

RESEARCH

Democracy and electoral violence: Its implication on Nigeria's political development process

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The rapid expansion and standardization of democracy, often called the globalization of democracy, is rising. Developing nations like Nigeria embrace liberal democracy to foster development and ensure the well-being of their citizens within a framework of good governance, justice, and freedom. Elections are fundamental to advancing democracy, promoting political liberalization, and encouraging active political participation. Election, a critical post-colonial instrument of democracy, involves multiple candidates representing political parties and electorates whose participation through voting plays a pivotal role in selecting leaders or governments that reflect the interests of the broader population. Since Nigeria's independence, numerous general elections have been conducted; however, they have often been marred by violence, leading to election malpractice and outcomes that are neither free nor fair. These challenges have hindered the country's primary goal of democratization. Election-related violence has frequently undermined the aspirations of citizens for good governance. Adopting a desk-review method, the paper examines the causes and consequences of electoral violence in Nigeria's contemporary democratic epoch. Some data from reports and articles are presented in tables, and findings are discussed. Based on the findings, the study recommends that political officeholders be selected based on the outstanding leadership traits of the contestants and not sentiments; political actors' utterances must be guided; and swiftly resolving election-related legal disputes before the inauguration is imperative. Also, consequential electoral reforms should be adopted, such as the government providing funds to enhance credible data availability.

Keywords: election, violence, Nigeria, democracy, electorates, development, political parties

Introduction

An election can be traced back to the 17th century in ancient Athens and Rome, where the Pope and Holy Roman Emperors were selected by casting votes. This practice transcended up to the 18th century when access to the political sphere lay mainly on an aristocracy. Participation in the election was regulated primarily by local customs and arrangements. American and French Revolution schools of thought maintained that the vote remained an instrument for political power possessed by very few. During the

19th and 20th centuries, there was an increased use of competitive mass elections in Western Europe and other countries of that region.

In Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1950s and 60s, a competitive election was basically on universal suffrage in these distinct periods. Nigeria adopted this voting pattern after decolonization. Elections in Nigeria started in 1959, with different political parties giving citizens the right to vote. Democracy through universal suffrage gave both males and females the right to choose public officeholders. After the independence date, several elections at different times, eras, reasons, and purposes gave the electorate the right to select a

political officeholder that should represent the voice of the masses in social, economic, and political affairs. However, it is very disheartening that supposedly an election that should give the electorate hope and a sense of belonging is surrounded by election violence, which almost makes the exercise lose its relish, value, and purpose.

Brief background to the study

Over the years, election violence has become a severe challenge to the electoral processes of most countries, and Nigeria is no exception (1). These irregularities aim to create a conducive platform to distort the electoral process, rig elections, or cause political unrest. In Nigeria, after independence, several polls have been held to nominate a public officeholder by the electorate via voting. This process was distorted due to some factors such as logistical challenges, political thuggery, disruption of registration procedures or campaign rallies, intimidation, sectarian activities, and ballot box snatching that could result in election violence before, during, or after an election. Politicians, candidates, and supporters perpetrate this violence during campaigns, voting, result coalitions, and announcements to favor party interests against the opposition parties. This violence can be in the form of killing, assassinating, kidnapping, burning of party campaign offices, setting ablaze valuable properties, and using hate speech, to mention a few. The fallout of these violent activities includes the loss of countless lives and property and stirs up resentment and hostility among the candidates and their supporters; this is problematic because innocent citizens are at the receiving end.

The general election held in 1964 used violence to gain political influence; this has become the order of the day and is more pronounced in several polls. The incessant sick mindset of politicians and their supporters has hampered fair and transparent elections in Nigeria; politics and its terrain saw the election as a “do” or “die” affair rather than fairness where one’s vote counts. This menace has impeded the electoral process; therefore, a review of the roles of political parties and candidates by the international community became imperative. The big puzzle is, “Why have presidential elections in Nigeria led to different forms of violence? Has this left a crack in the democratic transition process and development?”

Conceptualization of key terms

Electoral processes

An election is a formal collaborative decision-making process where a group of people, citizens of a country, select or vote for a person from the alternative contestant on whom to hold entrusted public office. The public

office in this context entails civic leadership of public affairs directly responsible for executive actions. Democracy involves leadership that protects and contributes to citizens’ dignity, worth, and potential. An election is a vital tool for selecting representatives in modern democracies in contrast to the practice of the democratic model, where the behavioral pattern and prototype of a contestant play out. The fallout of elections in some parts of the globe, especially in developing countries, is a “Sham or Show election.” A Show election is purely held for a show, as the name implies; that is, without any significant impact on the electorate’s choice of candidate in the poll (2). A “Sham” election is dictatorial and commonly characterized by little or no tolerance for political pluralism.

Afterward, the election results do not represent the people’s wishes but favor the political party in power. For instance, the incumbent president, Muhammadu Buhari, won Alhaji Atiku Abubakar in the 2019 general election. The election’s outcome could be called the Sham election, and Alhaji Abubakar affirmed this in an interview (3). The Sham election shows commendable features of voter turnout and high support for aspiring candidates. The election result did not represent the wishes and wants of the masses. Akin to the election’s outcome, one policy persecutes and intimidates most opposition. The example above explains some of the election’s consequences after the voting exercise, which does not promote transparency in the electoral process.

Election violence

The merging of these two concepts, “Election” and “Violence,” will emanate to a subject matter called “election violence.” Election violence has become an emerging problem in democratizing societies for several decades. Hoglund (4) asserted that it is a type of political violence defined by four criteria: the motive of the violence, the timing of the violence, the actors perpetrating the violence, and lastly, the targets of the violence. Political actors and their supporters indulged in countless electoral violence intended to thwart the electoral process to achieve political goals. These ailing behaviors in gaining electoral victory claimed lives and properties and caused severe damage to Democracy by undermining the public trust in government. The 2015 general elections were violent, as political assassinations, bombings, and armed clashes between factions of rival political parties disrupted campaigning in many areas. Furthermore, the violence formed a broader pattern of violence and abuses inherent in Nigeria’s political system and is still largely unacceptable.

Methods

The paper adopted a literature review method to analyze scholarly literature that has discussed the issue and identified knowledge gaps in Nigeria’s electoral violence. Given Nigeria’s political landscape, conducting fieldwork to gather

real-time data on election violence can present significant risks. Factoring in the challenge to gain insight into the problem, existing data from reviewed literature were assessed to examine “democracy and electoral violence and its implications to the development process in Nigeria.” Aside from scholarly review papers, secondary sources of data were also evaluated and cited from credible reports and articles from government organizations such as (i) the Independent Nigeria Electoral Commission (INEC), the National Bureau of Statistics and Security Agency, (ii) the Non-government Organizations, namely the International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, and the Center for Democracy and Development, and media reports from newspapers, articles, and online news portals. After democratic inception in 1999, archived data on elections in Nigeria was collated for five successive elections. Some data from reports and articles are presented in tables, and findings are discussed. Notably, the study was limited by poor data integration from the desk review assessment. However, despite this challenge, data-driven recommendations were drawn from discussing the respective data since there was a report of electoral incidents.

Research findings and analysis

Historical overview of elections in Nigeria

The chronicled antecedent of elections in Nigeria dates to the earliest 1960s, when the Clifford constitution played a significant role. Precisely, in 1962, the first post-colonial Nigerian electoral violence took place. It happened in the western zone and is called “Operation Wet E.” The rift between Obafemi Awolowo and Ladoke Akintola amid a parliamentary session resulted in acts of lawlessness between the two parties; they engaged in vicious physical combats. This common act resulted in ferocity among the people in northern Nigeria (5). Violent conflicts also occurred in parts of the Northern region, basically involving clashes between cohorts of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) and those of other parties, notably the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the Action Group (6).

In the election, each regional party openly daunted its opponents in the campaigns and violated the Federal Electoral Commission’s rules and regulations. This single act propelled the military to oversee the smooth running of the elections and their outcome. The United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) decided to shun the polls because the election process was chaotic. The contending political parties, which included the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP), the NPC, and the Action Group (AG)-UPGA, turned the Nigerian western region into a war zone.

In the quest to transition to the second republic, another election was held, and this brought in Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the President of Nigeria from 1979 to 1983; irregularities and corruption marred the elections, which sparked a series

of post-election violence. “Things began to fall apart, and the center could no longer hold.” General Muhammadu Buhari-led Military Régime, therefore, overthrew the Second Republic. Buhari’s regime could not stand the test of time because of harsh economic policies and a lack of clear vision and statements on the transitional process that ought to propel socio-economic development. Thus, the government was overthrown by his Chief of Army Staff, then Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, in a coup d’état.

Following the 1983 military coup led by General Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria conducted its first civilian election on June 12, 1993. After rejecting fifty other party applications, the presidential election was limited to only two political parties: the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). It is widely regarded as the freest and fairest election in Nigeria’s electoral history, and Chief M.K.O. Abiola of the SDP emerged victorious over Bashir Tofa of the NRC. However, the election was annulled after 11 days when General Ibrahim Babangida broke a promise on its commitment to transfer power to an elected civilian president. This decision triggered a political crisis and widespread unrest. The 1993 general election was a critical component of Babangida’s broader transition program to civilian governance, but its outcome and subsequent annulment significantly undermined this effort.

The then-president, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, argued: “That the annulment was eminent to salvage the judiciary’s image from being undermined and discussed both within and in a global sphere” (7). However, Western diplomats and the opposition dismissed Babangida’s reasons for canceling the election. Aftermath, during court proceedings, Babangida’s allies filed a suit, maintaining that irregularities surrounded the election. To this effect, there was an indefinite extension of military rule. The public declaration by Chief Abiola as the president escalated tensions and deepened instability in Nigeria. The annulment of the June 12th presidential election left many Nigerians dissatisfied, prompting the emergence of determined citizens who advocated for the military to transition back to democratic rule.

Due to the post-election violence and agitation across the federation states. In response, General Babangida stepped down and formed an Interim National Government (ING) led by Chief Ernest Shonekan. Subsequently, General Sani Abacha overthrew the ING and remained in power until his demise on 8th June 1998. General Abdulsalami Abubakar took control and was saddled with returning the nation to the Fourth Republic on 29th May 1999. He instituted a transition programme to return the country to democratic rule in 1999. As part of its initiatives, the regime established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to manage and conduct elections as scheduled. The creation of INEC marked a significant step toward Nigeria’s transition to the Fourth Republic. The commission established guidelines

for forming political parties, screenings, and timetables for political activities. This led to the emergence of major political parties, including the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All-Peoples Party (APP), and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) (8). The presidential aspirant of PDP (Chief Olusegun Obasanjo) emerged as the winner, was sworn in as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, and ruled for two terms, spanning to eight years of leadership.

Election timeline in Nigeria

2003 elections

After four years of the transition to democracy in 1999, another general election was conducted in 2003 by President Obasanjo's administration. The incumbent political party returned to power for the second time in severely flawed polls. The European Union Observers posited that the election was the "most fraudulent selection" in the history of Nigeria. The National Assembly, gubernatorial, and presidential election results were said to lack INEC guidelines and the Electoral Act. Instead, the inflation of election figures in government houses or collation centers aimed to return President Obasanjo and the PDP to power. The alleged electoral malpractices of the ruling PDP painted a black image of the party, and it was said to be the most sophisticated and corrupt in Nigeria's electoral history (9).

The political landscape of the 2003 elections was marred by widespread rigging and incidents of violence across various parts of the country. Some critics contend there was no election, claiming voters were intimidated. Basically, political elites and caucuses hold a firm resolute in the selection process. The election observers from different walks of life unanimously agreed that the electoral process lacks fairness. A Human Rights Watch report revealed that between April and May 2003, there was a high incidence of election violence; over 100 people lost their lives, and several were injured (10). Most of the violence was attributed to the PDP and its supporters (11).

Similarly, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a combination of over ninety Civil Society Groups, declared the 2003 presidential election "null and void" due to electoral fraud and irregularities. The alteration of the election result before the various Election Petition Tribunals (EPT) was clear evidence of the election result's incompetence.

2007 elections

As amended, the Nigerian constitution allows its president to serve only two terms in office. In 2007, under Prof. Maurice Iwu, 25 political parties were formed, but the main political parties were the PDP and the All-Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) (African Election Database). Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, the ruling PDP, won the poll. The European Union reported that the elections had fallen short of basic international standards. The credibility of

the process was questioned, citing poor election procedures, lack of transparency, significant evidence and level of fraud, disenfranchisement of voters, violence, corruption, and bias; the poll identified vote-rigging, fierceness, stealing of ballot boxes, and intimidation to be pronounced (12). The pre-election violence recorded suspected Islamic militants, activities of the Niger Delta militants, truck bombings, attacks on police stations, attempted killings, and failed attempts to destroy INEC headquarters in Abuja with a bomb truck (13).

All forms of deception characterized the 2007 general election, disenfranchised the electorate, and announced fabricated results in areas where elections never occurred. In most polling centers, the electorate faced intimidation by the police and military (14). Also, the election process was constrained by the late and non-delivery of election materials, hijacking of ballot boxes, and thumb/other printing methods. The captivity and humiliation of independent election observers and electoral and coalition officers' bribing abetted the election results' falsification (11). In a nutshell, the aforementioned characters associated with the 2007 election were a replica of the outcome of the 1964 general election. This has left a devastating impact on Nigeria's fragile democracy, likened to a wildfire consuming everything in its path.

In response, the late President Umaru Yar'Adua established the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC), presided over by Justice Mohammed Uwais, to develop a transparent system to ensure credible elections and strengthen Nigeria's democratic institutions. The committee discovered extensive electoral malpractices that drew widespread condemnation from local and international observers. During his inauguration, President Umaru Yar'Adua openly slammed the faulty election process that had brought him to power (11). President Yar'Adua was ready to deliver his promises of restoring the rule of law and guaranteeing sanity in the electoral system before his demise in 2009. Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, the vice president, assumed office as interim president.

2011 elections

Nigeria's 2011 polls marked the fourth multiparty election in Nigeria. Both local and foreign observers generally accepted that the 2011 general elections, compared with the 2003 and 2007 general elections conducted in the Fourth Republic, were quite commendable. Also, an ideology of the "Rotating formula" came on board; deciding which region of the country the next president would emanate from was a going concern. It was recounted that out of 61 registered political parties, only three were the major contenders in the contest (15). These include PDP Ebele Johnathan, Nuhu Ribadu for the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and Mohammad Buhari, representing the Congress for Progressive Change (16).

However, the election witnessed various forms of violence during the pre-, amid, and post-election periods. Pre-election violence was recorded in 2010 when bombs went off during a gubernatorial campaign rally. The pre-election campaign violence included shooting, killing, and bombing in some parts of Nigeria, including Abuja; the attack was blamed on Boko Haram activities in 2009 to disrupt the election (17). The the election day recorded poor turnout in some places due to killings; the next day, voting continued in the north as there was a high turnout (18).

The international observers reported that the election went smoothly and successfully; it had relatively low fraud, vote-rigging, and violence compared to the previous elections. Contentious issues such as underage voting and theft of ballot boxes have spelled out irregularities that should not be undermined (19). According to Human Rights Watch, the post-election violence was characterized by riots and killings of hundreds due to violent reactions and hate speech by the strongest opposition party (CPC) over election results (20).

Nigeria has a history of pre-, amid, and post-election, most notably the 2011 election in which tens of thousands of lives and properties were lost in post-election violence. As cited in Wikipedia, the 2011 post-election violence occurred in some parts of Nigeria; having announced Dr. Goodluck Jonathan the presidential election winner on 19th April, more than 700 people lost their lives in three villages in Kaduna (21). In parallel, the report on 2011 post-election violence evaluated several incidences in the 1960s and 1980s that led to the overthrow of the sitting presidents. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) 2011 argued that over 60 incidents of election-related violence across at least 22 states spanning all six geopolitical zones, resulting in approximately 58 deaths and numerous injuries, were recorded. The report also highlighted the prevalence of inflammatory language in the lead-up to election violence, including hate speech disseminated through the media and during campaign rallies by party representatives (22). The National Human Rights Commission (23) referenced a video of an outgoing state governor urging party supporters to “crush” and “kill” perceived opponents, referred to as “cockroaches.” Additionally, there were allegations of hostilities involving high-profile entities and political elites campaigning alongside one another.

In **Table 1**, European Union Election Observation (24) and Human Rights Watch (25) show 17 incidents and 810 casualties. In many places, the trailed political violence, especially in the north, raised concern, but the opposition party refused to condemn the political violence concerning the election result. The opposition interpreted it as implicitly giving his consent to the party supporters to riot in which they claimed election irregularities and manipulation of the process. Approximately 1000 people died, and 65,000 persons were forced out of their homes due to the riots in the north in the post-election violence (20).

2015 elections

The 2015 presidential election took place in the federation plus FCT states, except for River State, where a court injunction prohibits the All-Progressive Congress (APC) from forming and fielding candidates due to an internal crisis with the state chapter of the various political parties. The election was scheduled for 14th February 2015; however, the scheduled period for the election was adjourned due to poor distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and the extended time to curb the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeastern states to ensure the electorates were not disenfranchised and address technical problems that could emanate from the biometric card readers (26).

Table 2, cited in the International Crisis Group (27), showed 69 incidents and 181 casualties. The 2015 Nigeria presidential election took place on the 28th and 29th of March 2015. There were 78 candidates/political parties contesting the presidential race. Still, two key contenders were the presidential aspirants of the two major political parties. Muhammadu Buhari contested on the APC platform and Goodluck Jonathan for the PDP (28). Aftermath, the current president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of PDP, lost the poll to Muhammadu Buhari of APC, a strong contender in the presidential race. In 2015, UN observers asserted that the 2015 election was “one of its kind”; since independence,

TABLE 1 | Electoral violence in the six (6) geo-political zones in the 2011 general election.

S/no	Geo-political zones	No. of incidence	No. of casualties
1	North-Central	0	No casualties
2	North-East	3	11 people killed
3	North-West	13	798 people killed
4	South-East	0	No casualties
5	South-South	0	No casualties
6	South-West	1	2 persons killed
	Total	17	811 death toll

Source: European Union Election Observation (24) and Human Rights Watch (25).

TABLE 2 | Electoral violence in the six (6) geo-political zones in the 2015 general election.

S/no	Geo-political zones	No. of incidence	No. of casualties
1	North Central	3	9 killed
2	North-East	46	119 people dead
3	North-West	8	25 people dead
4	South-East	0	No casualties
5	South-South	1	6 dead
6	South-West	11	22 dead
	Total	69	181 death toll

Source: International Crisis Group (27).

an incumbent president lost an election and peacefully transitioned power to the elected president.

2019 election

The general elections on 23rd February 2019 covered the election to vote for the Executive and legislators (House of Representatives and Senate). By default, 73 political parties contested the presidential seat. However, the presidential officeholder, Muhammadu Buhari of the APC, defeated the closest party contender under the candidature of Atiku Abubakar with approximately four million votes. The 2019 election was mainly pre-election and had little post-election violence, such as ballot box snatching, killing, vote trading and impersonation, and supplies of explosives, which had several incidences and casualties. Hundreds were reported to have died during the following elections in 2015 and 2019 (29).

The African Union claimed that the election was incredible and that the poll was convincing. The INEC also acknowledged that the election was the most delicate (30). On the contrary, the Freedom House, a United States-funded organization that monitors censorship, intimidation, and violence against a journalist and public access to information, criticized the conduct and outcome of the election based on irregularities and malpractices (31).

Table 3, The Civil Society Situation Room (32), information claimed that the northwest region recorded the highest number of deaths, in which 172 persons were killed, followed by 146 mortalities in the northeast. The report also revealed that the South-South and North-Central had 120 and 111 fatalities. The South-West had 63 casualties and 14 persons killed in the South-East. The total death toll was 626 between the commencement of the election and its conclusion. The table revealed an increase in the death toll compared to the 2015 general election.

2023 election

This election was meant to decide who would take Nigeria to the next level of economic independence. Some citizens felt that hardships had befallen most Nigerians amid APC's eight

years of governance. The poll consists of four major political parties, namely: Bola Ahmed Tinubu of All Peoples Congress, Peter Obi of the Labor Party, Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, and lastly Rabiu Kwankwaso of New Nigeria People's Party. Nevertheless, the anomalies happened again; the presidential election was characterized by massive rigging and pockets of violence such as intimidation, snatching of ballot boxes, fighting, killings, thwarting of result sheets, and kidnapping, to mention but a few.

Across the federation states, most of the election observers reported the exercise to lack merit, be compromised, and not represent the voice of the electorates. Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, the substantive INEC chairman, argued that the election was free and fair, against all odds, and declared Ahmed Bola Tinubu's candidacy the winner of the 2023 presidential election. To most observers and electorates, it is indeed another "sham election." Therefore, the electoral process and democracy were truncated because the electoral guideline supporting transmitting real-time results to the INEC server was boycotted. As such, this single act questioned the credibility of the election result and procedure. Armed Conflict Location Event Data monitored the impact and dynamics of political violence in Nigeria through the Nigeria election violence. Interactive Tracker Resources reported violence and fatalities (33). Also, because of hate speech against rival candidates and ethnic and religious communities. (34). To crown it, political violence in the run-up to the 2023 election is primarily in line with the levels observed before the 2019 election.

Timing of poll

Holistically, election violence uses coercive force directed toward electoral actors or subjects in electoral competition (35). Election-related violence can occur at various stages before, during, or after an election. It often targets various individuals, including candidates, activists, poll workers, election observers, journalists, and voters. Pre-election violence typically involves conflicts between politicians, interruptions of campaign rallies, and clashes between groups of rival political parties. Post-election violence usually arises during the collation of votes, aiming to delay or manipulate poll results and the announcement of outcomes. Such actions undermine the electoral process, producing results that fail to reflect the valid will of the electorates.

All manners of political violence have characterized most general elections in Nigeria and have also been fueled by the activities of thugs and aggrieved parties. Nevertheless, election violence could take the form of a Top-Down or Bottom-Up Violence Approach. The first occurred from governing authority toward its opposition parties or people; the latter implies a false outcome or favoritism to the people protesting the government's rigged system. Each approach involves conflict between politicians, disruptions at campaign rallies, isolated clashes between supporters of competing political parties, and the destruction of properties.

TABLE 3 | Electoral violence in the six (6) geo-political zones in the 2019 general election.

S/no	Geo-political zones	No. of incidence	No. of casualties
1	North Central	23	111 killed
2	North-East	16	146 people killed
3	North-West	20	172 people dead
4	South-East	7	14 dead
5	South-South	59	120 dead
6	South-West	36	63 casualties
	Total	161	626

Source: Civil Society Situation Room (32).

Consequently, multiple post-election violence will occur if many reject the election results.

Contributing factors and results of electoral violence

Vote-buying (Clientelism): This entails buying the electorate's conscience through what is termed "dirty money or food items" given to the poor, vulnerable, and less advantaged people for political support or to influence vote choice (36). Vote-buying weakens political institutions, which, in turn, results in bad governance.

Social Status of Supporter Groups: The higher unemployment rate among youths, low level of literacy, and brainwashing have increased the ill activities of organized groups in the different states of the Federation, Local Government Areas, and Communities. The quest to earn a living has pushed these people to engage in illicit activities, resulting in public disturbance. Also, the existence of long-standing rivalries and disagreements between ethnic-religious cultural groups could result in violence during election periods (37).

Weak Legal Mechanisms and Frameworks: The degree of impunity of the political actor, the weak rule of law, delayed justice, corruption, executive interference, manipulation, and non-compliance with court orders, to mention but a few. These factors threaten the frameworks and the comprehensiveness of policies to combat social crimes and bring perpetrators to book.

Inflammatory and Hate Speech: Hate speech is any slur statement incited that promotes hatred and violence against a group or class of persons that condemns or stirs up violence (38). The harsh word resonated with Chief Obasanjo's statement in the 2003 general election. The use of inflammatory language or speech by political actors, aspirants, and other officials on the media towards minority/marginalized groups can propel electoral anarchy. For instance, Ayodele Fayose, the Governor of Ekiti State in South-West Nigeria and a prominent member of the ruling PDP, declared that the election would be "a do or die affair."

Similarly, the Niger Delta Militants asserted, "We are prepared for battle; everyone should go and fortify yourselves" (39). These statements could evoke the spirit of desperation, leading to violence that could disjoint the country's political stability.

Lack of Transparency in election Results: Disfranchisement and other voting challenges occurred during the poll. Changing the venue of collation centers, delaying the time for collation of results, and altering cum changing result sheets are propelling factors to election viscosity. These have led to several court cases from aggrieved aspirants (40).

Corruption and Infringement of Citizen's Fundamental Rights: Insecurity, a high degree of corruption within the

armed and security forces, had negatively influenced the electoral process. Where it is increasingly impossible to hold a violent free election, the participation of the security forces becomes very consequential. In the 2015 election, the opposition party claimed that soldiers and policemen were sent on a mission to ensure that harmony and tranquility were guided by the "rules of engagement" by firing gunshots; this scared the electorates away and resulted in voters' apathy (41). A breach of citizens' rights could plunge tribes, religions, or regions into civil war.

Exclusion of an Aspirant: A lack of consensus support for a candidate could prohibit or question the candidacy's credibility. This could result in a violation of the aspirant's constitutional rights and code of conduct, which could result in the outbreak of violence in a defined area from the supporter of the aggrieved candidate.

Conclusion and recommendations

From 1999 to 2023, several general elections were conducted in Nigeria under a civilian administration, proving Nigeria to be a democratic society (8). It was also observed that in 2019, Nigeria's electoral system comprised about 100 political parties but with few major political parties. On the contrary, the USA, from which developing countries copied the democratic ideology, has only two dominant political parties: the Democratic and Republican (42). Nigeria's political terrain is embedded with several political parties, but dominant political parties strongly influence the selection process. All the causative factors of election violence distort the political process to rig elections. Political violence has occurred in diverse spheres and times, from the party primary elections to the general election; this has done the Nigerian nation much harm and no good. Also, the lack of adequate legal framework and training on the part of the armed forces to control the electoral process is a fueling factor in election violence. Several reviewed scholarly works tacitly analyze election violence in Nigeria.

The prominent players in the previous elections were identified, and challenges and mitigating measures were proposed. In response, law enforcement agencies must ascertain the extent of preparedness before an election to curb security challenges. The area with historical, statistical records and other relevant information on conflict, tension, and dispute should be analyzed as strategies to combat the challenge.

From a theoretical point of view, election violence can be explained using the Elite theory, which seeks to describe and explain power relations in contemporary society. According to the Elite theory, "man can never be liberated from the subjugation of an elite structure." It posits that a small minority consisting of members of the economic elite holds power independent of democratic elections. The theory

argues that all societies are in two main groups: a ruling minority and the ruled. In most cases, the minorities tend to fight each other in favor of the players. In the quest to maintain and remain in power, minority groups are bought off, bribed, and used by the political elites, resulting in election violence to achieve selfish desires or goals.

The high violence of these elections is based on the contestants' example. On this note, drastic measures must be proffered to avert such scenarios in the nation's subsequent polls. Also, to understand the causes and challenges of election violence in emerging contemporary democracies, electoral bodies should develop the Marxist law of Negation of Negation and reform existing policies and programs to prevent electoral violence. Therefore, political aspirants must set out laudable footprints on the sand for their supporters to emulate to ensure peaceful co-existence among one another and be law-abiding to enhance transparent electoral processes.

For instance, in the 2015 election, President Goodluck Jonathan calmed the political tension that would have befallen the nation through his utterances and actions. He repeatedly said, "My ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigeria." He also admonished politicians not to rig the election or interfere with the electoral process and said he would concede defeat if he lost the election.

Since Nigeria's independence, this is the first time a presidential officeholder has lost out in a contest. He accepted defeat in good faith. This single act quieted tension in the land because groups clamoring for a skirmish could not see any reason to start a fight (20). He also refused to challenge the result in any court of law like other past presidential candidates. Instead, he displayed a true spirit of democracy and sportsmanship in politics. Consequently, political actors/players should be guided by the language/utterances used when addressing the media before, during, and after elections.

John Campbell, a former US ambassador to Nigeria, argued that Nigeria's governance, ethnic and religious tension, and corruption have negatively impacted Nigeria's democratic and electoral processes. He also asserted that Nigeria is at risk of collapse if the problems are not addressed. Campbell emphasized the need for independent and credible democratic institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure free and fair elections (43). The big question here is, "Is INEC independent?" He also called for electoral reforms to reduce vote rigging and violence.

Angerbrandt (44), in his work, opined that national electoral polarization can propel local ethno-religious conflicts, which could cause violence amid and post-elections. Due to the multi-party system of elections in Nigeria, he recommended that electoral reforms and policies be formed to reduce opposition and division among voters and political actors, which is the root cause of tension in Nigeria's electoral process and could result in violence.

To remedy this situation, in 2015, the National Peace Committee (NPC) developed a policy for political parties, candidates, and other stakeholders to sign the "Peace Accord," specifically to avert clashes and violence before and after the election. Peace Accords were signed from 2015 to 2023 and in subsequent general elections. Notably, the Peace Accord has helped curb the menace, but weak implementation and adherence have mitigated the goal's full actualization.

The two dominant political parties in the United States have significantly strengthened their electoral and democratic processes. However, voters may choose to think beyond the traditional leading parties when electing a president. Similarly, a shift away from the dominant political parties by the electorate during selection could significantly impact election outcomes. Additionally, to enhance Nigeria's democratic process, the swift resolution of election-related legal disputes before the inauguration of the winner to avert the sitting president using his power of incumbency to tweak and pervert the legal process would be ideal to mitigate or prevent post-election violence.

Government reforms, such as adequate funding to train personnel in proper data collecting and handling techniques for election outcomes, should be employed for further study. Also, support from credible sources or government agencies for primary data collection during elections should be implemented to avoid biased information on such issues. Accurate primary data will improve electoral assessment, enhance Nigeria's electoral process, and strengthen democracy.

Conflicts of interest

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