Electoral Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Electoral violence remains a significant challenge to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The country's transition to democratic governance has been marred by frequent violent conflicts during election periods, undermining the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and eroding public trust in democratic institutions. This paper examines the root causes of electoral violence in Nigeria, including ethnic tensions, economic inequality, and weak state institutions. It further explores the impact of such violence on democratic consolidation, focusing on how it disrupts political stability, hinders voter participation, and encourages authoritarian tendencies. The study was anchored on the basic proposition of frustration-aggression theory originally proposed by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939), believes that the primary source of human capacity for crisis or violence is the aggression mechanisms. The anger induced by frustration is a motivating force that disposes people to aggression irrespective of its instrumentalities. In conclusion, the paper argues that addressing electoral violence through reforms in the electoral processes, strengthening rule of law, and promoting inclusive political participation are essential steps toward sustainable democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Electoral violence, Election Rigging, Democratic Consolidation, Voter Intimidation, political instability.

Introduction:

Nigeria is looked upon by many both in Africa and outside to give leadership in the best democratic practices. Unfortunately, since its independence in 1960, its electoral process has been marred by electoral violence. There can be no democratic election, democratization, consolidation of democracy, growth in democratic culture or internalization of best democratic practice in any country if electoral violence is prevalent. Equally, no peaceful, secure, free and fair civilian-to-civilian transfer of power can take place without first purging the electoral process and the country of such infestations of violence. Violence limits people's participation in the electoral process and enables the imposition of candidates, programs, and policies, which, in turn, engender violent reactions from losers and the electorate. Hence, Kean (2004) observed that violence 'is the greatest enemy of democracy'. Yet, as Albert (2007) notes, 'elections play an important role in the life of a nation. It is one essential way by which citizens choose their leaders, and by so doing, contribute meaningfully to the identification of the kind of development they would like to see.' Despite the important position occupied by elections in democracies and the need for secure, peaceful, free and fair elections for a stable society and sustainable democracy.

Nigeria's history is replete with narratives of how its electoral process has been marred by massive electoral rigging, violence and the subversion of the desire of the individuals. While electoral brutality has been a consistent subject in Nigeria's history since independence, adding to the breakdown of past endeavors at digging in law based arrangement of administration, the

scale and force of political elections related to violence since the arrival to majority rules system in 1999appears to overshadow what the nation experienced in the past. As the nation prepared for the 2015 general elections, the phantom of violence related with political election inspired a feeling of deja'vu with regard to the survivability of the democratization venture in Nigeria (ICG Report, 2015)

Ideally, election is a means of determining the will of the people regarding their choice of political leaders and regime types. In essence, both the process and the outcome of the election should reflect the consent and aspirations of the people as organized electorate (Olu, 2013). This implies that apart from being a routine periodic democratic exercise, election must be competitive, transparent, free and fair as well as credible in order to live up to its democratic essence and merit. In Nigeria, the issue of election has been a problematic endeavour over the years. Ironically, election in Nigeria has been bereft of democratic ideals, much as it has been characterized by untoward circumstances.

Electoral violence could be regarded as elections-motivated-crisis employed to alter, change or influence by force or coercion, the electoral behaviour of voters or voting patterns or possibly reverse electoral decision in favour of particular individual, groups or political party. It could be seen as any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at any person or property involved in the election process, or at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period" (International Foundation for Election Systems, 2011).

Electoral violence could be before the election, thus involving all such activities that inflict any form of injury to the democratic system and its constituent and could be during voter registrations, campaigns and actual voting. Such violence could also be a post-election phenomenon which comes consequent on the manipulation of election results, rejection of results, etc. Corruption or fraud undermines the electoral process in both established democracies and transitional societies (Darnolf, 2013).

There is hardly any place in the world where perfect elections take place. In most African countries, and particularly in Nigeria, elections remain bitter and competition is characterized by electoral corruption, electoral violence and a lack of necessary transparency (Udu, 2023). The main objective of this paper is to show that widespread of electoral violence witnessed over the years has weakened and discredited democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Conceptualization of Elections, Electoral Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Elections:

Elections are a fundamental aspect of democratic governance, serving as a mechanism through which citizens express their preferences for political leaders and policies. Through elections, individuals have the opportunity to influence government decisions and hold leaders accountable for their actions. Elections embody the principle of popular sovereignty, where the authority of government is derived from the will of the people, as described by Dahl (1998). Elections can be defined as a formal process by which a population chooses individuals to hold public office. According to Lipjhart (1999), elections are the primary instrument of democracy, enabling the

peaceful transfer of power and allowing for citizen participation in government decision-making. This process typically involves the casting of votes to select representatives, including legislators, executives, and other public officials.

Obiyan and Afolabi (2013) view elections as a series of processes that result in choosing individuals from a larger group to occupy positions of authority. They argued that elections are effective tools for refining the functioning of democracy, establishing a representative government, and facilitating the transition of leadership. Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006) observed that elections represent the people's sovereign will and play a key role in granting legitimacy to political leadership. Akindele (2011 points out that elections involve much more than the events of Election Day; they are part of a broader process that includes activities before, during, and after the election. This process encompasses the legal and constitutional framework, the registration of political parties, party campaigns, media access and coverage, campaign financing, the role of security agencies, and the actions of the incumbent government.

Onyeka (2012) provided a clear explanation of elections as the process by which people choose their representatives in government. According to him, elections are held to fill public offices at different levels of government, whether federal, state, or local. In West Africa, elections serve as political tools for advancing these objectives, often resulting in quasi-democracies. In liberal democratic theory, elections are considered a crucial mechanism for establishing representative government. Beyond enabling leadership transitions, elections also promote political accountability, encourage citizen participation, and empower the people.

Akzin (1960) informs us that elections have technical and social significance. In the technical sense, they are the process through which an office or a post is assigned to a person by an act of volition that requires the simultaneous expression of many people's opinions. In the social sense, an election is the process by which a person is linked to an office through the due participation of the people who will bear the weight of his or her authority. It is this social aspect of elections that generates the idea of governing a society with the consent of the governed, and this boils down to democracy and distinguishes election from appointment (Akzin 1960). We should add here Mayo's view (1960) that the main 'purpose of the whole electoral process is to produce a government invested with legitimacy'.

The Role Elections in Democracy:
The role of elections extends beyond the simple act of voting; they are crucial for ensuring accountability, legitimacy, political stability, and representation in democratic societies. Scholars widely regard elections as the defining feature of democracy, as they enable the peaceful transfer of power and empower citizens to play a direct role in governance. Elections hold elected officials accountable to the electorate by offering a regular opportunity to either reward or penalize politicians for their performance in office. The possibility of losing office through elections encourages leaders to act in the public's interest. According to Schumpeter (1976), elections serve as a mechanism for competitive leadership selection, whereby voters have the power to remove officials who fail to deliver on their promises.

Democracy relies on this cyclical process of accountability, as elected leaders are more likely to implement policies that reflect public preferences when they know they will face the judgment of voters in future elections.

A core role of elections is to ensure political representation. Through elections, citizens elect representatives who advocate for their interests in legislative bodies and executive positions. Hanna Pitkin (1967) explains that representation means acting in the best interest of those who elect representatives, ensuring that government decisions reflect the diverse views of the electorate. Elections offer a platform for various political parties and candidates to present their policies, allowing voters to choose those who best align with their views. Elections confer legitimacy on elected leaders and the government as a whole. When elections are free, fair, and transparent, the government gains the consent of the governed, which is essential for democratic stability. As Robert Dahl (1998) notes, the legitimacy of democratic institutions largely depends on citizens' perception that electoral outcomes reflect their collective will. A government that is chosen through an inclusive and competitive electoral process is more likely to enjoy widespread public support. This legitimacy is crucial for governing effectively, as it strengthens the government's ability to implement policies and resolve conflicts.

One of the most significant roles of elections in democracy is ensuring the peaceful transfer of power. In a functioning democracy, elections allow for leadership transitions without the need for violence or coercion. Huntington (1991) famously argued that the peaceful transition of power is one of the key indicators of a consolidated democracy. Through elections, a sitting government can be replaced by an opposition party or candidate, depending on the voter's decision. Elections play a critical role in promoting citizen participation and engagement in political life. They give citizens the opportunity to express their opinions on key issues, voice concerns, and shape the direction of government policies. Elections empower individuals to exercise their right to vote, which is one of the most direct forms of political participation. Participation in elections also fosters political awareness and civic education. Campaigns, debates, and political advertisement help inform voters about the policy platforms of different candidates and parties, allowing them to make more informed decisions. Moreover, elections create a sense of civic duty, as citizens recognize their role in contributing to the collective governance of their society (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Elections serve as a mechanism for conflict resolution within democratic societies. In diverse or divided societies, elections provide a structured process for airing grievances and resolving competing interests through the ballot box rather than through violence or other extralegal means. When groups with different political, ethnic, or ideological interests participate in the electoral process, they can pursue their goals peacefully through formal institutions rather than resorting to conflict. According to Lindberg (2006), regular and credible elections help to institutionalize democratic practices over time; elections reinforce democratic norms, encouraging respect for the rule of law, civil liberties, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. As elections become routine, they contribute to the stability and consolidation of democratic systems.

Electoral Violence:
Some scholars define violence as the use of force against people and objects. Corsini (1999) describes violence as an expression of hostility and anger through physical force aimed at individuals or property. Degenaar (1990) views violence as the deliberate use of extreme force that damages objects and causes physical harm to animals or people. Other scholars see violence as the legitimate use of force. Hook (1934) defines it as the illegal use of physical coercion for personal or group interests, while Wolff (1969) argues that violence is the unauthorized use of force to enforce decisions against others' will. Audi (1971) asserts that violence, whether legal or illegal, is the unjustifiable use of force. Despite varying interpretations, these scholars agree that violence involves the use of physical force against people or property.

 Before addressing the concept of violence, it is important to examine its different forms. Most of the definitions mentioned above emphasize violence as a physical factor, but scholars like Galtung (1991, p 10-12) argue that it can also be psychological and structural in addition to physical. Physical violence includes acts of physical harm, such as assaults on individuals and damage to property. Psychological violence entails instilling fear, intimidating individuals, or disseminating harmful content aimed at them. Structural violence, as described by Daltung, is typically indirect but can be more harmful than physical or psychological violence. It encompasses factors such as political oppression, economic exploitation, and the denial of rights like freedom of choice (Galtung 1991, p10-12). This suggests that violence should not be seen solely as physical aggression but should be understood comprehensively, including its physical, psychological, and structural aspects. Therefore, in this paper, violence is defined as any organized or spontaneous act or threat by individuals or the government, intended to cause harm, take unfair advantage, or bring about destruction, with the goal of achieving a specific outcome.

To Albert (2007), electoral violence refers to "all forms of organized act or threats – physical, psychological and structural – aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a politician, stakeholders before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process. From Gaitung and Albert's views, Fischer (2012), sees electoral violence as "any random or organized 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". Similarly, Birch and Muchlinski (2018) describe "electoral violence as coercive force, directed towards electoral actors and/or objects that occur in the context of electoral competition – can occur before, during or after elections and it can target a variety of actors, including candidates, activists, poll workers, election observers, journalists and voters". In the same vein, Sisk (2013), defines electoral violence as "acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arises in the context of electoral competition".

What is clear from all the perspectives expressed above is the fact that electoral violence is dangerous to the peace, security, good governance and political stability of a country. It deprives the electorates the right to freely choose those who will govern them by subverting "the will of the people", which is central to democratic tenets and systems of government. Sisk (2013) asserts that electoral violence is orchestrated to affect an electoral process by influencing the process of elections, such as efforts to delay, disrupt or derail a poll and to influence the outcomes; this is

done mainly to influence or in the determination of winners in competition races for political office or to secure approval or disapproval of referendum questions.

Democracy:

According to Brennan and Honansky (1989), democracy has become a moral concept, with different regime laying claim to it just for the sake of survival without commitment to it ideas. It therefore becomes difficult for a consensus to be reached among scholars because of the diverse political regimes and systems that lay claim to democracy without being genuinely democratic. As a result, Mazi (2006) opined that different ideological leaning see democracy from their own perspectives. Thus: (i) Liberals understand democracy in individualist terms, as consent expressed through the ballot boxes, democracy being equated with regular and competitive elections; (ii) Socialists endorse a form of radical democracy based on popular participation and the desire to bring economic life under public control, dismissing liberal democracy as simply a bourgeois democracy; (iii) Anarchist endorse direct democracy and call for continuous popular participation and radical decentralization. Electoral democracy is a mere expression that attempts to conceal elite domination and reconcile the masses to their oppressors. (iv) Fascists embrace the idea of totalitarian democracy, holding that a genuine democracy is an absolute dictatorship as the leader monopolizes ideological wisdom and is unable to articulate the true interests of the people. Party and electoral competition are thus corrupt and degenerate.

> Owolabi (1999) in his "The Quest for Democracy in Africa", define democracy as a system of government in which every individual participates in the process of governance either maximally as a member of the majority or minimally as a member of the minority. This expands and expatiates on the literal definition of democracy as the 'rule of the people'. The right of the people to participate in the process of governance must be emphasized. Democracy is the free expression and determination, by the people of a polity, of how their society should be governed (Idris, 1999). The translation of this expression into action through appropriate policies and programmes is the function, and indeed the purpose of government. Democracy can only make sense to the ordinary people if they are active participants in its processes, and if eventually become better off through the implementation of concrete policies and programmes of a genuinely democratic government.

From the above definitions, four points need to be emphasized according to Eghosa (2022): (i) Democracy does not exist in a vacuum; it is a state variable and is expected to strengthen the state, not weaken it. Democracy cannot work in a state that is fragile and dysfunctional. (ii) Democracy is not given, in the sense that no state or society becomes democratic by creation, decree, wishful thinking, or the benevolence of external actors. Democracy is a system that is fought for, grown, defended and sustained through struggles by the people themselves. (iii) Democracy is not a one-size-fits-all system. The tenets and goals of democracy are basically the same, but the actual form that the system takes is a function of contextual variables…history, social formation, political economy, political culture. (iv) Democracy is a process that grows or diminishes over time. Once installed, democracy is expected to grow and become deepened, or else, it can stagnate or regress into authoritarian and non-democratic forms.

From the forgoing, democracy is approached as a system that can be grown, deepened and consolidated, because as an essential variable concept, democracy needs to be appropriated and owned for its full potentials and benefits to be realized. Alikpi (2004) argue that: Election is the barometer to measure the political maturity, health, legitimacy and stability of democratic

governance. It is generally held to be the single most important indicator of the presence or absence of democratic governance. The prime idea of democracy is for the people to have the right to determine the leaders who govern them and also elect the governing body and hold them accountable for their actions (Michael, 2004). Democracy imposes legal limits on the authority of the government by guaranteeing certain rights and freedoms to the citizens. Political power is employed to serve the interests of the public rather than of those who govern.

Democratic Consolidation:
Democratic consolidation is meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian aggression, of building dams against eventual "reverse waves". According to Diamond (2013), democratic consolidation means the quality, depth, and authenticity of democracy in its various dimensions has been improved: "political competition becomes fairer, freer, more vigorous and executive; participation and representation broader, more autonomous, and inclusive; civil liberties more comprehensively and rigorously protected; accountability more systematic and transparent.

Democracy defends the hopes of a people against onslaught by sundry intruders. Therefore, in the context of developing democracies, the stronger defense mechanisms of democracy, the nearer the tendencies of the system towards democratic consolidation. Hence, democratic consolidation critically refers to the growing of the defense mechanisms of democracy. Consequently, democratic consolidation is a process. It is not an accomplishment. Some scholars tend to view democratic consolidation as a realization – an achievement. Yagboyaju (2013) further opines that democratic consolidation could be said to effectively prevail in most mature and advanced democracies of the world, where many of the prominent democratic principles largely constitute the political culture. But democratic consolidation is a lot more than all of this. In fact, democratic consolidation is a feature of all democracies. While the need for building the defense mechanisms of democracy may be more pronounced in emerging democracies, all democracies are prone to attacks, which necessitate the fortification of democracy. It is this process of fortification that is democratic consolidation.

Grassi (2011) described democratic consolidation as "the process of defining and firmly establishing the essential characteristics of the structures and norms inherent in a democratic regime". Considering the essential characteristics and norms for the consolidation of democracy in a society, Schedler (1998), provided a list of conditions that are imperative for the attainment of democratic consolidation. From his view, the conditions include:

> Popular legitimation, the diffusion of democratic values, the neutralization of anti-system actors, civilian supremacy over the military, the elimination authoritarian enclaves, party building, the organization of functional interests, the stabilization of electoral rules, the routinization of politics, the decentralization of state power, the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, judicial reform, the alleviation of poverty, and economic stabilization.

In the real sense, a country can only be said to be democratic "when democracy becomes routinized, institutionalized and normalized to the extent that acting outside its tenets and practices or desecration of democratic norms is both unappealing and disadvantages for every politician and other political actor in the polity" (Gorokhvskaia, 2017). It means that democratic

consolidation is not necessarily about how long the democratic regime has lasted, but how well are the depth of the tenets, practices and processes of the democracy or how well do politicians and political actors uphold or observe the democratic principles in the society.

Theoretical Framework:
The purpose of theory in academic discourse cannot be overemphasized as it proffers empirically based general explanatory laws that are scientific in nature through synthesizing and integrating of empirical data for maximum unification. The frustration-aggression theory was first proposed by Dollard and colleagues in 1939. The theory posits that when individuals or groups experience frustrations – defined as the blocking of a goal or the perception of unfair barriers to desired outcomes – it often leads to aggression. Aggression, in this context, is viewed as a response to the feelings of anger and helplessness generated by unmet expectations or thwarted desires. Over time, the theory was modified to clarify that frustration does not always lead to direct aggression, but it can create a predisposition toward aggressive behavior, especially if there are cues that encourage it (Berkowitz, 1989).

In the Nigerian context, electoral violence can be understood through the lens of the frustration-aggression theory. Nigeria has a history of election-related conflicts due to various socio-political and economic factors, which create widespread frustration among the populace. Key sources of frustration include: (i) when people believe elections are rigged or manipulated, they feel their right to choose leaders is blocked. This frustration often sparks aggressive actions, such as protests, attacks on political opponents, or clashes between party supporters. (ii) Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society adds layers of frustration when certain groups feel marginalized or disadvantaged. During elections, these underlying tensions can erupt into violence, as various ethnic or religious groups see political power as a way to address historical grievances. (iii) the dominance of political elites who are perceived to perpetuate inequality through corruption also stokes frustration. Many citizens, especially those not aligned with these elites, may feel the system is rigged against them, leading to aggressive responses during elections, such as attacks on polling stations or electoral officials (Ikelegbe, 2005).

Frustration-aggression theory helps explain the roots of electoral violence in Nigeria, as various forms of frustration-whether political, ethnic, or economic-drive people to aggressive behaviours during elections. This violence, in turn, impedes Nigeria's efforts at democratic consolidation, as it weakens institutions, erodes trust in democracy, and perpetuates cycles of instability.

Causes of Electoral Violence in Nigeria
It is clear that due to the damaging impact of electoral violence on the country's political environment, numerous questions and concerns have been raised about its underlying causes. Some scholars argue that the causes of electoral violence include greed, electoral malpractices and rigging, abuse of political power, alienation, marginalization, exclusion, and the political economy of oil (Igbuzor, 2010). Yet, other scholars adduce the following as the causes of the phenomenon: poverty/unemployment (Mathew, 2014); ineffectiveness of security forces and culture of impunity; weak penalties; weak governance and corruption (McCulloch, 2013); and, proliferation of arms and ammunitions. In the same vein, other pundits argue that the causal factors are: lack of security; partisanship of traditional rulers who were supposed to be the custodians of our cultural heritage; abuse of office by elected officials; zero-sum politics or

winner takes all syndrome; lucrative nature of political office; poor handling of election petition, lack of faith in the judiciary; and lack of compliance with the extant electoral law and enforcement of the enabling laws; the partisan disposition of the police, and other security agencies detailed to monitor the election, and secure lives and property; corrupt INEC staff and ad-hoc officials who connive with the politicians; conflict of interests between and among politicians; and greed and selfish interests of politicians coupled with ideological bankruptcy (Ugiagbe, 2010).

Election rigging equally contributes to electoral violence in our country. Experience has shown that rigging has been a single most important cause that pervades free and fair election and this has been responsible for grave consequences for democratic stability in Nigeria. More so, electoral maladministration is also one of the causes of electoral violence in Nigeria. The insincerity of the electoral officers seems to over shadow the inadequate control mechanisms and poor logistics which all enhance manipulations through electoral fraud. Political intolerance and the tendency to see election as a do or die affair also contribute to electoral violence at the detriment of democratic stability. In Nigeria, hardly do election losers accept (even in those elections that are adjudged transparent) the verdict of the ballot box (James, 2024). The proliferation of armed groups and militant organizations, thus, particularly in the Niger Delta and Northern Regions, fuels electoral violence in Nigeia. These groups are sometimes co-opted by politicians to engage in violent acts, including ballot snatching, intimidation of voters, and attacks on opponents.in the Niger Delta, militant groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have historically used violence to express political grievances (Ikelegbe, 2005).

Intense competition between political parties often leads to clashes between their supporters. Political campaigns in Nigeria are characterized by inflammatory rhetoric and accusations, which heighten tensions and can lead to violence. When the stakes are high, parties resort to violence to secure victory or protest perceived injustices (Suberu, 2007). Flaws in Nigeria's electoral management contribute to electoral violence. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been criticized for organizational failures, including delayed election results, insufficient security at polling stations, and inadequate voter education (Adigun, 2015). The dominance of political elites and the culture of "godfatherism" also incites electoral violence. Political godfathers, who wield enormous influence, sponsor candidates and demand loyalty. These power brokers often use violence to maintain control over the political process and secure their interests. Nwolise (2007) notes that, godfathers use violence as a strategy to eliminate rivals or secure electoral victory for their protégés.

Corruption is deeply entrenched in Nigeria's political system, and electoral processes are often rigged or manipulated by politicians seeking to retain power. When elections are perceived as fraudulent, it triggers violent responses from those who feel cheated. According to Human Rights Watch (2007), weak institutions such as the police and judiciary fail to hold perpetrators accountable, allowing violence to continue unchecked.

Electoral Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria
Democracy encourages popular and mass participation in the governance processes beginning with involvement in the electioneering activities. Popular participation is a hallmark of a

democratic system. electoral violence has a grave impact and consequences on the democratic process. Democracy is said to be the government of the people, by the people and for the people; and when that's not allowed to happen, it set the ball rolling backward. The impacts of electoral violence on the democratic process are: It dissuades the people from participating in the electoral process or elections. When people feel threatened, they won't come out to vote during an election; It also leads to voter's suppression, which is a systematic and targeted strategy to limit participation; It makes election outcome to conform with the will of the stronger against the will of the people; It can as well leads to destruction of lives and properties, which itself is antithetical to a peaceful transmission of power from one government to another.

On the importance of popular participation in the consolidation of democracy, Alapiki (2004) opined that democracy remains the most popular and fascinating form of government to all people and government throughout the world because of its emphasis on the right to political participation through elections. With the increasing spate of violence at every election in Nigeria, Eke and Oghoator (2018) assert that the consolidation of democracy in the country through the conduct of free, fair and credible election has remained an illusion. Democracy is believed to be the best form of government by many international organizations and development agencies of the accountability principle imbedded in its practice through periodic elections.

Essentially, when the people are dissatisfied with the way a government discharges its functions, the accountability principles implied that they would be able to demand that government live up to its responsibility or change the government at the next election. The government will not be accountable in such situation since they do not necessarily need the votes of the people to be elected into power. This contradicts the democratic consolidation desires of the country. It creates lack of fate in the democratic process, and government as being capable of delivering on the "dividends of democracy". It is not therefore uncommon to hear some people in the country calling for military takeover of government, describing the violence through which most civilian government emerge under the present democratic dispensation as equal to or worse than a government that came to power through a coup d'état. The assertion above poses serious challenges to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Electoral violence in Nigeria remains a significant challenge to democratic consolidation. Despite the progress made since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the persistence of electoral violence undermines the integrity of the electoral process, weakens public trust in democratic institutions, and hampers effective governance. The causes of electoral violence are multi-faceted, including ethnic and religious tensions, weak electoral institutions, political corruption, and a lack of enforcement of the rule of law. Until these factors are addressed, Nigeria's democracy will remain fragile, and the prospects for deepening democratic consolidation will be limited.

However, Nigeria has demonstrated resilience in its democratic journey, as seen in peaceful transitions of power and the expansion of civil liberties. The key to democratic consolidation lies in the strengthening of institutions, improving the electoral process, fostering political inclusivity, and addressing socio-economic inequalities that fuel political violence. A focus in these areas will be critical in reducing electoral violence and achieving sustainable democratic governance in Nigeria. The research makes the following recommendations:

i.   The Electoral Management Bodies (EMB), i.e. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be further empowered with more autonomy, resources, and personnel training to manage elections more effectively. Adequate funding and institutional independence will enhance its capacity to organize free and fair elections.

ii.   Political awareness campaigns are essential to educate citizens about their rights, the importance of peaceful elections, and the dangers of electoral violence. Civil society organizations and government agencies should collaborate to carry out sensitization programs across the country.

iii.   There should be strict enforcement of electoral laws and severe penalties for individuals and groups found guilty of perpetrating electoral violence. The judiciary must expedite the trial of electoral offenders to serve as a deterrent to future violence.

iv.   Nigeria's political system should promote greater inclusivity by encouraging the participation of marginalized groups, such as women, youth, and ethnic minorities. Political parties should adopt internal democracy and embrace inclusive platforms to avoid fostering exclusion that often leads to violence.

v.   Poverty and unemployment are root causes of political violence. The government should prioritize policies that promote economic development, job creation, and social welfare programs. By addressing socio-economic disparities, it will be harder for politicians to exploit vulnerable groups to engage in electoral violence.

vi.   Government should establish conflict resolution platforms at the community and national levels, such as peace committees, can help resolve disputes before they escalate into violence. This should involve key stakeholders, including religious leaders, traditional rulers, and civil society organizations, who can mediate conflicts and encourage peaceful participation in the electoral process.

vii.   Nigeria government should seek regional and international support or collaboration in the areas of electoral observation, capacity-building, and sharing of best practices in managing electoral violence. Partnerships with the Africa Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the United Nations can provide technical and moral support to Nigeria's efforts in consolidating its democracy.

viii.   The police and security agencies must be properly trained and equipped to provide adequate security during elections, without being partisans or interfering in the process. Reforming the security apparatus to enhance professionalism and accountability is crucial to preventing violence.

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