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# 2019 ELECTORAL VIOLENCE: A TEST FOR NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

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**ABSTRACT:** It may be save to align with those who believe that results in Nigeria elections comes unfortunately in two separate columns: one records the votes cast at polling stations; the other the number of people killed around the time of the election. Nigeria's Presidential Elections of 2019 has come and gone, but its scathing criticisms have flowed freely in the media and non-media outlets in the wake of the embarrassing conduct of the said election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). That General Election's nightmare went beyond the acrimonious results produced by the returning officers even where it was glaring that the card reader or supposedly smartcard reader greatly malfunctioned or were even disregarded in some polling booths, but the election witnessed series of violence, such as killings, kidnapping, ballot box snatching, setting ablaze of INEC Offices and the worst of it all, was the role of the Nigerian Army and other sister security agencies. This paper adopted survey design as a method, hence using evidence of eye witness account and reports of civil society groups, Newspapers and political variables. Simple method was used in analyzing the data, as realist theory was used to assess the role power of incumbency played during and after election. This paper tend to examine the level of violence experienced during this period under review and ascertain whether the nascent democracy Nigeria started in 1999 is moving forward or otherwise. And again, does the conduct of Election have an integrity question (?) on Nigeria's leadership role in Africa. The assertion is line with the objective of the paper which tends to identify ways of reducing electoral violence in subsequent elections and offer options for stronger synergy between INEC and Security Agencies. One of the major findings of this paper was the connivance of security agencies and the government of the day; hence he pays the piper dictate the tune. The paper therefore, recommends that the National Assembly should make a law that will strengthen the independent of the electoral umpire to be really independent.

**Keywords:** Electoral Violence, 2019 Election, Democracy, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

President Muhammadu Buhari has been elected for a second term as Nigerians have also elected new members of the National Assembly and some State governors. The Presidential contest which featured more than 70 candidates, was largely a straight

fight between Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC) and former vice President Atiku Abubakar of the main opposition, People's Democratic Party (PDP). This election that brought the incumbent back into office was marred by political violence, some of it by soldiers and police  officers. The election period included persistent attacks by factions of the insurgent group, Boko Haram in the Northeast, increased communal violence between normadic herdsmen and farmers spreading southward from North-central States and the dramatic uptick in banditry, kidnapping, and killings in the North western States of Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara. Security forces eventually were unable to respond effectively to such threats. The above indexes shows that Nigeria is not yet threading on ethics and norms of global democratic best practices.

According to Fukuyama (1989:266-275), " last two decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of countries describing themselves as democracies. Nearly everywhere, it has been argued, liberal representative democracy has been accepted as the best method of managing political affairs". If you look at the concept " democracy" from its earlier beginning, it has been a contested phenomenon, arising historically from struggle against despotic rule and social injustice. That is, it was democratic politics which produced democratic institutions. Yet at the same time the institutions most associated with modern democracy---free elections, political and civil rights protected under the rule of law, and so on, were shaped through the efforts of dominant groups to regulate popular participation (Bastian & Luckman (ed) 2003:14-15).

In view of this, democratic institutions have been created in varying degrees to meet the following goals:

- To enable participation either directly or through elections
- To avoid tyranny by autocratic rulers and (in some democratic systems) by the majority.
- To promote open and fair competitions for power on the basis of the popular vote.
- To ensure the accountability of governments.
- To provide a forum for rational discussion of political problems and settlements of conflicting social interests.

The theme of this paper is to examine and ascertain whether the recent concluded 2019 General elections, with particular reference to presidential election met the global democratic best practices have seen the political wrangling going on Venezuela.

However, Politics has always been a big money affair even in the most conservative societies. As long as it remains a game of who gets what, when and how , who has what will always play a big role. But its alarming  trend in Nigeria is worrying. That it takes an average of between #750,000 and #800,000 to host a ward political meeting should be an issue of grave concern to any well meaning Nigerian. And that, the true source of most of these funds cannot be traced is a bigger threat to

**Problem Statement**

Electoral democracy is in a terrible state in Nigeria. Its practice defies universal standard of acceptable behaviour. The greatest danger to its development is Electoral violence. Elections are do or die affair in Nigeria. That desperation was on play during the 2019 presidential and National elections. To this effect, this paper seek to identify and proffer solutions to electoral violence in the country.

**Objective of the Study**

- To look at specific electoral violence areas.
- To examine the level of security agencies involvement in the 2019 elections
- To evaluate the challenges facing the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) in conducting hitch free elections.
- To suggest means and ways of stopping electoral violence in the country.

**Research Question**

- What are the causes of electoral violence?
- What kind of strategies that should be adopted in avoiding electoral violence?
- What are the common challenges facing various security agencies during the conduct of 2019 elections?

**Theoretical Framework**

The emergence of electoral violence in Nigeria's electoral democracy has continued to vary in form, fashion and dimension. This suggest that environment and level of development have the tendency to shape the modes of electoral violence. In respect of this, it is pertinent to guide this paper with theory. After considering other relevant theories, this paper decided to realist theory. Some scholars contend that realism contains offensive and defensive variables. At the centre of the distinction between offensive and defensive realism on different assumptions with respect to whether states maximize security or power, that is to say whether power is a means or an end. The primary goal that states seek to achieve are survival or security. The political situation in the 2019 presidential election showcased that, power is a tool for achieving a goal. The power of incumbency has really proved the analysis of offensive and defensive realism.

**Pre-Election Conflict Situation: Issues and Challenges**

Since 2011, Election violence became outstanding in terms of its magnitude, severity and consequences, it is pertinent to note that elections are synonymous with violence in Nigeria. All the Ten general elections conducted in Nigeria since independence in 1960 (including 1964, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007,2011, 2015 and 2019 elections) have been marred with various degree of violence (Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research 2002:8),

This is to show that, Nigeria's elections have historically been fraught with controversy, violence and other abuses, with 2015 elections, widely believed to have been largely free of violence, bucking this trend. There were reports of voter intimidation and violence around the 2019 elections at both the federal and state levels, including armed men hired by candidates and political parties and security forces, including the Nigerian police.

Arguably, the 2019 Presidential elections will go down in the annals of Nigeria's history as the poll that recorded the worst outcome. If feelers are anything to go by, politicians, especially the incumbents made their road shows victories through collaboration with security personnel, , more disgracefully, the Nigerian Army. However, the ugly signs of the impending political doom started showcasing from the postponementof February 16th to February 23rd 2019 election by the independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the umpire responsible for the conduct of Nigeria's Elections.

Characteristically, the true story or reasons that led to such ugly situation will never be told. But one thing that is clear, according to INEC, hinges on "logistics",; well , INEC has never expatiated on the word " logistics" In fact, this postponement created doubts in the minds of Nigerians to question the integrity of INEC and sincerity of federal government in conducting free and fair election that will based on acceptable global standard.

The above situation brought tension and pre-election conflict across the country. A lot of signs and misgivings indicated that, there will be no level playing ground that will produce credible results after the elections. In Rivers State, media reported of army troops deployed to Port-Harcourt, the state Capital, ahead of the elections. This stirred concern about the role military would play during the elections. To substantiate the above assertion, Chief Ayo Adebanjo, a Chieftain of Afenifere ( A Yoruba socio-cultural group) has this to say;

> *Well, the signs are too good for a peaceful Election and it is sad. It is unfortunate. All that is happening now are strange. So many things that the government (APC Led government) is doing, nobody expects it under a normal time, not to talk of when elections are approaching, but, we will continue to pray. (Sun, 2019:27).*

What pre-empted that 2019 presidential Elections might not to be free and fair hinges on the activities of federal government which include among others:

- Disarming of the Nations judiciary
- Appointment of Aisha Amina Zakari, a niece to President as a collation supervision officer

- Security architecture that is one sided based on ethnic or religious colouration
- Police arrest of two men with 14 sack of bags of tumb printed ballot papers in Kano
- Militarization of opponents strong holds
- Burning down of INEC offices in some states of the federation
- Allegation of permanent voters cards buying in some states
- Consistence in Herdsmen attack in the middle belt region
- Shoot at sight order on ballot box snatchers that was seen as a jungle pronouncement.

All of the above showcases road to political violence that manifested during the 2019 Presidential elections.

**2019 Nigeria's Presidential Election and Political Violence**

One uncivil axiom always say that, route to power has been violence. But to a civil and democratic person, political violence like the one that characterized 2019 Nigeria's General election is both a curse in itself and an obstacle to accountable and legitimate government. It is a curse because the process of violent struggle is hugely destructive. It is an obstacle because when power rests on violence, it invites an arrogant assumption that government is there to rule rather than to serve (Collier, 2009:1-2).

Analytically, let us have a look at the official photographs of our political leaders to get the point clear. In the mature democracies our political leaders smile: they are desperate to ingratiate themselves with their "masters, the voters". In the developing countries , such as Nigeria, the leaders do not smile: their portraits stare down from every public building, every classroom, with menacing grimace. They are the masters now that thankfully the colonialists have gone. The section of the paper try to x-ray why political violence is endemic in struggling democracy like Nigeria, with flash points at certain areas of violence in the just concluded 2019 General Elections. However, 2019 General Election, has come and gone but its horrific memory will never fade to oblivion. The level of violence that marred the conduct of the said election is better imagined than to be real. The catalogue of electoral violence has the following breakdown.

In Delta State, three persons were shot dead during the Governorship and State Assembly Elections. In Oyo State, three deaths were recorded, while in Ondo two deaths were recorded. In Katsina State, reports indicated that two security agents were killed, while twenty (20) electoral officials were abducted. In Edo State, reports had it that masked men set electoral materials on fire, while in Ebonyi, State INEC office was set ablaze (Vanguard, march, 2019). In Rivers State, what actually took place was not voting, rather it was a political battle fought by proxy between the incumbent governor, Chief Nyesom Wike and the Transport Minister Rt. Hon Rotimi Amaechi.

The military was alleged of conniving with the latter in causing political mayhem in the State. The military was accused of abandoning their constitutional responsibility of protecting citizens and were killing them. Human Rights watch documented allegation of collusion between some security agents and suspected APC supporters to cart away ballot boxes and result sheets. However, witnesses in polling places in Bonny, Abonnema, Isiokpo and Okrika said that armed men chased voters and observers with weapons in the presence of military officials. In many cases, Human Rights watch found military officials helped the electoral criminal elements intimidate voters and cart away sensitive election materials. However, the headquarters of the Nigerian Army put out a press statement highlighting the presence of "fake military personnel", and their alleged responsibility for security incidents. From debriefings with observers, it was considered possible that some incidents could have been committed by persons impersonating security personnel. In other cases, particularly around collation centres, it was thought unlikely that fake personnel could have been responsible, as those observed were interacting with other security personnel and seemed to be following a chain of command. In view of this, the Governor, Wike charged the military to explain to Nigerians what happened in the following areas of the State: Ikwere local government, Okrika and Emoha (Daily Sun, 2019:10). In similar reaction, an election observer group called, "Centre for Transparency Advocacy (CTA), equally accused military personnel deployed for security of not only abandoning their primary responsibilities but also displayed open partisanship during the exercise (Vanguard, 2019:5).

**Causes of Election Violence**

Studies have shown that the causes of electoral violence are universal though with some few exceptions. Among the generally identified causes include the following:

- Stakes of winning or losing
- Expectations of the players
- Fears of exclusion or defeat
- Ethnic entrepreneurs
- Absence of a tolerant political culture and entrenchment of a dominant party system
- The design of the electoral system
- The management and administration of elections.

**Approaches towards Combating Electoral Violence**

Nigeria's weak security and law enforcement capacity reflect on the country's inability to regulate the flow of small arms, curtail banditry and check the activities of thugs and militia groups. This means that intelligence is a panacea to most of the security challenges and threats facing our electoral democracy. One of the strategies to be adopted rather than conniving with miscreants by our security personnel is to apply Trend Analysis before the election proper,
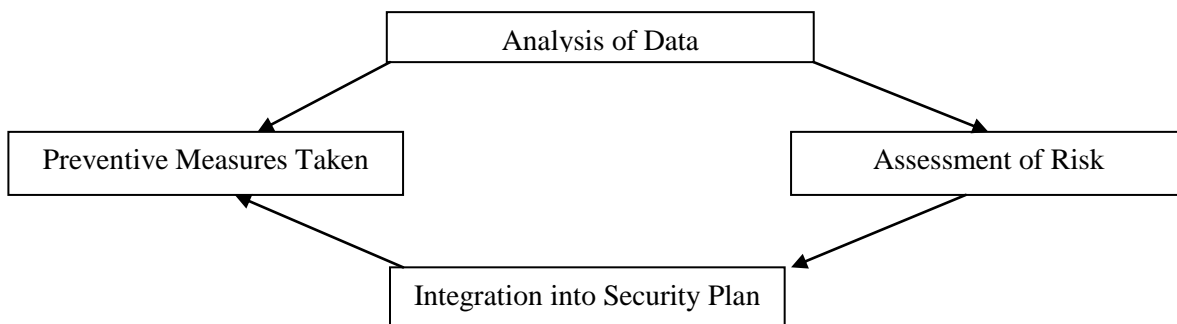
**Trend Analysis:** This could be regarded as a unique and dynamic assessment of the past present as well as means of extrapolating the future of security arrangement. Where trend analysis is properly done, it can assist security personnel in identifying many things, including the direction and scope of the changes taking place, whether they are positive in their impact or not. In some cases, this can provide a basis for anticipating danger. In this case, it enables the security operatives to take a precautionary measures to protect the system. In view of this, it is necessary that there must be a synergy among security operatives in intelligence sharing regarding any security breaches before and during election. It should be noted that, the most general goal of trend analysis is to discern whether the level of an indicator has increased or decreased over time, and if it has, how quickly or slowly the increase or decrease has occurred. However, this should be done comparatively with the past elections held.

**Threat Analysis:** By threat analysis, we mean a rational evaluation and analytical means of determining the degree of danger or otherwise posed by a considered threat(Lemchi, 2016:43). This is the first step in risk assessment. This analysis is a function of timely and adequate intelligence information required necessarily to determine the level of danger posed by the threat and the most appropriate means of reaction or response. This strategy is used by security agencies to identify the sources and types of threats and their likelihood. However, before 2019 presidential election indicators have shown that all were not well, such indicators include hate speeches, activities of Fulani herdsmen, attack on judiciary, fiat orders of the ruling party (All Progressive Congress, A.P.C), Boko Haram Insurgency etc.

In threat analysis, there are two outstanding forms of threat confronting security agencies of any country. These are "real or manifest threat" and "imagined or perceptive threat". In situation like this, when a threat is manifest, it means that there is a clear evidence of possible break down of law and order On the other hand, a threat can be imagined or perceive at the realm of psychology. A threat is imaginable because facts are uncertain about its potentials and this requires proactive precautionary measures that can help nip such in bud.

**Information and Intelligence Management as Risk Assessment for Electoral Violence**

Security Agencies should gather and analyze information to provide an appreciable assessment of election related violence as reflected below:

**Step One: Analysis of Data**

This stage involves the gathering of qualitative and quantitative data on the risk of violence in each of the electoral ward/constituency. The data should include among others the following:

- The historical and political contextual background to each electoral ward. This should also include key political actors, dominant political parties and reactions to previous election results.
- Security incidents occurring in each of the electoral wards during the past elections, and
- Demographic information, such as numbers of registered voters and polling units.

**Step Two: Assessment of Risk**

Each Electoral ward is to be assessed with a view to appreciating whether the available data indicated any risk of violence in that area. It is pertinent to note that the more the indicators the higher the assessment of the risk of violence.

**Indicators of Political Violence:** The indicators include the following:

1. There is no dominant political party in the ward/constituency
2. There is likely to be intense political competition for all or some of the elective positions with:
   - Prominent personalities standing as candidates, e.g former governors and their aides, commissioners, ministers, etc.
   - Long standing political and/ or family rivalries in the ward/constituency
   - There has been recent incidents of political tension in the ward arising from attempt to impose a candidate or manipulate the process, and
   - There are identified "flashpoints" of tension in the ward.

**Indicators of Risk of Election Violence**

This should include:

1. The results of the election indicating close tie between the major contenders. This could increase the possibility of post election tension and its implication on national security.
2. Inciting preaching by radical religious clerics with affiliation to political parties
3. Provocative utterances by party stalwarts
4. Provocative radio and television jingles fanning the embers of hatred for certain political party candidates.
5. Psychological warfare by political parties

6.  Manifestations of undue pressure and bribery as part of the election strategy aimed at manipulating the process.

**Step Three: Integrating the Risk Assessment into Stakeholders' Security Plans:**

The risk assessment factors or actionable intelligence obtained for pre-,during and post election process should be integrated into the security plans ahead of the elections for the state and federal levels.

**Step Four: Taking Preventive Measures**

Based on the foregoing, there should be deployment of adequate security before, during and after the elections with emphasis on the hot spots, where an increased risk of election violence is envisaged. There should also be constant liaison with party officials with a view to ensuring that their candidates and supporters adhere to the code of ethics, as enshrined in the constitution and electoral Act.

**Findings**

The findings revealed that, Clienlelistic politics was on increase. This was as result of voter inducement through distribution of money and gift items. This was the case in Rivers, Benue, Kaduna and Imo where we recorded heated rivalry between Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC). Another finding indicated early warning signs of violence. This was as a result of rise of political temperature. Incidence of vandalism and destruction of properties belonging to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) , Candidates or Political Parties were recorded in some states, such as Osun, Rivers, Benue Adamawa etc. The North West region has the highest recorded pre-election violence.

Hate speech was also shown as an indicator of early warning sighs of violence. This took place either because of faith or ethnicity, The paper observed the activities of Herdsmen as another finding. This was the case in the North Central states of the country such Benue, Plateau, Niger etc. It was direct sigh of anticipated violence which really manifested in the 2019 Presidential election. This group did not hide their agenda hence became de facto government in the area. Another significant finding is the role of power of incumbency in the manipulation of security apparatus in pre and during elections. The power that be, that is the Government of All Progressive Congress (APC) used the security agencies to scuttle peoples mandate in some states, which in some cases resulted to violence; thereby making INEC to compromise on their national sacred assignment.

**Conclusion**

The trend towards democratization in Nigeria has been fuelled by certain challenges like legitimacy, crisis, demand to allow peoples votes to count after election process.

What happened in the 2019 General Elections was nothing but gangsterism using military. It is worse than armed robbery, because they used arms to harass the people, thwart the people and seize their mandate. In the normal democratic setting, Nations do not celebrate the victory of a party, but the sacrament of democracy. And also, do not celebrate the victory of a party but a convention of freedom. They two prominent phrases above, "democracy and freedom" were all lacking in the just concluded 2019 elections in Nigeria. What we actually succeeded in establishing is a mockery of democracy, as far as democrats are concerned, we are not practicing democracy in Nigeria. The same INEC that promised that they will conduct free, fair and credible elections failed the nation. However, if a Statement credited to one of the State Resident Electoral Commissioner that, he was posted to a State to, " count votes and not money", is something to write home about, the issue of "Money-cracy" will be a bye-gone thing and sanity will be restored in our electoral system. The worst form of democracy is to subvert the will of the people through the ballot box.

## Recommendations

On the backdrop of violence assessment in just concluded 2019 Presidential election, this paper suggest that, the Independent of the Electoral umpire to remain sacrosanct, its chairman should evolve through political parties or the National Assembly. This is to enable the nation to have somebody who will do the needful, because he who pays the piper dictates the tune.

It is pertinent to advise INEC, most preferable, the National Assembly to make an amendment clause that will help to stop the issue of " inconclusive elections" that characterized most of the states elections, such as in Benue, Sokoto, Plateau, Adamawa, Bauchi and Kano. This has been a sore point in the just concluded 2019 polls. To deter impunity for violations of electoral regulations, the National Assembly should pass a bill to create a specialized offences commission with the authority to investigate, enforce and prosecute electoral offenders. In order to improve confidence in the administration of the electoral process, INEC should recruit ad hoc staff earlier in order to allow sufficient time for their training. Locally recruited staff should be more intensely vetted to ensure they are not politically affiliated. On the side of security preparations, the Police as the lead security agency, should be more assertive in coordinating with INEC. The Police should ensure greater consistency in preparation throughout State Police commands. Furthermore, to improve coordination among security agencies, both the Police and other security agencies should more effectively use state-level mechanisms to address security concerns. Election security planning needs to start earlier in the electoral cycle and clearly consider and define the roles of other security agencies. Again, the Presidency should assent the Electoral Act 2018 as a first step in addressing legal and regulatory needs of the electoral process. Amendment should be made on the appointment of INEC National and State Commissioners to limit as far as possible, the scope of political bias. Presently, these are all appointed by the president, with the only external consultation being the senate

confirmation. Lastly, political violence is one variant of the struggle for power. We now see it as illegitimate, and might not make right. In the high income societies, like America, Britain, etc, over the past century we have internalized their principles of democracy theoretically, and gradually we have come to regard them as global democratic best practices. Ballot not violence should pave the route to power.

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