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Violence, Security Challenges and the Electoral Process in Nigeria: A Futuristic Projection and Management Strategy

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Abstract

The history of elections in Nigeria since 1959 till date has, largely, been characterised by thuggery and violence among other notable electoral vices. Starting with the 1964 general elections, successive elections have all been experiences well known for their notorious and widespread acts of hooliganism and vandalism, with attendant loss of lives and property. This development has continued unabated, even in the 21st century when most young democracies in Africa are eschewing violence and other vices during elections. A case in point was the post-election violence in northern Nigeria after the 2011 presidential election in which hundreds of lives were lost, thousands displaced and invaluable property destroyed. While the 2015 election recorded remarkable improvements relative to 2011, incidents of skirmishes dogged the process, detracting from what was otherwise a fair process. The article, against this background, scrutinises the factors

precipitating and escalating violence in Nigeria's electoral politics. Drawing on theoretical postulations in the literature, especially the relative deprivation, rising expectations and frustration-aggression hypothesis as well as the political economy approach, the article observes that the attitude of the elite towards power contestations, prebendalism and socio-economic deprivation in the larger population have mainly accounted for violence in Nigerian elections. The article recommends good governance, persistent voter education, prosecution of electoral offenders, enhanced institutional capacity of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other stakeholders and strengthening of democratic institutions as prerequisites to sustainable violence-free elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Elections, Violence, Security, Democracy

Introduction

Many political observers of electoral process in Nigeria readily expressed their fears prior to the general elections in 2015 when asked to comment on the possible success or failure of the elections. Although, the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Ekiti and Osun gubernatorial elections on June 12 and August 9, 2014 respectively had been highly rated as one major factor responsible for the relative success and violent-free elections in those states, political analysts still observed that the 2015 general elections would be a different ball game. This position was predicated on two major propositions. First, that the gubernatorial elections in Ekiti and Osun states were isolated cases where the INEC needed to concentrate on only one situation at a time as against several number of cases during general elections. For this reason, it was possible for the INEC to draft thousands of security agents including soldiers to these states to provide security and ensure violent-free elections. To a very high extent, the success of the 2014 Ekiti and Osun states elections

were attributed to the heavy presence of security personnel in these states. This strategy, however, cast doubt on the ability of the INEC to conduct a violent-free election in 2015.

The fact that the 2015 elections were to be conducted in all the 36 states of the country simultaneously (except in those states that elections had been conducted earlier in the case of gubernatorial election) and the country could not boast of such number of security personnel that were deployed in Ekiti or Osun election in 2014 multiply by 36, agitated the minds of political analysts of electoral process in Nigeria. Going by the precedence already set by the INEC in Ekiti and Osun states where the heavy presence of the military personnel were able to imbibe in the electorate some psychological compulsion for peaceful conduct and orderly behaviour throughout the elections, doubts were raised on the effectiveness of such strategy during the 2015 general elections. In the light of this, it was expected that INEC would fashion out more effective options directed towards ensuring supportive attitudinal disposition of the electorate, as well as the politicians during elections.

Secondly and more worrisome, was the state of insecurity in some parts of the Northern Nigeria where the *Boko Haram*, a terrorist religious sect, continued to wreak havoc on the population through incessant bombing, kidnaping, indiscriminate killing and destruction of property. The activities of Boko Haram alone had resulted into thousands of deaths and injuries, widespread destruction, forced internal displacement, and the flight of hundreds of thousands of refugees to neighbouring countries (Adepegba, 2015; Ehikioya, 2016; US Department of State, 2014). Indeed, INEC eventually postponed the elections for six weeks on the grounds of the need to allow security agents counter the advances of *Boko Haram* which had occupied territories in the north east. The leader of the group, Abubakar Shekau, openly expressed his aversion to democracy which he regarded as forms of paganism and threatened to disrupt the electoral process. The

measures notwithstanding, *Boko Haram* made good its threat, with media reports claiming that the sect killed 41 people, including a legislator, on presidential election day (Faul and Umar 2015).

Added to Boko Haram's onslaught against government and civilian targets were events in the nation's political trajectory creating flashpoints with effects on electoral politics. Several reports highlighted cases of violence that characterised the build up to the elections in what was a quick reminder of the 2011 post-election violence in northern Nigeria in which hundreds of lives were lost, thousands displaced and invaluable property destroyed (see CLEEN Foundation, 2015a, 2015b). However, the 2015 elections unusually recorded violence on low level compared with previous experiences (Ladan-Baki, 2016). Nevertheless, the volume of violence recorded dogged the process, detracting from what was otherwise a fair process. The paper, against this background, scrutinises the factors precipitating and escalating violence in Nigeria's electoral politics. Following the introduction, it appraises concepts relevant to security and electoral violence in Nigeria with specific exposition on the physical, psychological and structural dimensions of electoral violence. It dwells on the nature and character of elections and violence in Nigeria and draws on theoretical postulations in the literature in attempting an explanation of violence and related vices. It concludes with a discussion on options and management strategies for sustainable violence-free election in the post-2015 phases.

On the Concepts of Election, Violence and Electoral Violence

This section of the paper attempts a concise clarification of the above mentioned concepts with special reference to political development in Nigeria. We begin with the concept of election.

Election

Election to many scholars, including Huntington (1991), Jega (2014), Mömkes (2013) and Nwolise (2007), is synonymous to

democracy, the absence of which no representative government survives. Chiroro (2005) and Ojo (2007) describe election as “the heart of the democratic order” and “the hallmark of democracy” respectively. With special reference to a political society, election is generally conceived as the process through which public office holders are selected periodically by a fraction of a country’s population otherwise referred to as the electorate. It is a selection process which elevates a group of persons to positions of authority with the power to direct the affairs of the state. Election in this regard has been defined as “a method for selection of persons to fill certain offices through choices made by the electorate...”

Apart from serving as a means of ensuring participation, accountability and legitimization, elections among other things provide the opportunity for periodic choice and peaceful change of leaders. Paradoxically, rather than being peaceful, elections have been characterized by violence in Nigeria before independence till date as documented in several studies.

Violence

The traditional definition of violence as “an act of force exerted to impart physical harm or injury on another person” has been challenged on the ground of inadequacy (Mclean and McMillan, 2003:560) For one; the definition emphasizes physical harm or injury to the exclusion of psychological abuses or attacks. Secondly, animals and other inanimate objects are not listed as possible victims of violence, whereas, the reverse is often the case. Thirdly, the definition overlooks the fact that violence sometimes assumes indirect effect on people other than its target. A more comprehensive definition of violence seeks to include all the major elements in any act of violence. In this regard, violence has been defined to mean “the direct or indirect physical attack, injury or psychological abuse of a person or animal, or the direct and indirect destruction or damage of property or potential property” (see Mclean and McMillan, 2003:560).

Apart from the physical and psychological nature of violence, Johan Galtung (1969) has also pointed out that violence could take a structural dimension which is a position of social injustice which may include creating economic misery, repression and alienation. The three nature of violence – physical, psychological and structural are generally acknowledged today by scholars as types of violence. While the physical violence may include brutal acts like killing, maiming and inflicting injury on someone, the psychological violence is more subtle and directed on human psyche. This may include threat; indoctrination and brainwashing (see Jinadu, 1980: 46 and 47).

Political violence on the other hand is a form of violence aimed at violating someone's basic rights (Mclean and McMillan, 2003). Its manifestation could assume various scale destruction including demonstrations, riots and strikes; assassination, coup d'état and rebellion; terrorism, war and revolution. Electoral violence is a unique form of political violence which requires elaborate discussion as provided below.

Electoral Violence

Any meaningful definition of electoral violence must derive from the general notion of violence already discussed above. Electoral violence is thus a special type of political violence characterized by election related destructive tendencies which may be physical, psychological or structural. In this regard and according to Igbuzor (2010) electoral violence refers to:

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 process.

Although, a little broader, Megan Reif's (2010) definition of electoral violence (as cited in Majekodunmi and Adejuwon, 2012) corroborated the above definition. According to him, electoral violence is:

any spontaneous or organized act by candidates, party supporters, election authorities, voters or any other actor that occurs during an electoral process, from the date of voters registration to the date of inauguration of a new government, that uses physical harm, intimidation, blackmail, verbal abuse, violent demonstrations, psychological manipulation, or other coercive tactics aimed at exploiting, disrupting, determining, hastening, delaying, reversing or otherwise influencing an electoral process and its outcome.

Albert's (2007) definition of electoral violence captures the three major dimensions of violence earlier identified above. Electoral violence according to him refers to all forms of organized acts of threat – physical, psychological, and structural – aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process.

Nwolise's (2007) categorization of the components in the three dimensions of electoral violence as experienced in Nigeria is very instructive. This attempt enables one to assign figures to specific form of electoral violence for measurement in order to ascertain the relative level of violence in a particular election. The approach also facilitates easy conduct of comparative studies on electoral violence in Nigeria. Table 1 below clearly illustrates Nwolise's categorization of the components in the three dimensions of electoral violence in Nigeria.

Table 1: Some Components of the Three Dimensions of Electoral Violence

Dimension	Components
Physical	Physical assault on individuals during campaign, elections and when election
	Assassination of political opponents or people perceived as a threat to one's
	Burning down of public or opponent's
	Shooting, shoot-outs.
	Killing of individuals
	Partisan harassment by security agents, arrests, forceful dispersal of rallies, or
	Kidnapping and hostage-taking.
	Bombing of infrastructure.
	Forceful disruption by thugs of political
	Destruction of ballot boxes and ballot papers by thugs or partisan security
	Armed raids on voting and collation centers, and snatching of ballot boxes
	Free-for-all fights.
Psychological	Threats against and harassment by security agents of opponents of the
	Shoot-on-sight orders that breed fear in
	Terror inflicted by political assassinations which makes people
	Publication or broadcast of abusive, insulting, or intimidating material or
	Threats to life through phone calls, text
Structural	Coercion of citizens by government to
	Exclusionary acts and policies.

	Unequal opportunities for political
	Deliberate changes in dates, venues, or times of events to the disadvantage of
	Partisan delimitation of electoral
	Excessive fees for collecting party
	Un-free campaign
	Reliance on money and brute force instead of moral integrity and
	Restraints imposed on voters.
	Use of the incumbency factor to give
	Announcement of false or fraudulent
	Lengthy delays in announcing election
	Absence of (adequate) voting materials
	Delays in voting.
	Absence of electoral officers from
	Partisan behaviour of police and other
	Discriminatory acts and policies

Source: Nwolise, O. B. “Electoral Violence and Nigeria’s 2007 Elections” *Journal of African Elections* Vol. 6 No. 2. October, 2007 pp. 155-79

The Nature and Character of Election and Electoral Process in Nigeria since Independence

The first general elections conducted in Nigeria was in 1959. Irrespective of the flaws noticed during the elections, the 1959 general elections remain one of the few relatively peaceful and violent-free elections in Nigeria, simply because the elections were conducted under the watchful eyes of the British colonial administration. Subsequent elections starting with the second general election in 1964 till 2011 were all characterized by several electoral vices, including widespread violence involving the use of political thugs, manipulation of elections through multiple voting and rigging of votes, monetization of the electoral process through

bribing of electoral officials and votes buying, extreme lawlessness, hooliganism and vandalism, etc. This development has contributed in no small measure to the slow advancement of democracy in Nigeria.

The 1964 general elections for instance witnessed several evidences of political violence before and after the elections. Before the elections, “there were claims and counter claims of intimidation of opponents, involving the use of thugs to disrupt and prevent campaigns, and to harass candidates and electoral officials, making it impossible in many cases for nomination papers to be filled” (Osaghae, 2002:44). Unlike earlier elections, the 1964 general elections were contested by two major alliances, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) which comprised mainly of the ruling party, the Northern People Congress (NPC) and Chief Akintola’s Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) formed by the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG) with few other minority parties from the Northern Nigeria. Despite the peace meeting of all political parties earlier convened in October, 1964 to ensure free and fair election, “cases of irregularities, disruption of campaigns, harassment of candidates and electoral officers, as well as assassination of opponents continued unabated” (Awofeso, 2014:167). The elections themselves were inconclusive in some parts of the country due to the directives given by the APGA leadership that the elections be boycotted by its supporters. Both the boycotted elections which were rescheduled for March, 1965 and the Western Regional elections which were slated for December, 1965 were also greeted with widespread violence. The Western Regional election was particularly turbulent and brutal such that “the campaigns and preparation for the elections were violent, as the NNDP deployed the coercive forces at its disposal against the more popular AG” (Osaghae, 2002:46). The election was massively rigged by both camps, leading to complete breakdown of law and order. Many

lives and property were lost in a protracted widespread violent demonstration popularly referred to as “operation wetie” which means “wet with petrol and burn”.

The third and fourth general elections in Nigeria were conducted in 1979 and 1983 respectively. Although, the 1979 general elections were not totally devoid of electoral malpractices, the elections were much more peaceful than that of the 1983 general elections because of the military regime factor which kept in check all anticipated crises during the 1978-9 electoral period (Joseph, 1991:154).

The calm atmosphere prevalent during the 1979 elections was not brought about by the existence of (a) fine political culture in the Nigerian people but was due to the veiled threat of immediate military retribution should law and order breakdown and were, the possibility of postponement of date of handover to the civilians (Kurfi, 1983:243).

Despite the relative orderliness witnessed during the 1979 general elections studies, including those conducted by Dudley (1982), Adamu and Ogunsanwo (1983) and Kurfi (1983), have noted how in 1979;

Surplus ballot papers had been sold to the highest bidder, that polling agents had thumb-printed ballots for those who paid them, that ballot boxes stuffed with pre-marked ballots were substituted for real ones on the way to counting centres, and that the deliberate invalidation of ballots by polling and counting officials had occurred, also, members of the huge temporary bureaucracy recruited by FEDECO to conduct the elections, as well as the police and other security officials assigned to guard against electoral malpractices, and finally the officers, candidates and supporters of the contesting parties, engaged in extensive act of collusion to manipulate various aspects of the electoral process, (Joseph, 1991:154).

The 1983 general elections was a reminiscent of the 1965 Western Regional elections, at least, in its widespread and style of

violence. The election also recorded several cases of electoral malpractices including multiple registrations during revised voters registration exercise, over-voting and voting by under aged. Of particular interest was the style which mayhem were launched on the public in a way and manner similar to the 1965 Western Regional election where in Ondo State, for instance, the entire family of a politician were wiped out following the crisis that greeted the 1983 elections. The levels to which violent degenerated during this election as reported by the *Afrique France Press*, Paris in August, 1983 was succinctly documented by Richard Joseph (1991:175) in the following words:

According to the Nigerian News Agency, more than 60 people have died during the electoral campaign. Most of the dead over the last two weeks were buried alive, following a fairly common practice in Nigeria of pouring petrol over and setting alight the victim. In the last few days, several members of the NPN and at least two policemen accused of having "stolen" cotes have been lynched by this method, which is generally reserved for thieves caught red-handed. After being soaked in petrol, an old tyre is put over the victim, whose body then burns for several hours after being ignited. The burning of thieves in this way "operation wet", is also known as "the bonfire".

It needs to be mentioned here that studies (Dudley, 1973; Post and Vickers; 1973; Madiebo, 1980) have equally identified electoral violence and several other misconducts on the part of politicians as part of the major excuses used by the January, 1966 and December, 1983 coup plotters which brought to an end the First and the Second Republics respectively.

The Third Republic which was aborted in November, 1993 following General Abacha military coup which removed Chief Earnest Shonekan as head of the imposed Interim National Government, also witnessed several electoral misconducts during the Babangida transition to civil rule. Needless to itemize or

analyse here those elections conducted by the Babangida military regime, which largely were not meant to realize the very purpose they were organized for. A case in point was the June 12, 1993 Presidential election which was widely applauded as the most peaceful, free and fair election to be first conducted in Nigeria. That the Babangida regime annulled the June 12, 1993 Presidential election is now a history today, but the fact that the election was acclaimed to be peaceful and violent free remains a credit that must be given to the military.

Since 1999 when the Fourth Republic commenced in Nigeria and 2011 when the last general elections were conducted by the INEC, the country has witnessed five different general elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. In all of these elections, cases of irregularities, electoral manipulations and wholesome rigging of votes were reported by both local and international observers who monitored the elections. For instance, and in respect of the 2003 general elections, the European Union observer missions in Nigeria report reads in part:

In certain states particularly in Cross River, Delta, Enugu, Imo, Kaduna and Rivers, European Union EOM Observers witnessed or obtained evidence of widespread election fraud. The election in these states lack credibility and appropriate measures must be taken to provide voters with truly democratic electoral process (Punch, April 23, 2003, P. 53).

The 2007 general elections were even reported to be worse than earlier ones such that, the late President Umaru Yar'Adua openly admitted that the election that brought him to power in 2007 was characterized by high level of irregularities and electoral malpractices. One disturbing dimension that violence assumed during electoral process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic was the rising incidence of assassination of political opponents and perceived "political obstacles" to the electoral victory of certain individuals. This development had sent many brilliant politicians to their early graves while several others that survived it continue

to live in fear. Few among the victims of political assassination were: Chief Funsho Williams, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) gubernatorial candidate in the 2003 election and the most favoured aspirant for Lagos State governorship in 2007 was murdered on July 27, 2006. Chief Henry Marshal, a chieftain and financial bigwig of the PDP was gruesomely murdered in his residence on March 6, 2003; Chief Daramola, who was set to challenge the incumbent governor, Ayo Fayose, for the PDP ticket in 2007, was murdered in August, 2006; both Alhaji Ahman Patégi and Dele Arojo who were the PDP Chairman and governorship aspirant in Kwara and Ogun states respectively, were killed in questionable circumstances. Despite the assurance from the federal government and security agents to uncover these crimes, many killers of these individuals are still at large.

Comparatively, the 2011 and 2015 elections exuded marked differences in the depth, trend and magnitude of violence. In addition to pre-election day skirmishes across the various geo-political zones, post-election violence in the 2011 elections left more than 800 people dead and more than 65,000 displaced in three days of rioting in 12 northern states (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Authors including Bamgbose (2011) and Orji and Uzodi (2012) link the violence to factors including the division of the country along ethnic and religious lines, heightened political ambition and tension, socio-economic deprivation including unemployment and illiteracy, weak state crisis management capacity, inflammatory rhetoric, communal tensions and an overmonetised electoral process, culminating into elections that were "[...] among the fairest in Nigeria's history, but [...] also [...] among the bloodiest" (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The 2015 elections were however less violent, but a number of incidents were recorded mainly in the south south. These included Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Bayelsa as well as other states such as Ondo, Ebonyi, Lagos, Kaduna, Jigawa, Enugu,

Ekiti , Katsina, Plateau, Kogi, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun (Muheeb, 2016).

Explaining Violence and Related Electoral Vices during Elections in Nigeria

Election related violence is political in character and this may include, “riots, party clashes, political demonstration with violence, looting, arson and political assassination” (Anifowose, 1982:4). Thus, political violence according to Anifowose (1982:4) is:

The use or threat of physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals, and/or property, with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction to property; and whose objective, choice of target or victims, surrounding circumstance, implementation and effects have political significance, that is, tend to modify the behaviour of others in the existing arrangement of power structure that has some consequences for the political system.

The above definition aptly describes the very nature and character of election related violence in Nigeria since independence and the various dimensions they have assumed in Nigerian politics.

The proponents of the theories of political violence are not unanimous in their views over the causes and dimensions violence may assume in any society. In fact, political violence is believed to exhibit the capacity for multidimensional and multifaceted dispositions in terms of its origin, spread and impact. For clarity and analytical purpose, every political violence is a unique one and is better understood in its historical specificity.

There is no single cause [...] which is more or less potent. In fact, usually, there are multiple causes and important contributing conditions rooted in historical relationships and

brought to violence by a variety of catalysts... Each conflict has been unique. (See Anifowose, 1982:5)

Nigeria has a long history of election related violence which span through over half a century. The causes of some of these violence can be subjected to theoretical explanations already propounded by scholars. Having explored the literature on political violence, Anifowose (1982) for instance, provides us with three of such theoretical explanation that can be used either collectively or individually to explain election related violence. These are:

The relative deprivation, rising expectations and frustration-aggression hypothesis;

The systematic hypothesis; and

The group conflict hypothesis

Although, the three hypotheses have their relevance in explaining election related violence, it must however be mentioned that, the first hypothesis, the relative deprivation, rising expectations and frustration-aggression theory aptly explains why electorate most a time, react negatively and spontaneously through demonstration, riots and arson when their expectations do not tally with outcome of election results which are believed to have been manipulated. Such were the cases during the 1964 general elections, 1965 Western Region election and the 1983 general elections. The only way to avoid such related crisis is to secure the confidence of the electorate through impartiality and transparency in the conduct of elections. The two other hypotheses better explain political violence holistically both in their social and group contexts. Apart from these hypotheses, one other approach that have reliably explained election related violence such as the use of thugs during elections, snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation and assassination of political opponents, is the political economy approach.

Scholars like Claude Ake, Bade Onimode, Julius Inhovbere and others have impressively employed this approach to explain why the Nigerian political class holds unto political power

tenaciously, not minding the means or methods used. Among the reasons given by these scholars for this political altitude is that the political class relies heavily on political power in order to accumulate wealth fraudulently, and since the political class has no economic base, everything, ranging from elections to assassination of political must be done to remain in power.

Ologbenla's (2003:81) response to the question: why we have predominant cases of election related violence in Nigeria aptly describes the position already explained above:

The answer to this question is that the political class use violence often in the political process to achieve their aims and objectives whenever they realize that competitive democratic process may not place them in power or position of authority desired. Further, we may say that some members of the political class are professional politicians. They have no other vocation or calling than politics. In fact, the political class has no economic base and because of this, capturing the Nigeria State (the superstructure) power, is often the only means by which they could accumulate wealth and live well. Thus, politics is a life sustainer for them. The consequence is that this group of politicians sees every election time as an opportunity to reap minimum financial returns on their efforts and financial commitment to politics. Thus, whenever a politician feels threatened by another person or a group in his quest for his daily bread, he could kill, maim and forment a huge conflagration of violence just to demonstrate his power and his relevance in the political process, all in the bid to make ends meet.

While the INEC and other stakeholders of election process in Nigeria continue to brainstorm on how to nurture a sustainable violence-free electoral process in Nigeria, deliberate steps must be taken to put structures and mechanisms in place to eliminate or reduce to its barest minimum, the election related violence discussed so far.

INEC and Electoral Administration in the Fourth Republic: Options and Management Strategies for Nurturing and Sustainable Violence-Free Elections.

It will be fair to commend the INEC under the leadership of the immediate past chairman, Attahiru Jega, for ‘revolutionizing’ electoral process in Nigeria toward an enviable direction through several innovations. The various reforms initiated in the inter-election period of 2011 to 2015 was a major factor in reducing incidents of violence on the one hand, and in enhancing the credibility of the electoral process on the other.

Following Jega’s appointment on June 8, 2010, the structure of the electoral body was overhauled and several other internal mechanism were put in place to enhance the credibility of elections. Remarkably, while legal issues continue to prevent full-blown electronic voting, the electoral body is now ICT’s driven in its functions and electoral process, including the computation of votes and announcement of winners at the end of elections. This manifested greatly in the 2015 elections in ways that enhanced transparency in the electoral process and reduced tensions and resorting to violence-inducing self-help by the voting public (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015). However, for INEC and other major stakeholders, there are still works to be done, especially in the area of security. It is necessary at this juncture to highlight some of the innovations introduced by the INEC to reduce election related violence and enhance credibility of elections.

It is very rare today to see the electorate negatively and spontaneously reacting to the outcome of elections because some elements of transparency have been imbibed into the process from the point of voting through counting of votes to the announcement of results. Unlike the 1964, 1965 and 1983 elections which were conducted through the secret ballot system and later counted and collated at different collation centres before results were announced, the practice now is better and more transparent. Today,

the modified open-secret ballot system is adopted. This allows the electorate to cast their votes in secret while the counting is done openly for all to see. The number of votes cast must not be more than number of accredited voters, neither must it exceed the total number of registered voters in a polling unit. The results of each polling unit are pasted in each polling unit for all to see before proceeding for collation at the ward level. This process, as it were, is a tension absorbing mechanism which announces to both the electorate and contestants each polling unit results without serious tension. In most cases, the outcomes of elections are already known to all even before their final declarations. So, the tendency for any protest or mobilization of any kind including those that will lead to snatching of ballot boxes has been drastically reduced.

Closely related to the above is the attempt by INEC to re-invigorate integrity to the electoral process. The idea of using university lecturers, including professors as collation officers at various levels has brought some level of credibility to the process. It is generally assumed that lecturers are men and women of integrity who will not easily submit to cheap intimidation or bribery by politicians. Unknowingly to most that served as collation officers in the recently conducted elections, the Technical Assistant attached to the collation officers were to serve dual functions – to assist in ensuring accurate figure and check any fraudulent collation officers. The collated results in each centre are forwarded electronically to INEC by the Technical Assistant, even before results are presented by him. This is a very effective control mechanism over manipulation of results. Unlike this practice, earlier electoral bodies relied on civil servants most of whom were politically aligned, as collation officers.

Also, the idea of a Permanent Voters' Card (PVC) for each electorate and smart card readers when perfected will help the INEC to eliminate incidence of double voting; and when integrated into electronic birth registration will in future help to forestall underage voting. However, the ability of INEC to build on the

positives recorded in the 2015 polls is central to electoral politics and democracy in Nigeria. The electoral management body has since encountered challenges in stand-alone elections conducted after the general elections. Most of the exercises have culminated into ‘inconclusive elections’ and renewed violence. This has resulted into a situation where ‘Nigerians observing the last few elections conducted by [INEC] have said the commission performed below expectation’ (Punch, 2016). It is then important that the new helmsman who took over the reins from Jega, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, galvanise the electoral body appropriately towards building an electoral management system that will aid the strengthening of Nigeria’s electoral politics.

Instructively, democracy being a means and an end should engender good governance at different levels of government. This is important in addressing socio-economic deprivation that oftentimes aid violent reactions in the population. There is also the need for persistent voter education through all traditional and social media channels available in orientating citizens on the larger consequences of resorting to violence. The electoral system needs reforms that will ensure timely prosecution of electoral offenders and enhance the capacity of democratic institutions in ways that enrich elections and democratic governance.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

Having x-rayed the nature and character of election process in Nigeria since independence by highlighting election related violence including rigging of votes, manipulation of election results, assassination of political opponents, e.t.c, the paper further explained why these practices are so prevalence in Nigerian politics, using some theoretical underpinning. The paper equally acknowledged the contributions made so far by the INEC in advancing the credibility of electoral process in Nigeria. Aside from these, the paper recognizes among other things, insecurity as a serious challenge to a sustainable violence-free election electoral

process, especially in the face of rising societal insecurity pervading the polity. It should be noted however that caution should be taken on the level to which the military personnel are involved in elections, so that the entire process is not militarized and another problem unconsciously created. Also, post-election utterances that are capable of inciting the public much be checked through legislation. More importantly, the INEC and other stakeholders in electoral process in Nigeria must show high level of commitment towards free, fair, credible and transparent elections in Nigeria.

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