

# The State and Electoral Violence: An Analysis of the 2019 Presidential Election in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The world is increasingly becoming globalized. Thus, elections have continued to enhance the smooth and orderly transmission of power with very little problems. This helps to ensure the maintenance and sustenance of the political system. Over the years, Nigeria's elections are devoid of electoral violence, snatching of ballot boxes, burning of election materials, kidnapping of candidates and their family members; and burning of homes of high political aspirants. While electoral violence has continued to subsist in many countries of the world, elections in Nigeria, in the contemporary periods has attracted global attention due to the challenge of establishing a secure environment that can facilitate free and fair democratic elections. The 2019 Presidential election experienced greater levels of violence as over hundred persons lost the lives throughout the exercise. This study x-rayed the state and election related conflict, particularly the series of electoral violence witnessed in Nigeria's 2019 Presidential. Albeit, Nigeria's 2019 Presidential election witnessed significant inciting campaigns across political climes and among political elites, political thugs, and political loyalties. The extent of the inciting campaign carried before the final election gave way to the high level of violence in states such as Lagos, Rivers, Kogi, Bayelsa, including Borno. Victims of brutal attacks during the election include the voters, INEC staff, party agents and unarmed security operatives at the 119 973 polling units. Against this background, the study adopted descriptive approach and content analysis as its methodological orientation. This study through the elitist theoretical framework unfolds contradiction of interests amongst the elites as a result of hedonistic manifestations. The study further ascertained that factors such as: the weak institutionalization of democratic architectures, ethnicity, tribalism, high level of unemployment, poverty and inefficient electoral management body among others have coalesced to constitute impediments to peaceful, fair and free elections in Nigeria. We therefore recommend the pursuit of good governance and genuine political will so as to ensure that people's trust in the electoral process is enhanced. Again, INEC should continue to remain autonomous and this should be further strengthened so as to achieve an objective and effective electoral process in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** State, Presidential Election, Electoral Violence, Conflict, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

In every democracy, election is the essential ingredient that allows transition from one administration to the other. Elections constitute very strong method of achieving very orderly and legitimate process of changing from one leadership or authority to another. Although only a part of a wider process; Elections, no doubt, is very strategic part of the democratic process, though they are only a unit of a bigger process (Woll 1978: 26). Indeed, all the other attributes of democracy "revolve around elections" (Almond et. al, 2004: 63). For Bratton (1998: 52), elections are very important requirement for achieving larger democratic consolidation. Nigeria as a country, has failed to conduct consistent and successful elections. This ugly situation has, therefore, made her democratic attributes to be continuously subjected to serious scrutiny.

Elections are veritable tools for smooth transfer and consolidation of power. Elections in Nigeria continue to elicit more than casual interest by Nigerian scholars. because Despite the understanding among scholars that only credible election can help the country's fragile democracy to solidify, Nigeria continues to fail woefully in conducting peaceful, open, free and fair elections, whose results become widely acceptable and respectable across the country (Igbuzor, 2010; Ojukwu, Mbah and Maduekwe, 2019; Osumah and Aghemelo, 2010, Ekweremadu, 2011.). All elections that have taken place in Nigeria since independence have been very controversial with accompanied by various levels of litigations and often characterized by mass violence (Gberie, 2011).

Importantly, Electoral violence is defined as acts in the form of threats, hate speech, blackmail, verbal intimidation, misinformation, destruction of property, physical assault or assassination organized and/or carried out by person(s) aimed at delaying or influencing the electoral process. This can be perpetrated both by the incumbent power holder to avoid defeat and by opposition elements seeking to wrest political power from the governing party. Often times, electoral violence is directed towards major stakeholders in an election which includes but not limited to party agents, voters, media, candidates, election workers, and monitors. Others include vote results, campaign materials, electoral information such as registration data, and ballots, campaign rallies, electoral facilities such as polling and counting stations (Höglund, 2006:8). The acts associated with electoral violence include physical harm (e.g. homicide, sexual violence, torture, assault); threats (e.g. physical, verbal); intimidation; destruction of property (e.g. arson, damage from stones or sharp objects); and forced displacement. Electoral violence often aims at influencing the electoral process and its outcome by gaining an unfair political advantage by a person or group of persons over another. It aims at becoming

victorious in political competition by the use of violence. It also targets the subversion of the outcomes of the electoral and democratic process through disempowerment and intimidation of political opponents.

History has it that Nigeria has had eleven presidential elections and several other elections at the regional/state/local levels of the country between 1954 and 2019. Most of these have been fraught with both pre and post-election violence. Nigeria gained independence in 1960 and had its first general elections in 1959. Civilian leadership in the Nigerian political nomenclature is usually delineated from the periods of military interventions by the use of the term “republic”. So the first civilian leadership in 1960 is referred to as “the first republic”. The First General elections brought the NPC (Northern People’s Congress) to power, in a coalition government with the predominantly Eastern NCNC (National Council of Nigerian Citizens) and the largely Western AG (Action Group). The NPC was led by Ahmadu Bello who opted to stay as premier of the Northern region. Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa became prime minister with Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as president and Michael Okpara was premier of the eastern region. The AG was the official opposition and it was led by Obafemi Awolowo, with party deputy Ladoke Akintola as Premier of the Western Region.

The Second Republic of Nigeria lasted from 1979 to 1983. It was led by Shehu Shagari as president and Alex Ekwueme as vice president under a new constitution that stipulated an “American style” presidential system of government. The hopes and dreams that preceded the second republic, however, turned out to be mere fantasies. The government was hopelessly corrupt and politicians looted the public treasury with shameless impunity. Ogunniyi (2009) opines that it was during the second republic that corruption came to be “institutionalized” in Nigeria as politicians feasted lavishly on government contracts and the scale of corruption nationwide accelerated alarmingly.

The Third Republic of Nigeria was a republic that never materialized; despite its republican constitution being drafted in 1989. General Ibrahim Babangida had promised to return the country to civilian rule by 1990; however, he later postponed this transition to 1993, citing civil unrest among other things. Elections were finally conducted in 1993 in which M.K.O. Abiola emerged a clear winner with a sweeping landslide. Babangida unwilling to relinquish power proceeded to annul the elections citing pending legal proceedings over its conduct. This situation opened the door for chaos in which over a hundred lives were believed to have been lost in the pandemonium that broke out with the public enraged with Babangida’s decision to annul the elections and end the third republic in its embryonic state.

General Abdulsalami Abubakar became the military head of the state of Nigeria following the sudden demise of General Sani Abacha in June 1998. Accordingly, building on the recommendations of a work in progress, (the constitution evolved by General Sani Abacha regime), a transition programme was announced to terminate with a handover to an elected civilian president on the 29th of May 1999. Three political parties which are: the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Peoples Party (APP), were registered by Nigeria’s electoral body, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to contest the elections for legislative and executive positions. As in 1979, the military rulers were not interested in perpetuating themselves in office and were desirous of supervising the conduct of free and fair elections. The APP and AD decided to contest the presidential elections on a joint ticket choosing Chief Olu Falae of the AD and pairing him with Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi of APP as his running mate while the PDP sponsored former military head of state, General Olusegun Obasanjo with Alhaji Atiku Abubakar as his vice-presidential running mate. Olusegun Obasanjo was the victor, although there were cases of electoral violence, hitches, complaints, mishaps, etc here and there the elections were generally described as free and fair.

The introduction of democracy in Nigeria in the month of May 1999 brought to end the 16 years of incessant military rule. Olusegun Obasanjo, who was a retired general, became centre of admiration for various roles he played in the country especially his opposition to Abacha’s dictatorship, as well as returning Nigeria to civilian-led government in 1979. The new president (Olusegun Obasanjo) inherited a country facing many problems, among which are collapsed infrastructure dysfunctional bureaucracy, and a military that wanted to be rewarded for going back quietly to the barracks. The president swiftly retired several hundreds of military officers who held various political positions. He further set up panel to investigate human rights violations. He also released many persons who were held in captivity without charge. Lastly, he canceled numerous questionable licenses and contracts left by the previous regimes.

The 2003 Presidential election was held on 19 April 2003. The result was a victory for the incumbent Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) whose major opponents were Muhuhamadu Buhari of the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and former Biafran Warlord, now Chief Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). The elections were regarded as massively rigged and as a result not considered to be free and fair. Both international and domestic election monitoring groups including the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), the European Union as well as a host of other civil society groups, advocacy groups, and NGO's were in unison about the poor conduct of the elections. The security agents and INEC officials alleged bias and rigging in the elections in favor of the ruling PDP (Roberts and Obioha, 2005). The INEC according to the EU, American, and commonwealth election Observer Team Reports, lacked transparency in all key stages of the electoral process (Ajayi, 2007).

The Nigerian Presidential election of 2007 was held on 21 April. The 2007 Presidential election has been severally described as the worst in the history of Nigeria according to several international and local observers such as the Domestic Election Observer Group -a coalition of several civil society organizations, Human Rights Watch, and the European Union (EU) amongst others. Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was declared the winner of the highly contested and controversial elections. The election was marred by electoral fraud, and denounced by other candidates and international observers. Yar'Adua’s presidency was fraught with uncertainty as media

reports said he suffered from kidney and heart disease. In November 2009, he fell ill and was flown out of the country to Saudi Arabia for medical attention. In February 2010, Goodluck Jonathan began serving as acting President in the absence of Yaradua.

The Presidential election of 2011 in Nigerian got Goodluck Jonathan re-elected in April 2011, which he won. The 2011 election was praised by both local and foreign observers as being among the fairest ever conducted in Nigeria but few could have predicted the violence that would erupt after the elections. With over 1,000 people killed and millions of property, the protests made the elections one of the bloodiest ever in the modern political history of electoral violence in Nigeria. The election was characterized by various levels of mal-practices, procedural inconsistencies and logistical deficiencies. Voter turnout in the presidential elections of about 78 percent in the South-South and the South-East, as reported in various media outlets, was far beyond the national average by at least 50 percent, which points to electoral fraud through organized manipulations.

Political succession remains contentious and highly challenging in many African countries. The privileges associated with power and the fear of being prosecuted by their successors cause some leaders to maintain control of the political process even through electoral manipulation and violence. For some years, the design of electoral systems to encourage cooperation, bargaining, and interdependence between rival political leaders and the groups they represent has become increasingly crucial for the promotion of democracy in poor and divided societies. This seemingly made it increasingly difficult to hold elections without violence or protest in such settings. As political elites and politicians construe elections to be an avenue of capturing the state apparatus as well as its resources, elections have continued to face severe threat in Nigeria. The important question thus becomes; when will Nigeria in particular and Africa in general conduct elections which will be adjudged to be that would be credible, transparent, and generally acceptable?

The presidential election of 2015 which took place on 28th March, ushered in Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) party. The election remains very memorable to Nigerians. Preceding the elections were vehement threats by politicians, interest groups and political parties. It was on this premise that many prophets of doom predicted that the 2015 elections will plunge the country into severe anarchy that will threaten, if not destroy her unity. Various degrees of crimes were recorded during the election amounting to a total of 275 different violations. Such violations include injuries to persons, killings, and destruction of property. Again, there were also 236 alleged perpetrators who were identified in different testimonies. More so, 120 people were named, while 116 were unidentified.

Commenting on the factors that work against democracy and national development in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria, Gilbert and Ubani (2015) allude to electoral malpractices and corruption. In Nigeria, elections are always strongly contested under party politics that is severe and violent rite-large. Electoral malpractices in Nigeria's Fourth Republic range from arson, snatching of ballot boxes, imposition of candidates by political parties, falsification of election results, , victimization and inducement of electorates, kidnapping and assassination of political opponents, unlawful disqualification of aspirants and candidates by both political parties and the electoral commission, long litigation in court, mobilization of religious sentiments, use of militant groups, political propaganda, among others. In more extreme cases, violent politics ensue such as youth restiveness and bombing. All of these constitute serious challenges to a healthy democratic practice, hence good governance will be lacking at the expense of national development. Though Nigeria's elections usually have been dogged with violence, the situation appeared to be worse in the Presidential election in 2019.

Thus, the main thrust of this research is to examine the Nigerian State and Electoral Violence with a focus on the 2019 Presidential Election.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The origin of the Elite theory is widely traced to the writings of Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), and Robert Michels (1876-1936). Mosca, on his part, explained that smaller minorities often outwit and become more organized than large majorities. He further added that "political classes" (i.e. Political elites or the Ruling class) often possess some intellectual, material, or even moral superiority over the people they govern (1923/1939, p.51). Pareto on the other hand submitted that in every society that has real unrestricted social mobility, the elites in such society would comprise of the most talented and admirable individuals. However, in actual societies, the elites are often those most skilled in using the two major modes of political rule: force and persuasion, and who also often enjoy important privileges such as inherited wealth and family links (1915/1935, paras. 2031-34, 2051). Pareto further made a sketch of different types of governing elites, which draws from the ideas of Machiavelli, to include lions and foxes. On his part, Michels placed elites (oligarchies) in the search by large organizations for leaders and experts in order to operate efficiently. As these persons garner control of funds, promotions, information flows, and other aspects of organizational functioning, power becomes concentrated in their hands (1915/1962; Linz, 2006). Emphasizing the inevitability and also the relative autonomy of elites, all free men characterized aspirations to fully democratic and egalitarian societies as futile.

Elites are defined as persons who can influence outcomes consistently and strongly as result of their strategic placement or locations in big or otherwise pivotal organizations and movements. In a different understanding, elites are individuals who possess the organized capacity to make real political trouble without being promptly checkmated or repressed. They are not found only among prominent and reputable but also, they exist in varying degrees in various societies and in such organizations as important voluntary associations, trade unions, and politically significant mass movements. There is also the existence of "Counter-elites" who also form part of this definition of elites though they act in negation of existing elites. They also possess the capacity to influence

and affect political outcomes very substantially. It is vital to note that the definition of elites above is limited and specifically political definition of elites. It is limited to persons who occupy the top of the pyramid or pyramids of political, social power and economic (Putnam, 1976, p.14). This definition does not see all those in the society that enjoy high cultural statuses, occupational, or educational statuses as elites in a political sense. As already stated, national political elites are not so numerous.

Governance and the pattern of democratization in the Nigerian state cannot be divorced from the elitist approach to the understanding of politics. According to Putnam (1976) the view of the elite theorists such as Pareto, Mosca, Michels, Mills, Burnham, and James Meisel could be summarized as:

1. The cynicism that political power is unequally distributed in any human society and that the unevenness of distribution is a function of wealth, skill, etc;
2. Because of the factor above, human society is classified into two: Those who have political power and those who do not;
3. That the elite are internally homogenous, unified, and self-conscious class;
4. The elitist class is a largely self-perpetuating class that exercises political dominance of the masses through the process of elite recruitment or recycling;
5. That political activities and decisions are largely a function of elitist interests.

Conversely, the above views especially as regards the ruling class being internally homogenous and that political activities are largely a reflection of elitist interest, Omodia (2004) stated that in the Nigerian political system democratic stability is often marred by elitist contradictions as a result of the excessive premium placed on political offices. Undoubtedly, the elite theory clearly explains the nature of Nigerian electoral system in particular the political system in general. This is because majority of the political parties found in the current democratic dispensation are either to be adjudged to be cadre or elite parties which usually manipulate the perceptions of the masses for their self interest of building an economic base. The tools of manipulation deployed by the ruling class over the masses as postulated by the elite theorists, exist because the elites are better organized than the masses and they also possess class consciousness more than the masses (Robert, 1976). The state in Nigeria is riddled with variegated manipulative processes employed by the ruling class which actually threaten the survival of the polity. This is so not just because of the conflict of interests amongst the elites due to pleasure-seeking manifestations but also as a result of the manipulative ethno-religious sentiments which the elites have employed as tools for the acquisition of political support.

Seemingly, the behavioral pattern existing among the political and economic elites in Nigeria is not in tandem with the core democratic values required for achieving a stable polity and national development. Politics of giving and take and respect for the unwritten rules of the game of politics are what make for sustainable democracy that could offer a good prospect for achieving national development. In so far as these ingredients of the democratic method are lacking, in so much the country would continue to have the orgy of violence and crises in the polity. Tied to these issues is the distributive framework in the political structure of the country. Therefore, attitudinal transformation is a necessary requirement on the part of the political elite for achieving good governance and national development without which these will continue to be a mirage.

### **The Presidential Election of 2019 and Manifestations of Electoral Violence in Nigeria**

This was the sixth general election in this Fourth Republic. The election was conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under the chairmanship of Professor Mahmood Yakubu. Before the date for that presidential election, Professor Mahmood Yakubu-led INEC had already conducted 196 off-season governorship and other by-elections from the day he came into office in 2015. The election presidential election date was announced on March 9, 2017. INEC extensively prepared for that election starting with a Strategic Plan 2017 – 2021. Afterwards, there were Election Project Plan, Election Management System, and Elections Operations Support Centre (Ojukwu, Mbah, and Maduekwe, 2019).

An INEC datasheet showed that 84 million voters were registered before the 2019 general elections. Out of this number, 72 million voters collected their Permanent Voter Cards. There were also 91 registered political parties and 119,973 Polling Units. The number of Accredited Domestic Observers was 120 while the number of Accredited Foreign Observers was 36. More so, 23,000 candidates competed for 1,558 positions. There were seven elections that took place over two Saturdays within the period. These elections included the Presidential, House of Representatives and Senatorial elections which were conducted on February 23. Then the State Houses of Assembly, Governorship, chairmanship, and councillorship elections of the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory were conducted on March 9, 2019. This was first-time in Nigeria's electoral history for elections to be conducted in such manner.

The General election in 2019 was conducted on 23 February 2019 to elect the Senate, the House of Representative, the President, and the Vice President. The elections were initially scheduled to hold on 16 February. However, it was postponed by INEC at 03:00 on the original polling day and scheduled to then hold a week after. INEC cited challenges in terms of logistics in getting electoral materials to polling stations on time. In some of the polling units, voting did not take place until 24 February as a result of electoral violence. Even in some polling units, voting was delayed until 9 March, when voting was done side by side with the Gubernatorial and State Assembly elections.

Officially, the elections engulfed the sum of N242bn. N189bn was used by INEC to prepare and conduct the elections while N53bn was given to security agencies for ensuring adequate security is provided on the election day. This became the costliest election in

the history of Nigeria. Note should be taken that the millions of dollars spent on the commission by the various international donor partners is not part of this amount.

For one to become the President of Nigeria through elections, a candidate must receive a majority of the vote cast and over 25% of the vote in at least 24 of the 36 states in the country to be elected in the first round, as Nigeria operates modified two-round system,;. If no candidate passes this entry, a second-round is conducted. The results of the presidential election hit the streets in the early hours of February 27, 2019 (see table 1 below). The incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari emerged the winner of the election being his reelection into the presidential seat, defeating his closest opponent, Atiku Abubakar by over 3 million votes. According to Ojo (2019), he was issued a Certificate of Return and was sworn in on 12 June 2019 (Punch Newspaper, Wednesday, March 20, 2019).

The 2019 election, being the election that was most contested, attracted serious controversies in the polity. There were over 640 court cases from aggrieved aspirants were recorded starting from after the party primaries (Punch Newspaper, Wednesday, March 20, 2019). The electoral commission (INEC) was joined as one of the defendants in all the pre-election cases. Periods before the elections, a constitutional amendment took place which pegged the time limit for dealing with pre-election matters to fourteen days. Thus, such law was never in existence before that time. President Muhammadu Buhari signed into law the Fourth Alteration No. 21 on June 8, 2018, which requires all aggrieved aspirants to file their matters within 14 days of the action while courts are mandated to deliver judgments on such matters within 180 days. Appeals from such judgments are also meant to be disposed of within 60 days.

**Table 1: 2019 Presidential Election Results**

Name of Candidates	Affiliated Party	Number of Votes	Percentage
1. Buhari Muhammadu	APC	15,191,847	55.60
2. Abubakar Atiku	PDP	11,262,978	41.22
3. Felix Nicolas	PCP	110,196	0.40
4. Mailafia Obadiah	ADC	97,874	0.36
5. Gbor John W. Terwase	APGA	66,851	0.24
6. Yabagi S. Yusuf	ADP	54,930	0.20
7. Akhimien D. Isibor	GDPN	41,852	0.15
8. Ibrahim Aliyu H.	APA	36,866	0.13
9. Donald Duke	SDP	34,746	0.13
10. Omoyele Sowore	AAC	33,953	0.12
11. Da-Silva Thomas Ayo	SNC	28,680	0.10
12. Shitu Mohammed Kabir	APDA	26,558	0.10
13. Yusuf Mamman Dantalle	APM	26,039	0.10
14. Moghalu Kingsley Bosah C.	YPP	21,886	0.08
15. Ameh P. Ojonugwa	PPA	21,822	0.08
16. Ositelu I. Babatunde	AP	19,219	0.07
17. Durotoye Adetokunbo O.	ANN	16,779	0.06
18. Bashayi Isa Dansarki	MMN	14,540	0.05
19. Osakwe Felix J.	DPP	14,483	0.05
20. Abdulrashid H. Baba	AA	14,380	0.05
21. Nwokeafor Ikechukwu N.	ACD	11,325	0.04
22. Maina Maimuna Kyari	NPC	10,081	0.04
23. Okhai Victor	PPC	8,979	0.03
24. Chike Ukaegbu	AAP	8,902	0.03
25. Ezekwesili Obiageli K.	ACPN	7,223	0.03
26. Ibrahim Usman Alhaji	NRM	6,229	0.02
27. Ike Keke	NNPP	6,111	0.02
28. Moses Ayibiowu	NUP	5,323	0.02
29. Awosola W. Olusola	DPC	5,242	0.02
30. Muhammed U. Zaki	LP	5,074	0.02
31. Eke S. Chukwuma	GPN	4,924	0.02
32. Nwabuikwu Chuks N.	AGA	4,689	0.02
33. Major Hamza Al.Mustafa	PPN	4,622	0.02
34. Okotie C. Oghenebrorie	ABP	4,554	0.02
35. Shipi M. Godia	FDP	4,523	0.02
36. Fasua T. Kolade	ANRP	4,340	0.02

37. Rev. (Dr.) Onwubuya	FJP	4,174	0.02
38. Dr Asukwo M. Archibong	ND	4,096	0.01
39. Ahmed Buhari	SNP	3,941	0.01
40. Salisu Yunusa Tanko	NCP	3,799	0.01
41. Shittu Moshood Asiwaju	ANP	3,586	0.01
42. Ikeagwuonu Obinna U.	APP	3,585	0.01
43. Balogun Isiaka I.	UDP	3,170	0.01
44. Obaje Yusufu Ameh	ANDP	3,104	0.01
45. Chief Umenwa Godwin	AGAP	3,071	0.01
46. Israel N. Davidson Dr.	RAP	2,972	0.01
47. Ukonga Frank	DA	2,769	0.01
48. Santuraki Hamisu	MPN	2,752	0.01
49. Adesanya-Davies Mercy O.	MAJA	2,651	0.01
50. Gbenga Olawepo-Hashim	PT	2,613	0.01
51. Ali Soyode M.	YES	2,394	0.01
52. Ojinika Geff Chizee	RPN	2,391	0.01
53. Nsehe Nseobong	CC	2,388	0.01
54. Rabia Yasai H. Cengiz	NAC	2,279	0.01
55. Atuejide Eunice J.	NIP	2,248	0.01
56. Dara John	ASD	2,146	0.01
57. Fagbenro-Byron S. Adesina	KP	1,911	0.01
58. Etim E.Ishie	CNP	1,874	0.01
59. Chukwu-Eguzolugo S. Chikendu	JMPP	1,853	0.01
60. Madu N. Edozie	ID	1,845	0.01
61. Osuala Chukwudi J.	RNP	1,792	0.01
62. Albert Owuru A.	HDP	1,663	0.01
63. Esosa Ize-Iyamu D.	BNPP	1,649	0.01
64. Inwa A. Sakil	UPN	1,631	0.01
65. Akpua Robinson	NDLP	1,588	0.01
66. Mark E. Audu	UP	1,561	0.01
67. Com. Ishaka Ofemile	NEPP	1,524	0.01
68. Kriz David	LM	1,438	0.01
69. Ademola B. Abidemi	NCMP	1,378	0.01
70. A. Edosomwan Johnson	NDLP	1,192	0.00
71. Abah Lewis Elaigwu	AUN	1,111	0.00
72. Angela Johnson	CAP	1,092	0.00
73. Nwangwu Uchenna P.	WPN	732	0.00
Invalid/blank votes		1,289,607	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>28,614,190</b>	<b>100</b>
Registered voters/turnout		82,344,107	34.75

Source: INEC (2019); Ojukwu, Mbah and Maduekwe, (2019).

Soon after the elections, there were allegations of widespread fraud perpetrated by the opposition. Among the fraud claims were accusations impersonation, ballot box snatching, explosives possession and vote-trading. The African Union declared that the elections were largely peaceful and conducive for the conduct of a credible election (Ojukwu, Mbah, and Maduekwe, 2019). The electoral commission (INEC) also declared that the elections were mostly peaceful. However, critical observation and analysis show that the 2019 election fell below expectations. Notably, the electorate had to grapple with seeing too many political parties on the ballot paper, up to 91 political parties. There were 73 presidential aspirants who expressed interest in being Nigeria's president, an unmatched figure in the history of Nigeria's democracy. Of course, not all of them made it to the final race as some of them withdrew along the line. Validation of the elections then rested with the court (THISDAY, Monday, April 8, 2019).

The presidential election was conducted on February 23, 2019. This became the 6th Presidential election to have taken place in the country in the line-up of presidential elections counting from 1999. The two major contesters in the presidential election were Muhammadu Buhari (the incumbent President) and Atiku Abubakar (former Vice-President).

Different studies have demonstrated that elections in Nigeria have continued to be associated with violence. However, the presidential election of February 23 has taken that fact even to a greater height which is very unfortunate. Apart from the violence

and other malpractices that characterized the election, it also witnessed a voter turnout of 35.6% going by INEC announcement. Two reasons account for the low voter turnout: electoral violence witnessed before the Presidential election and the postponement of the election from February 16 to February 23, 2019. A closer look into the election show the influence of various stakeholders such as private actors, the state, as well as other stakeholder in the electoral process by intimidating electorates, disrupting voting, and threatening the officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

There were several cases of disruptions in Ebonyi, Abia, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, , Rivers, and Lagos State as reported by the Civil Society Situation Monitoring Unit. There were also cases of attacks on INEC offices. The INEC office in Ijesa, Oriade Local Government Area in Osun State was one of the offices of the electoral body attacked on Saturday, February 23, 2019. Card readers and ballot papers used in the presidential election were reported to have been burnt by the arsonants.

The Civil Society Situation Room Report (2019, p. 33) also showed that there were 96 verified incidents, leading to 361 deaths between November 16, 2018, and February 23, 2019 which was the Presidential Election Day on. A daily average of 3.5 deaths of Nigerians was on record to have occurred within a period of 104 days, with a daily occurrence of incidents. There were incidents which resulted in fatalities that were reported to have taken place in 29 of the 36 States (including the Federal Capital Territory). These incidents took place in each of the six geopolitical zones. The number of incidents as well as the number of deaths per incident became more pronounced as the elections approached, with the Election Day recording the highest number of these incidents and then going down afterwards.

More breakdowns by the CSSR lay bare the fact that the average death count per incident was four, while the North-central, North-West, and North-East recorded death tolls exceeding the average. The South-east recorded the lowest number of deaths, incidents, and the minimum death rate. A critical analysis of national violence and deaths rates during the elections show Rivers States, Benue, Kaduna, and Borno states as the leaders. Reports also have it that 15% to 20% of all election-related deaths took place on the election day, with tensions that had existed over time prompting the clashes to more deaths. Though the incidents that took place in the north were not much, they were bloodier. Majority of the violence that took place in the Southern Nigeria on Election Day happened mainly in Rivers, Delta, and Lagos States (CSSR, 2019, Obiam, 2021).

**Table 2: Electoral Violence based on Geo-Political Zones in the 2019 General Elections**

S/N	Geo-Political Zones	No. of Incidents	No. of Casualties (killed)
1.	North – Central	23	111
2.	North – East	16	146
3.	North – West	20	172
4.	South – East	7	14
5.	South-South	59	120
6.	South – West	36	63

Source: Civil Society Situation Room (2019); Obiam (2021).

A state-by-state presentation of the data by the Civil Society Situation Room (2019) shows that Zamfara, Benue, Kaduna, Borno, and Rivers states witnessed the highest number of casualties. Again, violence caused by the security agencies were recorded in Bayelsa, Abia, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Lagos, Anambra, Benue, Kwara, Plateau, and Rivers States while incidents in the North East though they were few, they were fatal because of Boko Haram menace.

, The Niger Delta Watch (2019, p. 4) while writing on the 2019 presidential election, submitted that the Niger Delta region alone recorded intimidation or disappearance of party candidates or supporters, 116 cases of bribery, 103 fatalities, 159 violent incidents, 38 incidents of destruction, manipulation, or theft of campaign materials (such as billboards and posters), 35 cases involving detention, intimidation or disappearance of voters or civil society members, 36 cases of detention, 31 incidents involving delays or irregularities in voting preparations or processes, 16 incidents of destruction, 29 riots or protests, manipulation or theft of voting materials or systems, 12 incidents involving campaign misconduct or irregularities.

More so, according to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) (2019, p. 5), the 2019 presidential election was affected by several challenges ranging from INEC missteps and misconduct, logistical shortfalls, deliberate denial of access to observers and media, , intentional disruption by politicians, party agents, political thugs, and intimidation of collation staff by security agents.

INEC was also aware of the violence that were witnessed at various points in the election as it pointed out during the announcement of the result that voting was canceled in many polling units across the country due to disruptions, such as snatching

of the ballot box, violence, and polling officials' refusal to use the smart card reader, as well as for over-voting (National Democratic Institute/International Republic Institute Report, 2019). After all said and done, INEC announced the result on Wednesday, 27th February 2019, and declared Muhammadu Buhari of the APC who garnered a total number of 15,191,847 votes as the winner of the election while Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, garnered 11,262,978 votes. The other political parties' presidential candidates (71 of them) who participated in the election garnered a total of 2,159,365 votes (INEC, 2019).

For easy analysis, the intensity and dimensions of violence witnessed in the 2019 general elections are discussed under the following headings:

**1. Loss of life:** Virtually all the election observer groups acknowledged widespread violence before, during, and after the 2019 general elections. Of serious concern was the high incidence of deaths recorded during this period which to many observers surpassed the number of death recorded in previous elections. For example, the European Union Election Observation Final Report on the 2019 general election has the following to say ... approximately 145 people were killed in election-related violence, 84 of which were in the South-South zone... Approximately, 64 people were reportedly killed during the campaign up to the 23 February election, 21 of these deaths were during the week following the postponement. Approximately 35 people were reported killed on 23 February and 24 on 9 March (EU Election Observers Mission Final Report, 2019: 23). Similar figures on the number of deaths during the 2019 general elections were reported by other election observer groups. The Civil Society Situation Room on its part documented more than 260 politically motivated deaths since the beginning of the campaign that led to the 2019 general elections.

**2. Attack on INEC Offices and Officials:** Apart from observed irregularities including vote-buying, and intimidation of voters and election officials which were reported by virtually all the Observer Groups, the 2019 general elections also witnessed several cases of physical attack on election officials and the INEC offices across the country. There were reports that "INEC premises and officials were subject of attack and harassment during the three election day periods". It is on record that two weeks before the scheduled 16 February election, "three INEC offices in Abia, Plateau and Anambra states were engulfed by fire leading to the destruction of hundreds of PVCs, electoral materials for over 100 polling units and over 4,600 smart card readers". There were also reports of intimidation of INEC officials in 39 local government areas in 20 states by EU election observers. Several other attacks reported by election groups included: threatening and compelling INEC officials to issue collated results under duress; assaults, abductions, and sexual violence against officials; intimidation and unlawful arrest of election officials by soldiers who invaded collation centers, especially in Port Harcourt, etc.

**3. Snatching of Ballot Boxes and Destruction of Electoral Materials:** Both acts were well-known atrocities committed during past elections in Nigeria. However, the dimension they assumed during the 2019 general elections was so alarming. Social media were littered with videos of unimaginable acts of hooliganism and vandalism perpetrated by well-known political thugs, while the security agents meant to protect the voters and ballot boxes watched in disbelief, especially in Lagos and many other states. The role played by soldiers and armed gangs in Rivers State collation centers during the 2019 general elections was equally amazing to many political observers.

**4. Inflammatory Utterances and Hate Speeches:** Inflammatory utterances like a verbal threat against political opponents, use of abusive language, and hate speeches, especially during campaigns and before elections are often ignored as part of electoral violence. However, these practices have been shown to constitute major physiological assaults against their victims and are known to be very potent for building physical and structural violence during elections. Most of these acts played out during the period leading to the 2019 general elections. These helped to further heighten an already tense atmosphere ready to explode in violence as witnessed during the elections.

Two major cases among others readily come to mind. First was the warning publicly given by the President a few days before the elections that anyone caught disrupting the forthcoming elections or found stealing ballot boxes will pay with his life. Expectedly, the message was received with mixed reactions with the opposition interpreting it to mean a threat to them and their supporters, as well as a call for a more inclusive strategy for violence.

The second was the utterance credited to the Governor of Kaduna State, Mallam El-Rufai who purportedly threatened foreign election observers that they will be taken back in body bags after the elections. This was however interpreted as an open call for violence during the election by political observers, both local and international.

#### **Consolidation of Democracy and the Issues of Electoral Violence**

Elections are the life wire of a democratic government and give life to its functionality. However, the nature of the polls and the process of selecting leadership go a long way in determining the extent to which a democracy is consolidated. If elections are conducted in line with stipulated electoral guidelines, it creates more chances for the emergence of the best. Again, what determines if a leader is re-elected is how well he rules in the first term and if the constitution allows for the second term. In Nigeria's case, frequent electoral violence that has continuously occurred from the first republic to this fourth republic has been a bane of democratic consolidation.

In the 1999 presidential poll in Nigeria, as noted by Aniekwe and Kushie (2011), the election was accepted to give room for democratic rule and allow for growth (consolidation) and not taken because it was credible. In the 2003 general elections, about one hundred persons were killed (HRW, 2004). The 2007 election (HRW, 2007) gave the number of death to be 300, including police officers. Though the 2011 general elections were considered to be relatively peaceful, immediately, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) was declared the winner by INEC in the Presidential election; violence erupted in



Northern Nigeria. Supporters of (CPC) candidate General Muhammadu Buhari took to protest and violence. According to HRW (2011), over 800 people were left dead. The killing happened within three days of protest and violence in 12 Northern States. According to European Union EOM Report (2015), the 2015 general elections produced one of Nigeria's most tense campaigns, as imprudent words were commonly used. The National Human Rights Commission Report (2015) on pre-election violence identified 60 incidents and 58 persons killed over 50 days. Violence has continued to be a replicated experience in the fourth republic.

The rate of electoral violence in the 2019 general elections was unprecedented. The presidential and National Assembly elections were held on February 23, while the governorship and state assembly elections were held on March 9. The country's experience in the 2019 general elections was the worst than the experience in the general elections held in 2015. It was the election that brought back President Muhammadu Buhari for his second term as president. Before the elections, insecurity problems were at their peak following a series of kidnappings, several attacks on farmers by some criminal herdsmen (farmers – herdsmen clash), and Boko haram terrorist groups (Oli, Ibekwe, and Nwankwo, 2018). The high rate of pre-electoral violence, coupled with other factors, affected the voter turnout. According to INEC, voters' turnout was 35.6% for the elections of February 23, while that of March 9 was even lower. The figure was lower than the 44% percent recorded during the 2015 general elections (INEC, 2019).

Vote-buying, which gained prominence during the Ekiti governorship election in 2018 and that of Osun state, became a normal business during the 2019 general elections. The poll was characterized by vote-buying, snatching of ballot boxes, harassment, and intimidation of electoral officials, voters, and oppositions by hired armed men and even by some security personnel (Nwankwo, 2018). According to the electoral act 2015 as amended, section 29(3), INEC is the only institution can ask for deployment of security personnel when it becomes necessary, and it is carried out in consultation with the security agencies. Ebonugwo and Kumolu (2019) pointed out that the military was freely used during the election, many of whom were partial, as military personnel were alleged to have forced themselves into the INEC office at Port Harcourt, Rivers state and thwarted the process. As Ebuzor (2019 cited in Okechukwu, Chukwuka, and Chikwado, 2019) also reported that military men were beating up party agents in Bori Rivers State. European Union Election Observation Mission (cited by Sanni, 2019) said that about 152 people lost their lives during the election.

According to Justice (2019), violence was worst witnessed in six states, which include Plateau, Bauchi, Sokoto, Benue, Rivers, and Kano states. Consequently, INEC had to cancel elections and reschedule another day for supplementary elections for Kano and Rivers states. The two states (Kano State- APC and Rivers State – PDP) have become a hot spot for violence even during the past elections, which had resulted in several killings and the destruction of properties. Human Rights Watch accounted that 11 persons lost their lives in the presidential election that took place on February 23, 2019, in the two states. Similarly, Human Rights Watch reported that a Non-governmental Organization, "We the People" submitted that soldiers carried out a retaliatory attack after armed men killed one of them, and this led to the death of over 40 persons and with about 52 seriously wounded as they tried to swim across when soldiers were shooting randomly. According to Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (cited in Sanni 2019), about 629 persons (North Central 121, North-West 172, South-south 120, South-east 14, North East- 146, and, South-west 63) were killed before, during, and immediately after the 2019 general elections over election-related matters.

The election management body plays very important role in achieving a free, fair, and credible elections in every polity. The National Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria has not lived up to this expectation. The 1999 constitution and the Electoral Acts 2015 have mandated INEC to pilot the electoral process and ensure free and fair elections is achieved according to the rules and procedures stated (Obianyo and Vincent, 2015). Sections 117 to 132 of the Electoral Acts of 2010 as Amended, for instance, identified different electoral offenses and their attendant penalty. However, these provisions are flouted daily, while INEC stands akimbo without acting. Amnesty International (2008) noted that even when there are no armed conflicts in Africa, desperation for power has made it look like one exists especially during elections because of the recurring election-related crises. The happenings were evident in the pre, during, and post-electoral process and has resulted in casualties.

## Conclusion

If Nigeria's democracy is to be consolidated, protection of lives and properties and observance of fundamental human rights must be paramount because democratic governance promotes supremacy of the constitution and constitutionalism. The rule of law is also very important for the consolidation of democracy. In the absence of the rule of law, democracy will lose its good value. Anyaele (as cited in Igwe, 2010) submitted that the rule of law is the "supremacy" of the law over the generality of the people, i.e., not minding one's identity or position. Thus, both the leader and followers must act according to the dictates of the law. But that has not been the experience in Nigeria, as some individuals and groups see themselves as practically above the law.

Our discussion so far in this study reveals that elections and electoral processes in Nigeria have always been problematic and often characterized by violence since independence. Also, attempts by successive governments to address these challenges over the years had only shown little or no success. The 2019 Presidential elections in Nigeria however presented before Nigerians another opportunity to reflect and project into the future with the view to providing suggestions on how this common problem can be tackled, and with a special focus on the recommendations given by various Observer Missions during the elections. The big picture of the state of affairs in Nigeria can be located within the Marxist class analysis theory and the failure to regulate the electoral process. To tackle the electoral violence in Nigeria, we recommend the following:

1. We, therefore, recommend that to enhance confidence in the election process, INEC's complete autonomy must be strengthened to ensure it provides a more effective and objective electoral process. We seek to see an INEC that is decentralized to avoid issues of logistics and operational issues.
2. Under-age voting has continued to take place in some regions of the country in flagrant violation of the constitution.. INEC needs to move to curtail or even totally stop the ugly menace as it dents the credibility of the election process and ultimately a threat to Nigeria's democracy.
3. The various security agents in the country should be more serious with their duty in protecting the lives and property of the electorate and also ensure lives are not lost during elections.
4. Finally, there should be proper investigation into the allegations of violence and other cases of violent acts perpetrated during the elections and ensure that perpetrators are duly punished

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