

Electoral Violence and Political Instability in Nigeria before the Fourth Republic: A Historical Interrogation

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Abstract

Nigeria experienced instances of tragic electoral violence and political instability after the attainment of independence in October 1960. This unsavoury development portended great danger to the continued existence of the nation as attested to by the bloody civil war of 1967-70 whose occurrence was precipitated by a myriad of problems. These problems included the electoral violence that followed the massive rigging and other irregularities that characterized the 1964 general elections. In addition, 1965 Western Region elections and the subsequent military takeover in the wee hours of 15 January 1966 compounded the situation. If the political class had done the right thing by adhering to the rules guiding democracy, the military would not have been given any alibi to intervene in the nation's politics. Even after returning to civil rule in 1979, violence still marred the elections conducted during the Second Republic. The essence of this study is to bring to the fore the challenges and problems that had scuttled the emergence of an egalitarian society in the body polity called Nigeria due to frustration that hindered meaningful nation building. This found expression in the nation's political leadership inability to abide by democratic principles needful for floating stable and progressive governments but whose seed had been planted by the British colonial rulers who introduced unsavoury socio-political and economic policies that were to spell doom to Nigeria's body polity after the white rulers' departure.

Keywords: Nigeria, Democracy/ Election, Electoral Violence, Political Instability

Introduction

Man is naturally a political animal as noted by Aristotle and this is the case the world-over. There has always been the need for a group of people to rise and lead others in the administration of

justice, economic activities, social development, protection, as well as maintenance of law and order in the society. The members of the political class were in the ancient clays the royalty (monarchy) and civil men of proven integrity. As time progressed, democracy which was very common metamorphosed from being a direct or participatory democracy into an indirect or representative democracy due to population explosion¹. In the process of establishing democratic governance, those who were interested in participating directly often jostled or vied for elective offices.

The type of political kingdom that any society or nation establishes goes a long way in determining the fate of the citizenry in all ramifications. Thus, many people who have the wherewithal often contest against one another during elections. In the past, probably because money and self-aggrandizement were not so much attached to political offices but the desire to serve the masses, electoral processes were not characterized by violence of high intensity as it is today. Hence, elections were not permeated by brutal or fatal violence.

Shortly, after the departure of the colonial masters, the military stepped into the politics of the vast majority of African States as a result of political violence engendered by electoral intolerance and other factors. Even after the 20th century, when military regimes had been practically consigned into the museum of history, electoral violence became more rife and bloody as the political gladiators who derived much wealth, political power and influence for selfish interests often let loose their electoral foot-soldiers to unleash mayhem on their opponents and innocent electorate and this act led to the loss of lives and property.

There is no doubt that there exists a nexus between democracy and electoral violence as the latter is the bedrock and decisive factor on which the former rests. It is rather unfortunate that Africa's political landscape was and is often fraught with electoral manipulations and violence. Nigeria, being the most populous African nation, is guilty of political cum electoral violence even

before the attainment of political independence and during the post-military rule. This paper therefore historicizes the crises that took place in Nigeria sequel to the disagreement that greeted the pre-1999 elections due to the controversies and rejection of electoral results by the parties that participated in them and other stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework of Election, Electoral Violence and Political Instability

This section is devoted to the clarification of certain concepts which are very central to this study. However, it is pertinent to state that they are all related to politics. Politics itself has been variously conceptualized by numerous writers, authors and scholars. For David Hasten, politics is "the authoritative allocation of values", while I larold Lasswell views it as the process of "who gets what, when and how". But for Peter Merki, politics has to do with "the quest for power, order and justice" while according to Quincy Wright it refers to "the art of influencing, manipulating and controlling others". But for Vermon Dyke politics connotes "a struggle among actors pursuing conflicting desires on public issues".²

Politics is germane in any given society and cannot be ruled out since people try to define their positions in society as they struggle for scarce resources and as they try to convince others to accept their points of view. The most approved, universally acknowledged and acceptable way of occupying political offices is election. It is those who are elected and appointed into political offices that decide for the rest of the people as far as economic, socio-cultural, military, transport and aviation, information and communication, as well as industrial and educational matters, among others are concerned. The resources are scarce and so also are the elective posts to be contested for. This therefore leads us to the concept of election which is conducted to change governments in order to ensure democracy.

Like politics, the definition of election has received the attention of scholars. As Nwoliase has remarked, election is a process of selecting the officers or representatives of an organization or group by the vote of its qualified members. Anifowose on the other hand, defines election as the process of elite selection by the mass of the population in any given political system while lyayi regards it as the medium by which the different interest groups within the bourgeois nation state can stake and resolve their claims to power through peaceful means³.

From the above, it is obvious that not everybody can contest or vote during an election in a country. This implies that the types of franchise that exist determine who can contest and vote at any given time in the political and electoral processes of a nation. It is in the light of this that Echefu opines that there are two types of franchise, namely, limited or restricted franchise and people can be restricted on the grounds of citizenship, age, residence, registration, property, sex, race and education. The second is the universal adult suffrage or franchise but in which people can be disqualified on the basis of being under-aged, non-registration, insanity, residence, prisoners, aliens and bankrupts⁴.

Elections are the heartbeat of democracies in modern states as they determine the rightful way of ensuring that responsible leaders take over the mantle of power. It is imperative to state that electoral process is alien or foreign to Africa's pre-colonial political systems and that it was introduced in the continent by the various colonial powers that dominated the political landscape between 1880s and to the 1970s. Prior to the advent of colonialism, traditional African political "institutions choose their leaders through the lineage of royal blood while the Western model imported to the transitional society does not but through elections"⁵. Consequently, following the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the "wind of change" triggered off by the Atlantic Charter of 1941 which emphasized that a people under colonialism should be given the opportunity to choose the government under

which it desired to live, sparked off politics of decolonization permeated profoundly by the formation of political parties and electoral processes cutting across Africa.

Before examining electoral violence, it is necessary to look at what violence itself connotes. Political activities are often than not associated with violence. Violence or the threat of violence is a universal phenomenon. Individuals, groups and states throughout human history, have, in one form or another, resorted *to* violence or its potential uses as a tactic of political action.

According to Danzinger cited by Alanamu, the most common belief is that violence entails the use of physical force, usually with the purpose of injuring or damaging the object of the violence. The tools of such violence can range from flying fists and feet to clubs and bullets to nerve gas and nuclear missiles⁶. However, a broader view of violence covers the threat of violence as well as various forms of subjugation and manipulation. Violence has characterized Africa's politics as it is often unleashed with the slightest provocation. It is often commonly employed by most political power seekers across the universe. Those groups holding power and groups in the process of losing power also apply violence towards achieving their selfish ends.

As Bamgbose opines, scholars differ on whether to consider violence as objective or subjective, on what to include or exclude as violence, and how to classify the various forms of violence. As a result, classification of violence has emerged as indicated below:

Fanon offers a three-fold classification of violence in consonance with what Galtung wrote in his article in 1969. These are: physical, structural and psychological violence. Physical violence involves somatic injury inflicted on human beings. The killing of an individual is an example of this. Structural violence is a condition of social injustice whereas psychological violence is injury or harm done to the human psyche which include brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds and threats.⁷

In the same vein, Gur presents a three-fold categorization of violence which are: turmoil or mass-based, relatively unorganized

and spontaneous political violence (demonstrations, riots, strikes, and localized rebellions); conspiracy, that is, organized political violence which involves limited participation (assassination, *coups d'etat* and small scale guerrilla wars; and internal war or organized political violence involving mass participation (terrorism, large-scale guerrilla warfare and revolution)⁸.

Alain Chesnais who studied violence in the 18th and 19th centuries therefore asserts that "violence in the strict sense, the only violence which is measurable and disputable is physical violence. It is direct injury to persons; it has three characteristics: it is brutal, external and painful. It is defined by the material use of force."⁹.

In his own typology, Alanamu offers two categorizations of violence viz: direct and indirect violence, he comments that:

Direct violence refers to acts of deliberate violence resulting in a direct attack on a person's physical or psychological integrity. This category includes all forms of homicide (genocide, war crime, massacres, murders, terrorism) as well as all types of psychological suffering (kidnapping, torture, rape, maltreatment). Such behaviour corresponds in all instances to illegal acts running counter to the most basic of all human rights, the right to life. Indirect violence, on the other hand is a category intended to cover harmful, sometimes even deadly situations or actions which, though due to human intervention, do not necessarily involve a direct relationship between the victims and the institution¹⁰.

What therefore is electoral violence? Sectoral violence has been given considerable attention by scholars. According to Fischer (2002) quoted by Anickwe and Kushie, electoral violence or conflict is any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced 'protection' blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination. Lending credence to the above conceptualization is Igbuzor (cited by Aniekwe and Kushie) who posits electoral violence as:

any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during, and post election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes."

Nwolise (2007) quoted by Aniekwe and Kushie, views electoral violence as all forms of organized acts or threats: 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.¹²

The final stage of theoretical clarification centres on political instability. This phrase imports a situation whereby the polity is characterized politically by ugly and tense atmosphere which may result in violent overthrow of the government in power. This is preceded by riots, protests, thuggery, propaganda warfare against the ruling clique by the opposition and other aggrieved individuals and groups, arson, bloodletting and endless legal litigation at the election tribunals established to adjudicate on cases brought before them on the grounds of electoral fraudulence. In such a situation, the state so affected hardly records any impressive progress as the attention of the government is diverted to violence rocking the political landscape and the general insecurity prevailing in the country.

Historicity of Electoral Violence in Nigeria before the Fourth Republic

Prior to the emergence of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the nation had witnessed instances of electoral violence. The issue of election did not arise until the 1922 Clifford Constitution which introduced elective principle but the election held in 1923 did not involve electoral violence. The Clifford Constitutional provision was the basis on which the Nigerian National Democratic Party formed by

the later Herbert Macaulay in 1923 and Nigerian Youth Movement (1938) ^contested elections. By the early 1940's the NYM which upstaged the defunct NNDP had started losing its popularity and political flavour and was ultimately replaced by the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon which later became National Council of Nigerian Citizens with the excise of Southern Cameroon from Eastern Nigeria in 1951. The NCNC founded in 1945 under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay as President and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe as General Secretary remained a nationally based party until the emergence of the Action Group which rose from the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, a socio-cultural organization led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) which was given birth to by the *Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa*, a Hausa-Fulani socio-cultural group led by Sir Ahmadu Bello.

The 1946 Richards Constitution did much damage to the nation's unity as it was imposed on the Nigerians as the latter were not consulted before it was drafted. Worse still is that it regionalized the country by formally dividing it into three regions, viz: The North, East and West, with the North being larger than the combination of the East and West. This development gave political advantage to the North as it had to produce representatives whose number exceeded the numbers of the remaining two regions combined. The constitution launched the nation on the path of party politics characterized by regionaliation of such parties and ethnicity. The grievance that Nigerian nationalist leaders had against the constitution led to its death and the introduction of the 1951 Mac-Pherson Constitution which sought the views of Nigerians before it was drafted and operated.

The three political parties became highly competitive as they sought to dominate and sustain themselves in their respective regions and this posture engendered in the members of the parties the love for their regions rather than that of the whole country. This was the psyche of the nationalist leaders. The rivalry between

the NCNC and AG was even more pronounced, for as Udida A. Undiyaundeye has asserted:

Right from the foundation of the *Egbe Oino Odudurwa*, there was no love lost between the NCNC and the *Egbe* and by extension the AG. This rivalry ruled out any meaningful cooperation between the two leading southern politicians and their supporters and ethnic nations.¹³

Given the ethnic coloration and regionalization of political parties, it is not surprising that the 1951 general elections were marred by electoral irregularities. As Undiyaundeye has further observed:

From their debut in the 1951 general elections in the country, electoral malpractices, e.g. sale and purchase of votes, rigging, violence and arson, bribery and corruption of electoral officers, official manipulations, non-availability of electoral materials etc have continued to thrive¹⁴.

Indeed in 1951 elections in Kano, the colonial administration tried very hard to frustrate the Northern allies of Southerners who were opposed to the candidates of the *emirs*.

As Nnoli cited in Bamgbose has demonstrated:

The allies suffered diverse discriminations as they were not allowed to hold public meetings, intimidation and victimization of greater proportion. Colonial manipulation of elections led to the poisoning of relations between the North and South with the resultant effect of a consequent increase in the social distance between members of their populations¹⁵.

Apart from the pockets of electoral violence that took place in 1952 (the case of Azikiwe's defeat in Western Regional House of Assembly) the 1959 general elections witnessed electoral violence. The post independence elections of the First Republic ushered in real electoral mayhem and genocide especially in the 1964 federal elections and 1965 Western Regional elections. Two major allies were formed to contest the 1964 federal elections, namely the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) consisting of a merger of the NPC, NNDP and Midwest Democratic Front (MDF) and the second alliance being the United Progressive Grand Alliance

(UPGA) comprising the NCNC, AG, Northern Elements' Progressive Union (NEPU) and United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). "On the election day, as a protest against the arrest and imprisonment of UPGA members who were to contest election in the North and West, UPGA leaders directed that their supporters should boycott the election" noted Bamgbose. At the same time, it was an election so-well orchestrated with violence and so much normlessness that, Nnamdi Azikiwe, the President of the newly declared Republic, initially refused to call on Alhaji Abubakar Tarawa Balewa, the Prime Minister to form a government¹⁶. The 1965 Western Region's electoral crisis sealed the fate of the First Republic. The October 1965 election into the Western House of Assembly was decisive as it *was* to determine whether the Westerners endorsed all that Sir Tarawa Balewa had done to humiliate and maltreat them since 1962 and whether they accepted Chief S.L. Akintola's ruler-ship as the Premier of Western Region. While commenting on this election, Adewale Ademoyega asserts:

The people were loud and clear in rejecting Akintola and the NNDP at the polls. However, the Akintola Government did publicly interfere with the results of the election. In very many cases, AG candidates who held certificates that they were duly elected in their constituencies, later heard their names mentioned as defeated candidates through governmental news media.

Thereupon, the people of Western Region did not appeal to the deaf gods typified by the Regional Governor, the law courts and the police. They simply recalled the days of their ancestors where unpopular rulers were removed by the concerted efforts of the people¹⁷.

The crisis led to the invention of the *wetie* slogan (meaning "soak him up"), a practice in which a political opponent and his house or property were sprayed with petrol and set ablaze. By December 1965, there was a total breakdown of law and order and enthronement of anarchy in Western Nigeria to the extent that the mobile (anti-riot) police could not handle it or restore order and

sanity in the beleaguered geo-political zone. The Akintola Government lost total control of the situation and a state of emergency was declared in the region. But Balewa pretended as if the situation in the region was normal and as a result announced to reaffirm his self conceived pretext that everything was under control¹⁸. The ineptitude of the Federal Government eventually led to the first-military *coup d'etat* of 15 January, 1966.

The counter coup of 29 July, 1966 staged by the Northern officers and men of the Nigerian Army swept away many officers and men from among the Igbo speaking parts of the defunct Mid-Western and Eastern Regions. The counter coup got rid of General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi and brought into power Lt. Col. (later General) Yakubu Gowon¹⁹ who remained in the military-political saddle until 29 July, 1975 when he was overthrown in a bloodless coup while he was attending a summit of the erstwhile Organization of African Unity in Kampala, Uganda²⁰. The late Brigadier (later General) Murtala Ramat Mohammed assumed the headship of the nation's affairs before he was assassinated in a bloody mutiny that rocked the nation to its foundation on 13 February, 1976. The untimely demise of Mohammed brought his second in command, Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, Lt. General (later General) Olusegun Obasanjo to power and remained in office until 1 October, 1979 when he voluntarily returned the country to civil rule.

The military regime led by General Obasanjo introduced the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the election of an Executive President. The Federal Military Government promulgated the Electoral Decree No 73 of 1977 which authorized and empowered the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) to register political associations as political parties. At the end of serious scrutiny of fifty-two political associations, the FEDECO under the leadership of its chair, Chief Michael Ani registered five political parties. These were: the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the National Party of Nigeria (NPX) the People's

Redemption Party (PRP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria: (UPN)²¹. The presidential election was the last to be conducted and: was held on August 11, 1979 with Alhaji Shehn Shagari (NPN), Chk-Obafemi Awolowo (UPN), Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (NPP), Mallar: Aminu Kano (PRP) and Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri (GNPP) contesting for presidency. After a long legal battle between the NPN and UPN presidential candidates due to the closeness of their electoral result figures, there was no clear winner, Justice Atanda Williams declared Alhaji Shagari the winner and he therefore emerged as the first Executive President of Nigeria, of a system modelled after the United States of America's presidential system of government²². This was a total departure from the British Westminster Parliamentary or Cabinet system bequeathed to the nation at independence.

It is important to state that the 1979 elections were supervised by the Obasanjo-led military junta and not by the civilians. As a result, there was not much violence simply because the military played midwife role in organizing and conducting the elections to complete the transition programme. However, the 1983 general elections were characterized by violence because the military had bowed out of the political ring and the electoral processes were left in the hands of the politicians who were in power. No part of the country was spared of violence and mayhem but the crisis in old Ondo State was the worst. As Bamgbose has noted:

The ostensible cause was the popular reactions against rigged gubernatorial elections which followed a National Party of Nigeria (NPN) candidate in an overwhelmingly Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) state. In the violent demonstration the entire families of politicians were wiped out, and hundreds of houses were set on fire including the headquarters of FEDECO. Three months after the 1983 elections were held, the Second Republic was swept into oblivion. The army struck and the much tottered democratic experiment was jettisoned through the military coup of 31st December 1983.⁷³

The coup brought the retired Major General Muhammadu Buhari and the late Major General Tunde Idiagbon into power respectively as the Military Head of State and Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters (equivalent of Deputy Head of State). However, the duo were eased out of power by the coup that brought the retired General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida to power on 17 August, 1985. Babangida only succeeded in plunging the nation into a more violent nature as he embarked on an endless transition programme that culminated in the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election which was adjudged the fairest, freest and most credible election, won by the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola and his running mate, Ambassador Babagana Kingibe, on the Social Democratic Party platform. Babangida's political misadventure was widely condemned nationally and by the international community, which paved the way for his unceremonious "stepping aside" on 27 August, 1993 and the inauguration of the illegitimate Interim National Government headed by Chief Ernest Adegunle O. Shonekan who was sacked on 17 November, 1993 by the military²¹. The late maximum ruler, General Sardauna Abacha came on board and abused all the sectors of the economy, killed many innocent souls, sent many underground and tinkered with the transition to civilian rule programme through which he hoped to perpetuate himself in power. He died in June 1998 while in office. His Chief of Defence Staff, the retired General Abudu-Salami Abubakar took over the reins of government and returned the country to civilian rule thereby giving birth to the Fourth Republic which began on 29 May, 1999 with Chief Matthew Olusgun Okikiola Obasanjo sworn-in as the second Executive President of the nation.

Causes of Electoral Violence

Why were innocent Nigerians punished by the political class? On what ground did the politicians subject the people they were supposed to lead and alleviate their sufferings to harrowing experiences? Why did the politicians fail to fulfil the hopes and

yearnings the electorate reposed in them? And more importantly is why the political leaders allowed the colonialists to use them against the corporate peaceful existence and advancement of their country? Why were the politicians beclouded by parochial and regional/ethnic sentiments that led to the dismal failure recorded in nation building efforts after the departure of the British colonial rulers?

An exploration of electoral violence in Africa and especially Nigeria reveals the factors that contributed to this socio-political menace and subsequent political instability that threw Nigeria into a state of anomic. The same factors that led to electoral violence during the First Republic resurfaced in the Second Republic thereby leading to its fall. Therefore, the causes of electoral violence in Nigeria as experienced in the country are hereby discussed.

A notable cause of electoral violence was the abuse of the media by politicians who used it to whip up the sentiment of the electorate especially their supporters while discrediting their opponents. The political parties particularly those controlling regional/state or national governments owned newspapers, radio and television stations to shape their own image. Unfortunately, they disseminated information that fuelled tension, acrimony and civil violence. The media were often used during campaigns and election periods to gain sympathy for themselves and damage the character of other parties and politicians. While commenting on this as regards the First and Second Republics, Olusola Isola graphically asserts that:

During the major violence tagged "*Operation Wetie*" (meaning douse with petrol and burn), which accompanied the 1965 election, and which engulfed cities and towns like Ibadan, Ilesha, Osogbo, Mushin, and so on, the press projected the ruling party in a negative mode when accusations of election rigging were very rife. It could be recalled that the public in the Southwest Nigeria were yet to recover from the major political crises that occurred in the region in 1962, 1963 and 1964, and no effort had been made

to reconcile aggrieved parties either by the press or the government. Rather than reconcile the aggrieved people, the press continued in its partisan activities even more intensely before the 1965 parliamentary elections, while the government in power was busy plotting its survival.

The influence of newspapers on the audience of Southwest Nigeria was undoubtedly very strong in view of the extent of destructions that took place and the number of lives that were lost due to public dissatisfaction with the parliamentary elections.

In the same vein, by the middle and towards the end of the Second Republic, especially before the 1983 elections, there was virtually no politically neutral newspaper in circulation in Nigeria. Most of the hitherto neutral newspapers which could have served the democratic transformation better had been repressed during the thirteen years of military rule that preceded the Second Republic. The remaining newspapers had been compromised by politicians while new ones were being set up to achieve political objectives.²⁵

The damage done to the electoral process by poverty and penury was appalling. Poverty in Africa was very alarming as the self-styled leaders running the affairs of the various nation-states amassed ill-gotten wealth to themselves. This had debilitating effects on the socio-economic and political life of the African peoples. All the economic sectors were neglected with the resultant effects of collapse of factories, industries and companies with people thrown out of job while the younger generation remained unemployed for a long period of time after graduating from higher institutions of learning. Artisans and those who relied on electricity for their occupations to run often remained idle as a result of terrible power outages. The people therefore found it difficult to provide the basic necessities of life. Poverty in Africa has assumed an alarming dimension which "...gives room for the unemployed majority to be manipulated to perpetuate all forms of electoral violence... An individual exposed to those hardships is more likely to engage in electoral violence than a rich person in society. When

the economic hardship becomes too unbearable, the propensity for violence increases. 'Army of unemployed youth' then becomes a tool for electoral violence"²⁶.

The inability of the party in power and its institutions to remain neutral during the electoral process is another factor accounted for electoral violence. It is obvious that individual key political actors and their parties in Africa often seek to remain in power as long as they could manipulate political and electoral structures. Nigerian politicians are not exonerated from this allegation as they often resort to the sit-sight syndrome. Consequently, parties in power in their respective regions and later states always interfered during the period under study with electoral processes and their actions often angered the opposition whose foot soldiers were ready to go on rampage once it was noticed that the political interest of their principals was being jeopardized. Hence, violence became the order of the day, claiming several human lives and destruction of properties worth billions of naira. No wonder then that rigging of election results and hijacking of electoral materials by the hired political thugs often brought untold hardships to innocent souls.

Electoral violence similarly arose when the electoral commission established failed to declare the right candidate²⁷ winner in an election. The January 1966 military *coup d'etat* was partly launched due to the imposition of Akintola on the Western Region by the Balewa government. It is also instructive to point out that the suspension of Abiola from being declared the winner of the June 12 presidential election infuriated the masses who waited impatiently and spontaneously unleashed their anger when Abiola's death was announced during and by the Abacha military regime in 1998. The people reacted violently because the mandate given to the undeclared winners of elections was repudiated and their hopes and aspirations in the political gladiators became shattered prior to 1999.

In addition, weak governance and corruption instigated electoral violence. These made people to feel desperate to seek and

employ any means of revenge against those in political authority including violence. The rate at which the nation reeked with corruption was so annoying to the extent that millions of naira got embezzled with impunity by the politicians especially those in government at any level-local, state or federal. This was perpetuated to the detriment of the electorate many of whom lived below poverty line. Hence, small arms proliferations in African countries, Nigeria inclusive were on the increase. As it has been observed, "Possession of arms leads to the perpetuation of violent conflict and the creation of new cycles of violence and crime"²⁸.

Lithnic politics became highly pronounced in Nigeria's political climate. The British colonial government officials poisoned the minds of Nigerians against Nigerians. In 1951 election in Kano, the British colonialists tried hard to frustrate Northern allies of Southerners opposed to the candidates of the *emirs*. Indeed, the harm done to the country's electoral process by the British has been of immense disservice and political backwardness to the nation. One junior English civil servant named Harold Smith suffered greatly in the hands of the British colonial masters for his courage and bravery and for standing his ground not to dance to the whims and caprices of the colonialists during the 1959 general election which was to usher in Nigeria's political independence. As Chinua Achebe writes "... Harold Smith has been selected by no other person than Sir James Robertson to oversee the rigging of Nigeria's first election "so that his compliant friends in (Northern Nigeria) would win power, dominate the country, and serve British interest after independence". The late literary icon does not fail to eulogize Smith's veracity in the following words:

Despite the enticements of riches and bribes (even a knighthood, we are told), Smith refused to be part of this elaborate hoax to fix Nigeria's elections, and he swiftly became one of the casualties of this mischief. Smith's decision was a bold choice that cost him his job, career, and reputation (at least until recently)²⁹.

This implies that the British devised a *divide et impera* among the various groups comprising the Nigerian populace thereby showing favour to the Northerners and choosing the Southerners as enemies. The seed of hostility sown by the British is still very rife between the northerners who regard themselves as being "born to rule" and their southern counterparts.

Furthermore, electoral violence *was* not countered with strong criminal codes in Africa, including Nigeria. Weak penalties or punishments for violators of electoral process also created room for more crimes to be committed. Most African States lacked effective legislation against perpetrators of grievous and minor electoral offences and as a result, correction, retribution and deterrence being expected to manifest after the arraignment of electoral act breakers in the law court were practically non-existent. This fact is understandable bearing in mind that the sponsors of electoral criminals were in power and manipulated the state legal and other structures thereby letting the criminals off the hook.

Conclusion

This study examined the interface between democracy, electoral violence and political instability that inhibited advancement in Nigeria. The failure of the British colonialists and later indigenous political class to conduct credible elections in the pre and post-independence periods created a lot of confusion and havoc. The charged atmosphere that permeated the nation after the conduct of elections whose results were either controversial or unacceptable or both with the attendant violence claimed thousands of lives and property worth billions of naira prior to the birth of the Fourth Republic.

The British colonial rulers must be blamed largely for the sociopolitical quagmire in which Nigerians found themselves after the departure of the rapacious imperial exploiters. It was the British officials that introduced the rigging culture in Nigeria's electoral processes as showcased above particularly in the 1959 general

elections. It is rather unfortunate that their indigenous successors institutionalized this unfavourable innovation through their rigging machines. In a situation of chaos, absence of trust among those leading the country, corruption, rabid and inordinate ambition to acquire and retain power, and ethnic consciousness, no nation can attain any reasonable development. The question that arises is: Have Nigerians especially politicians learnt from the previous unpleasant experiences and changed for better as far as electoral processes are concerned? This is receiving attention in another study which deals specifically with electioneering during the Fourth Republic.

Endnotes

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12. Cited in C.C. Aniekwe and Joshua Kushie: *Electoral Violence*, 3.
13. J. Adele Bamgbose: "Electoral Violence", 207
14. Udida A. Undiyaundeye: "The 1951 Elections and the Origins of Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria" *Lapai Journal of Humanities, Journal of the Department of History and Archaeology*, Ibrahim Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State, Volumes 4/5, 2010/2011, 248.
15. Udida A. Undiyaundeye: "The 1951 Elections", 249.
16. J. Adele Bangbose: "Electoral Violence", 209.
17. J. Adele. Bamgbose: "Electoral Violence", 209 and for more information on the 1964 election contact A. Ademoyega: *Why We Struck*, 19-21.
18. A. Ademoyega: *Why We Struck*, 21-2.
19. A. Ademoyega: *Why We Struck*, 22.
20. A. Ademoyega describes the northern troops of the Nigerian Army a Rebel Army who saw Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon as their captain and rebuffed the leadership of Brigadier Ogundipe, the second in command to the slain First Nigeria's Military Head of State, General J.T.U. Aguiyi - Ironsi, Indeed, this posture created seniority tussle between Gowon and Lt. Col. Odumegun Ojukwu who was senior to Gowon. Read Ademoyega's: *Why We Struck*, 119-38.
21. One of the main reasons for sacking General Gowon was his inability to return the country to civilian rule, among other factors, consult; J, Isawa Elaigwu: *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier-Statesman*, Ibadan: West Books Publisher Ltd, 1986, 195- 235.
22. S.N. Echefu: *Modern Government*, 443.
23. S.N. Echefu: *Modern Government*, 443-4; J. Adele Bamgbose: "Electoral Violence", 210.

24. J. Adele Bamgbose: "Electoral Violence", 210.
25. For detailed information on the endless circuitous transition programme of General I.B. Babangida and his political perfidy against M.K.O. Abiola and his own stepping aside Saga consult Qudus O. Sikiru: "The June 121993 Crisis and Its Implication on Nigeria's External Relations", Unpublished B. A.(Ed) Long Essay, Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Tai Solarin University of Education, 2012, 34-54.
26. Olusola O. Isola: "Newspaper Press and Election Violence: Case Studies of 1965 and 1983 Elections in Nigeria" In Isaac O. Albert (ed): *A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria*, Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Ltd, 2012, 538-9.
27. Human Rights Watch: "Post-Election Violence in Northern Nigeria", n.d. 2.
28. Paul A. Adesupo: "The Church and Credible Elections in Nigeria" in V.O. Ido and E.F.K Salami (eds): *Issues and Trends in Nigeria's Development*, Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Ltd, 2012, 134.
29. Chinua Achebe: *There Was a Country: A Personal History of*