













of the presidential election were announced in the early hours of 27 February 2019 (see table 1 below). Incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari won his reelection bid, defeating his closest rival Atiku Abubakar by over 3 million votes. According to Ojo (2019) “he has been issued a Certificate of Return, and will be sworn in on 12 June 2019” (Punch Newspaper, Wednesday March 20, 2019).

Being the most competed for; that year’s elections have also attracted a lot of controversies. From October 7, 2018, when political parties finished conducting their primaries, there have been over 640 court cases from aggrieved aspirants (Punch Newspaper, Wednesday March 20, 2019). The electoral commission is joined as defendants in all these pre-election cases. In the lead-up to the elections, there was a constitution amendment that now pegged the time limit for pre-election matters to fourteen days. Hitherto, there used to be no such thing but on June 8, 2018, President Muhammadu Buhari signed into law the Fourth Alteration No. 21 which now asks all aggrieved aspirants to file their matter within 14 days of the action while courts are to deliver judgments on such matters within 180 days while appeals from such judgments shall also be disposed off within 60 days.

**Table 1: 2019 Presidential Election Results**

Candidate	Party	No. of Votes	%
1. Buhari Muhammadu	All Progressives Congress	15,191,847	55.60
2. Abubakar Atiku	People's Democratic Party	11,262,978	41.22
3. Felix Nicolas	Peoples Coalition Party	110,196	0.40
4. Mailafia Obadiah	African Democratic Congress	97,874	0.36
5. Gbor John Wilson Terwase	All Progressives Grand Alliance	66,851	0.24
6. Yabagi Sani Yusuf	Action Democratic Party	54,930	0.20
7. Akhimien Davidson Isibor	Grassroots Development Party of Nigeria	41,852	0.15
8. Ibrahim Aliyu Hassan	African People’s Alliance	36,866	0.13
9. Donald Duke	Social Democratic Party	34,746	0.13
10. Omoyele Sowore	African Action Congress	33,953	0.12
11. Da-Silva Thomas Ayo	Save Nigeria Congress	28,680	0.10
12. Shitu Mohammed Kabir	Advanced Peoples Democratic Alliance	26,558	0.10
13. Yusuf Mamman Dantalle	Allied Peoples' Movement	26,039	0.10
14. Moghalu Kingsley Bosah Chiedu	Young Progressive Party	21,886	0.08
15. Ameh Peter Ojonugwa	Progressive People’s Alliance	21,822	0.08
16. Ositelu Isaac Babatunde	Accord Party	19,219	0.07
17. Durotoye Adetokunbo Olufela	Alliance for New Nigeria	16,779	0.06
18. Bashayi Isa Dansarki	Masses Movement of Nigeria	14,540	0.05
19. Osakwe Felix Johnson	Democratic People's Party	14,483	0.05
20. Abdurashid Hassan Baba	Action Alliance	14,380	0.05
21. Nwokeafor Ikechukwu Ndubuisi	Advanced Congress of Democrats	11,325	0.04
22. Maina Maimuna Kyari	Northern People's Congress	10,081	0.04
23. Victor Okhai	Providence People’s Congress	8,979	0.03
24. Chike Ukaegbu	Advanced Allied Party	8,902	0.03
25. Ezekwesili Obiageli Katryn	Allied Congress Party of Nigeria	7,223	0.03
26. Ibrahim Usman Alhaji	National Rescue Movement	6,229	0.02
27. Ike Keke	New Nigeria People's Party	6,111	0.02
28. Moses Ayibiowu	National Unity Party	5,323	0.02

29. Awosola Williams Olusola	Democratic People's Congress	5,242	0.02
30. Muhammed Usman Zaki	Labour Party	5,074	0.02
31. Eke Samuel Chukwuma	Green Party of Nigeria	4,924	0.02
32. Nwachukwu Chuks Nwabuikwu	All Grassroots Alliance	4,689	0.02
33. Major Hamza Al Mustafa	Peoples Party of Nigeria	4,622	0.02
34. Okotie Christopher Oghenebrorie	All Blended Party	4,554	0.02
35. Shipi Moses Godia	Fresh Democratic Party	4,523	0.02
36. Fasua Tope Kolade	Abundant Nigeria Renewal Party	4,340	0.02
37. Rev. (Dr.) Onwubuya	Freedom And Justice Party	4,174	0.02
38. Dr Asukwo Mendie Archibong	Nigeria For Democracy	4,096	0.01
39. Ahmed Buhari	Sustainable National Party	3,941	0.01
40. Salisu Yunusa Tanko	National Conscience Party	3,799	0.01
41. Shittu Moshood Asiwaju	Alliance National Party	3,586	0.01
42. Obinna Uchechukwu Ikeagwuonu	All People's Party	3,585	0.01
43. Balogun Isiaka Ishola	United Democratic Party	3,170	0.01
44. Obaje Yusufu Ameh	Advanced Nigeria Democratic Party	3,104	0.01
45. Chief Umenwa Godwin	All Grand Alliance Party	3,071	0.01
46. Israel Nonyerem Davidson Dr.	Reform and Advancement Party	2,972	0.01
47. Ukonga Frank	Democratic Alternative	2,769	0.01
48. Santuraki Hamisu	Mega Party of Nigeria	2,752	0.01
49. Adesanya-Davies Mercy Olufunmilayo	Mass Action Joint Alliance	2,651	0.01
50. Gbenga Olawepo-Hashim	Peoples Trust	2,613	0.01
51. Ali Soyode M.	Yes Electorates Solidarity	2,394	0.01
52. Ojinika Geff Chizee	Restoration Party of Nigeria	2,391	0.01
53. Nsehe Nseobong	Coalition for Change	2,388	0.01
54. Rabia Yasai Hassan Cengiz	National Action Council	2,279	0.01
55. Atuejide Eunice Uche Julian	National Interest Party	2,248	0.01
56. Dara John	Alliance of Social Democrats	2,146	0.01
57. Fagbenro-Byron Samuel Adesina	Kowa Party	1,911	0.01
58. Etim Emmanuel Ishie	Change Nigeria Party	1,874	0.01
59. Chukwu-Eguzolugo Sunday Chikendu	Justice Must Prevail Party	1,853	0.01
60. Madu Nnamdi Edozie	Independent Democrats	1,845	0.01
61. Osuala Chukwudi John Kennedy	Re-build Nigeria Party	1,792	0.01
62. Albert Owuru Ambrose	Hope Democratic Party	1,663	0.01
63. David Esosa Ize-Iyamu	Better Nigeria Progressive Party	1,649	0.01
64. Inwa Ahmed Sakil	Unity Party of Nigeria	1,631	0.01
65. Akpua Robinson	National Democratic Liberty Party	1,588	0.01
66. Mark Emmanuel Audu	United Patriots	1,561	0.01
67. Com. Ishaka Paul Ofemile	Nigeria Elements Progressive Party	1,524	0.01
68. Kriz David	Liberation Movement	1,438	0.01
69. Ademola Babatunde Abidemi	Nigeria Community Movement Party	1,378	0.01
70. A. Edosomwan Johnson	National Democratic Liberty Party	1,192	0.00
71. Abah Lewis Elaigwu	Alliance for a United Nigeria	1,111	0.00
72. Angela Johnson	Change Advocacy Party	1,092	0.00
73. Nwangwu Uchenna Peter	We The People Nigeria	732	0.00
Invalid/blank votes		1,289,607	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>28,614,190</b>	<b>100</b>
Registered voters/turnout		82,344,107	34.75

**Source:** INEC 2019. (Computation into percentage was made by the Researchers).



Immediately following the elections there were claims of widespread fraud by the opposition. The claims included accusations of ballot box snatching, vote-trading and impersonation. There were also claims that caches of explosives were found by police. While the African Union said the elections were “largely peaceful and conducive for the conducting of credible elections” (Ojukwu, Mbah and Maduekwe, 2019). The electoral commission also described the elections as mostly peaceful. However, the 2019 election fell short of expectations. Informed commentators rightly identified the process smashing records. Standards dropped! We had to deal with having too many political parties on our ballot. The electoral manager INEC presented 91 parties to us. Some 73 presidential aspirants, an unprecedented figure in the history of our democracy, expressed interest in leading the country to greater heights. Some of them withdrew, thus could not complete the race. Validation of the elections now rests with the court (THISDAY, Monday, April 8, 2019).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In examining the just concluded 2019 presidential election, the Niger Delta Watch (2019, p. 4) stated that the Niger Delta region alone recorded; 116 cases of bribery, 159 violent incidents, 103 fatalities, 38 incidents of destruction, manipulation or theft of campaign materials (such as billboards and posters), 36 cases of detention, intimidation or disappearance of party candidates or supporters, 35 cases involving detention, intimidation or disappearance of voters or civil society members, 31 incidents involving delays or irregularities in voting preparations or processes, 29 riots or protests, 16 incidents of destruction, manipulation or theft of voting materials or systems, 12 incidents involving campaign misconduct or irregularities.

According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) (2019, p. 5), the 2019 presidential election faced various challenges that affected the election. The challenges observed in the election were: “INEC missteps and misconduct, deliberate denial of access to observers

and media, logistical shortfalls, intentional disruption by politicians, political thugs, and party agents and intimidation of collation staff by security agents”.

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

For easy analysis, the intensity and dimensions violence assumed during the 2019 general elections are discussed under the following headings:

**1. Loss of life:** Virtually all the election observer group acknowledged widespread violence before, during and after the 2019 general elections. Of serious concern was the high incidence of deaths recorded during this period which to many observers surpassed the number of death recorded in previous elections. For example, the European Union Election Observation Final Report on the 2019 general election has the following to say ... approximately 145 people were killed in election related violence, 84 of which were in the South-South zone... Approximately, 64 people were reportedly killed during campaign up to the 23 February election, 21 of these deaths was during the week following the postponement. Approximately 35 people were reported killed on 23 February and 24 on 9 March (EU Election Observers Mission Final Report, 2019: 23). Similar figures on the number of deaths during the 2019 general elections were reported by other election observer groups. The Civil Society Situation Room on its part documented more than 260 politically motivated deaths since the beginning of the campaign that led to the 2019 general elections.

**2. Attack on INEC Offices and Officials:** Apart from observed irregularities including vote buying, intimidation of voters and election officials which were reported by virtually all the Observer Groups, the 2019 general elections also witnessed several cases of physical attack on election officials and INEC offices across the country. There were reports that “INEC premises and officials were subject of attack and harassment during the three election day periods”. It is on record that two weeks before the scheduled 16 February election, “three INEC offices in Abia, Plateau and Anambra states were engulfed by fire leading to the destruction of hundreds of PVCs, electoral materials for over 100 polling units and over 4,600 smart card readers”. There were also reports of intimidation of INEC officials in 39 local governments’ areas in 20 states by EU election observers. Several other attacks reported by election groups included: threatening and compelling INEC officials to issue collated results under duress; assaults, abductions and sexual violence against officials; intimidation and unlawful arrest of election officials by soldiers who invaded collation centres, especially in Port Harcourt, etc.

**3. Snatching of Ballot Boxes and Destruction of Electoral Materials:** Both snatching of ballot boxes and destruction of electoral materials were well known atrocities committed during past

elections in Nigeria. However, the dimension they assumed during the 2019 general elections was so alarming. The social media were littered with videos of unimaginable act of hooliganism and vandalism perpetrated by well known political thugs, while the security agents meant to protect the voters and ballot boxes watched in disbelief, especially in Lagos and many other states. The role played by soldiers and armed gangs in Rivers State collation centres during the 2019 general elections were equally amazing to many political observers.

**4. Inflammatory Utterances and Hate Speeches:** Inflammatory utterances like verbal threat against political opponents, use of abusive languages and hate speeches especially during campaign and before elections are often ignored as part of electoral violence. However, these practices have shown to constitute major physiological assault against their victims and are known to be very potent for building physical and structural violence during elections. Most of these acts played out during the period leading to the 2019 general elections. These helped to further heighten an already tensed atmosphere ready to explode in violence as witnessed during the elections.

Two major cases among others readily come to mind. First was the warning publicly given by the President few days to the elections that anyone caught disrupting the forthcoming elections or found stealing ballot boxes will pay with his life. Expectedly, the message was received with mixed reactions with the opposition interpreting it to mean a threat to them and their supporters, as well as a call for a more inclusive strategy for violence.

Second was the utterance credited to the Governor of Kaduna State, Mallam El-Rufai who purportedly threatened foreign election observers that they will be taken back in body bags after the elections. This was however interpreted as an open call for violence during the election by political observers, both local and international.

### **Consolidation of Democracy and the Issues of Electoral Violence**

Elections are the life wire of a democratic government and give life to its functionality. But how the polls take place and process of selecting leadership is the determinant of how consolidated democracy is in such democracies. When elections take place according to the political rules, the chances are that the best will emerge, and how well the leaders rule will determine if they can be reelected for another term as allowed by the constitution. In the case of Nigeria, consolidation of democracy has been the worst hit by frequent electoral violence that has reoccurred continuously from the first republic to this fourth republic.

In 1999 presidential poll in Nigeria as noted by Aniekwe and Kushie (2011), the election was accepted to give room for democratic rule and allow for growth (consolidation) and not taken because it was credible. In the 2003 general elections, about one hundred persons were killed (HRW, 2004). The 2007 election (HRW, 2007) put the number of death at 300, including police officers. Though the 2011 general elections were relatively peaceful, immediately, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) was declared the winner by INEC in the Presidential election; violence erupted in Northern Nigeria. Supporters of (CPC) candidate General Muhammadu Buhari took to protest and violence. According to HRW (2011), over 800 people were left dead. The killing took place within three days of protest and violence in 12

Northern States. According to European Union EOM Report (2015), the 2015 general elections witnessed one of Nigeria's most tense campaigns, as misguided words were commonly used. The National Human Rights Commission Report (2015) on pre-election violence identified 60 incidents and 58 persons killed over 50 days. Violence has continued to be a replicate experience in the fourth republic.

Electoral violence took a higher dimension in the 2019 general elections. The presidential and National Assembly elections were held on February 23, while the governorship and state assembly elections were held on March 9. What happened in 2019 general elections was worst of its kind judging from the experience of general elections held in 2015. It was the election that got the incumbent president Muhammadu Buhari elected for his second term. Before the elections, insecurity problems were at its peak following series of kidnapping, several attacks on farmers by some criminal herdsmen (farmers – herdsmen clash), and Boko haram terrorist group (Oli, Ibekwe and Nwankwo, 2018). The high rate of pre-electoral violence, coupled with other factors, affected the voter turnout. According to INEC, voters' turnout was 35.6% for elections of February 23, while that of March 9 was even lower. The figure was lower than 44% percent recorded during the 2015 general elections (INEC, 2019)

Vote-buying, which gained prominence during the Ekiti governorship election in 2018 and that of Osun state, was an ordinary happening during the 2019 general elections. The poll was characterized by vote-buying, snatching of ballot boxes, harassment, and intimidation of electoral officials, voters, and oppositions by hired armed men and even by some security personnel (Nwankwo, 2018). According to the electoral act 2015 as amended, section 29(3), it is only INEC that has the mandate to request for deployment of security personnel when it is necessary, and that is done in consultation with the security agencies. Ebonugwo and Kumolu (2019) remarked that the military was freely used during the election, many of whom were partial, as military men were alleged to have forced themselves into the INEC office at Port Harcourt Rivers state and obstructed the process. As Ebuzor (2019 cited in Okechukwu, Chukwuka and Chikwado, 2019) also reported that military men were beating up party agents at Bori Rivers State. European Union Election Observation Mission (cited by Sanni, 2019) said that about 152 people lost their lives during the election.

According to Justice (2019), violence was worst in six states, which include Bauchi, Benue, Kano, Sokoto, Plateau, and Rivers states. Consequently, The Independent National Electoral Commission had to cancel elections and reschedule another day for supplementary elections for Kano and Rivers states. The two states (Kano - APC and Rivers State – PDP) have become a hot spot for violence even during the past elections, which had resulted in several killings and destruction of properties. Human Rights Watch reported that 11 people died in the presidential election held on February 23, 2019, in the two states. Similarly, a Non-governmental Organization "We the People" according to human right watch, reported that there was a retaliation of attack by soldiers after armed men killed one of them, and this led to the death of over 40 persons and with about 52 seriously wounded when they try to swim across as soldiers were shooting randomly. According to Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (cited in Sanni 2019), about 629 persons (North-West 172, North East- 146, South-south 120, North Central

121, South-west 63 and South-east 14) were killed before, during and immediately after the 2019 general elections over election-related matters.

The electoral body has a significant role to play in the success of free, fair, and credible elections. It also seems that the electoral body: National Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) has not lived up to expectations. The 1999 constitution and the Electoral Acts 2015 as amendment have mandated INEC to be in charge of the electoral process and ensure free and fair elections according to the rules and procedures stated (Obianyo and Vincent, 2015). Take, for instance, from Sections 117 to 132 of the Electoral Acts of 2010 as Amended identified various electoral offenses and their penalty, but in all sincerity, these provisions are violated daily, but the body has been silent on this. Politicians have often engaged in corrupt practices to manipulate the process in their favour. Due to a reoccurring election-related crisis, Amnesty International, in its report (2008) noted that even when there is no armed conflict in Africa, desperation for power has made it look like there is one during elections. The happenings were evident in the pre, during, and post-electoral process and has resulted in casualties.

## **Conclusion**

If we must have our democracy consolidated, there is a need for protection of lives and properties and observance of fundamental human rights. For under democracy, there is the supremacy of the constitution and constitutionalism. The rule of law is essential for the consolidation of democracy. In the absence of the rule of law, democracy will lose its virtue. Anyaele (as cited in Igwe, 2010) posited that the rule of law is the "supremacy" of the law over the generality of the people, i.e., irrespective of one's identity or position. Thus, both the leadership and followership must act according to the stipulations of the law. But that has not been our experience, as some individuals and groups see themselves as practically above the law.

Our discussion so far in this study reveals that elections and electoral process in Nigeria have always been problematic and often characterized by violence since independence. Also, attempts by successive governments to address these challenges over the years had only shown little or no success. The 2019 Presidential elections in Nigeria however provides us with another opportunity to reflect back and project into the future with the view to proffering suggestions on how to combat this common problem, and with special focus on the recommendations proffered by various Observer Missions during the elections. The broad picture on the state of affairs in Nigeria can be located within the Marxist class analysis theory and the inability to regulate the electoral process.

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

- a. There is need for the government to sincerely tackle poverty and unemployment through educational and economic empowerment programmes that would bring about socio-economic development by empowering the dominated class.
- b. A special court should be established in Nigeria to prosecute electoral offenders, as that will help to curb recurrent violence during electioneering. The electoral body must truly be independent to make and enforce electoral laws and sanction any candidate or political party that exceeds the amount pegged for electioneering to reduce the influence of money politics.
- c. Finally, education is power; hence the need for political education and awareness programmes to be organized by INEC, civil society groups, and political parties. These educative and awareness programmes should be geared toward ensuring peaceful, fair and credible elections in Nigeria and also emphasis should be made on the dangers associated with electoral violence, as it will help to curtail violence elections.

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