-out-23-election/>

The above table shows a downward slope in voter turnout during elections from 1999 to 2023. The 1999 election recorded a 52.26% turnout. The percentage increased in 2003 to 69.08% due to the euphoria that democracy had come to stay in Nigeria and the expectation that it would portend socio-economic growth for the country. However, the percentage declined in 2007 as voters' turnout was 57.49%. In the 2011 election, the percentage of voters' turnout was 53.68%. The 2015 elections recorded 43.65%. The turnout in 2019 was 34.74% while that of 2023 was at a record low of 26.9%. Poor governance and loss of confidence in the electoral umpire are among the factors that could contribute to political apathy and low voter turnout. However, the importance of a guaranteed security and peaceful electoral system can go a long way to encourage voters to participate in elections. Some scholars have noted that security challenges and concerns for safety at polling stations partly account for low turnout on election days. When elections are conducted in a peaceful atmosphere, democracy will be attractive to the people, and their confidence in it will be strengthened. That is what will make the masses

prefer it to any other form of government and be ready to defend it. That is what can reinforce democracy and guarantee democratic consolidation. In addition, electoral violence serves as a harbinger of military incursion into politics. The harassment, intimidation, thuggery, killing, maiming and arson which attend electoral violence may encourage the military to sack democratic institutions, as it was witnessed in many African countries, including Nigeria, in the past. As a matter of fact, this paper has already established the fact that it was electoral violence that brought an abrupt end to the First and Second Republics in Nigeria. Democratic consolidation is understood as a situation in which democracy has become so entrenched that citizens and political actors stay within the confines of democratic and constitutional procedure to resolve their differences. Linz and Stepan (1996) posit that democracy is consolidated when the majority of the people continue to pursue democracy even in the face of imminent economic, social and political crisis or when all the actors in the polity have the habit that political conflict will be resolved according to the established norms. While supporting this view, Beetham (1994) posits that, in democratic consolidation, it is not winning an election that matters, but losing in an electoral contest and accepting the result as the popular will of the people. This implies that the influential players and their supporters are prepared to respect the rules of the game and put it above the quest for continuation in office. This presupposes that democratic consolidation can only take place in a peaceful atmosphere where political gladiators take the option of resolving their differences through democratic and constitutional means rather than seeing politics as a 'do or die' affair, which often leads to vindictiveness and acrimony (Sobowale, 2015). In essence, electoral violence and democratic consolidation are like two parallel lines which cannot converge. Regrettably, the political elite in Nigeria have not been able to learn this lesson, and that is why the country's democracy has remained nascent for the past 25 years, after transition to civil rule.

Electoral violence encourages poor representation in Nigeria. Acts of electoral fraud always end in the declaration of the wrong candidates as the winners of the elections. The wrong candidates are often clueless, unresponsive to the needs of the citizenry, unaccountable to the people and unable to represent their constituencies very well (Ibrahim, 2011). This accounts for the reasons Nigeria has been having leadership challenges and bad governance since the beginning of the Fourth Republic. A government that is not representative of its citizens tends to be disoriented and mismanage the public funds on white elephant projects. Such mismanagement of public funds leads to corruption and unemployment and stifles socio-economic development. It is, however, sad that such visionless leaders usually want to perpetuate their stay in the political positions which they occupy. Hence, at every election cycle, they recruit more thugs whom they arm and give the task of suppressing opposition in order to ensure their victory. Thus, electoral violence has become a vicious circle in the country. Clueless leaders can never lead a country to achieve democratic consolidation. Unless the electoral process is free and fair and devoid of violence, the country may continue to dance

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around the same circle of parading ineptitude, corrupt, inefficient and ineffective leadership, which cannot engender good governance.

In an established democracy, political rallies are an essential aspect of the electoral process. They offer an opportunity to political parties to present their manifestos and market their party candidates to the electorate. Thus, elections are expected to take place in an atmosphere devoid of violence and intimidation. That is when the masses would be equipped to make their free choices during an election and hold their leaders accountable. Regrettably, the political culture laden with corruption, unfair practices and violence in Nigeria makes political rallies/campaigns a mere procedural democratic ritual. It does not really provide the opportunity for freedom of choice to the electorate, nor does it guarantee electoral happiness. This is a denial of civic rights, which is a fundamental right of the people. This is one of the reasons why Nigerian citizens do not place a high premium on democracy as it is being practised in the nation. Hence, democratic consolidation will remain an illusion in Nigeria as long as this indecorous culture remains in the country.

In addition, a culture of electoral violence often leads to assaults on people, including journalists who are meant to freely report and keep the people abreast of the happenings in the political terrain. Assault on media personnel gags the press, undermines freedom of expression by the citizenry and violates the public's right to information, which is also a fundamental human right of the people. This kind of scenario has often fuelled public frustration and led to further violence in Nigeria.

Moreover, election violence leads to insecurity and destruction of lives and property. A situation of violence and destruction of property means insecurity for investment. Hence, election violence serves as a disincentive to both local and foreign investors. During the 1983 political violence that engulfed Ondo State, the business concerns of some notable NPN party leaders were razed in Akure, the state capital. That situation affected the state's development for some time, as potential investors were deterred from investing their money. Similar destruction has been witnessed in other parts of the country, too. Lack of investment (both local and foreign investment) always retard socio-economic prosperity and hampers the growth and development of a nation, which, in turn, is a crucial element of democratic consolidation.

Furthermore, electoral violence usually generates animosity between members of different groups, be it social, economic or political groups. Electoral violence has, on some occasions, worsened the ethno-religious tension that has been ravaging Nigeria like wildfire since the country's independence. Inter-ethnic crisis has also strengthened ethnic and primordial politics, which continue to subject the masses to manipulation in the hands of the ethnic chauvinists and religious bigots. At the same time, national cohesion is constantly being relegated. None of these can engender the growth of democracy. Such was the situation in post-election violence that engulfed Nigeria in 2011 when the Northerners

began to slaughter people from the Southern part of the country on the assumption that they supported the incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan, a Southerner who won the election.

Recommendations.

This paper has emphasised the fact that electoral violence has hindered the development of democracy in Nigeria. The paper offers recommendations that could help the nation overcome this ludicrous culture, which subjects it to ridicule in the comity of nations. Hence, the paper recommends;

- (a) Commitment to the political education of the masses
- (b) Poverty alleviation.
- (c) Due and appropriate punishment to electoral offenders
- (d) Independence of the government agencies charged with election matters
- (e) Constitutional change
- (f) Making politics less financially attractive

Conclusion

This paper has established that electoral violence is a significant obstacle to the growth of democracy in Nigeria. The ferocity that usually envelops the country during elections since the nation returned to democracy in 1999 has stifled democratic development and wreaked havoc on the survival of democracy in the nation. Pre- and post-election violence has often robbed the electorate of the opportunity to elect their representatives and hold them accountable freely. The conduct of free, fair and credible elections, in a peaceful atmosphere, is a barometer to measure the strength of democracy in a nation. This is sine qua non to democratic consolidation.

Nevertheless, the thriving culture of election violence in Nigeria has consistently intimidated the electorate, leading to the emergence of candidates who lack the legitimacy to rule and the knowledge of accountable and responsive governance. This is one of the reasons the nation has not been on the path of democratic consolidation after about 25 years of unbroken democratic governance and the conduct of regular elections. Consequently, the hopeless masses always wait in perpetuity to enjoy the dividend of democracy while the political class feeds fat on the abundant resources of the nation. Unfortunately, the lack of even distribution of the nation's wealth perpetuates poverty, which makes it possible for the political gladiators to continue to use the poor as their tools to perpetrate further violence. The research, therefore, concludes that if Nigeria's democracy is to be consolidated, the government must ensure the protection of lives and properties, guarantee fundamental human rights, and ensure the prevalence of the rule of law throughout the electoral process. This will checkmate the prevailing orgy of electoral violence or at least reduce it to the barest minimum, restore the people's confidence in democracy and curb voters' apathy, which is gradually making the nascent democracy regress to authoritarianism. It is only then

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that Nigeria can chart a credible path towards becoming a consolidated democracy.

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