

**Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)**

Volume 4, Issue 3, June 2019

e-ISSN : 2504-8562

Journal home page:  
www.msocsciences.com**Appraisal of the 2019 Post-Electoral Violence in Nigeria****Timothy Onimisi<sup>1</sup>, Omolegbe Leah Tinuola<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Federal University Lokoja, Nigeria<sup>2</sup>Arts and Social Sciences Department, Kogi State Polytechnic, Nigeria

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**Abstract**

The article focuses on incidents and causes of post-electoral violence in the 2019 general election in Nigeria. The post-electoral violence recorded during the general election is one of the most violent in the history of democratic dispersion in the country. Ballot box snatching, burning of properties, various degree of injuries and loss of lives were the basic feature of the elections. Relying on the available records from various secondary sources and with the use of content analysis the current found that the main causes of the level of violence could be attributed to ethnicity and sectional in politics, in-depth ignorance, political impunity, lack of internal democracy, negative perception inflammatory campaign. The article recommended amendment of the electoral act as well as re-strategized the security architecture for elections in the country.

**Keywords:** election, electoral violence, democracy, political impunity**Introduction**

Cases of widespread violence are often high after the announcement of election results (Straus & Taylor, 2012). The 2019 general election in Nigeria witnessed one of the most violence post-electoral processes ever witness in the history of the country, as over 70 persons lost the lives during and after the exercise. Beside the loss of lives recording during and after the general election, ballot box snatching, burning of properties including the Independent National Electoral Commission offices housing sensitive and non-sensitive materials meant for the election, burning of houses of top political aspirants and people affected with varying degrees of injuries characterized the elections the President and member of the National Assembly on February 23rd as well as the Governorship and State House of Assembly of March 9th and the subsequent supplementary elections. Persistent post-electoral violence unfortunately has come to be associated with Nigeria which made it practically difficult to disassociate this fact from obvious economic and social inequalities, heightened religious and ethnic divisions, increasing cases of corruption, weak state institutions, structural weaknesses, abuse and use of power of the state to favor incumbents, ease in manipulation and use of the young people towards violence (Verjee, Kwaja, & Onubogu 2018; Onimisi, 2015).

The continuous electoral violence being witnessed in Nigeria if not addressed properly the country's democratic practice is at risk of becoming unpopular among the citizen of the country as elements of drawback in the future elections is beginning to manipulate among the people. Thus, one prominent enemy of current democratic dispersion remains electoral violence because of uncertainty, fears over

loss of lives and property, conflict and doubt continue to characterize the electoral system of Nigeria and threatening the survival of corporate existence of the nation (Kean, 2004; Agbalajobi & Agunbiade, 2016).

The prevalent post-electoral violence threatens democracy in Nigeria, democratization, democratic growth, democratic consolidation thus increasing unrest, security, and democratic transfer of power especially when the outcome of the election is perceived to be fraudulent as result violence act (Nwolise, 2007). In polarized societies where the outcome of elections that make little or no difference would often not acceptable to ruling and opposing parties (Verjee, et al 2018). This unacceptability of electoral outcome is more compounded where are evident electoral fraud or perceived irregularity and electoral violence especially in the case of Nigeria. The task of this paper is to appraisal the electoral violence in Nigeria's 2019 general elections. In making the objective of the paper traces incidents of electoral violence during and after the election, as well as the causes of the violence. Finally, it suggests the way forward for future elections in the country in order to recurrent of violence.

### **Conceptualization of Electoral Violence**

According to Sisk & Reynolds (1998) viewed electoral-related violence as threats of coercion, physical or bodily harm and acts of intimidation perpetrated to affect or hinder an electoral process in an electoral context. The scholar further stated that when these acts are carried out it affect the electoral process, thus may directly or indirectly influence the election process in a manner such disruption voting pattern, and delay or derail of the outcome of the elections. Electoral violence is a form of political violence exhibited before, during and after election which often take the nature of political motivated kidnapping, killing, ballot box snatching, armed attacks on perceived opponent and the officers of electoral umpire as well as electoral stakeholders, burning of collation centers and offices for the purpose of gaining political advantage. Pre-election violence are often more destructive in Africa, while violence on the day of election always come in form of attacks on electoral officers, ballot snatching, voter intimidation, manipulation of electoral outcome, while violence after the election comes in form of protest, burning of facilitates and electoral materials (Straus and Taylor 2009; Fischer 2002). Electoral violence happens in form of arson, assassination, looting, and attacks on those involved in the electoral process such the media, voters, a candidate standing for an election, destroying electoral materials and campaign rallies (Fischer 2002; Omotola 2010; Onapajo, 2014). According to Collier and Vicente (2008), electoral violence is a deliberate strategy to effective pool away from the opponents from voting thus keep the other political party an advantage. Similarly, Albert (2007), sees electoral violence as mental, physical structural acts targeted at blackmailing political opponent during the electoral process with the motive of shaping the electoral outcome towards a certain direction.

### **Incidents of Post-Electoral Violence in Nigeria's 2019 General Elections**

Election day February 23rd, 2019 in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria electoral violence claim the life of an ad-hoc staff in River state according to the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission by political thugs while a number of electoral staff sustained a various degree of injuries (Ajayi, 2019). Equally, in Delta state, South-south Nigeria five persons were confirmed killed five days to the general elections during a clashed between supports of major political parties contested. In Rivers State six persons where confirmed killed by political thugs while one suspected ballot box snatcher was shot dead in a polling unit in Ikot Udo Ossiom village, Ukanafun council of Akwa Ibom State in South-South Nigeria (Oladele, et al 2019). In Delta state Ughelli South Local government political thug opens fire on voters killing one person and juried several people during the governorship and state house of assembly election (Oladele, et al 2019).

Premium Times reported that in Anambra Southeast Nigeria police confirmed the death of two persons in Obosi area during the State House of Assembly election when armed political thugs attempted to snatch electoral results, while 47 people were equally arrested for disruption of elections, thuggery, and

assault during the March 9th election (Premium Times, 2019). A stray bullet killed an electoral observer at Umuida Community, Enugu state, Southeastern Nigerian during the governorship and house of assembly election (Oladele, et al 2019). Imo state, Southeastern Nigeria the police confirmed the arrested of 105 suspected political thugs for electoral offenses such as disruption of elections, ballot boxes, impersonating of policemen and harassment of members of an electoral umpire during the governorship and house of assembly election (Adepegba, 2019). The Imo state, Southeast Nigeria the Independent National Electoral Commission office in Ngor Okpala Local Government council was burned by political thugs during the governorship and House of Assembly elections (Thisday, 2019).

In the South-West political thugs and hoodlum burnt down the office, ballot papers and ballot boxes at the Independent National Electoral Commission in Oriade Local Government Area of Osun state (Adeniyi, 2019). In Oba Akoko area of Akoko South West Local Government Council of Ondo State, Southwest Nigeria two persons were lost their lives and the others were critically injured during the House of Assembly elections, while three vehicles were vandalized and depot set ablaze by political thugs as they attempted to attach and snatch results at Akoko South West collation center (Sowole, 2019). On the same day of the governorship and house of assembly elections in South West Nigeria, a serving member of House of Representative from Lagelu/Akinyele of Oyo State was confirmed killed by political thugs (Oladele, Anthony, Olaniyi, Sunday, & Ojo, 2019).

In Nasarawa State, North-Central Nigeria one party faithful who attempted snatching ballot box narrowly escaped being lynched as the angry mob left he in the state of coma in Akwanga Local Government Area of the State (Odama, 2019). In Nasarawa state a serving senator and Senate Committee Chairman of Information representing Nasarawa South Senatorial Zone was attacked by political thugs and hoodlums a day after the elections in Lafia but survived the assailant (Sha'ban, 2019). Daily Nigerian, February 24th 2019 reports indicated that in Kogi state North-Central Nigeria Police Command the murder of three persons during the presidential and national assembly election in the state, it shows that two days were killed on election day while the third person happens to be an inspector in the police service was killed on the eve of the general election. The supplementary governorship election in Ukum local government of Benue state witnessed burning of electoral materials for Azendeshi Ward by political thugs and causing bodily injuries to electoral officials in the state (Premium Times, 2019).

In Taraba North-Eastern Nigeria the Police Command confirmed the murder of five persons by political thug a day after the presidential and national assembly election in the state who were returning from election monitoring exercise (Alhassan, 2019). The violence that marred the February 23, 2019, presidential and national assembly elections in Nigeria led to arrest of 128 people for various electoral offenses ranging from ballot box snatching, malicious damage of items, voting trading and homicide, while 38 and a number of explosives were recovered (Yahay, 2019). In Kurmin Gwari, Kaduna state, Northwest Nigeria clash between the two main political parties in the country was recorded few days to the governorship and state house of assembly elections during a political rally with a number of people injured (Busari, 2019). In Katsina state, Northwest Nigeria report confirmed three ad hoc staff of the electoral umpire were declared missing, while voting was disrupted while ever other person fled different direction in Danmusa Local Government Area of the state as resulted of the activities of political thugs while a Police Corporal loss his life during governorship and house of assembly election (Oyelude, 2019). On the 22nd March 2019, a day before the supplementary election in Kano state a number political thugs wielding various kind of weapons dispersed electorates and journalists in Suntulma Gama Primary School in Nassarawa local government of the state (Shuaibu, 2019). According to Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), the supplementary governorship election held on 23rd March 2019 in Kano state witnessed widespread electoral violence across the 62 designated polling units, massive deployment and use of hoodlums as well as the loss of life (Onyeji, 2019). The main opposition party National Chairman in the 2019 general election the Peoples' Democratic Party opined that no fewer than 50 persons died during the Presidential and National Assembly election in the country (Nwogu, 2019). While 13 Nigerian lost their lives during the governorship and state house of assembly elections in various parts of the country (Oladele, et al 2019). While 323 persons were arrested across Nigeria by the Nigeria Police for various electoral offenses during the Presidential and National Assembly election of 23rd February 2019.

## **Causes of 2019 Post-Electoral Violence in Nigeria**

### ***Ethnicity and Sectional in Politics***

Candidates in elections in Nigeria as seen as representative of a certain ethnic group, section, religion or region of the country, this is equally applicable to how the people perceived political parties hence voting pattern tend to follows this particular configuration (Orji & Uzodi, 2012). Nigerian political class employs communal, sectional, ethnic and religious sentiment when they are faced with stiff political competition for power (Orji & Uzodi, 2012). No doubt the 2019 general elections in Nigeria witnessed stiff competition for power amongst the political class. The political class then turned to their ethnic and sectional inclination to gain a political advantage before and during elections. The electoral violence witnessed in some parts of Nigeria during the 2019 general elections was as a result of the uncontrolled ethnic and sectional sentiment exhibited before, during and after the elections. While the ethnic and sectional politics works for some politicians, it did not work for the others thus resulting in the use of violence to show their unhappiness. Candidate of major political parties during the electioneering process resulted in the ethnic and sectional campaign instead of campaigning on important issues that have a direct impact on the citizens. Campaigns along ethnic lines during electioneering encourage violence especially when other ethnic groups feel voting otherwise during elections. The electoral violence is commonly triggered by the political class or political party whose means of identification does not go beyond sectional or regional, religion and ethnic inclination and thus relies heavily on this means of wooing voters. The use of ethnicity in Nigerian electioneering is such the political aspirant with a great amount of ethnic influence having lost an election tend to encourage his or her supporter directly or indirectly to cause a disturbance which invariable most cases leads to violence in the community (Agbalajobi, & Agunbiade, 2016).

### ***In-depth Ignorance***

The growing level of ignorance as a result of increasing poverty, unemployment, and lack of basic education and important near absence of orientation contributed in no small measure to the 2019 electoral violence in Nigeria. The use of political thugs to cause violence during Nigeria's 2019 elections was made easy due to ignorance of the political thugs as a result of the high level of poverty, unemployment, and lack of basic education. Studies have shown that most electoral violence in Nigeria are carried by gangs or political thugs recruited, armed, financed by political party officials, politician, and government officials through selected representative due to increasing level of illiteracy, poverty and high rate of employment in the country (Orji & Uzodi, 2012; Aniekwe and Kushie 2011). The electoral violence commonly witness in the country are often perpetuated by sets of illiterate, something educated illiterate who are unemployed, financially weak and poor youths who depend on the political elites for their survival thus they easily turn political thugs for their political masters (Meadow, 2009).

### ***Political Impunity***

Impunity which the political elites and their political loyalty enjoy in Nigeria encourages of electoral violence. The culture of impunity was the law enforcement agencies fail to arrest and prosecute electoral offenders left no one in doubt that the absence of prosecution invariable lead to more offenses (Orji & Uzodi, 2012). Arrest and prosecution of promoters of electoral violence and electoral offenders would ordinarily serve as a deterrent to others. But in Nigeria, as reflected in 2019 election which that the possibilities of getting away of electoral violence and other forms of electoral fraud drawing from the experiences of previous electoral violence prompted violent acts witnessed in some part of the country. The political class and their political loyalties relied on the use of violence to achieve political gain because the tendency of the state through the instrument of law enforcement agencies to prosecute electoral offenders is absent (Orji & Uzodi, 2012).

### ***Lack of Internal democracy***

The lack of internal democracy especially amongst the leading political parties in Nigeria contributed in no small measure to the violence across the country. It is imperative to note that 809 pre-election cases aroused from the 2019 general election in Nigeria as a result of lack of transparent and credit primaries by the political parties especially the two leading parties in the country.

### ***Negative Perception***

The perception the citizen of the country has about the electoral umpire, in this case, the Independent National Electoral Commission about conducting free, fair and credible election remains low thus perceived irregularity could easily instigate electoral violence in Nigeria. The perception that election could be rigged by the electoral umpire and the distrust the people about these electoral officers' instigated the 2019 electoral violence witness in the section of Nigeria. Doubt over the integrity of the electoral umpire and negative perception of the electoral process among the stakeholder could lead to violence election (Orji & Uzodi, 2012).

### ***Inflammatory Campaign***

Nigeria's 2019 general election witness heavy inflammatory campaign across political diverse and among political elites, top political appointees, political thugs, and political loyalties. The level of the inflammatory campaign carried before the general election led to the number of violence in some section of the country. The political loyalties acted on a few inflammatory statements of their 'political godfather' in carrying out some actions which invariably led to electoral violence witnesses during the 2019 general elections. According to Ehinmore and Ehiabhi (2013) election campaign in the country is often characterized by show of thuggery, insults of political opponents, confrontations of all kinds, and unrealistic promises and intimidation of perceived enemy which often run to violence during and after the election. These case in point was witnessed heavy across the across in Nigeria during the 2019 general election. Inflammatory election campaign which polarized the constituency or the nation remains a vital reason for post-election violence (Angerbrandt, 2018).

### **Way Forward**

#### ***Amendment of the Electoral Act***

Since the reason for electoral violence is the perception among the citizens that the Electoral Act has some fundamental issue that needed to be resolved. Thus the amendment of the Act especially area the will strengthen the electoral process and ensure creditability and transparent of conduct of the election should be done with all urgency it requires. The use of the electronic machine called card reader should be immediately injected into the electoral Act thereby giving it legal backing it deserved. The amendment of the Electoral Act should also capture the continuous call for Electoral Offences Commission whose main responsibility would be to investigate, enforce, and prosecute electoral offenses. The unburdening of Independent National Electoral Commission this responsibility would ease their work as more attention of the commission would be advocated conducting free, fair and credible elections.

#### ***Security Agency***

The security agencies especially the Nigerian Police and Civil Defense have a greater to play to curb electoral violence. The security agencies in Nigeria must be neutral before, during and after elections in the country. The neutrality of the security agencies built conveniently in the citizens and ensure the integrity of the electoral process. However, they were the citizens see or perceived the security agency in the country as taking side with a particular political party such as the incumbent as this often the case in Nigeria the opposition political parties would revolt. Thus the security agency in Nigeria should neutral in order to ensure the certainty of the poll. Further, the Nigerian Policy and other concerned

security agencies in the coordination of the Independent National Electoral Commission should be more assertive and consistent (Verjee, et al 2018). Since no elections can be said to be credible and fair when one political party has the overwhelming support of the military, police, frontier guards, secret services and other paramilitary groups, this position of the bodies has great influence of the electoral process and election outcome (Przeworski, Rivero, & Xi, 2015).

## Conclusion

The paper attempted to analyze the cases and causes of 2019 post-electoral violence witness during the Nigerian general election. The opined that the 2019 general election in Nigeria witnessed one most violence post-electoral outcome ever witness in the history of the democratic dispersion in the country. The leading causes of this violence are ethnicity and sectional in politics, in-depth ignorance, political impunity, lack of internal democracy, negative perception inflammatory campaign. Article urgent need for amendment of the electoral act thereby making provision for electronic voting system and straightening provision and enforcement of the electoral offenses section as well as re-strategized the security architecture for elections in the country.

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