



THE NIGERIAN STATE AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

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

Keywords: State, Presidential Election, Violence, Electoral Violence, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Elections in Nigeria continue to elicit more than casual interest by Nigerian scholars due to the fact that despite the appreciation that only credible election can consolidate and sustain the

country's nascent democracy, over the years, Nigeria continues to witness with growing disappointments and apprehension inability to conduct peaceful, free and fair, open elections whose results are widely accepted and respected across the country (Igbuzor, 2010; Osumah and Aghemelo, 2010, Ekweremadu, 2011, Ojukwu, Mbah and Maduekwe, 2019). All the elections that have ever been conducted in Nigeria since independence have generated increasingly bitter controversies and grievances on a national scale because of the twin problems of mass violence and fraud that have become central elements of the history of elections and of the electoral process in the country (Gberie, 2011).

Since the Nigerian State assumed self-rule status from the British government on October 1st, 1960 and its celebration of 20 years of uninterrupted democratic rule from 1999-2019, the State has been battling rampant cases of violent elections in every election year. The pre-independence Nigerian State witnessed various constitutional developments (such as the Clifford constitution 1922, Richard Constitution 1946, Macpherson Constitution 1951, Lyttleton Constitution 1954) that introduced the elective principle and a sharing of power that was not favourable to the regions that made up the amalgamated Nigeria (Obiam, 2021). The Macpherson Constitution of 1951, in particular, favoured the Northern region by giving the region 50% of political representation at the federal level. This was to the disadvantage of the Eastern and Western regions and this laid the foundation for grievances which escalated after independence (FFP, 2018). In the first general elections conducted in Nigeria in the year 1959, the country was divided into 312 constituencies while the distribution of seats among the regions shows: Northern region: 174, Eastern region: 73, Western region: 62, Lagos region: 3 and Southern Cameroon: 8 (Ujo, 2000; Obiam, 2021). The post-independence elections conducted in Nigeria have always been violent. CLEEN Foundation reported that even as early as the 1940s, elections worsened communal, political, and religious violence, and this became worse after independence in 1960 (CLEEN, 2015). The Human Rights Watch (2007) has described elections conducted in Nigeria as corrupt, abusive and violent. This description to Malu (2009) is apt because it appeared that Nigerians seem to have sustained a culture of electoral violence as the 1964/1965, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 elections conducted in the country witnessed violence (Malu cited in Obakhedo, 2011; CLEEN, 2019; Obiam, 2021).

According to Obakhedo (2011) "the Nigerian state has only added to her litany of electoral violence since the inception of the ongoing democratic era in 1999". He further observed that the 1999, 2003 and 2007 presidential elections that brought President Olusegun Obasanjo and later the late President Umaru Yar'Adua to power were marred with widespread violence, fraud, and insecurity. Although, the 1999 presidential election witnessed little violence record largely because it was conducted under the military regime, the 2003 presidential election conducted by President Obasanjo government was characterized by rigging, thuggery, intimidation, manipulation of the electoral process, and politically induced killings of opponents.

The 2003 and 2007 general elections were also allegedly manipulated (Lewis, 2003; Suberu, 2007; Obiam, 2021). The 2007 election in particular, severely dented Nigeria's democratic credentials due to the national and international condemnation they elicited. However, on a rather positive note, the election led to a great deal of soul-searching among the

Nigerian leadership. The President at the time, Umaru Musa Yar'adua, publicly acknowledged that the election that brought him to office was fundamentally flawed. He therefore set up the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) to suggest measures that could improve the conduct of elections; restore electoral integrity and strengthen democracy in Nigeria. Some of the Electoral Reform Committee's recommendations were reviewed and adopted as amendments to the constitution and Electoral Act.

The 2011 presidential election happened to be the best in Nigeria when compared to the one held in 2007. However, the 2011 presidential election was also characterized by violence before, during and after the elections (Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017; Obiam, 2021). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (2011, p. 55) reported that; "the 2011 general elections were marred with violence that manifested in terms of injuries, deaths, arson, assault, abduction of political leaders or their supporters, looting, destruction of electoral materials among others".

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

The 2015 presidential election equally witnessed some degree of violence. The principal actors were the People Democratic Party (PDP) with Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as the flag bearer and the All Progressive Congress (APC) with Gen. Muhammadu Buhari as the flag bearer. The electoral process was characterized by hate speeches, slandering, victimizations, intimidations, killings and destruction of property. Electoral violence occurred before, during and after the election. Violence broke out during the registration period, after the winners were announced and on the main day of the elections in some sections of the Nigerian State (Campbell, 2019; Obiam, 2021). Close to the 2015 elections, security challenges became worrisome most specifically in Northern Nigeria. This is largely due to the sudden rise in the dreadful activities of Boko Haram which resulted in the postponement of the election by six weeks. The CLEEN Foundation Security Threat Assessment published in March 2015 found that 15 states were on a red alert level. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in its Pre-Election Report stated that at least 58 persons have been killed even before the conduct of 2015 general elections (CLEEN, 2015). According to INEC, there were 66 reports of violent occurrence across the country. "The violence was recorded in Rivers State (16 incidents); Ondo (8); Cross Rivers (6); Ebonyi (6); Akwa Ibom (5); Bayelsa (4); Lagos and Kaduna (3 each); Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti (2 each); Katsina, Kogi, Plateau, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun (one each)" (Vanguard, April 12, 2015). The European Union Election Observation Mission reported that about 30 persons were killed on April 11, 2015, Election Day, as a result of inter-party clashes and attacks on election places (EU EOM, 2015). Muhammadu Buhari eventually won the 2015 presidential elections with over 15

million votes, thereby unseating the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan (Paden, 2016; Obiam, 2021).

The continual electoral violence in Nigeria seems to suggest that candidates, supporters, political party members, and other electoral stakeholders participate in electoral violence from the first election held in Nigeria to the just concluded 2019 presidential election. Some of the violent means employed by politicians and their supporters to influence election outcome include assassination of opponents, disruption of voters registration in areas where the perpetrators lack political support, destruction of campaign billboards and posters of opponents, killings, harming and intimidating electorates during election, snatching of ballot boxes, disruption of rallies and campaigns of opponents, abuse and manipulations of security and law enforcement agencies, among others (Etannibi, 2011; Obiam, 2021).

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

Political succession remains contentious and highly challenging in many African countries. The privileges associated with power and the fear of being prosecuted by their successors causes some leaders to maintain control of the political process even through electoral manipulation and violence. For some years, the design of electoral systems to encourage cooperation, bargaining and interdependence between rival political leaders and the groups they represent has become increasingly crucial for the promotion of democracy in poor and divided societies. This seems to have made it increasingly difficult to hold elections without violence or protest in such settings. As political elites see elections as a means to capture the state apparatus and the resources it commands, electoral processes have come under severe threat. When will Nigeria and for that matter Africa as a whole conducts elections that would be transparent, credible and generally acceptable to all.

Thus, the main thrust of this research is to examine the Nigerian State and Electoral Violence with focus on the 2019 Presidential Election.

Theoretical Framework

In examining the Nigerian state and electoral violence, the 2019 presidential election, the study adopted the Marxist class analysis as its theoretical framework; it analyzes social formations and classes and their contradictory relationship. Marxists have argued that class – or very closely linked concepts like mode of production or the economic base was at the center of a general theory of history, usually referred to as historical materialism (Cohen, 1978). The basic idea is that different kinds of class relations are defined by the kinds of rights and powers that are embodied in the relations of production. In Marx's view, the dialectical nature of history is expressed in class struggle. With the development of capitalism, the class struggle takes an acute form. Two basic classes, around which other less important classes are grouped, oppose each

other in the capitalist system: the owners of the means of production, or bourgeoisie, and the workers, or proletariat. The approach assumed a radical posture in the interpretation of the economic process. Its emphasis is on social classes, productive forces and social relations of production. Karl Marx maintains that the substructure, which is the economy, determines the overall superstructure of society. Therefore, the economic base of the society determines the political, legal, cultural and other sectors of the society. It focuses on the society in its entirety through existing relations within it and essentially within the umbrella of social production.

For Ndu (2001, p. 313; Obiam, 2021): the Marxian political-economic approach implies an analysis of historical economic relations, given specific tools of analysis which are classes in social action. In other words, the approach focuses on man and how to meet his economic needs in society. Man must eat to survive; for him to eat, he must produce. In producing, he is linked with nature –that is, land – and he also enters into a social relationship with others. There emerge the class that owns and controls the means of production, and the class that does not own and control the means of production – the former is the exploiting class and the other is the exploited class. The approach sees production as very important in the proper understanding of the development of man and society and the analysis of the dynamics between it. There is an unequal exchange in the relationship existing between these two classes (exploiting and exploited class) that result in contradictions. And society must try to manage these contradictions to avoid falling into ruins. In Marx's view, the substructure which is the economy determines the superstructure which is the political, cultural, ideological, social, and legal systems. Following the Marxian line of thinking, Ake (1981, Pp. 1-2) argued that, once we understand what the material assets and constraints of a society are, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed, and what types of social relations arise from the organization of production, we have come a long way to understand the culture of that society, its religious system and even its modes of thought.

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

The relevance of this approach to the study is that it exposes the fact that the violence that has plagued the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria is as a result of the violent struggle among political actors (dominant class) in the country to access and control the resources of the state. In Nigeria, the person elected president determines and controls the economic sector and other sectors of the state. Hence, the contest for the post of the president of the country is viewed as a do-or-die affair and a zero-sum game that must be won by all means. It helps in the understanding of the double standard of the Nigerian political ruling class whose key interest is to control the commonwealth to enhance their economic interest without necessarily pursuing the collective interest of all. In the bid to capture or retain power, the ruling class uses various means which are mainly violent in nature. This political ruling class incites ethnic and religious

sentiments among the people to ensure that their interest is further protected. According to Ake (1996), the Nigerian political environment at independence became a war front as the struggle for power became fierce and internecine. The political ruling class engaged in primitive accumulation of state resources.

The Marxian class analysis is significant based on its concreteness and comprehensiveness in looking at the society in its entirety and issues emanating from the society, more specifically on the Nigerian state and 2019 Presidential Election and the under tune for violence which is economically linked (Obiam, 2021).

The 2019 Presidential Election and Manifestations of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

This was the sixth general election in this Fourth Republic. It was the first to be conducted by the Professor Mahmood Yakubu-led Independent National Electoral Commission. Although since coming into office in November 2015, his team has conducted 196 off-season governorship and other by-elections, the announcement of the date for that year's elections was made two years ago, precisely on March 9, 2017. The elections were the most planned for. Preparations started with the INEC Strategic Plan 2017 – 2021; thereafter, there were Election Management System, Election Project Plan and Elections Operations Support Centre (Ojukwu, Mbah and Maduekwe, 2019).

A factsheet on the 2019 General Election revealed that there were 84 million registered voters out of which 72 million voters collected their Permanent Voter Cards; 91 registered political parties; 119,973 Polling Units; 120 Accredited Domestic Observers and 36 Accredited Foreign Observers and 23,000 candidates competing for 1,558 positions. Seven elections were also conducted over two Saturdays. They were Presidential, Senate and House of Representatives elections on February 23 and Governorship, State Houses of Assembly, chairmanship and councillorship elections of the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory held on March 9, 2019. This was unprecedented in Nigeria's electoral history.

General elections were held in Nigeria on 23 February 2019 to elect the President, Vice President, House of Representatives and the Senate. The elections had initially been scheduled for 16 February, but the Election Commission postponed the vote by a week at 03:00 on the original polling day, citing logistical challenges in getting electoral materials to polling stations on time. In some places, the vote was delayed until 24 February due to electoral violence. Polling in some areas was subsequently delayed until 9 March, when voting was carried out alongside Gubernatorial and State Assembly elections.

Besides, the elections were the costliest in Nigeria's history. Officially, the Federal Government funded the elections with a whopping N242bn, N189bn of which went to INEC while the remaining N53bn was shared by the security agencies for the purpose of election security. This is outside the millions of dollars spent on the commission by the various international donor partners.

The President of Nigeria is elected using a modified two round system, to be elected in the first round; a candidate must receive a majority of the vote and over 25% of the vote in at least 24 of the 36 states. If no candidate passes this threshold, a second round is held. The results

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	-
Total		28,614,190	100
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 6th presidential election conducted in Nigeria since the return to democratic rule in the year 1999. The two major contenders for the seat of the president were: Muhammadu Buhari (incumbent President), the flag bearer of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Atiku Abubakar (former Vice-President), 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, 27th February 2019, INEC announced and declared Muhammadu Buhari of the APC who polled a total number of 15,191,847 votes as the winner of the 2019 presidential election while Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, pooled 11,262,978 votes. The other political party presidential candidates (71 of them) that participated in the election had a total of 2,159, 365 votes (INEC, 2019).

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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