

Election, Electoral Violence and Political Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Electoral violence has dominated Nigeria's pre and post-1999 democratic trajectory. In view of this, some scholarly works are replete with literature on electoral violence and elections, but little attention has been given to electoral violence and political development in Nigeria. This article analysed how electoral violence has shaped political development and also examined its implications on Nigeria's political development. A qualitative research design was utilised while the Frustration-Aggression theory guided its theoretical underpinning. The article drew its information from secondary data such as textbooks, scholarly journals, internet resources and newspapers. The data culled from these sources were subjected to content analysis. The paper revealed that electoral violence shaped political development through incessant proliferation of electoral acts and reforms. The paper also revealed, in a theoretical insight, that politics is not seen as a 'public good' but is associated with warfare, economic gains, inculcation of a military ethos, which makes the citizens exhibit a culture of electoral violence. These have implications of threatening political stability and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The paper, however, concluded that the incessant electoral violence associated with Nigeria's politics remains unresolved and indeed, a clear reflection of the retrogressive nature of political development in Nigeria. It was recommended that the government and citizens promote and internalise a culture of good governance to deter electoral violence in Nigeria.

Keywords: Election, electoral reforms, electoral violence, political development.

Introduction

One of the features associated with elections in the emerging democratic states is the issue of electoral violence. This issue has affected not only the electoral process but also the political development of these states. Electoral violence in these states seems to have affected their citizens' participation in governance. This is because democracy entails a lot more than the conduct of elections. Therefore, the credibility of elections depends on being violence-free and also acceptable to all election contestants and other relevant stakeholders in a country.

The credibility of elections is supported by Chukwu (2007), who opines that for elections to be democratic and legitimate, they must be competitive, periodic, inclusive, free and fair. In spite of this, the conduct of elections in emerging and troubled democracies has always been plagued by crisis, which causes incessant electoral violence that claims heavy human and material casualties as well as social dislocation (Ashindorbe, 2018). Awopeju et al. (2024) examined the conduct of elections in an emerging democracy like Nigeria. They think that the conduct of elections always brings apprehension because democracy is new and alien to these political systems. Therefore, the nature of democracy in these climes exacerbates electoral violence.

In Nigeria, for instance, virtually all elections conducted were marred by violence and rigging (Awopeju, 2011). As a result, the path to democratic consolidation is unclear and difficult to establish. To corroborate this, Nnadozie (2007), Udumaga & Okeu (2024) believe that elections have acquired a disconcerting, unique nature and have become stages for intense hostility and

display of extreme brutality by the country's political elite in their unrestrained pursuit to maintain or gain control of government.

Due to the exacerbation of electoral violence, unremitting occurrences, as well as its devastating effects in the troubled democracies, electoral violence has become a significant focus in the country's electoral process and has attracted the attention of numerous scholars. Studies such as Adetula (2011), Ebere & Chloe (2010), Odeh & Atime (2019), Kukah (2010), Yecho (2013), Ameh-Ogigo (2025), among others, have investigated the electoral violence in relations to survey of trends and patterns in elections, cycle of electoral violence, impact of electoral violence on nation building, electoral violence, its threats to democracy, causes, effects of political violence and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. However, little attention has been given to electoral violence and political development in Nigeria. The paper intends to fill this gap in the literature.

The questions that readily come to mind are: How has the issue of electoral violence shaped political development in Nigeria? What theoretical insight explains the issues surrounding the exacerbation of electoral violence and its implications on political development in Nigeria? In order to address these questions, secondary sources of data such as textbooks, journals, internet resources, newspapers, and government publications were used, while the analysis was content analysed. The paper is divided into six parts. The first part presents the introduction of the paper; the second part examines the conceptual clarification; part three presents the theoretical framework; part four provides a historical view of electoral violence in Nigeria. Part five presents a critical analysis of the issues surrounding electoral violence and political development in Nigeria, while part six encapsulates the conclusion and makes policy recommendations for the study. The paper, therefore, examines the issue of electoral violence vis-à-vis political development in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Electoral Violence

According to Albert (2007), electoral violence refers to "all forms of organised acts, physical, psychological and structural that are aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a politician, stakeholders before, during and after an election to determine, delay, or otherwise, influencing an electoral process. Similarly, Fisher (2012) defines electoral violence as "any random or organised act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay or to otherwise influence an electoral process. Birch & Muchlinski (2018) opine that electoral violence is the coercive force, directed towards electoral actors and/or objects that concur in the context of electoral competition. According to Ochoche (1997), there are many stages in the conduct of an election, and each of the stages can be abused, manipulated, violated, corrupted and distorted. For this work, Muchlinski's definition is the operational definition.

Political Development

This means the process of change, growth, and transformation in the country's political system, institutions and culture. Political development can be seen as institutional development, democratic consolidation, good governance, citizen participation and human rights. In Ake's view, political development means an increase of one or more of the following attributes: structural differentiation, cultural secularisation, equality, and capacity (Ake, 1982). Political development occurs when the political system is compelled to respond to certain types of problems or crises (Awopeju, 2016). In the context of this work, political development is seen as the ability of the political system to respond to certain challenges as well as institutionalizing development, consolidate democracy, promote good governance and ensure citizens' participation.

Theoretical Framework

The study is premised on the Frustration-Aggression theory. The theory was propounded by Dollard et al. (1939) and modified by other scholars, including Yates in 1962. Frustration-Aggression theory postulates that violent behaviour is a consequence of the inability to fulfil needs (Dollard et al, 1939). The theorist is influenced by psychological theory, which enthuses that motivation, behaviour could change to be bad. The nexus of frustration-aggression is the difference between what the people feel they want or deserve, to what they actually get – the “want-get-ration” (Feierabards, 1996) and the difference between “expected need satisfaction” and actual “satisfaction” (Davies, 1962). That once the expectation does not meet attainment, the tendency is for people to confront those they hold responsible for frustrating their ambitions. It is for this reason that Ted Robert Gur’s (1970) relative deprivation thesis becomes relevant. In his words, “the greater dependency, however marginal, between what is sought and what seems attainable, the greater will be the chances that anger, and violence will result” (p. 24). The implication of this, according to Ityonzughul & Kertyo (2022: 326), is that “frustration is no longer seen as the blockage of present goal-directed activity, but as anticipated frustration engendered by discrepancies between what is realistically attainable, given the social context and what is sought.”

The central theme of the theory is that aggression does not just occur as a natural reaction or instinct, as some realists or biological theorists would have us believe, but is much more the outcome of frustration. This is in a situation where the legitimate desire of an individual is denied either directly or by the indirect consequence of the way society is structured. The feeling of disappointment may lead such a person to express his anger through violence that will be directed at those he holds responsible or people who are directly or indirectly related to them.

This theory is relevant to this study because it explains that electoral violence in Nigeria stems from the dissatisfaction of the people with the conduct of elections and the electoral process by relevant stakeholders (parties, electoral umpire, and politicians) during the electioneering period. In other words, when the conduct of elections is not free and fair as expected, then aggression is inevitable. Because of this, parties involved in elections always introduce electoral violence into the electoral game and would like to win elections.

History of Electoral Violence in Nigeria Before 1999

Elections in Nigeria have a history traced to the 1922 Clifford Constitution, which introduced the elective principle. However, the history of elections is also associated with electoral violence. Electoral violence has a long history in Nigeria. It has a link with colonial rule because colonial rule laid its foundation in Nigerian politics. It can be traced to the 1954 Macpherson Constitution, which confirmed the regionalism introduced by the Richards Constitution “as the basis of running Nigeria’s federal system” (Nwolise, 2007: 162).

The equation of key ethnic boundaries with regional boundaries (North for Hausa-Fulani, West for Yoruba, and East for Igbo) set the stage for violent electoral battles among the three major ethnic groups that oppressed the minority groups politically and economically. However, the emergence of this political development marked the genesis of electoral violence in Nigeria because it brought about tribal support for ethno-tribal candidates. This has affected the relationship of the major ethnic groups in the country. This is confirmed by Gani (2015: 16) that “the post-colonial Nigerian state inherited absolutely, the several contradictory policies that affected not only the nature of governance but political relationship between and among the different ethnic groups in the country.” Nigeria set the stage and heightened the tempo of electoral violence through the 1952 political manoeuvres in the Western Regional House of Assembly that denied Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo representation.

Following this, Azikiwe abandoned the search for the political fortune of the West and went back to his Eastern base of origin, where he displaced Chief Eyo Ita, a minority man, to become the premier in the East. The act displayed by Azikiwe was not acceptable to the Eastern minorities, just as the Igbo did not take kindly to their candidate being ousted in the West. Consequently, it was in the 1959 elections that Nigeria's experience regarding electoral violence was exacerbated because there were physical and structural forms of violence, which took the forms of thuggery and election rigging (Nwolise, 2007). Despite these forms of violence, the Governor General, Sir James Robertson, handed power to the British long-favoured region, the North and its candidate, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, of the Northern People's Congress (NPC).

With the British handing over power to the candidate of its ally, there was little protest from the nationalists and other key political parties because they wanted the British government to end, and the country should gain independence. The main electoral violence emerged in Nigeria during the 1964 federal elections and reached "a crescendo in 1965-1966 during the western regional elections" (Nwolise, 2007: 162). The elections were characterised by maiming of opponents, hiring of thugs, kidnappings, murdering of opponents, disrupting of campaign rallies, burning of houses, hiring of thugs to beat up opponents, snatching of ballot boxes, disrupting of the votes in opponents' strongholds, etc. (Nwolise, 2007). The violence was premised on the ethno-regional nature of the political parties that contested elections and the fear of ethnic dominance that accompanied Nigeria's independence in 1960 (Akinduro, 1965). The violence led to the death of over 153 people and the destruction of five thousand houses (Ityonzughul and Kertyo, 2022; Afenifa, 2016). The electoral violence of the 1964-1965 elections of the Western region culminated in a full-blown national crisis that led to the first military coup and civil war in Nigeria.

With the emergence and interruption of the military regime on January 15, 1966, electoral processes were suspended for over 13 years. With the lifting of the ban on politics by the Obasanjo military administration, Nigeria had another round of elections that ushered the country into the Second Republic on 1st of October, 1979. The elections that ushered in the Second Republic were not free from electoral violence. Ugboh (2004) corroborated this when he asserted that:

The general elections conducted under Obasanjo's era that ushered in the second republic were not devoid of malpractices. Various forms of electoral malpractices were also recorded. The manipulations range from victimisation, use of thugs, manipulations of results by the polling agents, to bribing electoral officers as well as policemen.

This is further corroborated by Nwolise (2007), that the election was characterised by violence at the pre-election, during election and the post-election stages. In almost all the states, the results were contested and disputed. The major contending issue was that of 2/3 of 19 states, which was resolved in favour of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) presidential candidate, by the Supreme Court (Alfa & Otaida, 2012: 15).

However, the 1983 general elections were not free and fair, but were marred by electoral violence. This was triggered because the election was rigged in favour of the party in power, the NPN. As a result, electoral violence broke out in states such as Oyo, Ondo and Bendel that were strongholds of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). A lot of lives were lost and large-scale of properties were destroyed as a result of electoral violence. The consequence was the overthrow of the Shagari-led administration by a coup carried out by Major General

Muhammadu Buhari on 31st December 1983. Meanwhile, the overthrow of the Shagari-led civilian administration marked the end of the Second Republic.

Before the abortive Third Republic, the military regimes were in power. The Buhari military regime was ousted from office by a counter coup d'état staged by General Ibrahim Babangida on August 27th, 1985. When Babangida assumed office as the military head of state, he promised a transition from military regime to civilian regime in 1989 but later postponed the date due to the revision in the transition timetable (Oyediran, 1997). It was as a result of revising the timetable and postponing the transition date that Nigerians described his regime as "Babangidiocracy." The abortive Third Republic witnessed post-election violence due to the annulment of the June 12 presidential election that was described as the freest and fairest of all the elections conducted in the country. Afenifa (2016) corroborated the existence of violence when he thinks that violence not only threatens Nigeria's internal security but also has severe implications on the country's external relations. The electoral violence that has permeated Nigeria in the conduct of elections has made it associated with the challenges of free and fair elections, thus making her have incessant change of governments and also making stability of the democratic system or democratic consolidation a problem in the past. From 1960 to 1999, Nigeria had three reversals of democratic government.

An Analysis of Election, Electoral Violence and Political Development in Nigeria
Following the conduct of elections, Nigeria returned to democratic rule on May 29, 1999. The return to a democratic regime was a welcome idea and a political development because of the experience and long period of military rule. It was a significant political development because of the cancellation of the June 12 election and the intent of the military regime under the leadership of General Abdulsalam Abubakar to respond to the crisis by returning Nigeria to civilian administration.

The 1999 general elections, like other elections conducted before it, were not credible and were marred with electoral violence (Awopeju, 2011; Ityonzughul & Kertyo, 2022). The conduct of elections was marred by a few cases of electoral violence in states like Oyo, Ogun and Osun, and the death toll was uncertain (Ityonzughul & Kertyo, 2022). The 2003 general elections were heavily rigged and violently conducted (Adetula, 2007; Ebere & Chloe, 2010). There were cases of inflation of figures, intimidation of voters, underage voting, ballot box snatching, etc. (Fagunwa, 2022). These acts exacerbated electoral violence in the country, most especially in the North and the South East. To affirm this, Human Rights Watch (2004) posits that:

In the South, the 2003 post-election violence that broke out took on different dimensions. One of which was the inter-communal conflicts that dominated the affairs of several groups in Plateau, Benue and other places in the Niger-Delta region. In spite of the over 100 death cases recorded in the month of April 2003 alone, the indifference of the Nigerian state to electoral violence reflected in 2004 when several persons were killed in most local government elections.

The above quotation indicates that despite the occurrence of electoral violence in some states in Nigeria, the government took the issue with indifference and a lackadaisical manner, without considering the death toll. The attitude hampered political development and affected the election in 2007. However, before the conduct of the 2007 general elections, there was an apprehension that the conduct of elections might lead to anarchy due to the statement made by the then president, Olusegun Obasanjo, that "elections will be a do-or-die affair" (Obiyan & Olotola, 2013). Therefore, it was not a surprise that the elections were not credible, especially

the presidential poll, which was heightened by political frustration, propelled vibrant opposition, increased the ferocity of political campaigns, marred by violence, thuggery and killings (Obiyan & Olutola, 2013). All the identified characteristics made the elections fundamentally flawed, and virtually every segment of society seemed to have jointly condemned the spate of killings and violence associated with the conduct of elections. The local and foreign election observers further discredited the elections and tagged it to be the worst of all the elections conducted in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (The Guardian, April 30, 2007; Awopeju, 2011). The former Senate President, Senator Ken Nnamani, while comparing it with the erstwhile elections conducted in the Fourth Republic, posited that:

The 1999 election was better than that of 2003, and that of 2003 better than this 2007, and that does not show growth. It does not indicate that our democracy is being deepened, not to talk of thriving...Nigeria's democracy is a hybrid democracy...I think most of that fraud is a result of manipulated primaries, because when primaries are flawed or manipulated, it manifests in general elections (Nnamani 2007).

Based on the above assertion, it is necessary to know that the conduct of an election in any polity is the major test of the stability and legitimacy of the political system and that if the election is conducted in an orderly manner, it indicates political maturity. However, the above assertion implies that Nigeria's political system is yet to mature or develop. It was in this view that the former President, Umaru Yar'Adua, in his inauguration, publicly admitted the flaws in the election that brought him to power. To address the problem of electoral violence and other electoral malfeasance associated with the 2007 elections, he inaugurated a 22-member electoral reforms committee headed by Justice Muhammed Uwais in August 2007, with a number of terms of reference. Following their deliberations, the committee made several recommendations for improving and deepening the country's democracy. Chief among the recommendations included:

- (i) the removal of powers of the president to appoint the chairman and members of INEC.
- (ii) stipulating the time frame for the conclusion of the election petition before swearing-in of declared winners; and.
- (iii) the integration of the State Independent Electoral Commission into the structures of INEC (Aiyede, 2015)

The recommendations were considered by the Federal Executive Council and the National Council of States. The consideration of the two decision-making bodies led to a rejection of some of the recommendations. The action of these bodies made people believe that the regime lacked integrity to embrace credible elections. The rejection of the recommendations of the committee by the federal government represented a huge setback to the political development. In his view, Egwu (2013) posits that rejecting critical recommendations demonstrates a lack of practical commitment to electoral integrity and representative democracy. The electoral reforms suffered a greater setback with the death of President Umaru Yar'Adua on 5th of May 2010. After the death of President Yar'Adua, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, the Vice-President, became the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and sustained the reform efforts of his boss.

Following the sustenance of these reforms, INEC was reconstituted and was placed on the first line charge that granted the Commission relative financial autonomy (Jega, 2015) and the reform efforts had a significant impact on the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Despite the significant impact, the 2011 general elections followed the patterns of previous elections in the Fourth Republic. The 2011 elections were characterised by electoral violence. Although the European Union (EU) accorded credibility to the elections, electoral violence broke out in the northern part of the country in states like Gombe, Kaduna and Bauchi. The election claimed not fewer than 800 lives (Campbell, 2019), which happened to be the highest death toll in the

history of Nigeria's elections. The death toll debunked the claim of the EU that the conduct of that election was fair and fair.

During the 2015 elections, a series of election-related violence was extensively recorded even though the conduct of that election was a watershed in Nigeria's electoral process and the 2011 elections. There was marked improvement in the voting and counting of ballots, which enhanced the transparency and legitimacy of the polls. The Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) recorded the death of 106 persons due to the 2015 electoral violence. The profundity of the 2019 and 2023 electoral violence is yet another indication of the ineptness of Nigeria's electoral system vis-à-vis her political structure. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room estimated 626 as the death toll in the different stages of the elections (Scanning, 2019). Also, the 2023 elections exacerbated electoral violence. An estimated number of 161 people were affected by electoral violence during the 2023 general elections, and election day fatalities were recorded in Rivers, Benue, Delta, Osun, Katsina, Cross Rivers, Nasarawa, Ebonyi, Sokoto, Lagos, Taraba, Kogi, Ondo, Gombe and Abia states (PIND, 2023).

Table 1 shows the death toll and the affected states in the general elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023.

Table 1: Analysis of Death Toll in General Elections in Nigeria (1999-2023)

S/N	Election Type	Death Toll	States Affected
1	1999 General Election	Not Certain	Violence was recorded in states like Ondo, Osun and Ogun
2	2003 General Election	100	Violence was recorded in states across six geo-political zones of the country.
3	2007 General Election	300	Violence recorded across the six geo-political zones of the country
4	2011 General Election	800	Post-electoral violence in some northern states of Bauchi, Gombe, Kaduna was recorded resulting to the death and destruction of properties worth millions of Naira
5	2015 General Election	106	Violence was recorded across states in the six geo-political zones of the country. the South-South was however the main theatre of violence
6	2019 General Election	629	Violence was recorded in states like Benue, Kano, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Delta and Kogi. Besides, the death, properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed.
7	2023 General Election	161	Violence was recorded in states like Rivers, Benue, Delta, Osun, Katsina, Cross Rivers, Nasarawa, Ebonyi, Sokoto, Lagos, Taraba, Kogi, Ondo, Gombe and Abia states

Source: John Campbell (2019) and updated by the Author (2025).

The above historical antecedent shows that electoral violence has eaten deep into the political life of Nigeria. It has dominated and marred Nigeria's post-1999 democratic trajectory. Saliu (2025) is of the opinion that parameters of assessing political development include:

(i) free and fair elections,

- (ii) higher likelihood of power alternation among political parties,
- (iii) robust civil society engagement,
- (iv) high voter turnout in elections,
- (v) adherence to the rule of law, and
- (vi) the absence of major disputes and violence after elections.

Examining the parameters of free and fair elections, which include robust civil society engagement, high voter turnout and absence of major disputes and violence after elections, it can be deduced that Nigeria's present political system is yet to develop. For instance, the phenomenon of electoral violence associated with the absence of free and fair elections has led to low participation of citizens in the electoral process. Table 2 reveals the trends of electoral participation from 1999 to 2023.

Table 2: Analysis of Citizens' participation and its trends from 1999-2023

S/ N	Election Type	Estimated Population	Total No. of Registered Voters	Total No. of Actual Voters	Voter Turnout Rate (%)
1	1999 General Election	123,000,000	57,938,945	30,280,052	52.26%
2	2003 General Election	137,202,644	60,823,022	42,018,735	69.08%
3	2007 General Election	148,294,028	61,567,036	35,397,517	57.49%
4	2011 General Election	165,463,745	73,528,040	39,469,484	53.68%
5	2015 General Election	190,671,878	67,422,005	29,432,083	43.65%
6	2019 General Election	200,960,000	82,344,107	28,614,190	34.75%
7	2023 General Election	227,882,945	93,469,008	23,377,466	25.01%
	Total	1,193,475,240	497,092,163	228,589,527	

Source: Compiled by the Author (2025)

Table 2 indicates that in the Fourth Republic, the highest percentage of voter turnout was recorded in the 2003 general elections, with a percentage of 69.08% and the least voter turnout was in the 2023 general elections, with a percentage of 25.1%. The analysis from the table shows that since the conduct of elections in 2003, there has been a downward trend in voter turnout. In 2003, there was a 69.08% voter turnout, and the next general elections indicated a progressive decline, with a voter turnout of 57.49%. The subsequent elections indicated further downward trends of 53.68%, 43.65%, 34.65% and 25.01% in the general elections of 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023, respectively. These trends indicate that a minority of voters have been electing heads of government. The downward trend further indicates Nigeria's political immaturity and, therefore, its failure to attain the level of political development. One of the causes of this is the electoral violence, which is associated with Nigeria's electoral system.

The electoral violence, however, shapes political development through incessant proliferation of electoral acts and reforms in Nigeria's political life. In the era of the Fourth Republic, electoral reforms were initiated in 2006, 2010, 2015 (Amended) and 2022 with a view to improving the electoral process and curbing electoral violence. In other words, electoral violence always pushes for reforms and acts that cause change in the electoral system in Nigeria. Despite these reforms, electoral malfeasance associated with electoral violence is still unresolved in Nigeria's electoral process. This is because incessant electoral reform is a means but not a means to an end. Given this, the paper examines theoretical insight which explains the reason why electoral violence is prevalent and also remains a part of Nigeria's electoral culture. The reasons are discussed below:

First, politics is not seen as a "public good" in Nigeria. The "public good" is synonymous with the "general will" that is supposed to prioritise the overall well-being of

citizens in the Nigerian state. The “public good” is the priority of the political class. This is substantiated by Azaigba & Banke (2014) when they posit that the political class, which constitutes only about 5%, enjoy 90% of the total wealth of the country, while the remaining 95% share just 5% of the wealth which their collective labour has created in the first instance. So, the political elites initiate violence in an election or elections to maintain their level of political relevance, thus making the conduct of elections a cycle of fierce violence and manipulation.

Second, politics is associated with warfare. It is in this regard that politicians are desperate to win elections (Awopeju, 2025), thus introducing the zero-sum approach into the electoral game. In other words, politics is the continuation of the electoral game by other means. The politicians see the game of politics beyond the ballot box and paper and will like to win the election through their desperate antics as a result of the fact that there may not be compensation for their electioneering finances.

Third, electoral politics is seen as economic gain cum the other gains that accompany the political office(s). The political class sees politics as their sustenance for wealth. The control of wealth of the Nigerian state is substantiated by the works of Ake (1990), Ugoh (2004) and Dudley (1961). They confirmed the “attraction of politics” and “investment in politics” mentality, which governs parties as well as elections, formed an economic strand of electoral violence in Nigeria. This is because politics is seen as an investment; politicians and other stakeholders introduce electoral violence into the electoral game in Nigeria. According to Dudley (1961), the shortest cut to affluence and influence is through politics. What this implies is the conviction of politicians is that politics is an avenue for acquiring money. Because of this, they introduce prebendal politics in which political office is contested primarily for self-aggrandisement, associates and cronies, family members, etc., tend to become a pre-occupation of most of the politicians. The influence of godfathers through their political patronage has heightened electoral violence. In Nigeria, “political patronage is based on one’s ability to be sycophant to attract the favour of a patron who acts as a godfather” (Azaigba and Banke, 2014: 58). In other words, godfathers and their antics radiate from the deliberate manipulation of the electoral and political process to facilitate the enthronement of persons in positions of political advantage for exclusive benefits (Awopeju et al., 2022). The fact is that the prevalence of godfatherism threatens political stability, thereby results in political violence in Nigeria.

Fourth, the culture of military rule is another factor that exacerbates electoral violence in recent times. One of the effects of long and incessant military rule is the inculcation of military ethos in the average Nigerian citizen. In other words, the citizens have been militarised due to a military regime. Adewale (2010) thinks that the culture of violence and access to power through the barrel of the gun is traceable to military rule. As a result of the fact that soldiers used guns to get to power, it would seem natural that their counterparts, civilians, would be tempted to use elections as a means or weapon of violence in the Nigerian state.

Fifth, members of the political class have always invoked a tense atmosphere through their connection and influence on the Nigerian state. This contributes to the culture of impunity by the political class that exacerbates electoral violence by breeding thugs and proliferation of small arms and public distribution of sophisticated arms and ammunition to thugs, invoking hate and inflammatory speeches sponsored by members of the political class. These insights have implications for political development because they threaten political stability and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This finding agrees with the frustration-aggression theory, which postulates that violent behaviour is a consequence of the inability to fulfil needs in society. In other words, when the conduct of elections is not free and fair as expected, aggression seems inevitable, which may exacerbate electoral violence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper examined the phenomena of elections, electoral violence and political development. It analysed how electoral violence shapes political development and the implications of this on political stability and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The paper has established the fact that electoral violence is a culture associated with the Nigerian electoral game. It concludes that endemic electoral violence is indeed a clear reflection of the retrogressive nature of political development in Nigeria. In spite of the several reforms initiated and implemented, electoral violence remains unresolved in Nigeria's electoral process because reforms are means but not ends. However, there are some strategies that the government needs to take in curbing electoral violence, as well as ensuring that the political system matures or develops. They are as follows:

First, there is a need to strengthen electoral laws to deter electoral violence in Nigeria. The previous and existing legal frameworks to curb electoral violence are weak. The engagement of members of the political class in electoral violence should be exposed by the citizens and should be accompanied by strict penalties. The political class gets away with the malfeasance because they are connected and powerful. The legal framework should be able to deter and curb the activities of godfathers and other members of the political class.

Second, besides the strengthening of electoral laws, law enforcement agencies and civil societies should collaborate and be well-equipped to curb electoral violence. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) should be well funded so that they can perform their traditional role of maintaining law, peace and order in the Nigerian state.

Third, elective positions should not attract juicy pay. A lot of politicians intend to win elections by all means to enjoy the benefits attached to some of these positions. If they make these offices less financially attractive, those who are ready to serve and have the interest of people at heart will vie for political offices.

Fourth, the culture of good governance or democratic culture should be promoted. The culture of good governance, which includes participation, accountability, transparency, rule of law, and even education, should be inculcated in the citizens. Besides, a lack of democratic culture is evident in all electoral processes. This ranges from internal party wrangling to campaign rallies, to political debates, as well as the interaction between the politicians and the public. The democratic institutions should ensure that democratic culture is promoted, and their values are internalised by the citizens of Nigeria.

Fifth, Nigerian citizens should be educated on electoral malfeasance (electoral violence). This can be achieved by a rigorous campaign against it so that citizens will be familiar with the evil of electoral violence. This can be done by various media sources such as television, radio, newspapers and even the internet with a view to exposing the evil of electoral violence.

Sixth, the citizens, especially the youths, should resist electoral violence. This can be achieved by cooperating and ensuring that members of the political class are not using them as thugs to destroy the electoral process of the country.

Seventh, the government should employ the youth. As they say, the idle hand is the devil's workshop; some of the youths that the political elites use are not educated; if they are educated, they are jobless. The Nigerian government should ensure that those who are not educated are encouraged to embark on one apprentice or the other, and those who are unemployed should be offered job opportunities so that they will be busy.

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