

## THE POLITICS AND ECONOMY OF ELECTION VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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### Abstract

Although election violence in Nigeria dates back to pre-independence era, it has become more frequent and deadly since the Fourth Republic that began in 1999. With over 626 deaths in election-related violence in 2019, observer groups believe that the 2019 general election remains one of the most violent in Nigeria's electoral democracy. This paper examines the factors that underpin and sustain election violence in Nigeria, especially in the Fourth Republic. The argument here is that election violence in Nigeria is rooted in two mutually reinforcing politico-economic factors; the structure of the Nigerian state and its governance system, on the one hand, and the character and worldview of its ruling class elite, on the other. Findings indicate that election violence not only threatens the stability of electoral process, but it also undermines the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and political regimes. Thus, a radical alteration of the composition of the political class elite through a repudiation of the age long process of political leadership may be one way of address the challenges of election violence in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Election Violence, Electoral Process, Nigeria, Political Class Elite, Regime Change

### Introduction

Results in Nigerian elections come in two separate columns. One records the votes cast at polling stations; the other the number of people killed around the time of the election.<sup>1</sup>

After 16 years of military dictatorship and authoritarianism (1983-1999) that was characterized by wanton violation and repression of the political, economic, and social rights of Nigerians,<sup>2</sup> the military on 29 May 1999 disengaged from politics and relinquished power to a democratically elected government. That marked the beginning of the Fourth Republic in

<sup>1</sup> The Economist, 'Nigerian elections: Ballots and bullets', 14 April 2011, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2011/04/14/ballots-and-bullets> (20 January 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Eghosa E. Osaghae, 'Democratisation in sub-Saharan Africa: Faltering prospects, new hopes, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 17, 1 (1999), pp. 4 – 25.

Nigerian's attempt at democratic consolidation since political independence on 1 October 1960. This was after the failures of previous attempts at democratization as was witnessed in "the collapse of the first (1960-6) and second (1979-83) republics, and the abortion of the third republic through the criminal annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election".<sup>3</sup>

More than two decades since 1999, four different civilian regimes have emerged at the federal level in four successive transitions from one civilian administration to another (Olusegun Obasanjo, 1999-2007; Shehu Musa Ya'Adua, 2007-2010; Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, 2010-2015; and Muhammad Buhari, 2015-date). While political power at the federal level alternated between one civilian regime and another within the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) between 1999 and 2011, in March 2015, Nigeria witnessed power alternation and regime change from a ruling political party to an opposition political party after the newly formed All Progressive Congress (APC)'s<sup>4</sup> presidential candidate, Muhammad Buhari was declared the winner of the election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under what Nic Cheeseman would describe as the "least likely circumstance in a non-open-seat election."<sup>5</sup> A non-open-seat election refers to one in which the incumbent is a contestant.

While some see these developments as clear indications of growth, consolidation and stability of democracy in Nigeria,<sup>6</sup> the electoral process, which is an integral part of the democratic and political processes, at least from the perspective of liberal scholarship,<sup>7</sup> has, however, continued to be characterized by recurrent violence. This has had implications for the expansion and liberalization of the democratic space to enable inclusive participation, especially by the vulnerable groups, namely, youth, women, and people with disabilities (PWDs).<sup>8</sup> The phenomenon of election violence has also had implications for the strengthening of democratic institutions and the electoral process, which are necessary to sustain democratic growth,<sup>9</sup> creating what some analysts have described as an 'uncertain future'<sup>10</sup> for democracy in Nigeria. Most fundamentally, election violence has had negative implications for the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and political regimes as well as the willingness of the people to participate in the process. For instance, John Campbell has argued that being excluded from the political process due to violence, "Nigeria's ethnically and religiously fractured public has become increasingly indifferent to the country's national electoral politics."<sup>11</sup> This may help our understanding of Damilola Ojetunde's assertion that "for the first time in history since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria recorded

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah S. Omotola, 'Elections and democratic transition in Nigeria under the fourth republic', *African Affairs*, 109, 437 (2017), pp. 535 – 553.

<sup>4</sup> The All Progressive Congress (APC) came into existence on 6 February 2013 following the merger of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC). These were later joined by a faction of All Grand Progressive Alliance (APGA) and a faction of PDP, otherwise called the new Peoples Democratic Party (nPDP).

<sup>5</sup> Nic Cheeseman, 'African elections as vehicles for change', *Journal of Democracy* 21, 4 (2010), pp. 139 – 153.

<sup>6</sup> See The Sahel and West Africa Club Building Peace and Democracy in West Africa, 'Proceedings of the forum of political parties, the media and civil society in West Africa', co-organised by the Sahel and West Africa Club and the Strategic Watch Club for Peace in West Africa, held in Cotonou, Benin 28 June -1 July 2005.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance, Alan Ware, 'Liberal democracy: One form or many?' *Political Studies* 40, 1 (1992), pp. 130 – 145, August.

<sup>8</sup> Hamza Mohamed, '20 years of democracy: Has Nigeria changed for the better?', 12 June 2019, *Aljazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/20-years-democracy-nigeria-changed-190611124203153.html> (10 January 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Oladipupo Adamolekun, 'Some reflections on democracy and development in Africa' (African Peacebuilding Network (APN) Lecture Series: No. 2, July 2018); Giovanni Carbone and Andrea Cassani, 'Nigeria and democratic progress by elections in Africa', *Africa Spectrum* 51, 3 (2016), pp. 33 – 59.

<sup>10</sup> Udo J. Ilo, 'Nigerian democracy's uncertain future', 23 March 2019, *Open Society Initiative for West Africa*, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/nigerian-democracy-s-uncertain-future> (29 December 2019).

<sup>11</sup> John Campbell, 'Electoral violence in Nigeria', (Contingency Planning Memorandum No. 9, Council on Foreign Relations, 21 September 2010).

the lowest rate of voter turnout of 34.75 percent at the last presidential election held on 23 February”.<sup>12</sup>

Although election violence in Nigeria dates back to the pre-independence era, it has, however, remained recurrent and has become more frequent and deadly in Nigeria’s contemporary political process, especially since the Fourth Republic that began in 1999. With over 800 deaths recorded in 2011<sup>13</sup> and about 626 deaths recorded in election-related violence during the 2019 general elections,<sup>14</sup> election observer groups have noted that the 2011 and 2019 general elections remain the most violent in Nigeria’s electoral history.<sup>15</sup>

Premised upon the assertion that the phenomenon of election violence in Nigeria is rooted in two mutually-reinforcing endogenous political and economic factors, namely, the structure of the Nigerian state and its governance system, on the one hand, and the nature and character of Nigeria’s political class elite, on the other hand, this paper examines the core and contextual factors that underpin and sustain election violence as well as its implications for democracy in Nigeria, especially in the Fourth Republic.

### **A History of Election Violence in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic**

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, election violence may include any act of violence perpetrated in the course of political activities including pre, during and post-election periods.<sup>16</sup> The Council has also clearly articulated the indicators of election violence to include but not limited to acts of political thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings and voting at polling stations, use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral actors, and cause of bodily harm or injury to any person or persons connected with the electoral process. It further notes that election violence also includes violent clashes between political party supporters that take place at campaign events, attacks on or assassination of existing or aspiring politicians, burning and destruction of political structures, and campaign posters, among others.<sup>17</sup> Within the Nigerian context, it may be necessary to include the burning and destruction of election infrastructure such as the offices of the election management body and election materials. These indicators of election violence manifest in every election in Nigeria at all tiers of government, Federal, State and Local Governments.

Although election violence dates back to colonial era, such as the Gusau election riots of 1957 in the then Sokoto Province, its full manifestations began most prominently in the early part of post-independence Nigeria. At that time, election violence was nothing more than the use of political thugs. Political thuggery, according to Billy Dudley, was the accepted general practice in

<sup>12</sup> Damilola Ojetunde, 2019 election: Nigeria has the lowest rate of voter turnout in Africa’, International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 14 March 2019, <https://www.icirnigeria.org/2019-election-nigeria-has-the-lowest-voter-turnout-in-africa/> (25 February 2020).

<sup>13</sup> See Human Rights Watch, ‘Nigeria: Post-election violence killed 800; promptly prosecute offenders, address underlying causes’, *Human Rights Watch*, 16 May 2011, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/16/nigeria-post-election-violence-killed-800> (29 December 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, ‘Report of Nigeria’s 2019 general elections’, (Situation Room Secretariat, Abuja, 2019), pp.34-35.

<sup>15</sup> See for instance, Diplomatic Watch, ‘Statement on Bayelsa and Kogi election by Delegation of the European Union to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Abuja 18 November 2019, [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/nigeria/70578/diplomatic-watch-statement-bayelsa-and-kogi-elections\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/nigeria/70578/diplomatic-watch-statement-bayelsa-and-kogi-elections_en) (January 10, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> John Campbell, ‘Tracking election violence in Nigeria’, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 15 February 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/tracking-election-violence-nigeria> (29 December 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, Nigeria security tracker, 1 February 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483> (25 February 2020).

the 1964 federal elections.<sup>18</sup> Dudley also noted that election violence at that early part of political independence was perpetrated by “an intolerant political leadership which sees as the only condition of its survival, the total elimination of political rivals and the suppression of any form of social criticism.”<sup>19</sup> Using the Gusau election riots of 1957, the Tiv election riots of 1960 and 1964 in which over 700 people were killed, as classical examples, Dudley showed how election violence was used by members of the ruling political parties to deal with opposition political parties. According to him, it was purely a class issue, which in some cases undertook a religious undertone. In his words;

In ... the North, the supporters of the governing party, it is reported, are told that to kill a member of the opposition is not a crime since members of the opposition are religious heretics-kaferis-unbelievers, who are already condemned before God. To support the opposition under such circumstances is equivalent to dissociation from the religious community, and did not the Prophet say that 'the hand of God is upon the community (*al-jama'ah*); and he who sets himself apart from it will be set apart in Hell-fire. He who departs from the community by a handspan ceases to be a Muslim'. It does not make any difference if the member of the opposition is a Muslim. All that is needed is to stipulate that such men are not real Muslims, as was the case in the riots in Gusau (in Sokoto province) in 1957. Earlier in Kano in 1953, the Jam'iyyarMahau- kata or Society of Madmen, a 'storm' group took upon itself to eliminate from the province the party opposed to the government.<sup>20</sup>

Similar scenarios as pictured above have also played out in recent elections in Nigeria. For instance, in the build up to 2003 elections, the presidential candidate of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) was reported to have at the closing ceremony of the 16<sup>th</sup> National Qur'anic Recitation competition held in Gusau, Zamfara State, “called on Muslims across the country to vote only for the presidential candidate that would defend and uphold the tenets of Islam.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in the 2015 general elections, electioneering campaigns were characterized by unprecedented levels of campaign of calumny and character assassination founded more on religious differences<sup>22</sup> in which presidential candidates were openly described as ‘infidels’ by their rivals based on their religious affiliations.<sup>23</sup> The attendant consequence of election violence in that era was the prevalence of political instability and the reinforcement of centrifugal forces that kept the country divided along ethnic and regional lines that ultimately resulted, in part, to the collapse of the First Republic.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Billy Dudley, ‘Violence in Nigerian politics’, *Transition*, 21, (1965), pp. 21 – 23.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>21</sup> Isah Ibrahim Maru, ‘Nigeria: 2003: Buhari urges Muslims to vote upholders Islam’, 22 January 2002, *This Day*, January 22, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200201210250.html> (10 January 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Tijjani M. Bande and Ufiem M. Ogbonnaya, ‘Federalism and party politics in Nigeria’, in Okechukwu Ibeanu and Mohammad J. Kuna (eds), *Nigerian federalism: Continuing question for stability and nation-building* (Safari Books, Ibadan, 2016), pp. 147 – 174.

<sup>23</sup> See Will Ross, ‘Nigeria elections: Mixing religion and politics’, *BBC News*, 29 January 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31026554> (10 February 2020).

<sup>24</sup> See Claude Ake, ‘Explaining political instability in new states’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11, 03 (1973), pp. 347 – 559’ Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, (Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 2006). pp. 4-5; Larry Diamond, ‘Class, ethnicity

In the aborted third republic, election violence was also prevalent. According to Ebenezer Obadere, election violence in that era was different in some respect from what happened in the past. While politicians in the First and Second Republics relied only on the use of political thugs and to some extent, state security apparatus to harass and intimidate opposition candidates and voters, in the Third Republic, there were instances of bomb explosions, which were all directed at military targets.<sup>25</sup>

In the Fourth Republic, election violence has been more recurrent and prevalent, resulting in monumental losses in human and material resources and posing a threat to the stability of the political and electoral processes as well as the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and political regimes. As the Nigeria Peace and Security Working Group rightly noted, “since Nigeria’s return to democratic and civilian rule in 1999, election periods have brought uncertainty and volatility, resulting at times in violence.”<sup>26</sup> For instance, between April and May 2003, at least 100 persons were killed and many others injured during the federal and state elections in Nigeria.<sup>27</sup> In 2007, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) estimated that at least 300 people were killed in violence linked to that year’s elections. In very graphic details, NDI reported that;

... as electoral competition intensified, political violence also rose, particularly at the state level. The July 2006 murder of Funso Williams, the leading contender for the PDP gubernatorial nomination in Lagos State, was preceded by that of Jesse Arukwu, an ACD governorship candidate in Plateau State, in June. In August, another gubernatorial candidate, Ayo Daramola, was murdered in Ondo State.<sup>28</sup>

In 2011, election violence came to a climax when post-election riots broke out in 12 states in the northern part of Nigeria, namely, Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara. The violence left over 800 persons dead and many others fatally injured while relief officials estimated that more than 65,000 people were internally displaced.<sup>29</sup> According to the Human Rights Watch, the violence began with widespread protests that degenerated into violent riots and sectarian killings by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim from the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), following the re-election of incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta in the south, who was the candidate for the ruling PDP.<sup>30</sup>

In the 2015 general elections, major election violence began in the last quarter of 2014 and continued up to the first quarter of 2015. In October 2014, attacks on PDP members and supporters took place in Abuja and Akwa Ibom State in advance of the 2015 general elections. Nigeria’s

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and democracy in Nigeria: *The failure of the first republic*, (University Press, Syracuse, 1988); Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic politics in Nigeria (revised edition)*, (Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Ebenezer Obadere, ‘Democratic transition and political violence in Nigeria’, *Africa Development*, XXXIV, 1&2 (1999), pp. 199 – 219.

<sup>26</sup> Nigeria Peace and Security Working Group, ‘Nigeria elections and violence: Synthesis of the national picture and regional dynamics and recommendations for action’, (Nigeria Peace and Security Working Group Election Scenarios and Recommendations, 19 January 2015), p.1.

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘Nigeria’s 2003 elections: The unacknowledged violence’, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/nigeria0604.pdf> (29 December 2019).

<sup>28</sup> National Democratic Institute, ‘Final NDI report on Nigeria’s 2007 elections’, (National Democratic Institute, Abuja, 2008). p.26

<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘Nigeria: Post-election violence killed 800; promptly prosecute offenders, address underlying causes’.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) reported that at least 58 people were killed in election-related violence between 1 December 2014 and 13 February 2015.

In 2019, while SBM Intelligence reported that about 585 deaths were recorded across the country between 16 November 2018 and 10 March 2019 in election-related violence,<sup>31</sup> the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room(NSCSR) reported that “at least 626 people were killed during the period from the official start of campaigning in October 2018,until the final election in March 2019.”<sup>32</sup>Even the off-season governorship and National Assembly elections in Bayelsa and Kogi States held on 16 November 2019 were marred by high rates of “fatalities and missing persons, including INEC staff.”<sup>33</sup>The enormity of violence that characterized elections especially in 2019 may have informed President Muhammad Buhari’s assertion that, “violence during elections vitiates our commitment to demonstrate to the world and upcoming generations that we are a people capable of electing leaders in a peaceful and orderly manner.”<sup>34</sup>

From foregoing, it is clearly evident that the political and electoral processes in Nigeria have remained significantly and incrementally violence-prone right from the beginning with increased frequency of occurrence and fatality, especially in the Fourth Republic. This may have informed the apt assertion by The Economist that “results in Nigerian elections come in two separate columns. One records the votes cast at polling stations; the other the number of people killed around the time of the election.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Theoretical Direction and Recurrent Issues of Election Violence in Extant Literature**

Contemporary literature on election violence in Nigeria have identified, among other causative factors,ethnic and religious intolerance, hate speech and fake news, weak election regulatory institutions, political exclusion, absence of internal party democracy, inter- and intra-party crises, and the incumbency factor as the fundamental and root causes of election violence.<sup>36</sup>For instance, Moses Duruji has argued that Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999 opened up the space for expression of suppressed ethnic demands that were bottled up by many years of repressive military rule. These expressions have manifested in several violent dimensions, especially during elections.<sup>37</sup>

On the weakness of election regulatory institutions in Nigeria, the arguments in the literature submit that although election management comes with huge logistical and operational challenges, the election management body, in this case the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), suffers from several institutional inadequacies and operational limitations. First, the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) places INEC at the centre of the electoral process; from the registration and monitoring of political parties and party finances to the registration of voters and the actual conduct of the election, and even the management of election security. Specifically, Section 150 of the Electoral Act grants INEC the authority to prosecute electoral offences.

<sup>31</sup> SBI Intelligence, ‘Election violence in numbers’, *Research Report*, 13 March 2019, <https://www.sbmintel.com/2019/03/election-violence-in-numbers/> (29 December 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, ‘Report of Nigeria’s 2019 general elections’.

<sup>33</sup> Diplomatic Watch, ‘Statement on Bayelsa and Kogi election by Delegation of the European Union to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Abuja.

<sup>34</sup> Sahara Reporters, ‘Kogi, Bayelsa elections: Violence sponsored by politicians, says President Buhari’, 18 November 2019, [http://saharareporters.com/2019/11/18/kogi-bayelsa-elections-violence-sponsored-politicians-says-president-buhari\\_/](http://saharareporters.com/2019/11/18/kogi-bayelsa-elections-violence-sponsored-politicians-says-president-buhari_/) [20 January 2020).

<sup>35</sup> The Economist, ‘Nigerian elections: Ballots and bullets’, 14 April 2011, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2011/04/14/ballots-and-bullets> (20 January 2019).

<sup>36</sup> See Bande and Ogbonnaya, ‘Federalism and party politics in Nigeria’.

<sup>37</sup> Moses M. Duruji, ‘Democracy and the challenges of ethno-nationalism in Nigeria’s fourth republic: Interrogating institutional mechanisms. *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, 15 (2010), 92-106.

However, INEC lacks the institutional capacity and resources to effectively and efficiently deliver on this mandate. For instance, INEC does not have control over state security institutions including agents of the institutions who engage in security provisioning during elections. At best, INEC belongs to an omnibus body; Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), which lacks legal and regulatory powers to sanction erring security agents on election duty. The Justice Mohammed Uwais-led Electoral Reform Committee had in 2008 identified these evident institutional inadequacies on the part of INEC when it recommended that the Federal Government should unbundle the INEC to reposition it for greater efficiency as the nation's electoral umpire.<sup>38</sup>

On inter- and intra-party crises, it is argued that the excessive structural fragility, weakness and inadequacies of political parties as key institutions of democracy, which have been complicated by the absence of internal party democracy, may explain why political parties in Nigeria seem not be professional and democratic in their processes and procedures. By their actions and inactions, political party officials have severally instigated and incited election violence. As Jibril Ibrahim has observed, because the relationship within political parties in Nigeria is essentially one between godfathers, founding fathers, or patrons and clients, members have severally been mobilized on pecuniary, ethnic and religious grounds to perpetrate violence.<sup>39</sup> Recent cases, especially in the Fourth Republic include the 2011 post-election violence in northern Nigeria that led to the death of over 800 persons including 10 members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), which erupted after the candidate of the opposition CPC, called for violence.<sup>40</sup> Another instance was the directive by President Mohammad Buhari who was also the presidential candidate of the APC in the 2019 general elections that the military should shoot at sight any individual or group snatching election materials on election day.<sup>41</sup> While some have described the presidential directive as “illegal”<sup>42</sup> and a violation of the rights of the people as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), others described it variously by unanimously as “a call for violence.”<sup>43</sup> Another recent case was the violent protest in Bayelsa State after the immediate past National Chairman of APC, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole rejected the Supreme Court ruling on 13 February 2020 that upturned the victory of David Lyon, candidate of the All Progressives Congress, as winner of the November 16, 2019 governorship election in Bayelsa State.<sup>44</sup> The party chairman not only rejected the Court ruling but also declared that no other candidate will be inaugurated as governor. That assertion led to violent protests in Bayelsa State by supporters and loyalists of the APC.<sup>45</sup>

On the incumbent factors, Hakeem Onapajo showed in a study with evidences from Nigeria at different electoral periods that “in terms of influencing election outcomes, the incumbent has

<sup>38</sup> Federal Government of Nigeria, ‘Report of the electoral reform committee: Volume 1’, December 2008.

<sup>39</sup> See Jibril Ibrahim, ‘Introduction: Engaging political parties for democratic development’, in Olu Obafemi, et. al (eds), *Political parties and democracy in Nigeria* (National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies Press, Kuru, 2014), pp. 1 – 18.

<sup>40</sup> Clifford Ndujihe and Daniel Idonor, Post-election violence: FG panel report indicts Buhari, *Vanguard*, 11 October 2011, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/10/post-election-violence-fg-panel-report-indicts-buhari/> (20 February 2020)

<sup>41</sup> Leon Usigbe, ‘Ballot box snatching: FEC okays Buhari ‘shoot-at-sight’ order’, *Nigerian Tribune*, 20 February 2019, <https://tribuneonline.ng/ballot-box-snatchers-fec-okays-buharis-shoot-at-sight-order/> (20 February 2020).

<sup>42</sup> The Guardian, ‘Fresh controversy over Buhari’s shooting order’, 21 February 2019, <https://guardian.ng/news/fresh-controversy-over-buharis-shooting-order/> (20 February 2020).

<sup>43</sup> Ephraim Oseji, ‘Buhari shoot-on-sight order is call for violence—Onyesoke’, *Vanguard*, 21 February 2019, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/02/buhari-shoot-on-sight-order-is-call-for-violence-onyesoke/> (20 February 2020).

<sup>44</sup> Ade Adesomoju, ‘Updated: Supreme Court nullifies Bayelsa governor-elect’s election, declares PDP winner’, *Punch*, 13 February 2020. <https://punchng.com/breaking-supreme-court-nullifies-bayelsa-governor-elects-election-declares-pdp-winner/> (21 February 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Jacob S. Olatunji, ‘Bayelsa: CSOs call for arrest, prosecution of Oshiomhole, Lyon over inciting statement’, *Nigerian Tribune*, 20 February, 2020. <https://tribuneonline.ng/bayelsa-cso-calls-for-arrest-prosecution-of-oshiomhole-lyon-over-inciting-statements/> (22 February 2020).

been more associated with violence during elections than the opposition” arguing that “the existing nature of executive power in Nigeria provides a plausible explanation for the incumbent’s violence during elections.”<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, some other studies have attributed the recurrence of election violence, especially in the Fourth Republic, to existing security challenges in Nigeria. For instance, since 2009, when the Boko Haram terrorism and insurgency began in the North East part of the country, the group has significantly threatened the peaceful conduct of elections. In 2015, for instance, the general elections had to be postponed for a period of six weeks due to the security situation in that area, especially in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, in a recent study on the trends in electoral violence in Nigeria, Olowojolu Olakunle, et al attributed the development to unbridled quest for power. According to them, “electoral violence is one of the strategies employed by Nigerian politicians during electioneering period. Desperate and power drunk politicians often sponsor unemployed youths and stark illiterates to carry out assaults on their perceived political opponents with a view to manipulating election results to their own advantage.”<sup>48</sup>

Valid as the foregoing submissions are, the phenomenon of election violence in Nigeria cannot be considered in isolation of the socio-cultural and economic environments in which the elections are conducted, the adequacy or otherwise of the regulatory institutional and legal frameworks, namely the election management body, in this case, the INEC and the electoral laws, as well as the behaviour and perception of the individuals who are in the centre of the saddle, either as interested parties in the process or as operators and regulators of the process. Thus, a reasoned understanding of the phenomenon of election violence in Nigeria may be adequately informed by certain theoretical postulations such as Yolamu Barongo’s espousal that:

In a very real sense, the nature of political life in a particular society, the type of institutions that are created and sustained and the peculiar patterns of political processes that emerge are a function of the interplay among three main factors, namely, the condition of the base of the society, the history and the experiences of the society and the actors’ perception, interpretation and response to environmental stimuli.<sup>49</sup>

Using Barongo’s theoretical espousal as a point of departure, an explanation of the phenomenon of election violence in Nigeria may have to begin with the attainment of an appropriate knowledge of the economic condition of the Nigerian society, on the one hand, and the history and the experiences of the Nigerian society, as well as the actions and inactions of Nigeria’s political and ruling class elite as well as their perception, interpretation and response to the electoral and political processes, on the other hand.

<sup>46</sup> Hakeem Onapajo, ‘Violence and votes in Nigeria: The dominance of incumbents in the use of violence to rig elections’, *Africa Spectrum*, 49, 2 (2014), pp. 27-51.

<sup>47</sup> See Statement on the timetable for 2015 general elections by the Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Attahiru M. Jega, at a Press Conference on February 7, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Olowojolu Olakunle, Rasak Bamidele, Ake Modupe, Ogundele Oluwaseun, and Afolayan Magdalene, ‘Trends in electoral violence in Nigeria’, *Journal of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, 11, 1 (2019), pp. 37-52.

<sup>49</sup> Yolamu Barongo, *Political Science in Africa: A critical review* (Zed Publishers, London, 1983), p.138.



## Explaining the Phenomenon of Election Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic from a Point of Departure

From Yolamu Barongo's theoretical postulations, two mutually reinforcing endogenous political, economic and socio-cultural factors may well explain the recurrent phenomenon of election violence in Nigeria since independence but more especially in the Fourth Republic. They include the structure of the Nigerian state and its governance system, on the one hand, and the character and worldview of the political class elite, on the other hand.

First, as a socio-culturally heterogeneous and ethnically diverse and complex state, Nigeria adopted to operate a federal system of government as mechanism for managing its diversity. However, Nigeria's federal system is highly lopsided in favour of the federal government to the detriment of the federating units; state and local governments. For instance, the exclusive legislative list of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), upon which only the federal government has the exclusive powers to legislate, contains 68 items while the current legislative list, upon which both the federal and state governments have concurrent powers to legislate, contains only 30 items.<sup>50</sup> Even at that, the same Constitution provides that "if any law enacted by the House of Assembly of a state is inconsistent with any law validly made by the National Assembly, the law made by the National Assembly shall prevail, and that other law shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void."<sup>51</sup> The implication of this is that the federal government retains and wields more than a significant proportion of political power as allowed by the Constitution.

It also means that the federal government has control over all state institutions of security and economic production to the exclusion of the state and local governments. This constitutional arrangement not only makes the federal government politically very powerful; it also makes the federal government economically very attractive. Thus, whichever group (political, religious or ethnic) that controls political power at the federal level also controls the institutions and means of economic production and resources of the entire Nigerian state. Thus, over the years, elections in Nigeria have become a struggle for "state capture"<sup>52</sup> and a battleground for the control of the economic resources both at the federal and state levels. This is because, for many political actors, controlling political power is not just a way to improve their personal economic lot and prestige but also those of their ethnic, regional and religious groups. Most importantly, it also enables them to be in control of not just economic resources but also of the affairs of the people. This raises the stakes, likelihood and propensity for election violence because winning elections at all cost including the use of violence is the endgame, especially for those seeking personal economic and political gains.<sup>53</sup> This may well help our understanding of the background from which Olusegun Obasanjo, the then President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria described the 2007 general elections as in Nigeria as "a do-or-die-affair for PDP."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> See Federal Government of Nigeria, 'Parts I and II of the second schedule of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999' (Government Press, Abuja, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> See Federal Government of Nigeria, 'Section 4(5) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999' (Government Press, Abuja, 1999).

<sup>52</sup> National Endowment for Democracy, 'Nigeria's flawed poll, corruption, state capture and Africa's uneven democratic performance', *Democracy Digest*, 13 March 2019, <https://www.demdigest.org/nigerias-flawed-poll-corruption-state-capture-africas-uneven-democratic-trajectory/> (20 February 2020).

<sup>53</sup> Sampson Kwarkye, 'Roots of Nigeria's election violence', *ISS Today*, 4 March 2019, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/roots-of-nigerias-election-violence> (25 February 2020).

<sup>54</sup> Kolade Larewaju, 'Nigeria: Obasanjo explodes - April polls do or die affair for PDP', *Vanguard* 11 February 2007, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200702110015.html> (22 February 2020).

Secondly, Nigeria is an ethnically complex state where both the major and minor ethno-nationalist groups aspire for the control of the federal power. This legitimate aspiration brings about the building of political alliances and coalitions among groups. As Tijjani Bande has noted, these alliances not only create some dynamism in the competition within and among political parties, they have also influenced the dynamics of party politics since the First Republic and have equally helped in raising fundamental issues that border on Nigeria's federalism<sup>55</sup>, which have had implications for election violence. For instance, by the 1964 general elections, Nigeria's political landscape had been polarized into a competition between two opposing alliances; the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). The Northern People's Congress (NPC) aligned with a faction of the Action Group (AG) led by Chief Samuel Lakode Akintola and the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), to form the NNA while the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) aligned with the Chief Awolowo-led faction of AG, United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and Bornu Youth Movement (BYM) to form the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). These alliances were equally replicated in the Second and Fourth Republics. These developments have had implications for the nature of political parties that are formed, the manner in which state resources are allocated and the contentious and violent dimensions that elections have assumed in Nigeria. On the one hand, for instance, Adele Jinadu has noted that "Nigeria's political party system since independence has remained a reflection of the deep-seated splits among the emergent political elite and Nigeria's ethno-regional diversity"<sup>56</sup> while elections have been about elite bargain and settlement.<sup>57</sup>

As experiences have shown, in Nigeria, elections provide opportunities for open exhibition and display of deep-seated, bitter, and rancorous divisions and animosity along personal, ethnic, religious and regional lines with the elimination of rival individuals and opposition groups as a strategy. This is because the preservation of political hegemony is perceived as a condition for survival by political actors. This scenario has remained a threat not only to peaceful conduct of elections but also to the stability and consolidation of the democratic processes.<sup>58</sup> A typical example was the 16 November 2019 governorship election in Kogi State. Beyond the inter- and intra-party rivalries, the campaigns were, from the beginning, framed in ethno-religious narratives and presented as a battle to settle scores between two of the three major and dominant ethnic nationalities in the state; the Ebira, which are predominantly Muslims and the Igala, which are predominantly Christians.<sup>59</sup> Although they were a total of five contestants in the election, the election was straightforwardly a contest between the incumbent Yahaya Bello of the APC, an Ebira and a Muslim and Musa Wada of the PDP, an Igala and a Christian. Such ethnic cleavages and rivalries left the election marred by high rates of fatalities and wanton destruction of election

<sup>55</sup> Tijjani M. Bande, 'Dynamics of political party competition in Nigeria: Origins and evolution', in Olu Obafemi, et al (eds), *Political parties and democracy in Nigeria* (National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies Press, Kuru, 2014), pp. 60-77.

<sup>56</sup> Adele Jinadu, 'Elections, democracy and political parties: Trends and trajectories', in Olu Obafemi, et al (eds), *Political parties and democracy in Nigeria* (National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies Press, Kuru, 2014), pp. 19-44.

<sup>57</sup> See for instance, LadiHamalai, Samuel Egwu, and Shola J. Omotola, *Nigeria's 2015 General Elections: Continuity and Change in Electoral Democracy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>58</sup> Political Parties and Leadership Development Centre, 'Report of the 2019 election observations' (National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, 2019).

<sup>59</sup> Vanguard, 'Kogi poll: Ethnic cards on as Bello, Wade battle for 1.5m votes', 16 November 2019, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/11/kogi-poll-ethnic-cards-on-as-bello-wade-battle-for-1-5m-votes/> (22 February 2020).

materials including the killing of the PDP Women's Leader in Ofu Local Government, Mrs. Acheju Abuh.<sup>60</sup>

In general terms, it is not only in elections that Nigeria's lopsided federal structure has created incentives for violence. Objective analyses by several studies, indicate that Nigeria's lopsided federal structure is also responsible for the recurrent agitations for the restructuring of the system that have been dominant in the political space since 1999, especially in the southern part of the country. According to some studies, the agitations, which have been sustained by the emergence of a motely group of ethno-nationalist militia and secessionist movements, are founded upon sentiments and feelings of real and perceived expansive inequality and systemic politico-economic exclusion and marginalisation from the allocation of state resources (political and economic).<sup>61</sup>

Thirdly, there is the reasoning, among some schools of thought, led by Dele Olowu<sup>62</sup> that Nigeria's neo-colonial status has made the country disconnected from the people. This has had implications for election violence. Very forcefully, Olowu has argued that what has emerged from the structure of governance in post-independence Nigeria is a state that places a premium on leadership, either by one man or a small clique, which through the monopolization of power, imposes its wishes on the rest of the society.<sup>63</sup> He further argued that the monopolization of power has two fundamental implications. First, the state does not respond to the wishes of the people because operators of government find ways to ascend to power or perpetual their stay in power without the peoples' consent. They also do not see any necessity for gauging or responding to public opinions. For this reason, government operates without caring for the impact of their policies on the public. They rely solely on the use of force to get the citizen to comply with state directives. As a result, the loyalty of the people to the state is weak. The second implication is that the state is non-accountable. That means that the state is non-responsible, not answerable to the people, and non-culpable. The non-accountable and non-responsive character of the state when coupled with the formal centralized structure of governance explains its deliberate refusal to provide services to the people.<sup>64</sup> The consequence of this monopolization of state power is that it not only results in election violence but also general violent social conflicts, particularly where the regime is not capable of providing essential services to the population. Thus, the Nigerian state in terms of its structure and system of governance, is in all its ramifications, central to explaining and understanding the phenomenon of election violence.

Beside the structure of the Nigerian state and its governance system, a fundamental variable that equally explains the phenomenon of election violence in the country is the character and worldview of the political class elite. As a class, Nigeria's political elite has certain characteristics that predispose the country's electoral and political processes to violence. First, it a class for itself, in which for some, politics has become the only way to improve their economic lot, while for

<sup>60</sup> Ibrahim Oyewale, 'Kogi PDP Women Leader burnt to death in post-election attack', *This Day*, 19 November 2019, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/11/19/kogi-pdp-women-leader-burnt-to-death-in-post-election-attack/> (22 February 2020).

<sup>61</sup> See Godwin Onuoha, 'Contesting the space: The "new Biafra" and ethno-territorial separatism in South-Eastern Nigeria', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 17, 4 (2011), pp. 402-422; John A. Ayoade, 'Secession threat as a redressive mechanism in Nigerian federalism', *Publius*, 3, 1 (1973), pp. 57-74, Okechukwu Ibeanu and Muhammed J. Kuna (eds), *Nigerian federalism: Continuing question for stability and nation-building* (Safari Books Ltd, Ibadan, 2016); Tope S. Akinyetun, 'Intricacies and paradoxes: Federalism and secessionism in Nigeria, the case of Biafra agitation', *Discovery*, 54, 265 (2018), pp. 29-45.

<sup>62</sup> Dele Olowu, 'The nature and character of the African state', Paper presented for AAPAM 15th Roundtable at Banjul, Gambia, 24-29 January 1994.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

others, it is a matter of personal prestige or simply being in control of other people and resources rather than a public service. The implication of this is that for those seeking public office, election is about elite bargain and settlement rather than public service and “winning elections at all cost including the use of violence is the endgame.”<sup>65</sup> This self- and egocentric nature of the political class elite predisposes them to certain behavioural tendencies that instigate election violence. First, they do not play by the rules of electoral contest. As John Campbell has noted, “the greatest challenge facing election officials in Nigeria is the enforcement of rules, and by extension, securing the cooperation of the political class... which has little incentive to play by the rules.”<sup>66</sup> Their deliberate refusal to play by the rule is informed by their perception of electoral contest as “a-do-or-die-affair.” This perception has created in them the tendency to pursue electoral victory at all cost including the use of violence.

Second, members of the class take advantage of the plural nature of the Nigerian state and its fault lines to frame political narratives in ethno-regional and religious terms in order to advance their personal ambitions. The implications of this is that party formations and alliances, competitions and patronage bear the imprints of group, regional, ethnic, and religious rather than national considerations, which serve as predisposing factors to election violence. Third and most fundamentally, the self- and egocentric nature of the class accounts for excessive monetization of the electoral process. This is both deliberate and ideological and it has far reaching implications for inclusivity, corruption in governance and election violence. For instance, the cost of the expression of interest and nomination forms for elective positions in some select political parties in the 2019 general elections was way beyond the reach of the ordinary Nigerian (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Cost of Expression of Interest and Nomination Forms in 3 Political Parties in the 2019 General Elections**

Positions	Political Parties		
	APC	APGA	PDP
State House of Assembly	N850,000	N1,000,000	N600,000
House of Representatives	N3,850,000	N2,500,000	N1,500,000
Senate	N7,000,000	N5,000,000	N3,500,000
Governorship	N22,500,000	N10,000,000	N6,000,000
Presidential	N45,000,000	N25,000,000	N12,000,000

**Source: Report of the 2019 Election Observation by NIPSS-PPLPDC**

The figures shown in the table are exclusive of the cost of electioneering campaigns among other election expenditures and incidentals. Excessive monetization of the electoral process is deliberate because it has created room for the exclusion and marginalization of the poor and vulnerable groups, especially the youth, women and people with disabilities (PWDs) from the political process, leaving politics squarely in the hands of moneybags. It is also ideological because it has created a justification for public office holders to allocate jumbo salaries, bonuses and very enticing perquisites of office to themselves. Such jumbo salaries, bonuses and very enticing

<sup>65</sup>Kwarkye, ‘Roots of Nigeria’s election violence’.

<sup>66</sup> John Campbell, “Protecting Nigeria’s elections from its political class”, Council of Foreign Relations, 16 November 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/protecting-nigerias-elections-its-political-class> (25 February 2020).

perquisites of office that public office holders allocate to themselves account for high level of election violence in Nigeria. This has been the case right from the First Republic. As Billy Dudley noted, “the explanation of this resort to violence is not far to seek. It is clearly the case that in almost all, if not all the developing countries, the shortest possible cut to affluence and influence is through politics. Politics means money and money means politics.”<sup>67</sup> The development has also occasioned high cost of governance and resulted in unbridled corruption and pillage of national resources by political actors, especially public office holders. Corruption among political office holders in Nigeria has not only become pervasive, it is also “the single greatest obstacle preventing Nigeria from achieving its enormous potentials.”<sup>68</sup>

The second characteristic is that the political class is a class against itself, that is characterised by elite disagreement, elite rivalries and clashes of interests rather than consensus. Inherent contradictions in the political class result in violent class struggles that also manifest in election violence. This factor was very manifest in the build up to the 2015 and 2019 general elections which saw high-profile political defections and party switches by politicians across political parties. As Tijjani Bande and Ufiem Ogbonnaya have noted, “the build-up to the 2015 general elections was characterised by unprecedented level of campaign of calumny and character assassination founded more on personal differences, rather than differences on party ideology, manifestoes or issues of national interest”<sup>69</sup>. This heightened political tensions and created the enabling environment for election violence in 2015.

The third characteristic of the political class, which is very fundamental in our understanding of the phenomenon of election violence, is that it is a prebendal and a consumerist class. Elected and appointed state officials and functionaries see themselves as legitimately entitled to a share of state resources, otherwise called the “the national cake” or “dividends of democracy” in Nigeria’s politico-economic parlance. Thus, they use state resources to the benefit of their supporters, co-religionists and members of their ethno-cultural groups. The implication of this is that the sharing and allocation of the national cake within and outside the political parties, whether through election or appointment, bear the imprints of ethno-regional and religious considerations rather than national preferences. For instance, in an address at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) on 22 July, 2015, President Mohammad Buhari was reported as saying that “political realities dictate that those who gave him 97 per cent of the votes cannot in all honesty be treated equally with constituencies that gave him just 5 per cent”.<sup>70</sup> Statements such as this led to the vicious and vigorous mobilization of opposition political machinery under the auspices of the Coalition of United Political Parties (CUPP) to unseat the Buhari regime in the 2019 general elections. However, the regime’s response with force through the deployment of the military and the police resulted in high degree of violence that characterized the 2019 general elections, especially in Adamawa, Bauchi, Kano, Kogi, Lagos, Nasarawa, and Rivers States, among others.

There is the belief by state actors that security simply means the preservation of political regimes. This explains why the state and those who act on its behalf rely on the use of security institutions of the state to secure election victory. While this has been the practice in Nigeria since

<sup>67</sup> Dudley, ‘Violence in Nigerian politics’, p.23.

<sup>68</sup> See Matthew T. Page and Sola Tayo, ‘Countdown to February 2019: A look ahead at Nigeria’s elections’, *Africa Programme* (Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, July 2018); Mathew T. Page, ‘A new taxonomy for corruption in Nigeria’, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2018).

<sup>69</sup> See Bande, T.M., and Ogbonnaya, U.M. (2016). “Federalism and Party Politics in Nigeria.” In Ibeanu, O. and Kuna, M.J. (eds), *Nigerian Federalism: Continuing Question for Stability and Nation-Building*, (Ibadan: Safari Books Ltd, pp.147-174.

<sup>70</sup> Sahara Reporters, Buhari’s statement at the US Institute Of Peace that made everyone cringe, 25 July 2015, <http://saharareporters.com/2015/07/25/buhari-s-statement-us-institute-peace-made-everyone-criinge-0> (25 February 2020).



independence, it has escalated in the Fourth Republic. For instance, since 2003, state security agencies in Nigeria have continued to be implicated by local and international election observers in election violence and the manipulation of electoral processes across the country, especially in the intimidation and harassment of political opponents and voters.<sup>71</sup> This was more prevalent in the 2019 general elections where state security personnel were instrumental in occasioning election violence in Adamawa, Bayelsa, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Lagos and Rivers States in order to suppress the stronghold of opposition parties.<sup>72</sup> The implication of state security agencies in election violence suggests that security agencies on election duty either do not have Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) for their personnel or that the personnel deliberately do not comply with the SOPs or that the agencies do not have the mechanisms to ensure compliance to the SOPs by personnel on election duty. The use of state security and instrument of violence is seen as a carryover of colonial mentality. According to Bill Dudley, parties in power in the First Republic used members of the Native Authority, Local Government police forces and the Nigeria Police Force, which is the federal police to intimidate political opponents.<sup>73</sup> In the Fourth Republic, this practice has gone beyond the use of the police to the deployment of the military as election security agencies.

### **The Need to Refocus Democracy in Nigeria**

From a minimalist perspective, the phenomenon of election violence in Nigeria threatens democratic consolidation as democracy and democratic governance itself still grapples with the challenges of widening socio-economic inequality, poverty and miserization of the mass, evident political exclusionism, weak democratic institutions, absence of internal party democracy, lack of respect for human rights and rule of law, low level of compliance with extant electoral laws and lack of inclusivity especially for marginalised and vulnerable groups; women, youth and People With Disabilities (PWDs). These have in turn, continued to threaten economic and human development, political stability and national security in the country.<sup>74</sup>

The recurrence of election violence in Nigeria has occasioned human rights abuses and violations manifesting in deliberate use of state security agencies for the indiscriminate arrest, detention, torture and in some cases outright assassination of members of the opposition, and the use of political thugs for the intimidation and killing of voters, among others. In Nigeria, for instance, the US Department of State in its 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017' blamed the reluctance of the Buhari administration to properly investigate allegations of abuses, especially by members of the armed forces and top officials and prosecute those indicted as the main impediment to fighting rights violations.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Dare Ezekiel Arowolo, 'Security agencies and the 2019 elections in Nigeria, *Social Science Research Council Kujenga Amani*, 15 February 2019, <https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2019/02/15/security-agencies-and-the-2019-elections-in-nigeria/> (25 February 2020).

<sup>72</sup> CLEEN Foundation, '2019 Election Security Threat Assessment of Nigeria, January 2019', <https://cleen.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2019-Election-Security-Threat-Assessment-of-NigeriaJanuary-2019.pdf> (25 February 2020).

<sup>73</sup> Dudley 'Violence in Nigerian politics', p.22.

<sup>74</sup> Ufiem Maurice Ogbonnaya and Mohammed Saffa Lamin "Regime Change and Power Alternation as Emerging Trends in West Africa's Democratic Experience: Evidences from Nigeria, Ghana and The Gambia." In Adeola, R., and Jegede, A.O. (eds.) *Governance in Nigeria Post-1999: Revisiting the Democratic 'New Dawn' of the Fourth Republic* (Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press, 2019), pp. 248-262.

<sup>75</sup> Ibekwe, N 'How Buhari administration encourages human rights abuses – U.S. Government. Premium Times, Saturday (2018) August 25. Available at <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/266159-how-buhari-administration-encourages-human-rights-abuses-u-s-government.html> [Accessed August 25, 2018].

Largely, therefore, democratic governance in Nigeria has failed, due to election violence to ensure the preservation of the sanctity of the institutions of democracy, the legitimacy of the electoral process and election outcomes as well as national security and protection of state sovereignty. The implications are that democracy itself stands threatened by these developments in the country. This raises the imperative need of refocusing democracy in Nigeria. At the moment, the prevailing system of democracy in the country is one that is market-oriented, which is more concerned with regularity of elections, security and autonomy of state and electoral institutions and electoral processes, which is the case with all liberal democracies across the world. To make meaning, democracy in Nigeria needs to be sustained through regular electoral processes, which guarantees the security and safety of not just the process but also of the citizens. Secondly, democracy itself has to become development and human-oriented, which will lay emphasis on the security, socio-economic wellbeing of the people and sustainable development, while ensuring that the processes are founded on unambiguous, predictable conditions and supported by strong socio-economic institutions and popular participation devoid of violence.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing indicates very clearly that the structure of the Nigerian state and its governance system are central to explaining the phenomenon of election violence. It also indicates that the character of the political class elite and their political worldview also engender election violence. Nigeria is saddled with a political class elite that have little or no incentives to play by the rules of electoral contests, which is informed by their perception of electoral contest as a-do-or-die-affair.

Addressing the recurrence of the phenomenon of election violence in Nigeria will require a number of measures, namely, the strengthening of legal and institutional frameworks to ensure appropriate punishment for election violence perpetrators; political reforms that will significantly disincentivize the vicious contestations among members of the political class for public offices due to pecuniary interest by discouraging the prevailing system of 'winner winner-takes-all'; and the restructuring the federal system to ensure decentralization of power and the practice of the principles of complementarity and as well as the combination of the principle of share rule and self-rule.

However, except the composition of the political class elite in Nigeria is radically altered along with its vested political and economic interests, election violence will remain prevalent in the foreseeable future. Achieving this requires a radical departure, through the citizen agency, from the age long process of leadership recruitment and emergence in Nigeria. In other words, the citizen agency must consciously mobilize and act to evolve and entrench a political process that ensures the recruitment and emergence of political leaders through credible electoral process. Secondly, the citizens must ensure the entrenchment of a democratic process that involves conscious actions and mobilization on the part of the citizens to ensure that political office holders are held to account and elections are credible and violent free.