



Election Violence in Nigeria: The Experience of 2003 to 2015 General Elections

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Abstract:

The problem of election violence in Nigeria is not new and has always engaged the attention of scholars but while some conclude that the problem is symptomatic of ethnicity or tribalism, others argue that the problem is caused by religious differences. However, it is the contention of this paper that the wide spread of violence across the country, during the 2003 to 2015 general elections, makes it plausible to assert that election violence is not and cannot be caused by ethnicity, tribalism or religion in Nigeria. The analyses in this paper are on the basis of the six geopolitical zones of the country, the North Central, the North East, the North West, the South East, the South South and the South West. The violence that occurred in each zone, among the same ethnic group, tribe, religion, cannot possibly be caused by ethnic hostility, tribalism or religious intolerance. Rather, the paper argues that intra and inter party crisis, occasioned by the crisis of in-cohesive dominant class more than any other problem creates bitter divisions among the people, who are followers of the belligerent factions of the dominant class, which is why a losing group does not accept none favourable election results and will take to violence.

Keywords: Nigeria, Election Violence, General Elections, Democracy, Elections

Introduction

The problem of election violence in Nigeria is not new. It started soon after independence and had ended the first and second republics, in 1966 and 1983 while it has also resulted in serious violence and bloodshed in 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. It has again occurred at different times and in varying degrees, although less severe, during the periods of military regimes when military governments conducted general elections; in 1979, 1990, 1993 and 1999. The most significant crisis under the military was the 1993 annulled election results. One reason why elections degenerate to violence in Nigeria is because there is so much premium on political power that every political party aims at having, making election results to be highly contentious. Political crises and election violence in Nigeria have always engaged the attention of scholars but while some conclude that the problems are symptomatic of ethnicity or tribalism, others argue that the problems are caused by religious differences. The analyses in this paper are on the basis of the six geopolitical zones of the country, the North Central, the North East, the North West, the South East, the South South and the South West. In other words, election violence, during the general elections from 2003-2015 were examined in each of the six zones.

This is an attempt to show that election violence that occurred within the same geopolitical zone, in each state and among the same ethnic group and even the same tribe cannot possibly be caused by ethnic hostility, tribalism or religious intolerance.

The period under review of election violence in Nigeria, during the current Fourth Republic was limited to the 2003 to 2015 general elections because first, the 1999 general elections were conducted by the Military Government which has the tendency to militarize the atmosphere during election time to intimidate the citizens, thereby preventing the people from expressing themselves, including violence expression over election outcomes. Second, the period was limited to the general elections that were conducted by civilian governments of the same political party, in this instance, The People Democratic Party (PDP), over a period of twelve (12) consecutive years. Third, the period, being over twelve years of continuous political competition, under the liberal democracy, the people were expected to have been gradually more tolerant of opposition and therefore there ought to be a noticeable decline in their penchant for violence over election outcomes. In other words, violence ought to be reducing at each subsequent election from 2003 to 2015.

Democracy and Election: A Brief Conceptual Note.

Democracy.

Although democracy has a long history and tradition, its meanings and essences keep changing from time to time. The support for democracy is today global; spreading from continent to continent that the tendency is for all governments, the world over, to call themselves democratic (Levine, 1982). And that is because the defense of democracy is so widespread that it appears in nearly all forms of political spectrum. The word democracy has acquired strong emotive overtones that in spite of the different principles and characteristics of all known political systems, almost all are described as democratic, making the concept of democracy to be used in a variety of ways and contexts. (Barry, 1995). Consequently, democracy has become the most popular form of political system in the modern world and perhaps no single word with more meaning in comparative politics than democracy itself. (Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones, 2006). It is against that background that Bernard Crick says that democracy is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world public affairs (Crick, 1962). As democracy continues to spread, it has become more varied in its operations and has expanded beyond its core meaning in classical times and its basic meaning in early Western Europe (Hague and Harrop, 2001).

Today, democracy is subject to universal acclaim, even though it is conceptually opaque but for the first time in human history, man is living in an age that is dominated by democracy, a common political system and ideology and therefore each modern state struggles to be democratic in order to be recognised as a legitimate political system. (Eagles and Johnson, 1999). Thus, legitimacy and accountability as democratic creeds are seen as elements of modern polity which makes election as a viable means or method of responding to the demands of politics. Democracy is now a method or a way by which human collectivities can manage conflicts and also able to make rational decisions. (Held, 1990).

However, democracy has assumed various callings across many political spectrums. We now have the classical, liberal, Marxists, quantitative, qualitative, representative, direct, indirect, political, economic, social, elitist, pluralist types of democracies.

Consequently, it shall surface here to briefly discuss two broad perspectives of the idea of democracy, the two that are more or less the most comprehensive perspectives under which all the available perspectives can be grouped. The two broad perspectives are the liberal and Marxist/radical perspectives.

In the liberal tradition, democracy is defined by phrasing it, variously, as a system of government in which citizens can participate in decision-making in the political, economic and social processes of a country. (Held, 1990). It can also mean rule by the people, a political system in which government is based on a mandate from the people. (McCormick, 2007). Indeed, democracy is seen as government by the people where liberty, equality, fraternity are secured and where human capacity is well developed to serve as a means in discussing common problems and interests, (Pennock, 1979). Liberal democracy is also seen as a political system in which individual rights are given constitutional protection against the majority while representative organs of government are determined in general elections with the population enjoying suffrage. (Macpherson, 1986).

Nowadays, liberal democracy is characterised by some essential elements, such as popular accountability of government which means that leaders are accountable to the citizens, political competition which means that citizens/voters must have a choice of candidates or political parties to vote for. Other elements include majority decision, popular representatives, political equality, and right of dissent, popular consultation and free mass media. (Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones, 2006).

However, Marxists believe that liberalism is the philosophy of the capitalist class making liberal democracy to be an ideology that serves just the interests of the capitalists. Thus, Marxists believe that liberal democracy was established against the special privileges of feudalism and the monarchy to serve the interests of the capitalists. But Marxist philosophy emerged in the nineteenth century as a reaction against the liberal philosophy and its political system arguing that the people's democracy should be against the special privileges of the capitalist class. That is because Marxists do not regard democracy as just a political system but a process because the struggles by the working class go beyond making democracy as merely a political system or a method of leadership selection or just being a democratic state because the ultimate aim of democracy is to build a society without the state, where there will be no class exploitation and oppression. (Goodwin, 1982)

Marxists believe that liberal democracy is a sham because it is merely the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie over the working class. Liberal democracy anchors political power in the hands of the capitalist class to serve the interests of the capitalist class alone, because each class has a social philosophy of its own which is the basis of its social, economic, cultural, moral and political values. (Swingewood, 1975)

To the Marxists, if the interests of the classes in society are antagonistic, then liberal democracy will only serve the interests of the ruling class alone because in any liberal capitalist society, the state as the institution of political power always represents the capitalists. Thus, the dominant class in a capitalist, liberal society will present democracy to the majority of the population as the best system of managing the affairs of the citizens. Liberal democracy has a narrow meaning because it is for capitalist exploitation and only meant for the property class, while the working class remains in poverty and want. Indeed, liberal democracy ignores the

economic needs of the people to the point where any attempt at real democracy is destroyed (Belov, 1986). A truly democratic system is therefore one where in addition to the popular liberal political rights, there will be a considerable measure of collective action to create social and economic equality. (Baradat, 1984)

Whichever way we look at democracy, it does not preclude a fundamental agreement on the rules by which society and government should be organised. It is in this regard that every modern constitution talks of suffrage, which makes election a pertinent element of a democratic system.

Election

The quest for democracy makes elections inevitable and that is because the general premises about election are reflected in the assumptions about the democratic process. Thus, a good deal of literature is today available on either examining the conditions of elections or exploring their procedures.

Generally, elections are seen as the foundation of a democracy, where in the adult population of a nation elects the people's representatives. Elections are the formal decision making processes in which groups determine which individuals will hold public office. Frequent elections are therefore, a hallmark of any representative democracy which allows elected members of government to understand the will of the people. (Held, 1990). Therefore, in every democracy elections take place regularly as a system by which citizens, at regular intervals, elect their representatives and can also switch them when they want. In other words, elections are now standardized forms by which citizens cast votes and elect members to different government positions. Indeed, elections can be seen as competitions where groups and political parties try to convince people (citizens) to vote for their candidates. So, in modern society, elections are critical because they often equate representative government with liberal democracy, making competitive, free and fair elections under universal suffrage as one of the defining characteristics of liberal democracy.

Today, elections have become the integral part of liberal representative democracy because they are now powerful elements of indirect democracy since they encourage citizens to elect their representatives. Also, elections provide the citizens the opportunity to choose the party whose policies will guide the government in the process of making laws. An election allows for the peaceful transfer of power from one form of government to another and ensures that no government is in power for an indefinite period of times. Thus, it has been argued that where an election is competitive, free and fair, it shows that the winning candidates have overwhelming support (Heywood, 2007)

Election Violence in Nigeria

Rigging has been described as the manipulation of electoral processes that is aimed at favouring some given candidates. (Yoroms, 2016) Again, election rigging takes different forms and patterns, such as electoral manipulations like recruiting juvenile to vote, stealing or snatching ballot boxes at polling booths, tampering with voting materials and voter impersonation. (Yoroms, 2016). Election rigging also includes illegal voting, bribery, intimidation of voters, falsification of results, wrong announcement of results, and declaration of a wrong candidate as the winner, stuffing of ballot boxes or pre-thumbing of ballot papers. All the types of rigging take place at two levels: the rigging process and rigging at polling units. While the rigging process is the sequence of steps or the process of the planning and

scheming to rig, especially before the elections, rigging event is the actual manifestation or the carrying out of rigging on the election day, during voting time.(Yoroms, 2016).

In Nigeria, election rigging, in all its forms, has been observed to be the precursor to violence. Thus, electoral history in Nigeria is replete with various forms of election rigging and violence, characterizing all political competitions (politics) in the country. (Fadakinte, 2014).

Election violence has been described as an attempt to destabilize the election process which may be in the form of physical attack, threat, terror, assassination, disruptions of the actual voting at the polling units, blackmail, intimidation, killing, destruction of election materials or bombing. Election violence is related to election process in that there are three dimensions of election violence. These are pre-election violence, polling unit violence and post-election violence. Pre-election violence occurs before the day of election. This type of violence can take the form of attacks on campaign teams and the party candidates, attacking electoral officials on their way to the election venue, hijacking of electoral materials before the commencement of election, assassination of party candidates or prominent party members. This type of violence may start well before the commencement of elections, sometimes six months before the elections, especially in such violence cases like assassinations and physical attacks on oppositions. Polling unit violence takes place at the polling units and this includes intimidating voters, disorganizing the voting process, hijacking or snatching of ballot boxes, stuffing of ballot boxes, causing confusion to create chaos or physical combat at the polling units. Post election violence takes place after the announcement of election results and the declaration of the winners. It may start immediately the announcement is made and may last for days, depending on how widespread the violence is. (Yoroms, 2016)

Thus, general elections in Nigeria, since independence, have witnessed all the above types of rigging and violence which make elections to be regular rituals of criminality, chaos, confusion, violence and bloodshed which, on each occasion, assume some frightening proportions that threatened the corporate existence of the country. As argued by Muheeb, representative democracy in Nigeria between 2003 and 2015 has gone through some strains and stress as the country transits from one civilian government to another, through elections.(Muheeb, 2015)

There are two basic reasons why election must be rigged in Nigeria. First, a lot of investments go into it because politicians see politics as a business, a quick and fast yielding business. Second, winning an election opens the door for political power which, in Nigeria, is the ultimate because it guarantees access to economic resources and other sociopolitical opportunities. Therefore, with these in the minds of politicians, the fear of losing in an election cannot be contemplated. Hence, election must be won by all means.

A zone by zone account of election violence during the 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections are given below.

2003 General Election Violence

The 2003 general elections both at the federal and state levels were accompanied by the usual violence and bloodshed. The elections were so crisis ridden that the accompanied violence left scores of people with serious injuries and some died either during the fracas

or in the hospital. It was reported that in many instances political thugs unleashed violence at the polling units, across the country, which led to large scale fraud, right from the polling units because election materials were hijacked in order to falsify election results. See <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>

Violence was extremely widespread during the 2003 general elections that there was no part of the country that did not have its own share of the bloody violence that led to the death of hundreds of people. According to Ajeli, one common element in all the states in the 2003 elections was the snatching and stuffing of ballot papers and the disruptions of voting which eventually led to violence between supporters of the different parties. (Ajeli, 2022) It has been argued that the 2003 general elections were the most fraudulent in the history of elections in Nigeria, so much so that most of the election results became doubtful.

The North Central

In the North Central geopolitical zone of the country, there were reported cases of politically motivated killings, attempted assassinations and attacks, at different locations. For example, just before the elections, a serious spate of violence occurred when two people were confirmed killed and several others injured in a fight between supporters of the PDP and ANPP, in Kwara State. There were cases of electoral violence in other states within the North Central geopolitical zone, such as in Benue, Kogi, Plateau and Niger, where there were armed clashes between members of rival groups leading to the termination of many lives. (Human Right Watch, 2004)

The North East

The 2003 general elections were seriously affected by terrible violent incidents which led to the death of many people in the South East geopolitical zone. Quite a number of the violent acts were committed at the polling units leading to large scale fraud, and the eventual invalidation of some of the election results. In other word, political thugs unleashed violence at the polling units with the aim of falsifying election results. Cases of killing and arson were rampant and between March and April 2003, over 100 people were killed across the North East geopolitical zone. For example, electoral violence was reported, in Benue, Taraba, Bauchi and Borno States. There were violent protests that led to disruptions of election, with some human casualties. There were instances in most states of the zone where people who were trying to prevent rigging were brutally beaten by thugs from the various parties. In some places, voting did not actually take place, a problem that was rampant in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno and Gombe States. (Human Right Watch, 2004)

The North West

Violence in the North West geopolitical zone was very rampant and one of the causes of violence was imposition of candidates on the electorate, leading to intraparty fighting that eventually led to violence. The case of imposition of candidate was very common in Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara where, for example, the incumbent governors automatically became the party candidates, especially with the PDP where incumbent governors had automatic tickets to contest in the 2003 elections. (Human Right Watch, org/report,2004)

In the North West, cases of doubtful results were detected in Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi and Zamfara, resulting in violent protests, physical violence and killings (Nyam). Also, there were serious cases of under-age voting, smashing of ballot papers, destruction

of INEC documents and office, and illegal thumb-printing. In addition, interparty clashes after the declaration of results were very common across the zone. (Human Right Watch, org/report,2004)

The South East

The South East recorded the highest level of violence in the 2003 general elections. It was there PDP governors and their party supporters used violent attacks on opposition candidates. It was also reported that there were armed clashes between members of rival groups in the process of snatching ballot boxes, with sporadic shooting at the opposition and in most of the violent actions, many lives were lost. (Aondowase, 2015). For example, in Abia State, there were no elections in many places as a result of ballot snatching, sporadic shooting that disrupted voting. In Anambra, sporadic shooting was very rampant, resulting in killing of people. It was also common for political thugs, especially those of the PDP to destroy opposition party billboards and burning opposition properties, including INEC offices.

The above violent atrocities were regular occurrences in Eboin, Enugu and Imo States. It was reported that in all the South East States there were cases of imposition of candidates, lack of display of voters register and late registration of voters all that led to violent protests by party supporters with many casualties, which made it impossible to have election in many places. Generally, in the South East, there was a direct link between electoral fraud and electoral violence. (Aondowase, 2015).

The South-South

The South-South witnessed very serious violence during the 2003 elections. The violence was so serious that foreign observers believed that what took place in the South -South was not election but a mini war between gangs from rival political parties.

Elections in Rivers State were reported to be both more violent and more brazenly rigged than in most other parts of the country, all in the bid to secure victory at the elections, which were perpetrated primarily by the ruling PDP. Rivers State was enveloped in reigns of terror just before and immediately after the elections. For example, just before the elections, the National Vice Chairman of the ANPP for the South-South zone was killed. It was reported that two groups of gangs were used by the PDP to embark on violent crimes throughout the state. For example, many incidents of violence, including several killings were reported in different parts of Ikwereland where kidnappings, ballot snatching and massive illegal thumb printing took place, with the activities of thugs resulting in massive attack by different gangs of the different political parties. In Bayelsa, Cross River and Akwa-Ibom states, series of violence were perpetrated by intra/inter party crisis, ballot snatching, and disruption of campaigns and snatching of result sheets from INEC officials at gun point. Delta State witnessed a high level of violence before, during and after the elections. There was a serious violent protest at the distribution of materials leading to the postponement of election in some districts while election did not take place in many areas. (Aondowase, 2015).

The South West

There was little violence in the 2003 general elections in the South West zone which was due mainly to the division of the AD, the dominating party in the South West, to throw its weight behind President Olusegun Obasanjo who was running for a second term

in office. It was also due to the fact that the AD did not field a candidate for the office of the President and some of the incumbent governors in South West campaigned for the re-election President Obasanjo. However, there were some pockets of violence across the zones which were occasioned by some problems like lack of proper documentation for the distribution of INEC material like ballot papers that led to protest and violence. Other problems that led to violence also included non- display of voters lists, discrepancies on the total number of votes on the displayed lists. (Testing Democracy, 2003)

2007 General Elections Violence

The North Central

In Minna, Niger state, armed thugs invaded several polling booths, snatched fifteen ballot boxes and destroyed ballot papers on the Election Day. In Nasarawa, a group of armed men believed to have been angered by the role the police played in the election ambushed and killed nine members of the Nasarawa police command who were heading towards their duty post in preparation for the presidential election. In Benue state on 14 April, an aide of ANPP candidate, Professor Daniel Saror was shot dead in his residence in the state house of assembly quarters. In Markurdi, on the 18th March 2007, there were violent clashes, precipitated by the murder of a PDP member and the violence led to the death of ten people, (Nwolise, 2007)

The North East

In Gombe town, Police officials watched while INEC officials were intimidated by PDP agents to change an election result sheet. On 2nd February 2007, the supporters of ANPP were killed by thugs. Also in Gombe state on the 15th March, PDP supporters were attacked by opposition members. On the 2nd February 2007, two supporters of ANPP were killed by thugs and on 3rd March 2007, armed Policemen attached to some politicians shot and wounded some party supporters who suddenly turned violent and started protesting. (Nwolise, 2007)

The North West

In Kano state, thugs, brandishing cutlasses and swords invaded several polling booths, disrupting voting during the presidential election. On 14th March, 2007, thugs attacked the convoy of the Governor of Kano State, but there were no fatalities.

In Katsina state, it was reported that electoral officials delivered only half of the ballot boxes meant for the state and the people, on discovering this anomaly, engaged in violent clashes with INEC officials, destroyed houses of PDP members and in the process, two people were killed and at least six were wounded. The following day, in Daura general hospital, some young men were discovered to have been badly wounded, including one teenager who had been shot in the stomach by soldiers that were attempting to stop the rioters. Again, in Katsina, a policeman who was trying to stop the theft of a ballot box was beaten, with his own club by a gang of thugs and was forced to flee. It was also reported that seven houses were burnt down during the presidential election in Katsina and the INEC office in Zango, Daura Local Government Area was set ablaze on the same day. Again, in Kaduna State during the presidential election, three people were killed by party thugs in Karaye area of Zaria. (Aondowase, 2015).

The South East

Violence was very rampant in the South East before, during and after the elections in 2007. Most of the issues that led to violent protests by thugs and party protesters include the creation of illegal

polling booths for electoral fraud, ballot snatching and stuffing, voting in unauthorized places, open display of vote buying, disruptions of voting by party thugs, conspicuous display of illegal thumb printing and chasing away of party agents by political thugs. What is remarkable about election violence in the South East was the replication of all the types of the above mentioned violence induced issues in all the South East states, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. However, a serious violence occurred in Owerri, Imo state, because of the refusal of INEC resident electoral commissioner, Prince Soyebi, to falsify election results in favour of Chief Onyema Ugochukwu, which led to Ugochukwu slapping Soyebi and calling him a big fool. Ugochukwu's thugs then dealt mercilessly with Soyebi who was rescued by members of the Nigerian Air Force. Again, there were violent intra- patty clashes at PDP primaries at Mbeke Ishieke, Ebonyi. There were wide spread of election malpractices in Enugu state which led to widespread electoral violence. (Aondowase, 2015).

The South South

Violence in the South South zone assumed the dimensions of very dangerous riots, protests and attacks, leading to the destructions of personal and official properties of opposition politicians and the office of INEC. In Bayelsa State, Steven Divei, a top member of the PDP narrowly escaped death after a gun attack by assassins who had trailed him for a day before the attack. (Human Right Watch, 2004)

In Edo State, Adams Osiomohole, the gubernatorial candidate for Edo state on the platform of the ACN party, was attacked along with his convoy at Auchi on 21st April by armed thugs, who were allegedly sponsored by the PDP. There were shootouts between supporters of different political parties. One of such incidents was at Akoko Edo, where soldiers arrested ten people during the shootout. Those arrested were supporters of the PDP and ACN party. (Bello, 2015)

At Ogoni, Rivers State, three persons were killed and twenty injured, following intra-party clashes while a senator's car was smashed at PDP primaries. The PDP primaries that were held at Ogugbolo were rescheduled because of violence that broke out there, threatening people's lives. In Port Harcourt, on the same day of the primary elections, the house of PDP governorship aspirant was bombed. (Bello, 2015)

Just before the elections in April 2007, assassins shot and wounded a PDP leader, Dr Nelson Ejakpori in Benin, Delta State. A man was found in the Abankpa area of Delta State with prepared tally sheets and was shot dead, instantly. On 24th November 2006, before the elections, the house of Senator Patrick Osakwe was bombed. One Nduli Elumelu's house and that of Theodora Giwa-Amu were also bombed. By April 18, when the elections started, many houses were set ablaze including the country home of a serving commissioner Mr Evans Iwhurie where a couple that was visiting the Iwhurie family was also burnt to death. On the same day, four people had been killed and twenty were wounded. On 3rd February, in Benin, a PDP chieftain Lawson Onokpasa was assassinated. Again, in Benin, eight voters, who attempted to stop thugs from snatching ballot boxes, were beaten to a state of coma by the thugs. In Port-Harcourt, eight people were shot and seven of them died on the spot while the eighth person was taken to the hospital. At Elelewon and Rumaokoro police stations, some vehicles and the two police stations were burnt. On 21st March 2007, at Rumuekpe, Rivers State seven people were killed and

twenty others injured over a dispute on governorship candidates. Eleme in Rivers State, one person was killed and many people injured, following intra-party clashes. (Vanguard.com, 23 March, 2007)

The South West

In Ogbomosho town, Oyo state, according to the Inspector General of Police (IGP), the heavy presence of security hindered elections in many wards as intimidated voters stayed away from polling centres. In Abeokuta, Ogun state, there was an attack on incumbent governor after the party primaries. At Okelewo, also in Abeokuta, some scoundrels decimated two ballot boxes, scattering the ballot papers on the main road. Again, at Abeokuta, on 10th March, some violence was recorded when members of the different political parties engaged in free for all fights, using guns, cudgels, and cutlasses and wounding twelve people.

In Ondo state, the declaration of the results of the governorship election by INEC, announcing the victory of the PDP candidate, led to supporters of the Labour Party going on the streets, protesting against the defeat of Dr Olusegun Mimiko, the Labour Party candidate for governorship because Labour Party supporters believed that the election had been manipulated in favour of the PDP candidate. The violent protest led to many vehicles burnt and the house of a PDP chieftain was also burnt. The house of Mr Ogunniya and that of Chief Ojo Akinpelu, Chairman Ondo Local Government were burnt. The INEC office at Akure was destroyed by irate youths. The violence spread like wildfire from Akure to Ondo, Akoko, Ile Oluji, Oke-Igbo and Idanre. On 14th February, 2007, in Okitipupa, there was a violent protest over the discovery of underage registration. (<http://www.premiumtimes.ng.com>, 15th February, 2007)

In Lagos, a popular politician Mr Funsho Williams, who was the PDP gubernatorial candidate for Lagos State was assassinated in July 2006. And on 7th March 2007, a campaign rally of DPA candidate was violently disrupted by thugs where many people were injured.

At Ijan Ekiti, Ekiti State Dr. Ayo Daramola, a prominent member of the PDP and a candidate of the party in Ekiti State was assassinated on 14th August 2006. (<http://www.premiumtimes.ng.com>, 15th February, 2007, see also Aondowase, 2015).

In Osun State, there were protests against the re-election of Governor Olagunsoye Oyinlola and the protests led to the death of sixteen people, including an 8-year-old girl who was hit by stray bullets. There were widespread of violent protests in Oyo, Ekiti and Ogun States where the total number of votes cast were more than the actual number of voters registered. The violent clashes claimed fifty-five deaths on the first day of election and the unofficial estimates for the whole period was over two hundred deaths. (Aondowase, 2015).

2011 General Elections Violence

The North Central

In Minna, Niger State, it was reported that, protesters stormed a lodge occupied by members of the Christian corps fellowship, where the rioters locked in fifty corps members in the building and set it ablaze. The corps were able to escape after one of them forced the door open. An 18-seater bus and some motor cycles belonging to one the fellowship members were burnt by the

protesters. In Bida, Niger state, two irate groups of youths were so bold that they marched to the palace of the Etsu of Nupe, Yahaya Abubakar, with the intention of attacking the palace. They were shot and killed by security agents. An election officer at Ungwar Dumi polling station and student of the Department of Food Science and Technology, Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi was attacked and killed by thugs. The offices of PDP Secretariat in Niger state were burnt with the Minna centenary roundabout at Kpakungu area and INEC office. (See Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre(PLAC), 2011)

At Mararaba, Karu, Nasarawa State, on April 18th 2011, protesters destroyed windscreens of five vehicles that were parked in front of the PHCN offices. In Lafia, on April 18th 2011, anti PDP protesters attacked some journalists who were seen taking photographs. Nasarawa State correspondent, Umar Muhammed was beaten and almost rendered naked. His digital camera, tape recorder and phone were destroyed.

In Plateau State, between April 17th and 18th 2011, youths from Jos north barricaded major roads in Jos and they made bonfires on the Masalachi Jumaa Road, Bauchi Road and Nasarawa Road which engendered panic and tension in the state capital.

On April 20th 2011, there were attacks on Bachit district of Riyom Local Government Council, with one person dead and three others injured. At Kanam and Jos North Local Government Area, irate youths went on rampage at DengiKanam Local Government Area of Plateau State, following the declaration of presidential elections results. Irate youths went on rampage on the streets shouting protest songs, smashing cars and beating passersby.

On April 19th, 2011, residents of Angwan Rogo and Angwan Rimi areas of Jos North Local Government had their houses burnt down by Muslims protesters for allegedly betraying fellow Muslims by voting for Jonathan Goodluck instead of Muhammadu Buhari. See Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre(PLAC), 2011

The North East

Election violence was very conspicuous in Borno State, just before the elections with gunmen killing Fannami Gubio, the gubernatorial candidate of the ANPP in Borno state and six other supporters of the ANPP. Gunmen also killed the chairman of the ANPP in Jere Local Government Area at his home in Maiduguri a few hours before the commencement of the elections. There was a rejection of PDP and ANPP by CPC supporters and this was reflected in acts of violence, including bomb attacks on INEC and other government institutions in Borno State by protesters.

There were explosions at Galadima Junction in Maiduguri, where unidentified individuals threw explosives at a team of mobile policemen. On the previous day however, a police inspector was shot in the afternoon at a polling center in Ummarari. (Onapajo, 2015)

At Potiskum and Damaturu, in Yobe state, on April 18th 2011, protesters blocked the junctions of Texaco, army barracks and Sokoto road junctions, two people were killed in Potiskum with seven others injured and were admitted to Potiskum General Hospital. At Zuba, Kwali, Abaji on April 18 2011 youths and party supporters protesting and alleging rigging of 2011 presidential elections, SET tyres on fire, causing heavy traffic jam in the Kwali-Lokoja road.

At Jalingo, in Taraba State and Bali, Gassol, Mutum-Biyu, Ardo-Kola, in Yobe State violence led to four casualties in Ardo-Kola, and the Local Government Secretariat was burnt, including PDP

secretariat in Gassol Local Government. Dan Zaria, a PDP chieftain's house was also razed.

At Jada and Yola in Adamawa State, on April 16th, 2011 the houses belonging to some prominent party leaders were set on fire or destroyed. CPC supporters burnt down the house of governor Nyako's adviser on youth empowerment, Alhaji Bala Buba Jada for keeping stolen election materials and stuffing ballot boxes in his house. The commissioner for lands and survey, Abubakar Shuaibu's house was also destroyed by CPC supporters. (Onapajo, 2015)

On April 17th 2011, enraged voters took to the streets on a violent protest shortly after the announcement of the election results. The protest led to the death of five people in Yola, Munia and Machida towns and over fifty private houses and business houses were burnt. INEC office, President Goodluck Jonathan campaign office and some houses of some PDP chieftains and supporters were razed.

At Yola, Jimeta Shinko, in Benue State, after news of the election results, CPC supporters removed all the bill boards with PDP logo and vandalized them while shouting Sai Buhari (up Buhari). In Gombe, youths protested the electoral victory of Goodluck Jonathan, attacked popular hotels at central Kampala and Gombe city while Sabon line and INEC headquarters were destroyed. (Egobueze, 2015)

On April 17th 2011, anti PDP riots were on Gombe streets, with the protesters attacking the house of Governor Danjuma Goje and attempted to set it on fire. The youths burnt the house of the resident electoral commissioner and the houses of PDP prominent persons were torched. Five persons were burnt to death and one police man killed on Biu road. There was also a serious destruction of four Gombe line mass transit vehicles. (Olowojolu, 2019)

In Bauchi State, eleven NYSC members were killed in Giade, Gadau, Katagum and Alkaleri Local Government Areas. They were set ablaze in front of a police station where the corps had sought protection

The North West

The 2011 general elections violence started from Kano and Kaduna States and spread like wildfire to other parts of northern Nigeria. The violence included shooting, killing, arson, wanton destruction of properties and all of these were perpetrated by officials and supporters of different political parties. Some of the violence that accompanied the 2011 elections were well organized pre-election violence with intra party and inter party clashes which were due to struggles over party nomination and access to the electorate. (Olowojolu, 2019)

There was a serious violence in Katsina where protesters attacked Katsina prison in Malumfashi and released 45 prison inmates. It was also reported that seven people were killed, four persons burnt alive in their homes, nineteen vehicles and over eleven houses burnt down in Malumfashi, including the Local Government Secretariat and the PDP Secretariat in Kankara. The private residence of some local PDP chieftains and Shema campaign office of PDP were also destroyed. Also, in Funtua, Malumfashi, Kankara, Jibiya, Daura on 18th and 19th 2011, attacks were directed at churches after the announcement of the election results. It led to seven people dead and over 60 churches set ablaze. In Sokoto State, at Kanwuri, Rijiyya, Mabera, there were attempts to set the palace of Sultan of Sokoto on fire but a house at Rijiyya was torched, two vehicles and a motor cycle belonging to officials

of Rim radio were burnt. In Zamfara State, at Tsafe, Magazu and Gusau thousands of youths went on rampage after the declaration of the election results. They destroyed dozens of shops and 3 churches, barricaded major roads and made bonfire to disturb vehicular movements, shouting (ba muso) we don't like the president, President Goodluck Jonathan. (Olowojolu, 2019)

In Jigawa State, electoral violence occurred in April 16th, 2011 as hundreds of youths went on violent attacks, protesting that PDP rigged the presidential elections. A government building was set on fire and four vehicles in the area were burnt. In Hadejia, there were serious destructions as mob razed people's houses and cars in Madori town. Two people were killed and many more were injured. On the night of the presidential elections, in Kaduna State, there were 2 bomb blast incidents. One was at the Happy Night Hotel in Kabala West and in Magajin Gari, Sharia Court 1 and the second bomb blast occurred at about 10.30 in the same area. Ten people were killed in the two blasts. Some journalists were also beaten up by the protesting youths in the same area.

On April 17th 2011, in Tundun Wada Area of Kaduna town, there was a protest by irate youths over the defeat of CPC presidential candidate, Mohamadu Buhari by the PDP presidential candidate Jonathan Goodluck. The properties of Jonathan's supporters were attacked with seven people killed. In Zaria, hundreds of people were injured in a protest by supporters of the CPC party and the house of Mr Sambo Namadi, the Vice- President, was burnt. The Emir of Zazzau's house was also burnt as well as the houses of prominent PDP members, including the state INEC office. In Kano State, at Kawo quarters, in the city of Kano, 10 people were reported to have died with properties of ANPP chieftain, Alhaji Bashir Tofa and his vehicles burnt. Alhaji Ghali Na'abba, former Speaker of the House of Representatives' house was also burnt. (Olowojolu, 2019)

The South East

Although it was reported that the South East Zone recorded the lowest number of deaths that were caused by electoral violence, Imo State recorded high incidents of violent protests by thugs who were allegedly sponsored by political godfathers. It was also reported that in Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi States, political thugs attacked voters at polling units, attacked INEC officials and in some of the places took away the ballot boxes. On 8th April 2011, gun men stormed the house of the chairman of Nwangele L.G.A, killed him and fired at others. . (Onapajo, 2015)

The South-South

In Rivers State, two rival cult groups openly fight for their sponsors or political godfathers. At some points, the streets would be deserted and school closed whenever members of the cults engaged in violent clashes. Just before the governorship election, gunmen, who were allegedly hired by PDP top members invaded Port Harcourt, ravaged many areas and shot into the crowd. The above pattern also occurred on Bayelsa and Delta States. (Onapajo, 2015)

The South West

Although the scale of violence during and after the 2011 general elections was not as high as that of the 2007 general elections, there were violent protests by thugs, who went on the rampage, killing people, burning houses and kidnapping several persons that were linked to the incumbent governor Alhaji Lamidi Ladoja, at Ibadan. The violence was perpetrated by the thugs from the ACN opposition party. It was common to see thugs and criminals who were employed by political godfathers to attack oppositions, their

offices and private properties in Ondo, Osun and Ekiti States. (Onapajo, 2015)

2015 General Election Violence

The North Central

In Kwara State, there was intense shooting in Ilorin between police and hoodlums, who were armed with guns, cutlasses and charms, protesting APC's victory. This incident also occurred at Ikokoro, Niger Street and Taiwo Isale where political thugs, armed with guns, knives and other dangerous weapons, attacked oppositions. It was also reported that there were killings in Asom in Logo Local Government, close to Markurdi, in Benue State. The violent incident led to the death of three people while six other people were seriously injured. Again, significant violent incidents were recorded in Plateau, Kogi and Nasarawa States, resulting in many casualties. Violent incidents were also recorded in Kaduna where nine people died. (Onapajo, 2015)

The North East

It was reported that forty one people were killed in Maiduguri which made people to flee from the polling centres. There was confusion on the 12th April 2015, the day of the elections when unidentified gunmen attacked and destroyed properties at the central primary school in Alkali Local Government in Bauchi State. Alkali divisional police station and the INEC office were also burnt. On 11th April 2015, gunmen stormed Bugurum Primary School in Darazo Local Government Area, attacked and scared away voters and made the electoral process vulnerable to manipulations. The gun men also attacked collation centres and snatched electoral materials from INEC officials and destroyed some sensitive materials by setting them on fire. (Muheed, 202015) Violent attacks were manifested in Gombe and Borno States as men suspected to be political thugs opened fire at the polling stations and killed seven people at Birnin Bolawa, Birnin Fulani in the Nafanda district of Gombe. In Dukku, 80 kilometers from Gombe city, voters were shot at while queuing to cast their votes. It was alleged that three people were killed by thugs and two other people were injured. There were also attacks on Miringa town in Biu Local Government Area of Borno State where thugs shot at voters on Election Day. In all, twenty five people were killed and five others injured for taking part in the electoral process. (<http://www.premiumtimes.ng.com>, 15th February, 2007)

In Taraba State there were allegations that soldiers frightened and intimidated voters during the March 28 elections, allowing for malpractices. It was reported that instead of ensuring free and fair elections, soldiers assisted in rigging the elections in favour of the PDP. The deployment of soldiers in Wukari, Takum and other communities openly threatened voters, the action that was repeated during the supplementary elections in the state, which led the APC to allege that the electoral process was fraught with violence, massive rigging, ballot snatching and abuse of the card readers many parts of the state by the PDP. (<http://www.premiumtimes.ng.com>, 15th February, 2007)

The North West

According to INEC, there were violent incidents in many areas of the six states in the zone. The violence was widespread from Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Kano to Jigawa. For example, in Kano, there were reports of shooting, ballot box snatching and killing. It was also reported that in Kano and Kaduna, thugs were used to undertake illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers while they also intimidated and attacked oppositions. In addition, it was

reported that significant number of violent incidents were recorded in Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara. (International Crisis Group, 2015) The South East

At Afikpo, South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State thugs intercepted the transportation of sensitive electoral materials meant for a polling unit in Oso Ward 2 during the April 11th, 2015 general elections. At Ameka ward in Ikwo Local Government Area electorate and INEC officials were attacked by scoundrels who disrupted the electoral exercise using machetes, guns and other dangerous weapons. At Ishi Nkwo-Ukawu ward polling unit 003 and 007 in Onicha Local Government Area electoral materials were carted away by unknown persons who attacked the ad hoc staff and some INEC officials. (Bello, 2015)

At Ugambo-Ukawu ward in Onicha Local Government Area some unknown persons who posed as party agents disrupted the voting exercise and went away with electoral materials including ballot papers and two ballot boxes. In Imo State, there was the use of light weapons in causing panic and havoc. The modus operandi included hijacking of INEC materials by armed thugs who were suspected to be members of a particular party, taking many of the wards and polling units' officials as hostages. The thugs carried the ballot papers and boxes away after attacking all the opposition members that were there and also the policemen on duty. (Bello, 2015)

The South South

The 2015 general elections recorded serious violence in the South South states, such as Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers and Bayelsa. In Delta, Akwa Ibom and Rivers States, wrong compilation and computation of results and ballot box snatching were reported in the States. Also in the same areas, thugs prevented people from voting, while other people were denied their voters PVCs as reported. Again, inflation of election results was alleged in Akwa Ibom, Delta and Rivers States. All the acts led to violent protests at where ever they occurred in all the states.

On 13th March, 2015, a local PDP leader Albert Ukpah was strangled to death in Abak, Akwa Ibom State. The act was reported to have been perpetrated by some members within the party, due to a dispute over his eligibility for political office. A PDP leader, Eshiet Usung-Inwang was shot dead at Ikot-Uso, Ekong near Eket, allegedly by rivals because he was competing with a particular candidate. (<http://www.vanguardngr.com>, 20th June, 2015)

In Rivers State, sixteen people were killed because they were accused of violating the electoral law. INEC headquarters in Rivers State was set ablaze while two people were killed during the gubernatorial elections. This ugly trend led to members of the opposition party to go on the streets of Port Harcourt, protesting and demanding that the election be rescheduled.

Again, in Rivers State, the gubernatorial polls witnessed heavy gun shots in Ozuoba and Rumuolumeni in Obio Akpor Local Council Area of the state. Soldiers invaded Buguma in Asari Toru Local Council and two people were killed by political thugs. Again, unknown arsonists burnt a police patrol vehicle, the house of the state commissioner for women affairs and a polling centre in Kalabari National College in the state. On 18th June 2015, in a post-election violence, gunmen attacked a house of assembly aspirant, Alfred Watson Belemote, on the Brass/Okpoama waterways in Bayelsa State. He was wounded and two of his aides were killed. (<http://www.vanguardngr.com>, 20th June, 2015)

The South West

At Ille Ife, there were violent clashes between the supporters of the APC and PDP at Gbodo in which 3 people were killed. At many locations, in different towns in Ekiti State, thugs did not allow many voters especially APC opposition members to take part in the accreditation. They also forced Youth Corps Members who were working for INEC to abandon the card reader machines for them while they, the thugs, stuffed the ballot boxes with fake ballot papers. The thugs would then shoot into the air to scare voters away.

so that they could illegally thumb print and stuff the ballot boxes. (Vanguardngr.com, 20th June,2015)

In Ekiti, violence occurred in Itawure on the outskirts of Efon-Alaye on 18th April 2015 with some casualties. Again it was reported that the army collaborated with PDP in attacking the electorate and rigging elections. It was reported that in Ondo State a significant number of violent activities took place in the state and many lives were lost. (Vanguardngr.com, 20th June, 2015)

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the Six Geopolitical Zones



Figure 2: Map of Nigeria



Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the Six Geopolitical Zones **Figure 2:** Map of Nigeria showing the Main Ethnic Groups in each Zone.

Source: www.google.com

The Struggle for Power and Election Violence

It is now clear that between 2003 and 2015, election violence became a common and regular phenomenon. Indeed, during the period, violence increased at every turn of election on each occasion, and became so alarming that those general election periods were characterized by fear, tension and anxiety. Thus, the four general elections, from 2003 to 2015, were marred by violence like in the first and second republics.

For example, before the 2003 general elections days, supporters of the PDP and ANPP had engaged in serious and bloody violence in Kwara State, especially in Ilorin, the state capital. Again, during the same period, there were recorded cases of armed clashes between members of rival groups which resulted in many casualties in Benue, Kogi, Plateau and Niger States. Also, in Abia, Akwa Ibom and Anambra States, there were records of violent attacks on opposition candidates, especially by the PDP members. There were also armed clashes between members of rival groups in the process of snatching ballot boxes in Imo, Enugu and Eboin states. Again, there were reports of violence in Port Harcourt, Calabar, Benin, Ibadan and Osogbo. The violence in the above mentioned places were so serious, so much that foreign observers believed that no election took place in some of the areas, even though the areas recorded election results. (Egwu, 2015).

The 2007 general elections were described as having been characterized by unprecedented electoral malpractices which led to wide condemnation from local and international observers. The elections witnessed the announcement of fictitious election results, even in areas where elections did not take place, intimidation of the

electorate, hijacking of ballot papers, illegal thump printing of ballot papers and brazen destruction of ballot boxes by thugs. All over the country, the 2007 general elections violence was widespread, with pre election violence witnessing assassinations, intra-party and inter-party clashes, attacks on party offices, attacks on campaign teams and attacks on the homes of political candidates. In many areas across the country, spontaneous violence greeted the announcement of election results with most of the violent attacks ending in the death of several people.

It is important to note that during the four general elections between 2003 and 2015, violent conflicts took place across the country in the same state, among the same people, tribe and ethnic group. For example, it was reported that during the 2007 general elections, the violence in the three geo-political zones in Northern Nigeria resulted in the death of 800 people. Ironically, at the same time as the Northern Nigeria was embroiled in bloody violence, there were bombings, killing of opponents, clashes between supporters of different political parties and severe attacks on campaign teams by political thugs in all the three geo-political zones in Southern Nigeria, from Bayelsa, Rivers, Abia, Imo, Edo, Ekiti, Oyo to Ondo States. It can be argued that election crisis has become an integral part of the electoral process in Nigeria. According to Ajeli, political parties support their members in committing electoral violence and politicians encourage their supporters to perpetrate violence. (Ani, Kelechi & Ojakoroti, 2022) It is interesting to note that between 2003 and 2015, election violence and bloodshed were widespread across the country as never before. Intra-party and inter-party violence before, during and after elections occurred among the various political parties,

especially among and within those political parties with large following, in a way it has never been witnessed in Nigeria. What is to be noted in the above cases of violence is that the violence occurred in the same towns, villages, and communities and among the same ethnic groups and tribes, but more significant and more disturbing is that all the cases of violence were between the same people of the same language, culture, tradition and history. The widespread violence across the country makes it clear that ethnicity, tribalism or religious intolerance are not the cause of election violence in Nigeria but the intra-party and inter-party crises that create rancorous groups among and between the same people.

It is the contention of this research that the wide spread of violence across the country, during the 2003 to 2015 general elections, makes it plausible to assert that election violence is not and cannot be caused by ethnicity, tribalism or religion in Nigeria. Rather, the fierce struggle for power among the dominant class, which results in intra and inter party crisis more than any other problem creates bitter divisions among the people. The bitter divisions then creates enmity among members of the different political parties which is why a losing group does not accept none favourable election results and will take to violence. Thus, in Nigeria, the dominant class has not emerged as a strong and cohesive class, united with a common interest that will make the political elites abide by the rules and ethics of liberal democracy, which is why the different factions of the dominant class always mobilize the people for violence whenever they believe that election results do not favour them. From 2003 to 2015 the political elites who are in different and antagonistic groups subjected the four general elections to situations of war, leading to violence and bloodshed. Thus, what causes election violence in Nigeria is the inability of the dominant class to be cohesive, develop liberal democratic ideology and acquire the needed political culture with the right liberal political temper to enable them posses hegemonic values that will unite the people and not ethnicity, tribalism or religious intolerance.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, it will be beyond debate to conclude that ethnicity, tribalism or religion cannot be the cause of election crisis in Nigeria. It is, therefore, logical to argue that the inability of the dominant class to be cohesive and possess the same ideology with which to construct hegemonic order for the society so that the people can imbibe a dominant culture, in particular, the liberal democratic culture, is the cause of election violence. This is because the rancorous factions of the dominant class always polarize the people and set them at each other, whether the people are of the same family, tribe, religion or ethnic group. What engender election violence in Nigeria therefore are the antagonistic relations, the blind and bitter struggle for power by the dominant class, which lead to their inability to be united, evolve a ruling class and construct a hegemonic order by making use of some social institutions that will unite the people. In Nigeria, therefore, it does not matter whether within the same tribe, same religion or ethnic group; belligerent factions of the dominant class of the same tribe, same religion or same ethnic group will always incite the people to violence in order to eliminate oppositions or ensure victory at the polls or in reaction to unfavorable outcome of election results.

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