



# Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Implications for Political Stability

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## Authors' contributions

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author AE designed the study, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author AE also managed the literature searches, analyses of the study and performed the spectroscopy analysis. Author CO managed the experimental process. Author AE identified the species of plant. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## ABSTRACT

Elections are key pillars of democracy and have become the commonly accepted means of legitimizing government. Once elections are flawed, it is an invitation to violence in the State which may snowball into political instability. This study examines electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999 - 2015) and its implications for political stability. The methodology for this study is qualitative, using documentary evidence and the ex-post-facto research design in terms of reviewing the 2015 general elections. We adopted conflict theory as a framework of analysis and argue that the inordinate ambition of the political class and their allies to capture State power and retain it at all cost in order to expand their accumulation base is the cause of electoral violence in Nigeria. The study amongst others, recommends adherence to the rule of law as a major step to achieving stability in elections in Nigeria.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria like many other African states has a chequered history of conflicts [1]. The cause of these conflicts could be traced to primordial factors associated with ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry, structural imbalance of its federalism, bad governance, political intolerance and electoral brouhaha.

Nigeria can be rightly described as one of the most deeply divided states in Africa. From its inception as a colonial state, Nigeria has faced a perennial crisis of territorial or state legitimacy, which has often challenged its efforts at national cohesion, democratization, stability and economic transformation [2].

The politicians in Nigeria have over the years 'become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power: more reckless and greed in their use and abuse of power; and more intolerant of opposition, criticism and efforts at replacing them' [3].

These conflicts orchestrated by political elites and their allies, have been for selfish actualization of primitive accumulation anchored on regional sentimentalism, ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry, economic materialism, political domination of the State. To achieve their inordinate interest, these politicians manipulate the youth to accepting them as the corner stone for their survival in the State. They arm these youths with dangerous weapons to prosecute the elections in their favour. Those already in government use the men of the Nigeria Police to chase their opponent and protect them in order to use the youths to unleash mayhem against their perceived enemies. These youths are hardly arrested nor detained for the havoc they may have caused. The youths therefore, are at the heart of most violent conflicts in the country. A recent study suggests that the youths are prosecutors of 90-95% of violent conflicts in Nigeria [4]. Commenting on the forgoing, Human Rights Watch, noted: 'Many of Nigeria's ostensibly elected leaders obtained their positions by demonstrating an ability to use corruption and political violence to prevail in sham elections. In violent and brazenly rigged polls, government officials have denied millions of Nigerians any real voice in selecting their political leaders. In place of democratic competition struggles for political office have

often been waged violently in the streets by gangs of thugs- youths - recruited by politicians to help them seize control of power' [5].

At the heart of Nigeria's crisis of governance particularly as manifested in electoral violence is a complex linkage between the State and the Youth, as well as Security apparatus especially, the men of the Nigeria Police that are constantly used to chase the opposition. The action of the men of the Nigeria Police in Rivers State, Edo State and Ekiti State preceding the 2015 general election defines the role of the Police in violence as well as electoral conflicts in Nigeria. Some of the youth leaders who are allies to the powerful politicians now dictate and control what happens in their various Communities. The Niger Delta Ex Militants are not left out; some of them sponsor and impose candidates for election. In other cases, in an attempt to win election at all cost, some of the Ex militants perceived to have the capacity to cause violence through the barrel of guns are sponsored for election as flag bearers of major Political Parties. These Ex Militants who have been given amnesty by the Nigerian Government see politics as a legitimate source of primitive accumulation thus; they lord over everybody in their locality, where possible, they maim to win elections for the parties that sponsor them, just for selfish economic aggrandizement. These heinous activities of the political gladiators, the youth and the Police have continued to fan the embers of electoral violence in Nigeria. The critical question that comes to mind at this juncture is 'what role has the State played in either averting or encouraging the high incidence of electoral violence within the past fifteen years in Nigeria?' Through a critical examination of the theoretical underpinnings of electoral violence in democratic contexts and from empirical analysis of pre, during and post electoral violence in Fourth Republic of Nigeria (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015), this research would provide answers to these questions.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this research, we are adopting the conflict theory as our conceptual analysis in the context of the contemporary capitalist state, where the political class has created weak institutions in order to continue to control the resources of the State. To begin with, we locate our explanation in the theoretical writings of Prussian political

economist and activist, Karl Marx (1818-1883). Conflict theory holds that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than consensus and conformity. That is, those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by suppressing the poor and powerless. Conflict theory has been used to explain a wide range of social phenomena, including wars and revolutions, wealth and poverty, discrimination and domestic violence.

This theory is therefore very germane for our study because it juxtaposes electoral violence and political stability. It reveals that electoral violence in Nigeria is as a result of quest for political offices, which is predicated on primitive accumulation. It is important to note that the failure of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governance, forge national integration and promote what can be called real economic progress, through deliberate and articulated policies, have led to mass poverty and unemployment. This has resulted into communal, ethnic, religious, electoral and class conflicts that have now characterized the nation. These conflicts have great implications for political stability, as most often, State Security apparatus, especially, the men of the Nigeria Police Force were used by the ruling party to suppress and propagate their will. Resisting the above culminates to violence. Poverty and unemployment have therefore served as nursery bed for much violence in Nigeria, especially electoral violence, because unemployed persons are hired for little stipends for political advantage of the rich. The country now has a reservoir of poor people who are determined to sell their conscience to the rich at the altar of making money through inglorious and fraudulent electoral malpractices. Elections and the acquisition of political power provide the key for carnage. Consequently, these poor Nigerians serve as mercenary fighters, kidnappers and electoral thugs to their wealthy masters. What this means theoretically is that poverty and quest for money increase the number of people who are prepared to kill or be killed for a given course at token benefit.

### **3. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF TERMS**

#### **3.1 Election**

Election is the formal process of selecting a person for public or of accepting or rejecting a political position. Roberts and Edwards as cited

in Omotola define election as: "A method for the selection of persons to fill certain offices through choices made by an electorate; those (citizens who are qualified to vote under the rules and procedures of the electoral system" Elections are organized channel of popular expression [6].

#### **3.2 Violence**

The word violence has been viewed from different angles by different scholars from distinctive standpoints. Thus, for the purpose of this discourse, we are looking at violence in terms of both violation of human rights and social injustice. According to Gilula & Daniels as cited in Wikipedia, violence is 'destructive aggression'. This conceptualization of violence implies the use of physical force to injure persons or property; and this is the core of most definitions of violence [7].

#### **3.3 Electoral Violence**

Igbuzor, defines electoral violence as: 'any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes' [8].

#### **3.4 Political Instability**

Political instability is a situation where by a country is going through political turmoil. It may also involve the death of people within that country and in many cases the country deteriorates in terms of its economic progress [9].

### **4. HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA**

The history of elections in Nigeria dates back 1922 with the introduction of Clifford's Constitution. The first recorded electoral violence in post colonial Nigeria occurred in 1964. In the Western Region, violent political conflicts, popularly referred to as "operation wet e", were recorded from 1964 to 1965 following both federal and regional elections as well as rift between Awolowo and Akintola. There were also violent conflicts in parts of Northern Region,

especially between supporters of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and supporters of other parties, mainly the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and Action Group [10]. Each of the Regional Parties in the election openly intimidated its opponents in the campaigns. When it became clear that the neutrality of the Federal Electoral Commission could not be guaranteed, calls were made for the army to supervise the elections. The UPGA resolved to boycott the elections. The elections were finally held under conditions that were not free and fair. The Western Region became the "theater of war" between the NNPP and the NPC and the AG-UPGA. The upheavals led to the First Military coup on January 15, 1966. This coup marked the end of the First Republic.

Subsequent elections that followed were the 1979 and 1983 which ushered in Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the President in 1979 and 1983 respectively and the Legislators of the Second Republic. Again, the elections were marred by irregularities and corruption, this sparked a series of post election violence. Since the centre could no longer hold, the Second Republic was therefore overthrown by the General Muhammadu Buhari led Military Junta. Buhari's government could not savour the political terrain for long because of obnoxious policies and lack of vision for a Transition Programme, thus the Regime was sacked in a Palace Coup led by his Chief of Army Staff, then Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. With Babangida's transition programme on course, a general election was organized in 1993. The 1993 elections were believed to be the most free and fair, ever conducted in Nigeria. Chief M.K.O. Abiola of the Social Democratic Party was assumed to have won the election. The annulment of the election by the Military Junta was greeted with stiff opposition and thus led to political unrest. As part of the post election violence, Chief Abiola declared himself President. This action further exacerbated the tension and increased instability in Nigeria till the demise of Chief MKO Abiola and the then Head of State, General Sani Abacha that sacked the Interim Government headed by Chief Shonekan. General Abdulsalami Abubakar took over the saddle and returned the Nation to the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999 with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the President of the Federal Republic and Commander in chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria. President Obasanjo ruled for eight years. His government organized the 2003 election which was marred by irregularities and

conflict in almost every State of the Federation. He handed over to President Umaru Ya'Adua who openly condemned the election that brought him into power, describing it as flawed. Umaru Ya'Adua died and was replaced by his Vice, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. President Jonathan organized the 2015 General Election which also like the previous election was violence ridden.

## **5. ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA'S 4<sup>th</sup> REPUBLIC, 1999 – 2015**

Nigerians were dissatisfied with the annulment of June 12 Presidential election. Vociferous groups emerged, pressing on the Military to return the Country to democracy. Faced with this pressure, General Babangida formed an Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, The ING was overthrown by General Sani Abacha. With the death of General Abacha on June 8, 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar instituted a Transition Programme with the view of returning the State to civil rule in 1999. Beside other programmes, the Regime set up an Electoral Body known as the Independent National Electoral Commission. The inauguration of this Body crystallized the beginning of the journey to Nigeria's 4<sup>th</sup> Republic. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) set the rules and time - table for the commencement of political activism, thus, Political Parties were registered and only three Parties, namely: Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) scaled through the huddle and were registered [11,12].

The results of the 1999 general elections indicated that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which fielded Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, winning in 21 States across the country was returned elected. The All Peoples Party (APP) came second with 9 states, while the Alliance for Democracy (AD), which held sway in the South-west, had 6 states. As akin to other elections, there were irregularities, but not as pronounced as other experiments.

Another general election was conducted in 2003 by President Obasanjo's Regime, and President Obasanjo was returned again returned to power for the second time in an election that was so badly flawed. That election was described as the "most fraudulent election" in the history of Nigeria [13]. In fact, the election results proved and confirmed that proper National Assembly, Gubernatorial and Presidential elections were not

conducted in accordance with the INEC guidelines and the Electoral Act. Rather, figures were literally manufactured in Government Houses or collation centres as results for the return of President Obasanjo and the PDP to power. The alleged electoral malpractices of the ruling PDP were regarded as the most sophisticated in the electoral history of Nigeria [14]. Further to the massive rigging were pockets of violence in different parts of Nigeria.

A number of people have argued that there were no elections in 2003, but merely the intimidation of voters and the selection of already decided winners by elites and caucuses [12]. Both internal and external observers were unanimous on the unfairness of the competition in the electoral process which was said to have been manipulated by the so-called ruling party, Peoples' Democratic Party. For example, according to the Human Right Watch's report, between April and May 2003, about one hundred people were said to have been killed and many more injured during federal and state elections in Nigeria and that most of the violence was perpetrated by the ruling PDP and its supporters [15]. Also, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of over ninety Civil Society Groups, in its report on the 2003 general elections, passed a vote of no confidence on the elections. Some political parties and their candidates decided to challenge some of the results before the various Election Petition tribunals and have gone ahead to do so while others declared "mass action" to pressure a government without popular mandate to abdicate power [16]. Most of them were however denied justice by a corrupt judicial system.

It would be recalled that the 2007 general elections reeked off all manner of chicanery characterized by the brazen attempt to disenfranchise the electorate and announce fictitious results in areas where no elections took place, not to mention intimidation of the electorate by the police and military in many places, non-delivery of election materials, hijack of ballot boxes, thumb printing and even foot-printing of ballot papers, incarceration and humiliation of independent election observers, bribery of electoral officers in order for them to look elsewhere when atrocious acts of perfidy were being perpetrated by party agents which all resulted in a bogus series of elections which both foreign and local observers described as nothing less than a travesty. Contributing to the above, Marietu opines:

Prior to the elections, the political atmosphere was again very tense. Among other mind-boggling incidents, President Olusegun Obasanjo condescendingly declared that, for him and the PDP, the 2007 election was 'a do or die affair' ..... [17]

Supporting the above, Ezirim and Mbah argue:

The political violence that erupted in all these elections progressively had high ethnic tones as there were ethnic insurgencies during the various elections, such that between June and August 2006, three gubernatorial candidates were assassinated. The run-up to the April 2007 elections was violent, as campaigning in many areas was punctuated with political killings, bombings and armed clashes between supporters of rival political parties. The violence formed part of a broader pattern of violence and abuses that is inherent in Nigeria's still largely unacceptable political system [18].

Without doubt, the 2007 elections was evidence that the cub of election rigging which was born in 1964 had now become a wild rampaging lion, consuming all it saw and leaving a shaking democracy in its wake. The process was characterized by unprecedented electoral malpractices which led to wide condemnation from local and international observers to the extent that upon inauguration, the then President, late Umaru Ya'Adua condemned the flawed election that brought him to power [12], thus, decided to set up a committee known as the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) headed by justice Mohammed Uwais to fashion out a transparent system that would ensure the conduct of credible elections and thereby deepen democracy in Nigeria. President Yar'Adua was ready to deliver his promises of the restoration of the rule of law and guarantee sanity in the electoral system before his death in 2009.

Nigeria's 2011 polls marked the fourth multiparty election in Nigeria. The 2011 general elections were generally acceptable by both local and foreign observers to be partially fair when compared with the 2003 and 2007 general elections which were conducted under the fourth republic. The election however witnessed some violence, the pre, during and post election period. Akwa Ibom State witnessed one of the worst histories of political violence in March 22, 2011. An eye witness report on the matter indicate that many properties which included: 200 brand new

Peugeot 307 cars; 500 brand new tricycles; the Goodluck/Sambo Campaign office which was burnt down by the rampaging mob; Fortune International High School owned by Senator Aloysius Etok which was razed down with school children in session and over 20 Toyota Hiace buses belonging to the PDP and Godswill 2011 Campaign Organization, nine Hilux jeeps belonging to the Government of Akwa Ibom State which were either completely destroyed or vandalized. Consequently, the Presidency set up a Presidential Committee of Inquiry to investigate the remote and immediate causes of the violence and recommend ways of averting future political violence in the State. This was aimed at seeking peaceful means of resolving the conflict.

Further to the above, the release of 2011 Presidential election result by the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) which produced President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP as the winner led to sectarian violence in some Northern parts of Nigeria. Some of the affected State were Bauchi, Yobe, Maiduguri, Kaduna among others. The post electoral violence that accompanied the 2011 general election resulted in the killing of about ten Youth corps members in Bauchi State [19].

## **6. ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY, PROGNOSIS OF 2015 GENERAL ELECTION**

We had earlier noted that electoral violence takes three major dimensions, namely, pre, during and post. Alemika opined, 'Nigerian electoral process and governance system largely rest on the logic and practices of organized criminal enterprises. Organized crime entrepreneurs employ secrecy, cooptation, corruption and violence to promote and defend their interests and organizations. Nigerian political parties and politicians operate in very similar ways. Therefore, it is not surprising that violence, corruption and lack of transparency are embedded in the aims and strategies of Nigerian political parties and politicians' [10]. Events preceding the 2015 general elections are evident that the election may be a reminiscence of 2003. If Social Science actually mirrors the society, then, based on the empirical facts at our disposal, we can succinctly predict the outcome of various political actions, especially given past experiences. The ripple of 2015 general election falls within the realm of our analysis.

Ayodele Fayose, Governor of Ekiti State, South West Nigeria and a leading Member of the Ruling

Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) shamefully boasted in a South West PDP meeting held in Akure Ondo State on 27th December, 2014 that the 2015 election '*will be a do or die affairs*', this is a reminiscent of Chief Obasanjo's statement in 2003, and it evokes a spirit of desperation. Highlight of this is as captured as follows: "propaganda would only waste time and attack is the best form of defense, .... the party in general and South West PDP needed to be valiant to face the Tinubus anywhere they are ... we have control of the Police and the Army and I cannot afford to lose my control on Police and the Army" and without Jonathan being the president, we will lose the control [20].

A foremost pan-Yoruba socio-political group, Afenifere, led by Chief Reuben Fasoranti in a News Conference in Lagos said: 'We have in our hands, a country that appears to be preparing for a war but almost all are pretending that it is all build-up to the next elections. The saber-rattling going on amongst some major party and political actors are not healthy for the democratic project as most of the noise going on is not even about solving any of the major challenges confronting the country but power mongering...[21].

The Niger Delta Militants rising from a meeting in the Government House of Bayelsa State said they are ready to go to war. One of the Militants, Asari Daukubo was quoted as saying "For every Goliath, God created a David. For every Pharaoh, there is a Moses. We are going to war. Everyone of you should go and fortify yourself," [22].

On Tuesday, 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2015, explosion and gunfire rocked by recalcitrant rented youths destabilized an election rally in Rivers State, killing one police officer and injuring four others while a reporter covering the event was stabbed [23]. The violence erupted at a Governorship party rally organized by All Progressives Congress (APC) for their candidate Dakuku Peterside in Okrika, the hometown of President Goodluck Jonathan's wife Patience. In a press conference that same day, Dakuku Peterside accused the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) as masterminding the attack. He further confirmed that over fifty persons were critically lying injured at Casely Harrison Specialist Hospital, Port Harcourt. This attack was beside other attacks on the party offices at Andoni, Omoku, Ogu, Okrika and their billboards across the State. The then Governor of Rivers State, Rotimi Amaechi filling an interview on Channel Television openly accused the wife of Mr. President Her Excellency

Dame Patience Jonathan for the attack at Okrika.

Recently, a former Minister of External Affairs, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, warned of a possible post-election crisis this year and the need to do everything possible to avert or minimize it. He states as follows: 'the certainty of violence after the 2015 elections is higher than it was in 2011. If President Jonathan wins, the North would erupt into violence as it did in 2011. If General Buhari wins, the Niger Delta will erupt into violence. I don't believe that we need rocket science to make this prediction. The violence of 2015 is going to be horrendous and worst than the one of 2011 for the simple reason that the illegal massive importation of weapons into the country has reached such alarming proportions that I really wonder which is better armed, the militias on one hand or the official Armed Forces on the other hand [24].

As part of United States' diplomatic attempt to sustained peace in Nigeria, the Secretary of State, John Kerry visited the Country. His visit was a pointer to the fact that the United States of America was watching all preparations for the election with keen interest. His visit also reminds Nigerians that the election must be keenly contested. During his visit, Kerry reiterated that in the interest of peace and fair play, the election must be conducted and not postponed. He equally met with the two front-line Presidential Candidates, namely, Dr. Jonathan and Alhaji Buhari.

In order to prevent the mayhem and catastrophe that may be expected as post election violence, all the Presidential aspirants signed a peace accord for none violence pool in Abuja. The US Ambassador to Nigeria held similar meetings and signed Memorandum of Understanding for a peaceful pool with frontline Governorship Candidates in some States of the Federation.

Finally, very worrisome was the sudden shift of election dates by the electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Muhammadu Buhari, APC presidential candidate in an interview with journalists on Monday in Abuja during a courtesy call on him by the first elected President of Malawi and Leader of the Commonwealth Election Observers Group, Dr. Bakili Muluzi sounded the warning that further shift in the rescheduled March 28 election will lead to "a civilian and military coup" [25]. Also contributing to the above, a former Governor of

Ekiti State, Fayemi states, "To me, this is more of a civilian coup against democracy because for military to have said that it cannot provide security for INEC to prosecute the election implies that it is hands in gloves with the presidency. This is a travesty and a danger to our democracy [26]. Also disturbing were series of litigations in court; a disqualification of any of the frontline presidential candidate would have led to an unprecedented pre – election violence that was capable of tearing the nation apart.

In all, the journey to 2015 general election was rough, many politicians were assassinated and others kidnapped. Campaign offices and cars of perceived opponents were burnt, while some campaign convoy were stoned including that of President Goodluck Jonathan in Bauchi, Katsina, among others.

## 7. PROSPECTS FOR POLITICAL STABILITY

The problem of political stability, that is, the dilemma of how to secure enduring, legitimate political order in Nigeria has long been the focus of much philosophical discourse. Thomas Hobbes sees political stability as paramount because in its absence, there could be no security for either life or liberty, and thus man's existence could never be anything more than a chaotic, violent and bloody struggle for power.

Nigeria was in danger of becoming what the UN Secretary General has called "a failed State". The UNDP *Human Development Report (1994)* predicting societal disintegration" as cited in a Canadian Security Intelligence Service Commentary No 66 cited Nigeria as a prime possibility, given the wide social and economic disparities between its states, noting they were among the worst in the world. And if Nigeria does crash into anarchy, it would take some of its West African neighboring countries with it—transforming the region into a global crisis zone. Structural constraints should not be neglected in any analysis of Nigeria; the way forward is to develop a special model for conflict resolution that suites Nigeria. Policies should be geared towards strengthening democracy, human rights development, the market economy, infrastructural development, provision of employment, conflict management and prevention of the local level, particularly in the country's hotspot areas, to ensure long lasting calm and to further stabilize the still fragile, three-tier federal system [27].

The pursuit of electoral victory at any cost is still a regular feature of the Nigerian political system. The 'must-win' attitude of political participants, coupled with a winner-takes-all political system in Nigeria, with its adversarial nature, usually engenders divisions and provides incentives for competitors to resort to court. This explains why systematic rigging of elections, bribery of voters, disenfranchisement of group and individuals, miscounting, non-counting of ballots, false tallying of votes, use of under-age, intimidation by opponents and of opponents, and the open employment of uniformed and civilian thugs to create fear and compliance have been the hallmark of elections in Nigeria. These events of the past were manifest in 2015 General Election. There is a limit to which the courts can be trusted to handle the issue of non acceptance of alternation in power, being a politically endemic problem largely due to the mindset of the political participants.

In tandem with the philosophical thoughts of Thomas Hobbes, a peace agreement was initiated for all the Presidential aspirants and their Party Chairmen in the 2015 General Election. Peace accord or agreement is a major aspect of conflict management that involves third party intervention. The third party acts as a mediator to the conflicting parties in attempt to deescalate and transform the conflict.

The violence that followed the 2011 presidential election in the country led to the death so many Nigerian and created tension and apprehension of possible insecurity in 2015 general election. To stem the tide of hostility which already had brewed, on January 14 2015, the Office of the National Security Adviser and the Special Adviser to the president on Inter-Party Affairs through a generous financial grant and support of donor agencies including United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), European Union (EU) and others organized a workshop on the 2015 general elections [28]. The workshop with the theme: "2015 General Elections Sensitization Workshop on Non-Violence" had most of the political parties' chairmen and presidential candidates invited and in attendance. The workshop was an attempt to deescalate the raging conflict that was looming in the political space through reorientation of the political actors- political parties' leadership, candidates and other stakeholders. The 14 presidential candidates and their Chairmen as well as Chief Emeka Anyaoku

signed the below declaration while Mr. Kofi Anna observed the proceedings.

We, the undersigned presidential candidates of the underlisted political parties contesting the general election of 2015, desirous of taking proactive measures to prevent electoral violence before, during and after the elections, anxious about the maintenance of a peaceful environment for the 2015 general election, reaffirming our commitment to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, desirous of promoting the unity and corporate existence of Nigeria as an indivisible entity, determined to avoid any conduct or behaviour that will endanger the political stability and national security of Nigeria, determined to place national interest above personal and partisan concern, reaffirming our commitment to fully abide by all rules and regulations as laid down in the legal framework for elections in Nigeria hereby submit ourselves and our parties to the following:

1. To run issue based campaigns at national states and local government levels. In this, we pledge to refrain from campaigns that will involve religious sentiment, ethnic or tribal profiling, both by ourselves and all agents acting in our name.
2. To refrain from making or causing to make in our names or that of our parties any public statement, pronouncement, declaration or speeches that have the capacity to incite any form of violence before, during and after the elections.
3. To forcefully and publicly speak out against provocative utterances and oppose all act of electoral violence whether perpetuated by our supporters and, or opponents.
4. To commit ourselves and political parties to the monitoring of the adherence of this accord if necessary, by a national peace committee made up of respected statesmen and women, traditional and religious leaders.
5. All the institutions of government including INEC and security agencies must act and be seen to act with impartiality [29].

The initiators of the accord created a platform for the implementation, monitoring and mediation where in breach. Consequently, the National Peace Committee (NPC) with General Abdusalami Abubakar as Chairman and other eminent Nigerians as Members was created.

Despite this accord, there were still conflicts in different parts of the Country.

President Jonathan had called Muhammadu Buhari to congratulate him on his victory at exactly 5:15 p.m. local time on Monday, March 30. The phone call took place almost ten hours before the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officially declared Buhari the winner with a total of 15,424,921 votes against 12,853,162 for Jonathan [30]. This historic call, couple with the conceding of victory speech by President Jonathan after the announcement of election results, to a large extent stemmed the violence that would have arisen. These actions deepened political stability

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to salvage the nation from collapsing into precipice and engender political stability, we recommend the following:

- ❖ Full autonomy for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This autonomy would engender administrative efficiency and professionalism of the Body. Also, the appointment of INEC Chairman should reside in the people and not Mr. President. The people in this circumstance are the Legislature. The Constitution should be restructured to make the office elective through an electoral college that would be composed of Members of the National Assembly, State Houses of Assembly and all serving Judges of the Supreme and Appeal Courts in Nigeria.
- ❖ Respect for rule of law.
- ❖ The establishment of Election Offences Commission as suggested by the Justice Uwais Committee to try those who flout the Electoral Law by committing offences such as rigging, falsification of documents and election results, thuggery, etc be implemented.
- ❖ Implementation of the report of the National Constitutional Conference, 2014.
- ❖ Setting up of alternative dispute resolution mechanism.
- ❖ Job creation for the army of unemployed in the State.
- ❖ Mass reorientation/education of the citizens by the National Orientation Agency, Political Parties, Civil Society Organizations and the Mass Media on the

dangers of electoral violence and possible punishments for offenders.

- ❖ Making political offices as part - time and less attractive.
- ❖ Institutional strengthening of all agencies related to the elections, especially, the Nigerian Police Force to be discipline, combat ready, equipped and corruption free.
- ❖ Strengthening of the Judiciary to be fully independent, transparent and incorruptible. To this end, we recommend that National Judicial Commission (NJC) should be restructured and better equipped to
- ❖ Exercise punitive measures against corrupt Judicial Officers that pervade justice at the Electoral Tribunals, Appeal and Supreme Courts.
- ❖ Enhanced electoral monitoring by election monitoring groups, are essential for the institutionalization of effective electoral administration for democratic consolidation.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

Electoral violence generally refers to violence that is directly or indirectly connected to protest against an election. Nigeria's post independence history is replete with accounts of incidents of electoral violence. In the contemporary world, elections have become the most accepted means of changing the government. Although history has shown that, it is usually difficult to hold elections that are completely free and fair. Consequently, we argued that elections, which in other climes are processes that bring about peaceful change of government, have not been conducted in Nigeria according to international best practices governing their conduct. We analyzed the historical trajectory of elections in Nigeria, electoral violence in Nigeria's 4<sup>th</sup> republic, 1999 – 2015, electoral violence and political instability, prognosis of 2015 general election and prospects for political stability. Finally, we made far reaching recommendation which amongst others includes the establishment of Election Offences Tribunals to try those who flout the Electoral Law by committing offences such as rigging, falsification of documents and election results, thuggery, etc. It is our hope that our suggestions if adhered to would set the stage for the conduct of violence-free elections which would engender political stability and place Nigeria in the echelon of powerful democracies in the world.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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