THE EFFECTS OF SECURITY CHALLENGES ON ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA: THE FOURTH REPUBLIC IN FOCUS

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Abstract

The Electoral contest in many developing democracies in Africa including, Nigeria, are faced with the challenges of conducting free, fair, credible and violence-free elections. Election violence has become a recurring phenomenon and a threat to genuine democracy associated with peaceful and credible elections. Against this backdrop, the paper examines the effect of electoral violence on electoral behaviour in Nigeria. The paper adopts the descriptive analytical approach. The data collected were classified, analyzed and organized chronologically in a manner that ensured effective interrogation and presentation of the interests driving the debate on the subject matter to ensure adequate comprehension. The Structural Functionalist and Frustration-Aggression theoretical perspectives were adopted to describe the pattern of political engagement and rationalize incidences of perceived violence in the Nigerian electoral process. The study posits that voter participation in the electoral process is affected by widespread violence and feeling of insecurity resulting in low-level participation. Consequently, some policy advices are made. The governments at all levels should strengthen security mechanism to forestall outbreaks of violence during election periods and ensure prompt prosecution of electoral offenders. Appropriate security network and intelligence should be organized to monitor electoral activities to mitigate incidences of violence. The Independent National Electoral Commission should conduct transparent and credible elections while the political parties and candidates should ensure strict compliance with electoral regulations.

Introduction

The Electoral process in many developing African democracies including Nigeria is faced with the challenge of attaining legitimacy through free, fair, credible and violent free elections. The Nigerian democratic project has been enmeshed in violence and has become a recurrent phenomenon even though in modern times genuine democracy is associated with peaceful and credible elections. Voter participation in the electoral process is hampered by widespread violence and feeling of insecurity capable of resulting in low participation and abstention. Increasing academic interest has been attached to electoral participation in the established and developing democracies. Various works

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by scholars ((Skocpol & Morris, 1999; Dalton 1998, 2006; Norris 1999, 2010) have expressed concern over the seeming decline in the levels of citizens' engagement in electoral activities as well as the low level of confidence placed on democratic institutions. Pharr and Putnam (2000, p. 18) note that "it is an irony that just at the moment when liberal democracy has defeated all its enemies on the battlefields of ideology and politics, many people in the established democracies believe that their political institutions are not performing well."

Globally, and especially in the African continent, violence and insecurity have become phenomena occurrences associated with the electoral process in democratic practices. Nigeria however, has had experiences and incidences of election-related violence since Independence in 1960. From one election to another, overambitious politicians have devised and instigated violence-related activities to create feelings of insecurity in the electoral process in an attempt to acquire political power at whatever cost possible. These phenomenal events have hampered the quest of achieving credible electoral process and the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. As noted by Adekanye (1989) and Ake (2001), elections have become smeared with distrust, doubts, and treats of insecurity to lives and property in Nigeria. Historically, the conduct of elections since 1964 has encountered several forms of violence and controversies which borders on violations of the citizen's rights. Instead of election serving as a medium for the attainment of credibility in the voting process, it has become a charade subjected to the manipulative will of political and electoral officials which is capable of causing political instability and truncating Nigeria's corporate existence.

Since 1999, Nigeria began another face of the democratization process, attempting to entrench and consolidate the basic precepts of democracy. However, after twenty (20) years of practice (that is, from 1999- 2019), the country is still at the threshold of democratic consolidation, and the foundation for virile, democratic and ideological based political parties is yet to be laid. Genuine political participation derived from politically educated and enlightened public and objectivity driven civil society groups are still to be realized. Nigeria's political elites are still in the process of transition from autocratic realm or influence of leadership to the reality of democratic or people-oriented form of leadership where governance or government actions are streamlined towards the interest of the people. However, it can be stated that Nigeria's democratic experience has succeeded to the extent that the country has experienced twenty (20) years of uninterrupted civil rule within which the political elites have had numerous experiences required to develop. Among these experiences, is the problem of insecurity and violence that has plagued the Nigerian political and electoral process. Since 1999, every election held has had its fair share of violence. The elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019) were all marked with one type of violence or another, either before, during or after. Election periods in Nigeria are usually full of apprehension and fear. A Human Rights Watch report stated that widespread protests led to the death of over eight hundred (800) people in the Presidential election of 2011 and over

sixty- five thousand (65,000) people were displaced internally in Borno, Zamfara, Katsina, Jigawa, Adamawa, Gombe, Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna, Sokoto, Niger and Yobe states (HRW, 2011; Bekoe, 2011; Adesote, & Abimbola, 2014; Udu 2015; Oladele, Anthony, Olaniyi, Sunday, & Ojo, 2019; CDD, 2019).

Though, democratic processes the world over do witness one form of electoral violence or the other, the established democracies have put up mechanisms that have reduced violence in their electoral process to a minimal level. In Africa, particularly Nigeria, the political elites and governments (ruling/opposition) are either busy scheming to retain power or to wrest it from the incumbent. The government and other relevant stakeholders have not done enough to confront head-on the problems of electoral violence with a view not only to prevent future occurrences but also to punish offenders so as to serve as deterrent to others (Damania, Fredriksson, & Muthukumara, 2004; Sadiq, 2006; Forest, 2012). Thus, electoral violence has become a norm rather than otherwise. The perpetrators punished while the victims are allowed to suffer. Electoral violence violates the rights of the voter and is thus, a crime that should not be tolerated, in the quest for democratic consolidation.

The idea of a democratic system of governance connotes equality and rights of opportunity for the citizenry. It guarantees the recognition of acceptable governance popular sovereignty, effective representation, the rights of a minority, consensus consultation, the right to select among alternative programmes as well as periodic elections (Oke, 2005, 2010). It gives room for participation in the political decision- making process, refutes uncertainty, autocracy and protects individual personality and values (Ake, 1991, 1996). It also emphasizes open competition, accountability, transparency, freedom to organize, protest, and guarantee civil rights and welfare (Cheema & Maguire, 2004; Sharma, 2007). Therefore, it is incumbent on the government of Nigeria at all levels to create an environment that is free from anxiety and fear so that eligible voters can participate actively, freely and confidently in the electoral process to elect leaders of their choice.

The paper is thus, aimed at examining the nature, causes, and impact of electoral violence on electoral participation in Nigeria. This study is vital because of the dangers that continuous low voter turnout poses to the democratic system. This trend can adversely affect not only the legitimacy and stability of the electoral process but also impede many eligible voters from taking an active part in electoral participation and policy decisions of their country due to feeling of insecurity and incidences of violence. The paper adopts the descriptive analytical approach presented in a narrative. The data collected were classified, analyzed and organized categorically and chronologically in an attempt to effectively interrogate the interplay of interests driving the debate on violence and electoral participation in Nigeria.

Conceptual Analysis
i. Electoral Participation
Researches on public participation in politics by scholars in the discipline of political science have focused conservatively on the participation of the

electorates in the political system (Braddy, 1999; Van Deth 2001; Fawole, 2005; Glasgow & Alvarez 2005, Alechenu, 2012). Electoral participation can be seen as citizens' legal acts in compliance with extant rules that allow the electorate to choose their representatives and to some extent, influence their actions in governance (Fawole, 2005; Glasgow & Alvarez 2005). Electoral participation has also been construed in terms of the activities undertaking directly or indirectly by the citizens to select their representatives and to support or influence the governance institutions at all levels (Braddy, 1999; Van Deth 2001). Participation in the political system is not only restricted to voting periods but also encompasses other important political activities that take place around the election time frame in which the citizens attempt to influence political actions and governmental policies to their advantage (Höglund, 2009). This view of citizens' participation in the political or electoral process is all-inclusive in that it is not only limited to voting but also other political activities such as protests, boycotts and strikes, etc (Norris, 2002a).

ii. Violence

The term violence has been explained from the point of the employment of force illegitimately to enforce decisions or actions on other people against their will (Kolawole, 1988; Hoglund, 2006; Keane, 1996). Subsequently, violence can be construed in terms of the employment of physical force or power deliberately (whether as treats or attempted) against one's self, another person, a group or community that has the likelihood to or results in psychologically harm, deprivation, and an injury or death (WHO 2002). Violence has been pigeonholed into three typologies- physical violence, structural violence, and psychological violence. Physical violence relates to harm or attacks that inflict injury on persons which can lead to death. Structural violence has to do with the unfair and biased treatment of people in society. Psychological violence deals with harm or injury to the mind of the individual such as all forms of treats, harassment, indoctrination and brainwashing (Jinadu 1980, Galtung 1985, 1991; Schröder & Schmidt 2001). The employment of violence as a tool for disrupting and influencing electoral outcomes as well as intimidating political opponents, election stakeholders and voters has become synonymous with Nigeria's electoral trajectory.

iii. Electoral Violence and Insecurity

According to Höglund in Taylor (2018, p. 8),

> …widespread agreement on a clear definition has proven relatively challenging. Broadly speaking, electoral violence can be grouped within one of two more common fields of political analysis … First, electoral violence can be thought of as a subset of political violence and thus conceptually similar to communal violence, rebellion, and civil war… Electoral violence might be thought of as a type of political violence that is defined by four criteria: 1) the motive of the violence, 2) the timing of the violence, 3) the actors perpetrating the violence, and 4) the targets of the violence…

Electoral violence refers to acts inimical to the electoral process, which is carried out by agents that are against credible, free, and fair elections. Such acts as perpetrated against the actors in the electoral process include blackmail, coercion, various forms of threats and intimidation as well as inflicting physical injury including assassinations and deaths (Fischer, 2002 and Sisk, 2009). Electoral violence has been differentiated from other types of violence by Höglund (2009) who aver that electoral violence is a type of violence associated with the processes of elections and voting periods, which is intended to influence electoral processes and outcomes.

Alternatively, electoral violence can be thought of as a type of election malfeasance, and therefore more similar to election rigging, vote-buying, and other forms of electoral fraud. Violence is then one element of the menu of manipulation that can be used to manipulate election results (Schedler in Taylor 2018, p. 8).

According to (Nwolise 2007), electoral violence epitomizes any planned action that encompasses physical, psychological, and structural threats directed at either to intimidate, harm, blackmail or pressure a candidate for political office. This action could be before the election, during the election or after. This action is directed at influencing and subverting the otherwise fairness of the electoral process (Nwolise 2007). In terms of motivation, violence is usually intended to influence the outcome of an election. The specific type of violence employed can take a variety of forms, but it is temporally close to Election Day. The perpetrators of violence are generally actors who have a vested interest in the election outcome, such as members of the state security apparatus (police, military, etc.), militias that are loyal to particular parties, and rank-and-file party supporters. For this subject, electoral violence can be "understood as a coercive force, directed towards electoral actors or objects that occur in the context of electoral competition… [It] can occur before, during or after elections and it can target a variety of actors, including candidates, activists, poll workers, election observers, journalists and voters (Birch & Muchlinski forthcoming, in Taylor 2018, p. 8).

Electoral violence has also been seen as any action that overtly threatens the physical and psychological structure of the human being resulting in any form of damage or harm directed at political events, electoral materials, and electoral actors including, the destruction of property (IFES, 2011). From the foregoing, violence associated with electoral activities can be construed as acts directed overtly or covertly, directly or indirectly to actors in the electoral process aimed at undermining election processes. The objective of agents of electoral violence is to influence the processes of elections unduly and to gain an advantage over other political rivals or opponents.

Theoretical Framework
i. Structural-Functionalist
The theoretical explanation of electoral violence has two perspectives, namely-the Structural-Functionalist and the Frustration-Aggression. As a framework for building theories, structural- functionalism sees society from the viewpoint of a multifaceted system that has the whole parts working together collectively

to enhance consistency and permanence. The structural-functionalism perspective considers societal construction and functions. The structural-functionalism approach explains the social construction and configurations from the perspective of the fundamental functioning of its constituent elements which include the customs, traditions, accepted standards and institutions. A common analogy popularized by Herbert Spencer views the constituents elements of the society as organs that ensure the proper functioning of the whole body (Urry 2000). To this end, the social structure of society is seen as coherently woven and fundamentally relational concepts that work like organisms, having different social institutions functioning cooperatively to ensure an all-inclusive social balance.

The theory of institutional functionalism seems a plausible explanation for electoral violence in Nigeria. Biegon (2009) averred that the institutional-functionalist perspective describes the fragile or unstable nature of society by concentrating on the interface between institutionalization and political participation. In which case, societies (like Nigeria) with a low or weak process of political institutions and a high political participation level have a higher vulnerability to experiencing a high level of political disorders. He thus, stated that the concept of institutionalism and functionalism is directly related to fragile states and violent incidences, such that there is the likelihood that states that fail to meet up with the obligation of good governance resulting in poor living standards of the citizenry, are more likely to be susceptible to violence. This theory emphasizes structuralism as having a direct link between social stratification and the configuration of power relations among the internal and external forces of the social settings within the state, in the explanation of incidences of violence. The theory suggests that the social configuration of society and the structure of the political system are such that it generates violent incidences. Furthermore, the state is structured in a manner that substantial parts of the citizenry are excluded from meaningful participation in the determination of electoral and policy outcomes and from benefiting from the political and economic life of the state. These sections of the citizenry may decide to reverse the effects of the exclusion using violent means (Nathan 2000). Nigeria can be regarded as a weak state in terms of its weak institutional structures, especially the political and electoral management systems that have been encumbered with the challenges of conducting free and fair elections in the electoral history of Nigeria.

A cursory look at the Fourth Republic (from 1999 to 2019) shows that the 1999 and 2015 general elections recorded fewer incidences of violence resulting from electoral matters; the other elections- 2003, 2007, 2011, 2019 recorded high occurrences of election violence. This outcome buttresses the proposition that the electoral system structures in the Nigerian political system are defective and dis-functional and that a large number of people are excluded from influencing and determining electoral and policy outcomes. The results of these structural defects and exclusions are reactions and actions by the concerned citizenry to change the status quo and the opportunity for self-centred politicians to use violent means to influence electoral outcomes.

ii. Frustration-Aggression

The theory of Frustration-Aggression as postulated by Dollard et al (1939) is based on the notion that frustration leads to aggression. The theory posits that frustration leads to aggression and that aggressive behaviour is the result of inhibition or hindrance of someone's effort, aim or ambition to achieve a certain goal. When the source of the aggression cannot be confronted, the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target. An alternative to this theory is the idea of relative deprivation, wherein an inconsistency exists between what is sought and what is attainable. The further the discrepancy, the more likely the anger and resort to violent means.

When parties are quite certain of loss or exclusion in an election context, especially when they expect to be permanent minorities (to lose not just once, but again and again), the certainty of outcomes is also a strong causal driver of violence. When a strongly insecure party or faction expects to be systematically excluded from political power, they may well turn to violence to either prevent their exclusion or to prevent the election process (Sisk 2008, p.10).

The frustration-aggression perspective has been criticized mainly for placing too much importance on the individual's internal mechanism. To Lupsha (1971), violence in the political system is very complex and relational in terms of the idea of deprivation and the resultant action or reaction from the deprived state of affairs. According to him, frustration does not always result in violence; citizens can be frustrated without taking to violent activities and that violence can occur in a society without the preconditions of frustration. Despite the criticism against the frustration-aggression model, it is still very useful in explaining the justification or rationale behind election-related violence. The usefulness of the theory can be seen from the point of view that violent activities can be the result of frustration or aggression. When people are pressurized beyond their limit, there is the likelihood that they would react violently to repel the aggression.

Deriving from the above analysis therefore, it can be contended that the weak structures of political institutions in Nigeria, gives ample opportunity to political officials to circumvent the processes of elections. Thus, violence can become a mechanism employed by rival political opponents to subvert the will of the people and entrench their self-willed purposes. The incapability of perceived victims or parties to change the status quo could ultimately lead to frustration and conflict, which could result in the outbreak of further violence as a last resort. Also, when it becomes apparent to the citizenry especially eligible voters that they cannot influence the process of election in terms of making their vote count in the determination of electoral outcomes or that they cannot influence policy outcomes to their benefit, frustration could result, leading to aggression and the employment of violence or support of same.

The Frustration which can lead to other social reactions can also occur when citizens feel that the government and political officials do not care about their interests, especially when corruption by public officials, poverty, and insecurity are persistent in society. This thesis probably explains the Nigerian situation

where almost every election that has been conducted, especially in the Fourth Republic, has recorded high incidences of violence. Where the system is perceived as not working to ensure fairness and credibility in the conduct of elections and governance, there is bound to be reactions, conflicts, and violence resulting from structural dis-functions and frustration. The combination of the Structural Functionalist and Frustration-Aggression theoretical perspectives vividly describes the pattern of political engagement and a logical rationalization for incidences of perceived violence in the Nigerian electoral process. The above-analyzed scenario is also capable of resulting in dissident groups taking up arms against the state and thriving on the premise of bad governance, corruption, and poverty in the society

The Impact of Violence and Insecurity on Electoral Participation
The relevance of an election in democratic settings cannot be overemphasized. Election contributes significantly to the democratic system of governance conducted through the auspices of representative government. A periodic election ensures continuity in governance by helping to resolve the challenge of leadership succession in a democratic setup. The instrumentality of elections thus helps the citizenry to choose their representative in government as well as hold them to account for their stewardship. Citizens' participation in the process of election instills a sense of self- esteem, political worth and usefulness to the political system. The right to participate in an election and the power to refrain from doing so can be an expression of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the political system or process of election. Four conditions required for the conduct of free and fair elections were identified by Mackenzie (1964) to include an autonomous judiciary; an honest, nonpartisan and competent electoral management body; an established political party system and the acceptance of the guiding electoral principles by the general political community. The electoral system is the institutionalized provision that ensures that the conduct of elections meets the stipulated legal requirements for electoral activities. These include the registration of voters and the administration of the entire process of elections (Roberts, 1971). A country's electoral system performs these significant functions for ensuring the shaping and sustenance of the behaviour of the citizenry in the political system (Okolo, 2002).

The electoral process has been categorized into three significant groupings; these include- before the election activity (polling centre delimitation, registration of voters', political party registration, the nomination of candidates, the processes of campaigns, media activities, voter education, etc.); during the election activity (management of polling stations, secret balloting, ballot boxes, and ballot papers, materials for the election, counting the votes, monitoring of elections, etc.); and after the election activity (announcing the results, after election assessment, and disputes arising from the conduct of the election (Sisk 2008, UNDP 2009, Adoke 2011). To a great extent, the level of a society's culture of politics, participation, and governance are determinants of the type of electoral conduct and contest in that society. However, whatever feat that is attained would be dependent on how effective and efficient the electoral system

is. Though regularly conducted elections have increased the hope of achieving credibility, stability and democratic consolidation, the trend of violent activities related to elections is a worrisome threat to these expectations (Lindberg 2008; Campbell, 2010). Scholars the world over have initiated studies to determine the nexus between violence and democratic engagement by appraising the influence of violence on individual attitudes. Bergman (2006) averred that the rise of violent activities poses a serious threat to the institutions of democracy worldwide. Citizens exposed to violent activities tend to show signs of dissatisfaction with their country's democratic framework thereby displaying low- level support for political institutions (Fernandez & Kuenzi 2010).

Bratton (2008) researched the 2007 general elections in Nigeria and stated that citizens' living within violence infested environment are less likely to participate in voting during elections. Analyzing the 2007 Nigerian general elections, Bratton (2008) posit that the incidences of violence negatively impacts on citizens' participation in elections. He stated further that the experience of the menace of violence portends the most powerful effect on turnout. Adopting a probabilistic model, Bratton (2008 p.626) discovered that "for an average Nigerian, with other variables held at their mean, a threat of violence reduces the odds of intending to vote by 52%". This viewpoint was corroborated by Collier and Vicente (2008) in their electoral participation study in Nigeria. The study was based on a field experiment conducted across the country. They contend that the intimidation of voters' is an effective stimulus for voter abstention in the electoral process. It can be argued, therefore, that the participation of the citizenry in the political system within the framework of conventional practice may decrease when they are dissatisfied with the institutions of politics and the performance of democratic practice (Norris, 2002b).

The line of argument as regards the above subject matter is that violence or threat to violence creates a seeming feeling of insecurity and can negatively impact the participation of the electorates in a given election since citizens exposed to violent incidence show a lack of confidence in the electoral system practice. The spate of violence in a community increases the seeming level of insecurity in the electoral process circle during elections. In communities prone to violence, eligible voters are less likely to turn up for voting purposes in some polling units where a high probability of the outbreak of violence is anticipated. The Nigerian electoral environment since 1999 has been encumbered by numerous incidences of violent activities leading to assassinations of political opponents and other such related killings that are politically motivated (Ladan & Kiru 2005; The Fund for Peace, 2018). A great percentage of Nigerians have been killed, with many others injured, displaced while properties estimated at billions of naira destroyed. These scenarios have degenerated to a hostile political environment of uncertainty and instability in the political system practice. Party conflicts and struggles for elective offices have resulted in lawlessness and indiscipline; nomination and election into political offices have turned into that of client and patron association, in which the patrons decide who stands for or win elective positions (Ezendu &

Akparandu 2010; European Union, 2019). Consequently, this has led to violent contention between opposing parties thereby posing serious challenges to Nigeria's quest for democratic consolidation.

The Causes of Electoral Violence

The violence that is associated with the electoral system practice refers to a form of politically related violence. Election-related violence denotes a particular form or sub-type of politically related violence which occur within the milieu of democratic consolidation. This societal malady though prevalent in developing democracies also occurs within systems that are termed consolidated. Khadiagala (2009) and Baregu (2009) identified three main causal factors related to election violence which are: social and economic divisions, resulting from poor governance; regimes inimical to political change; fragile institutions and weak institutional electoral regulations. It is noteworthy that election-related violence can occur at any three stages of the electoral process–preventing, Election Day and after- Election Day. The character, intensity and resultant outcome of election-related violence vary from time to time. The factors that influence these typologies of violence include inconsistent or unsuccessful elections, low level of governance and practices of political exclusion, etc. (Linz & Stephan 1996). In many instances, it is either electoral activities have occasioned differences in political opinion or have aggravated or led to an outburst of tension hitherto suppressed (Linz & Stephan 1996, Rakner, Menocal & Fritz 2007; Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2015). Experience shows that violent outburst and reactions usually occur as a result of accusations of fraudulent electoral practices or dissatisfaction with the outcome of the elections in terms of the results declared.

Various scholars (Sisk & Reynolds 1998, Elklit 2007, Bjornlund et al 2007, Horowitz 2001, Reynolds 2002, Lijphart 2004, Reilly 2006, HRW 2007, Omobowale & Olutayo 2007) have pinpointed several impediments to conducting peaceful and fair elections. The views of these scholars are highlighted hereunder.

i. **Absence of a tolerant political culture**: One of the requirements for the conduct of a credible and peaceful election in a democratic environment is a tolerant culture. In most liberal democracies, political bigotry and domination are rife especially, when such government exhibits dictatorial posture. In such milieu, the deliberate intention and consequences of acts of violence are premeditated in various ways- to either manipulate the whole process of the election or to use manipulative means like coercion to induce voters to vote against their will.

ii. **Low level internal political party democracy**: Some political parties are incapable of organizing themselves in line with democratic requirements for electoral conduct. This challenge introduces tension and hostilities into the electoral system practice as some political elites regarded as godfathers take over control of the parties and influence their decisions. These political godfathers influence the choice of party delegates who vote to select leaders

of the parties as well as candidates at the party's primaries. By controlling the delegates, the godfathers decide who should become the party's leaders as well who gets the nomination to contest for elective positions. The activities by some of these political elites create a disconnect between the party's structural configuration and the achievement of conventional electoral practices within the party.

iii. **Protection of incumbency**: Elections character-wise portends uncertainty and competitive processes. In Africa and specifically Nigeria, elections are frequently linked with tension and the upsurge of social aggression over who controls the state apparatus. Violent activities occur in situations where it is envisaged that there is the probability of replacing the incumbent leadership of a state and where such incumbent is not ready to relinquish power. This scenario could be as a result of the dominance of one party or the attitude of intolerance of opposition.

iv. **The nature of the electoral and party system**: These are key factors that can exacerbate or moderate the occurrence of violence in the process of an election since they directly affect the character and political ideology of the party. The level to which these systems are viewed as just, equitable, inclusive, and democratic may control or mitigate the likelihood of eruption of violence.

v. **The administration of elections by electoral bodies:** Electoral management bodies play significant roles in ensuring the effective management of elections and ensuring credibility, fairness and success of elections. If such a body behaves in a manner that cast doubts on the otherwise fairness and credibility of an election, the ensuing reactions and discontents may result in conflict when election results are declared.

vi. **Low-level confidence by the public in the operations of electoral regulations and institutions of government that enforces them:** These may lead to lack of confidence and abstention from political participation by the citizenry. Though regulatory and legal provision exists at local and national levels, they are not always complied with or enforced.

The Roles of Electoral Regulations and the Security Agencies in Electoral Participation

Incidences of violence have pervaded electoral competition regardless of the threat it poses to Nigeria's democratic development. HRW (2007) discovered that over eleven thousand (11,000) Nigerians lost their lives in various incidences of political violence. Moreover, the politicization of acts of electoral violence has made this societal problem more difficult to handle, particularly when the ruling party and opposition members are both involved. The continuing scenery of electoral violence may be attributable to the very relaxed punishment for electoral crimes in Nigeria as contained in the Nigerian Electoral Act, 2010 (and as amended). Section 131(1) and 95 (7b) of the 2010 Electoral Act specify a maximum fine of one hundred thousand nairas only (¦ 100, 000.00) or three years of imprisonment for any person found guilty of political violence. For instance, if a political party is found guilty of the act of violence associated

with elections, the party is to pay a fine of two million Naira (¦ 2, 000, 000.00) for the first offence and one million naira (¦ 1, 000, 000.00), for any subsequent offence (Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, 2010). Considering the immensity and gravity as well as the negative impact election-related violence can inflict on the electoral process, and on Nigeria's political image, the prescribed sentences are too mild to serve as enough disincentive to perpetrators of violent acts in the electoral process circle.

Security agents of the State have the duty to make sure that the lives and property of Nigerians are protected; they are to forestall the outbreaks of violence and ensure that there are order and peace in the political environment. It is assumed that the detailing of security operatives at venues where political engagements, conferences, primaries, and general elections take place, etc. would prevent the activities of agents or perpetrators of violence. Experience has however shown that previous general elections that were conducted (especially that of 2003 and 2007) cast doubt to this assumption as instances reveal that security agents posted to election polling booths were engaged in acts other than to guarantee a peaceful, credible and fair election. Numerous reports by election monitors and the various newspapers abound, describing the often negative roles played by security operatives during the periods of election (HRW, 2007; Fafowora, 2007; Ezendu & Akparandu, 2010). In the 2007 general election, it was reported that the security agents detail to monitor and protect election activities tolerated manipulative tendencies from politicians and in some instances assisted in the stuffing of ballot boxes in connivance with the electoral officials to rig the election (Alemika, 2007).

Similarly, Suleiman, Ajala & Müller (2019) affirm that election for the governor of Osun state, in August 2018, was marked by a heavy militarization of the state that intimidated the electorate. In that by-election held only in two local government areas of Osun state, the number of soldiers and police officers outnumbered the citizens that were to vote in the election. …police officers were accused of barring election monitors and observers from participating and observing the election. Some security agents manning the polling stations were also accused of physically beating and violently harassing members of opposition parties during the by-election.

In summary, the conduct of elections in Nigeria has not provided an opportunity for politics of rationality, which promotes productive negotiations and compromise. Attempts at political development have failed to yield desired results because politics has become a game of violence, fierce confrontation, bitter competition, and repression. This type of environment would impact negatively on voter participation in the political process. The importunate and endemic nature of electoral violence has not only remained as obstacles in the wheel of democratic politics but also indicates very fundamental socio-economic policy implications. Thus, the prevalence of electoral violence points to the failure to build on the tenets of democratic consolidation, security and stability.

Security Challenges and Electoral Participation in the Fourth Republic

The consolidation and sustenance of the democratic structure through a free, fair, credible and periodic election is the most fundamental challenge of most African countries (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1997; CDD, 2019). Abiding by the rules of the game in ensuring a credible electoral outcome has posed a daunting challenge to the Nigerian state since the birth of the Fourth Republic (199-2019). Since 1999, six civilian administrations have ruled, while five general elections have been organized by civilian governments (till 2019) in the quest for democratic consolidation. That is, the elections conducted between 2003 and 2019 have witnessed the transfer of political power from one civilian administration to another. For example, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (the incumbent president in 1999) was re-elected president in 2003 on the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Also, the Late Alhaji Umaru Yar' Adua of the PDP won the 2007 general election. In April 2011, the Acting President, Dr Goodluck Jonathan (who became president following the death of President Umaru Yar'Adua) won the 2011 elections on the platform of the PDP (Aniekwe and Kushie, 2011). Furthermore, Muhammadu Buhari, the candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC), an opposition party, won the March 28 2015, presidential election (BBC, 2015). President Buhari was re-elected as president on the platform of the APC, on February 23, 2019 (Ojetunde, 2019).

Though democracy (that is, changeover of government) was consolidated in the period between 2003 and 2019, various elections conducted during these periods were enmeshed with electoral frauds leading to several electoral and violent conflicts resulting in loss of lives, displacements, and destruction of property worth billions of naira. For example, the 1999 general election witnessed a presumably more peaceful atmosphere with minimal violent incidences arguably because it was organized and supervised by the military. Subsequent elections especially those of 2003 and 2007 conducted under the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo were marred by high-level irregularities and violence and were adjudged as the most fraudulent and corrupt elections conducted in the history of Nigeria (Kurfi, 2005; Animashaun, 2010; Aniekwe and Kushie, 2011).

The 2003 general election was enmeshed with numerous irregularities and malpractices such as fraudulent electoral practices, ballot box stuffing, intimidation of voters, assassinations, killings, etc. It has thus, been contended by political analysts that the election of 2003 was a charade and a mockery of voters and the electoral process because it was a process of merely selecting predetermined winners by political elites and their caucuses (IFES, 2011; Abimbola & Adesote, 2012). Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2004) for instance, reported that about one hundred persons lost their lives and with many sustaining various degrees of injuries during the election period (between April and May 2003) in Nigeria.

The 2007 General Election was adjudged the worst election in post-independent Nigeria (HRW, 2007). The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES- Nigeria) stated that there were nine hundred and sixty- seven (967) incidences of "pre- and post-election violence" (Omotosho, 2007; HRW,

2007; IFES-Nigeria, 2007). An interview conducted by HRW prelude to the 2007 elections showed that some eligible voters indicated their unwillingness to participate in the election. For instance, a retiree from Oye- Ekiti indicated the resolve of some advanced adult males and women not to participate in the 2007 elections for fear of electoral violence. During the April 2007 elections, close to three hundred (300) persons reportedly lost their lives. The resultant turnout level of eligible voters was low as many registered voters were discouraged by the spate of violence across the country (HRW, 2007; Asemota, 2011; Binniyat, 2011).

The election of 2011 was generally accepted as partially fair by observers from the local and foreign divide. Although also marred by irregularities such as the intimidation of voters, snatching of ballot boxes, vote-buying, etc., it was a marked improvement from previous elections such as in 1999, 2003, and 2007 elections (Yusuf 2011; Bekoe, 2011). As submitted by the CDD (2019, P.29), "…the election adjudged as one of the most credible in the history of Nigeria was dented by the escalation of an unprecedented level of post-electoral violence in which unquantifiable lives and property were lost/ destroyed…". More so, Nigeria's 2011 elections were the most violent in the country's modern history as more than 800 people were killed in just three days following the presidential election … The 2011 elections represented the greatest bloodshed in the country since the 1967-70 civil war. This violence was largely triggered by the loss of Muhammadu Buhari (now running under the banner of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) to PDP incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the South who had assumed the presidency after the death in office of President Yar'Adua. As with the re-election of Shagari in 1983, Jonathan's decision to run and subsequent victory was seen violating the unwritten agreement between North and South to share power by alternating presidential representation every two terms. Many Northerners felt that as Yar'Adua had died in office during his first term, the North was still owed another full term of the Presidency and were therefore aggrieved by Jonathan's candidacy (The Fund for Peace 2018, p. 14).

The general elections of 2015 (March 28 and April 11) have been adjudged the best election ever conducted in Nigeria (Gabriel 2015). Election monitors from both domestic and foreign divide scored the election high. The election was relatively peaceful. The technological innovation by INEC- that is the introduction of biometric voters' registration and use of the Smart Card Reader improved the efficiency and standard of the election. Also, sensitive electoral materials such as the result sheets and ballot papers were customized and possessed high- security features and codes. However, despite these improvements in the electoral process, the 2015 election was not without flaws. Some of the anomalies identified in respect to the election include "late arrival of election materials, overcrowding, failure of the card reader, result manipulation and voting of under-aged in some units in the Northern part of the country" (Udu 2015, p. 102).

According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) (2019, p. 29):

> …The 2015 general election did not witness much electoral violence largely because of the spirit of sportsmanship demonstrated by the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan, who conceded defeat and willingly handed over power to the opposition that emerged victorious at the polls.

Similarly, the 2019 General Elections were violence infested. The European Union Observer Mission stated that:

> The election became increasingly marred by violence and intimidation of voters and INEC officials, primarily by party supporters. This harmed the integrity of the electoral process and may deter future voter participation. Party leaderships did not take sufficient steps to rein in their supporters but accused opponents of using violence to disrupt the process and/or selectively depress turnout. Based on updated information available from media and other sources, during the campaign and the three election days observed, approximately 145 people were killed in election-related violence (European Union 2019, p. 33).

The violence that marred the February 23, 2019, presidential and national assembly elections in Nigeria led to the arrest of one hundred and twenty-eight (128) people for various electoral offences. These include ballot box snatching, malicious damage of items, vote trading and homicide; while several explosives were recovered (Yahay, 2019).

Conclusion and the Way Forward
Credible elections are relevant in achieving an enduring democracy and democratization process, and in essence, good governance. Electoral participation serves as the instrument for the attainment of a viable and representative government in democratic societies. Voting then becomes the contact linkage between the representatives and the citizenry and provides the foundation for discussions, deliberations, and citizens engagement in the operation of the political system. Consequently, if turnout declines, the primary linkage between the citizen and the political system may become weakened, this may threaten the legitimacy of the democratic system. Citizens' participation in the process of governance is necessary to accomplish an equitable and civilized society. These tenets will not be achieved if a majority of eligible voters continue to stay away from voting during elections as a result of recurring violence. The Nigerian political space has become enmeshed in violence, fierce confrontation, bitter competition and repression. This type of environment would negatively impact on voter participation. It is on record that more than half of the population of eligible voters has not voted since the Fourth Republic and also that about half of registered voters or less have not voted during elections. This situation calls for concern as it is worsening. The need for this study becomes imperative since the level or degree of voter turnout serves as a parameter for measuring popular will, credibility, and legitimacy of elected officials and also, as a bedrock for democratic stability.

To effectively forestall and manage incidences of electoral violence, the following suggestions are made.

1. The federal and state governments should put on modalities to mitigate the incidences of violence during elections. This should be done to encourage citizens to actively participate in the electoral process. This could be ensured by designating adequate security personnel to ensure safety during voter registration, political rallies and campaigns and voting periods.
2. The security personnel should strictly carry out the duties of forestalling violence and mostly to prevent any act or actions that negate the electoral regulations that often lead to violent outbreaks during elections.
3. Also, adequate intelligence and monitoring team should be assigned to cover all election centres during elections in Nigeria. This team should also be assigned to monitor the activities of election security personnel to check their excesses.
4. The negative syndrome of win at all cost by incumbents and most politicians in Nigeria should be discouraged.
5. The political parties should develop and entrench internal party democratic structures for credible primaries, general elections, and accommodate opposition political parties.
6. The INEC should be assisted by all stakeholders to conduct transparent and credible elections that are free and fair.
7. Electoral regulations should be strictly enforced and perpetrators of violence should be promptly arrested and prosecuted.
8. Finally, the government in all levels should continuously liaise with the relevant stakeholders in the electoral process to ensure that they conform to the electoral process regulations and contribute to democratic consolidation.

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