

## THE 2003 GENERAL ELECTION VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract**

*Over the years, the Nigeria electoral process had been characterized by massive violence. The 2019 general elections was the sixth multi-party and the third hand over of Civilian administration since the beginning of the Fourth Republic democratic dispensation in Nigeria. The account of electoral process in Nigeria cannot be complete without making reference to electoral violence. This violence has become a permanent feature of electoral processes in Nigeria. From independence till date, there has never been any election adjudged absolutely free and fair as far as Nigeria is concerned save the one purportedly won by chief MKO Abiola in 1993. This paper examined electoral violence and its general implications on the democratization process in the country, with special emphasis on the 2003 general elections. Methodologically, the paper adopts the historical analysis method while data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The paper argues that the high incidence of pre and post electoral violence in the country in the period under study has to do with the way Nigerian politicians regard politics, the weak political institutions and weak electoral umpire as well as the compromising nature of the security agencies. The paper therefore recommends that to reduce the high rate of violence associated with elections, politicians must eschew the politics of do or die.*

**Keywords:** Election, Violence, Nigeria, Electoral Umpire, Democracy.

### **Introduction**

Election has been variously defined by different authors and scholars alike. But each definition points to the fact that election is the process of selecting people for a leadership position. Thus, Ojo defines election as “formal expression of preferences by the governed, which are then aggregated and transformed into a collective decision about who will govern, who should stay in office, who should be thrown out, and who should replace those who have been thrown out<sup>1</sup>.”

To Awopeju, the term election connotes the procedure through which qualified adult voters elect their politically preferred representatives to

parliament of a country or any other public positions for the purpose of running the government of the country or the public office<sup>2</sup>. Nwachukwu and Uzodi sees election as a set of activities leading to the selection of one or more persons out of many to serve in positions of authority in a society. Consequently, **election**, is the formal process of selecting a person for public office or of accepting or rejecting a political proposition by voting.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand election violence is any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay or otherwise influence electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, discrimination, physical assault, forced protection or blackmail, destruction of property or assassination.<sup>4</sup> According to Nwolise, electoral violence is a form of organized acts or threats, physical, psychological and structural aimed at intimidating, harming or blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view of determining, delaying or otherwise influencing a n electoral process<sup>5</sup>.

Electoral violence in Nigerian electoral process has been a source of concern to Nigerians and the international community who expects an improvement in the electoral process each time a general election is to take place. This high expectations of Nigerians and the international community always hit the rock after each election with the rate of electoral violence in the current election being higher than the preceding ones which is expected to be improved on. Between 1999 and 2019, Nigeria had had six general elections with the rate of violence increasing in each electoral year. Many incidents of violence were recorded during the April 12 and 19 elections in 2003. By the time the state Houses of Assembly elections began around May 3, much of the electoral violence had run its course especially in states that made up the South-South and the South-East, like Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta. This was at least partly because opposition parties started boycotting the polls, complaining of rigging and fraud in the earlier elections and urging their voters not to cast useless votes.

Conceptually, the term election according Ojo is a “formal expression of preferences by the governed, which are then aggregated and transformed into a collective decision about who will govern, who should stay in office, who should be thrown out, and who should replace those who have been thrown out<sup>6</sup>.” In concurring, Awopeju defines election as a procedure that allows members of a given society to choose representatives who will hold positions such as leaders of local, state and national government<sup>7</sup>. According to R.T Dye, election is an important mechanism for the employment of administrative governance in

democratic social order, a major involvement in a democracy and the way of giving approval to a regime<sup>8</sup>.

On the other hand, violence was conceptualized by Johan Galtung in terms of influence (to mean harm), and explains the relations between the influencer, influenced and a mode of influencing; categorized in terms of a subject, an object and action<sup>9</sup>. He accepted though within the limited assumption, that the end of state of violence is its somatic incapacitation or deprivation of health of the individual by means of killing which is an extreme form of violence in the hands of actors who intend it to be the consequence of their action<sup>10</sup>. He sees violence as “present when human beings are being influenced (harm) so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realization”. It is therefore clear that violence can start or occur, covertly with a built-up emotion and in the process manifest gradually from hate approach in terms of negative /hate speeches and comments made with aggressive attitudes/behaviour, manifesting in the form of hostility and confrontation through furious behaviour that involves assault, intimidation, fighting and attacks among other methods.

The concept of electoral violence is therefore made up of two distinct concepts in one, which includes electoral and violence. In this review, the two concepts are defined and then reviewed in the context of the subject matter of the current study. The word electoral in the opinion of Bamgbose is the process involved in the conduct of elections either at the public or private level<sup>11</sup>. In the same vein, Laakso defines electoral violence as an activity motivated by an attempt to affect the results of elections either by manipulating the electoral procedure and participation or by contesting the legitimacy of the results. It might involve voters and candidate’s intimidation, killing, attacks against their property, forceful displacement, unlawful attentions and rioting.<sup>12</sup>

Ojo conceptualized electoral violence to mean any act of violence perpetrated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post-election periods and may include any of the following acts; thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations or use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or cause bodily harm to any person connected with the electoral process<sup>13</sup>. Electoral violence therefore means any act of violence perpetrated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post-election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations,

or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process, or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes.

Theoretically, this paper adopts two theories namely, the frustration aggression theory and the Marxian theory of conflict. The frustration aggression theory was developed in 1939 by Dollard and colleagues. They published a monograph on aggression, which later was known as the Frustration-Aggression theory, anchored on the assumption that “aggression is always the consequence of frustration.” This theory primarily focuses on aggression, as Dollard has it that “the occurrence of aggressive actions always presumes the existence of frustration and contra wise, and that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression”<sup>14</sup>

Frustration-aggression reflects one of the reasons for electoral violence because men who want to live above their social means do not accept their limitation in defeat. This results into violence as the last resort in order to achieve their aims of living beyond their social means. Frustration-aggression theory addresses the pre-election and post-election violence. Thus according to in situations of pre-election violence, frustration and aggression comes into play when a certain aspirant is power-hungry and possibly realizes the indications that he/she may possibly lose to the rival, thereby adopting vehemence for their own personal gains.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, the frustration aggression theory provides an explanation for electoral violence that has been occurring in Nigeria. The relevance of this theory to our study is that events surrounding electoral violence in Nigeria are as a result of fear of defeat exhibited by electoral candidates, which triggers frustration and then transfer of aggression, through the employment of human mercenaries in perpetrating violence in pre, during and after elections. To achieve peace, fairness and transparency of elections in Nigeria, the theory specifies the need for enlightenment on the importance of citizens coming out to vote in their masses in support of a free and fair election, making their votes count and as well make provisions for well-equipped security personnel that would safeguard life and property of voters during elections.

On the other hand, the Marxian Theory of Conflict maintains that social classes arises from the relations of production under capitalist mode. Marx observed

that the social relations of production under capitalism generates two major and distinct classes in the society based on access to the means of production<sup>16</sup>. The structure is such that those who possess the means of production (bourgeoisie) control, dominate, subjugate and exploit those who do not possess capital but depend only on their labour as a means of living (proletariats/have-nots).

Conflict theory holds that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than consensus and conformity. That is to say that those who controls wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by suppressing the poor and powerless.

This theory is therefore very apt for this study because it juxtaposes electoral violence and political stability. It reveals that electoral violence in Nigeria is as a result of quest for political offices, which is anchored on primitive accumulation. It is important to note that the failure of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governance, forge national integration and promote real economic progress, through deliberate and articulated policies, have led to mass poverty and unemployment. This has resulted into communal, ethnic, religious, electoral and class conflicts that have now characterized the nation in recent time.

The review of related literature revealed the thoughts of authors on electoral violence. Thus, Robert states that electoral violence depicts acts of aggression, thuggery, and other similar acts that are displayed in the course of the electoral process<sup>17</sup>. Balogun sees electoral violence as any form of violence that arises at any stage (pre, during and post-election) from differences in opinions, feelings and engagements of electoral processes<sup>18</sup>. Igbuzor, also wrote on electoral violence; to him, electoral violence is 'any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post-election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes<sup>19</sup>. Although there exists many literatures on this subject matter, the fact that none was on 2003 general election electoral violence has left a gap in the literature. Thus this work will fill this gap.

Electoral violence is one major problem that has affected Nigeria's democratic sustainability and achievement of good governance. Absence of proper, dedicated and committed democratic institutions militates against the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. Thus democratic institution such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should put in place structures and election ethos with a view to conducting smooth and credible elections, built on the notion of "one man, one vote" for the purpose of achieving a violence free election.

### **Historical Overview of Electoral Violence in Nigeria**

The electoral history of Nigeria from independence is replete with massive irregularities. The British colonial administration left behind several contradictory policies that affected not only the nature of governance but some strange political relationship between and among the ethnic groups. Thus, the ethnic groups relate with each other on grounds of suspicion and conspiracy. Therefore, virtually all elections that were conducted in Nigeria were definitively violent often making the state unproductive.

The only periods when there was minimum or no violence at all were elections conducted by the military in 1979 and 1999. This was obvious as the military would not tolerate any act of violence neither could the politicians allow it, in order to avoid a situation where the military might renege in returning power to civilians, although, the military could may impose their preferred candidate on the people. The collapse of the Nigerian first republic in 1966 was precipitated by electoral violence of 1964 and 1965 in Western Nigeria<sup>20</sup> but aggravated by coincidental and reactive crisis taking place in the North, particularly the Tiv crisis of 1963 and 1964; as well as the controversial 1963 population census. The official death toll in the 1965 election was put at 153 people, out of which police killed 64 in direct confrontation. However the unofficial figure speculated up to a total of 2,000 deaths.<sup>21</sup>

Second republic which lasted from 1979 to 1983 before another coup took place was pregnant with serious political violence especially with the 1983 election which gave Shagari what the ruling party, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) called a "landslide victory" but was dubbed by General Danjuma as "a gunslide victory"<sup>22</sup>, and was later to be replaced by military slide coup in 1983 revealed the extent to which violence was displayed to win the election. In Ondo state for instance, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) declared Chief Akin

Omoboriowo of NPN as the elected Governor. However, a counter announcement was made over the state radio by the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) pronouncing Adekunle Ajasin as the true winner. The later allegedly went round Akure, the state capital in an open van "calling on his supporters to come out and defend their votes"<sup>23</sup>

In Oyo and Imo states Chief Bola Ige and Sam Mbakwe's press conferences and radio broadcast threatened that "if NPN went ahead to rig that election as planned the wives of those who helped them will become widows and their children orphans". Indeed both Oyo and Ondo states experienced monumental violence that eventually led to the collapse of the second republic. The weight of rigging in the 1983 election was so massive that there were not only calls for its cancelation but there was also moves towards confederation.<sup>24</sup>

The most feasible election which was adjudged the most free, fair and credible was the 1993 elections which were fundamental to the quest of Nigerians for liberal democracy, but the military leadership under General Ibrahim Babangida however annulled the elections. The presumed winner of the election Chief Moshood Abiola, popularly known as (MKO) and his running mate Ambassador Babagana Kingibe were both Muslims. Nigerians voted for him because he was accepted across the country irrespective of his religious background. The election was conducted peacefully but the reason for the annulment which Nigerians are yet to be told precipitated the post-election violence<sup>25</sup>. For the second time in 1993 Nigerians began to move back to their home state of origin for fear of impending war. The first experience was in 1967 during the civil war. And for the second time in 1993 the western part of Nigeria was held up as the theatre of violence. Given the impending doom, General Babaginda abdicated and handed over power to an Interim Government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, Abiola's kinsman from Abeokuta, Ogun state.

This arrangement however did not avert the doom as the Interim government was declared illegal by the court, the outcome which made General Sani Abacha surreptitiously upturn the Interim regime and took over power in military styled coup. In the process, Nigeria experienced for the first time serial bombings, killings and threats to life and property. Nevertheless, General Sani Abacha began a series of transition programmes that would have led to his transmutation to a Civilian president but for his death in 1998. At the time General Abdulsalami took over power after the death of General Sani Abacha, it was not possible for the military to hang on to political power in spite of options

given to him including extension of tenure to cushion the turbulent environment before election. Therefore Abubakar began a quick-fixed transition programme which led to the election of Chief (General) Olusegun Obasanjo that opened up Nigeria's Third Republic on the 29th of May 1999.

### **The 2003 Election Violence in Nigeria**

The 2003 general election was presided over by President Obasanjo's regime which came into power in the previous 1999 election organized by General Abdusalami Abubakar, and again President Obasanjo was returned to power. That election was described as the "most fraudulent" in the history of Nigeria. In fact, the election results proved and confirmed that proper National Assembly, Gubernatorial and Presidential elections were not conducted in accordance with the INEC guidelines and the Electoral Act. Rather, figures were literally manufactured in Government Houses or collation centres as results for the return of President Obasanjo and the PDP to power. The alleged electoral malpractices of the ruling PDP were regarded as the most sophisticated in the electoral history of Nigeria.

Further to the massive rigging were pockets of violence in different parts of Nigeria. A number of people have argued that there were no elections in 2003, but merely the intimidation of voters and the selection of already decided winners by elites and caucuses. They were making reference to Anambra state where Dr. Chris Ngige was selected by Chris Uba to be the governor, despite the fact that Mr Peter Obi won the election, his victory did not see the light of the day until a court of appeal in Enugu sacked Dr. Chris Ngige and installed Mr. Peter Obi. Both internal and external observers were unanimous on the unfairness of the competition in the electoral process which was said to have been manipulated by the ruling party, the Peoples' Democratic Party.<sup>26</sup>

According to the Human Rights Watch report, between April and May 2003, about one hundred people were said to have been killed and many more injured during Federal and State elections in Nigeria and that most of the violence was perpetrated by the ruling PDP and its supporters.<sup>27</sup> Also, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of over ninety Civil Society Groups, in its report on the 2003 general elections, passed a vote of no confidence on the elections<sup>28</sup>.

Some political parties and their candidates decided to challenge some of the results before the various Election Petition Tribunals and have gone



ahead to do so while others declared “mass action” to pressure a government without popular mandate to abdicate power. Most of them were however denied justice by a corrupt judicial system. In Delta state, office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was burnt down and electoral materials destroyed. Also in Delta state houses were burnt and a couple visiting one of the parliamentarians were burnt to death<sup>29</sup>. In Edo state, a staff of INEC and members of the ANPP were killed and in Rivers, some state assembly candidates were beaten by armed thugs.<sup>30</sup>

Human Right Watch recorded that on March 5, 2003, Marshall Harry, the National Vice Chairman for the South-South Zone of the largest opposition party, the ANPP, became the most senior national figure to have been killed since Justice Minister and Attorney General Bola Ige was killed in December 2001, while many more Nigerians have lost their lives in small-scale political clashes than in targeted assassinations, these high-profile deaths have provoked perhaps greater turmoil in Nigeria, and in some cases a slightly more focused response by government and police. In many of these cases it is difficult to confirm the exact motive for the crime.

In Imo state, an ANPP senatorial candidate and former commissioner Ogbonnaya Uche, was shot in his home in Owerri on February 8, 2003, and he died two days later. Speaking to journalists before his death in the hospital, Uche reportedly said he believed the attack was political, and explained that two days before the shooting, he had been trailed to the party secretariat by a group of armed men, who had asked his driver his whereabouts.<sup>38</sup> Another death in Imo shortly followed; Theodore Agwatu<sup>31</sup>, a principal secretary to the Imo State governor, was shot and killed in his home on February 22, 2003. From all indications, these killings was not unconnected with the 2003 elections in the state. This is because, politicians view the election as a war that must be won by all means. Thus making politics a do or die affair.

Furthermore, one common element in almost all the states in Nigeria in the 2003 election has been the snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes. This was reported in 2003 in Benue, Kogi and Nassarawa in North-Central; in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe in North-East and in Jigawa and Zamfara in North-West. It was also recorded in Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers in the South-South and Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo in the South-East<sup>32</sup>. In Imo this included the destruction of ballot boxes from non-

cooperative areas. Non-cooperative areas are those voting areas who were discovered to be massively voting for the opposition party.

Again, ballot snatching and stuffing was reported in Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo in South-West. It was assumed that if security was adequately provided such actions could have been prevented. But it was quite unfortunate that even in some cases where the security forces were on ground—the police and the army, they were at times involved or bribed to look the other way as nothing is going wrong.<sup>33</sup> In fact, it was evident that security personnel perpetrated electoral malpractices and fraud in collaboration with political parties<sup>34</sup>.

Also worrying has been the provision of results even for areas where voting did not actually take place, which has been the case in many states. In the 2003 elections, doubtful results were declared in Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa and Plateau in the North-Central; in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe in North-East; Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara in North-West; and in Abia, Anambra and Enugu in South-East. Also fake results were provided in Benue, Kogi and Kwara in North-Central; Delta, Edo and Rivers in the South-South; and Osun in South-West.<sup>35</sup> Other irregularities recorded included under age voting especially in the northern states of Nigeria, kidnapping before elections, shooting at distribution and collation centres as well as snatching of electoral materials particularly result sheets as recorded in almost states in Nigeria, and the announcement of suspicious figures as authentic results<sup>36</sup>. Election violence in Nigeria is so conspicuous that the citizens always await two results after elections; the number of ballot papers cast and the number of victims of election violence.

### **Causes of Election Violence in Nigeria**

Election violence has in recent times become a part and parcel of the Nigerian political norm. Thus, it has generated a dozen of questions and posers about the causes of electoral violence, and a review of the problem suggests a numerous reasons. The answer can be found in the array of causes of electoral violence that have been identified in the literature. Some scholars were of the view that the causes of electoral violence includes: greed, electoral abuses and rigging of elections, abuse of political power, desire to perpetuate oneself in office, alienation, marginalization and exclusion and the political economy of oil.<sup>37</sup>

Others ascribe poverty/unemployment<sup>39</sup>, ineffectiveness of security forces and culture of impunity, weak penalties, weak governance, corruption and

proliferation of arms and ammunitions<sup>38</sup>. Still others argue that the causal factors are: lack of security, partisanship of traditional rulers who were supposed to be the custodians of our cultural heritage, abuse of office by elected officials, zero-sum politics or winner takes it all syndrome, lucrative nature of political office, poor handling of election petition, lack of faith in the judiciary and lack of compliance with the extant electoral law and enforcement of the enabling laws, the partisan disposition of the police, and other security agencies detailed to monitor the election, and secure lives and property, corrupt INEC staff and ad-hoc officials who collect bribe from politicians, conflict of interests between and among politicians and greed and selfish interests of politicians coupled with ideological bankruptcy.<sup>39</sup>

However, the most prevalent forms of political violence in Nigeria exude in political assassinations, arsons, violent campaigns, thuggery, election-related ethno-religious crisis, snatching of ballot boxes and so on. Analysts believe that this has been possible because election in Nigeria is seen as a “do or die affair”. This violence is most often carried out by gangs whose members are openly recruited and paid by politicians and party leaders to attack their sponsors’ rivals, intimidate members of the public, rig elections, and protect their patrons from similar attacks.

The architects, sponsors, and perpetrators of this violence generally enjoy complete impunity because of both the powers of intimidation they wield and the tacit acceptance of their conduct by police and government officials at all levels who has a share in their lawless practice<sup>40</sup>.

It is against this backdrop that the Nigeria’s governing elite have been widely implicated in acts of electoral violence, corruption and fraud so pervasive as to resemble criminal activity more than democratic governance<sup>41</sup>. It is surprising that members of the political class who are responsible for instigating this plethora of violence as well as their foot-soldiers who undermine the electoral process by perpetrating these violent acts are never brought to book.

Political behaviourists have argued that violent electoral behaviour which is either intended to hurt or kill political opponents or their supporters has a devastating human rights impact on ordinary Nigerians. In the same vein, they contend that the scenario is prevalent because of the nature of the political system, the prevailing political culture and the level of political socialization. In the Nigerian case, electoral violence is more entrenched because our political

system is supportive of zero-sum game politics. (The winner takes it all). This explains why Otoghile<sup>42</sup>, described electoral violence as the radioactive by-product of some structural and attitudinal dislocations in the society which affects the level of political participation of the citizenry.

Pre-election campaigns, election-time, and post elections periods are usually violent, with campaigning in many areas beset by political killings, bombings and armed clashes between supporters of rival political factions<sup>43</sup>. As a matter of fact, examples too close to our subject matter abound in Nigeria's system of politics which has actively and continuously rewarded corruption and violence with control over governorships, parliamentary seats and other positions of public trust despite existing law<sup>44</sup>. This in itself encourages election violence.

### **Effects of Electoral Violence on Democratic Stability in Nigeria**

Electoral violence has had tremendous negative effects on the democratic stability of Nigeria. A persistent and uncontrolled electoral violence has the potentials of truncating democratic stability in a country. More so, given the nature of our politics, electoral violence has become a norm. A major consequence to this is sabotaging the will of the electorates at the elections. It may lead to a situation where leaders that emerge are elected by the minority because the majority that has fears for their lives will not go near the electoral process<sup>44</sup>.

Again, large scale electoral violence has adverse effect on democratic stability because it negates the essential purpose of elections as a popular basis for change of government. For instance; a government which by electoral violence sustains itself in power against the wishes of the majority of the electorate lacks the legitimacy or the moral authority that popular mandate bestows<sup>45</sup>. Nigerian politics has always been marred by violent conflicts even in the colonial period where state repression was common. The women's riots (Aba women's riot) of 1929, the Egba uprising of 1931, the General Strike of 1945, the Enugu Colliery Strike of 1949 and the Kano Riots of 1953 are cases of violence in Colonial Nigeria<sup>46</sup>. In the early years of independence the prospects of violence reared its head in the Western Region and the Middle Belt. The violence that ensued ultimately led to the collapse of the first Republic.

Pre, during and post-election violence is capable of truncating democracy and ushering military intervention in politics which generates another violence. The

intervention of the military in politics in 1966 also generated more violence in the scale that was unprecedented. Not only were political assassinations the order of the day but the pogrom against Easterners in the North and the Civil War in which over 2 million Nigerians lost their lives showed the desperation of the political elite for power and the extent they could go to maintain it. Electoral violence has created room for the emergence of incompetent persons who occupy vital electoral positions made possible by some political demagogues. The fact that such people are mediocre, they cannot deliver the dividends as expected by the masses. It is also important to note that due to political violence, some of the best brains in political and economic management are not in governance as a result of victimization, while others have been brutally eliminated. The assassination of Funso Williams, Chief Bola Ige and Chief MKO Abiola are still fresh in our memory.

Election violence breeds political apathy among the electorates. Once an election records violence such as shooting, snatching of ballot boxes, kidnapping and other physical injuries, it becomes certain that the electorates turns cold feet in coming to carry out their civic responsibility. This in turn gives the political opportunist free hands to perpetrate their planned evil act.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

From the foregoing, it appears electoral violence has been an integral part of the electoral process in Nigeria. This is because virtually all elections conducted in Nigeria since independence has a mark of violence on it. Every facet of the electoral process engages in electoral violence directly or indirectly. Political parties tips their members to commit electoral violence, politicians encourage their supporters to perpetrate violence in order to retain or achieve their political mandates, electoral bodies at all levels collect bribe to short-change submitted names or cause omission of names of candidates which in turn ignite violence.

With every part of the process been fingered as an accomplice to electoral violence, what should be done to achieve a free and fair electoral process devoid of electoral fraud and violence and ensure that votes cast during election count, and violence reduced to the barest minimum? We therefore recommend the following as panacea to election violence.

- i. Public enlightenment/awareness on the part of the electorates would ensure the enthronement of free and fair election. This is because when the electorates especially the youths who are often used as thugs are properly

educated about the consequences of their actions, most of them will definitely drop the idea of working as thugs to politicians who send their children to good schools abroad and place them in better jobs that will make them useful members of the society while endangering their own lives as a result of peanuts that will be given to them.

- ii. Delisting and deregistering of political parties involved in election violence and outright disqualification of those elected under that platform. This will send strong signal to other political parties who would want to use violence to achieve their political victory.
- iii. Prosecuting and banning of politicians involved in electoral violence. Politicians who are involved in electoral fraud should be banned for life. They should also be prosecuted and made to face the full wrath of the law so that others should be called to order by learning to play the game by the rule.
- iv. Every electoral petition should be dispensed with before the swearing of elected officials. The current situation where someone alleged to have stolen the vote enjoys the fruits of office, and even spends public funds on his petition defense before eventually losing at the court, should be discouraged.
- v. Again, there should also be formation of an Electoral Offences Commission to strengthen the state's capacity to punish electoral offenders. Such a commission should be made to dispense justice faster than the conventional courts, without necessarily sacrificing the principles of justice and fair play. If one must reform and redeem Nigerian democracy, then electoral cheats and those who aid and abate them in INEC must be made to face the full wrath of the law.
- vi. Furthermore, recognition and acceptance of independent candidature will enrich the Nigerian democratic process and curb cases of imposition in the parties and lack of internal democracy, knowing that an alternative platform is open to aggrieved but popular candidates.
- vii. Any elected office holder found guilty should not only be barred from future elections, but should be jailed for the offence. A national database should be created as every rigged elections starts with a padded voter register. There is an urgent need to ensure the electoral roll is genuine and not fake. The existing of the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) will go a long way to address the issue of electoral violence. The PVC captures the biometrics of the voters on the roll.
- viii. Lastly, there should be a war against poverty to discourage vote buying/selling. This is because poverty is the major reason people sell their PVC.

When these measures are put to action, it will go a long way to bring sanity to the electoral process and make the country have self-worth when it comes to election matters.

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