



JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, POLICY AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

Volume 2, Number 4 (September, 2026)

ISSN: 1595-9457 (online); 3043-4211 (print)

Website: <https://jppssuniuyo.com/> Email: jppssuniuyo@gmail.com

Received: August 19, 2026 Accepted: September 12, 2026 Published: September 30, 2026

Citation: Shehu, Enoch A.; Ari Ogah M. & Jibrin, Abdullahi D. (2026). "Electoral Violence in Nigeria and Lessons for Future General Elections." *Journal of Philosophy, Policy and Strategic Studies*, 2 (4): 49-59.

Article

Open Access

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA AND LESSONS FOR FUTURE GENERAL ELECTIONS

Enoch Amila Shehu ¹, Ogah Musa Ari ² & Abdullahi Dan'Asabe Jibrin ³

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Federal University of Lafia,
Nasarawa State, Nigeria ^{1, 2 & 3}

Corresponding Email: shehuenochamila@gmail.com ¹

Abstract

Since 1951, violence has consistently marred Nigerian elections. From colonial to 2023 general elections historical perspective of electoral violence is lacking in existing literature. This study examined the incident of electoral violence in Nigeria from a historical perspective and drew lessons for future elections. The study was anchored on securitisation theory, and data were sourced from secondary and observation sources. Data analysis indicated that electoral violence in Nigeria has conferred undue political advantage to regions, political parties and individuals. In 1965 and 1983, electoral violence contributed to the military takeover. Among others, the study found that electoral violence is a threat to Nigeria's state and democracy. The research concluded that electoral violence should be securitised in Nigeria. In order to ensure the survival of Nigeria's state and its democracy the study recommended among others that the federal government should declared electoral violence as state emergency with capital punishment for the perpetrators; and politicians and electorates should priorities Nigeria survival than myopic interest.

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Violence, General Election, Securitisation.

Introduction

Electoral violence has become a normalised abnormal attribute of elections in Nigeria. Political actors deployed electoral violence as a strategy to gain electoral advantage (Daxecker, 2020). Those who adopt this model to win elections recognise the dynamics of political competition within a specific context, as well as the inevitability of violence. Achieving electoral victory through violence hinges on the timing, methods, and locations where such violence can be effectively employed. The art and science of electoral violence

have gained scholars' attention. Some are generic introductions (Birch *et al.*, 2020; Ani & Uwizeyimana, 2022), while others are on new or emerging democracies (Omotola, 2011; Daxecker, 2020). Nigeria as a developing democracy is not immune from electoral violence. Since contact with Europe and subsequent integration into liberal democracy under the elective principles enshrined in the 1922 constitution and the third wave of democratisation, electoral violence has remained resilient. Frequencies of violence during elections have made electoral epoch volatile in Nigeria. Electoral violence halted the Nigerian democratic experiment in 1965 and 1983 (Kurfi, 2005; Yoroms, n.d.). It also denied credible aspirants contesting in an election, caused political apathy and conferred undue electoral advantage to unpopular candidates (Arinze *et al.*, 2021). Scholarship on Nigerian electoral violence can be categorised into single election case studies, republic, comparative and historical perspectives. Nwolise (2007) and Arinze *et al.* (2021) contributions fall under the single election case study of Nigeria's electoral violence. Agah (2017) and Alao (2021) studies focus on Nigeria's fourth republic incident of electoral violence, and Genyi (2019) added a comparative view. These studies, along with others, lack a comprehensive historical perspective. Anyika and Ani (2022) historical standpoint excluded the colonial epoch and 2023 general elections. This exclusion marked the point of departure for this study. This study examines the incident of electoral violence in Nigeria with focus on evolution of electoral violence from the colonial era to 2023 general elections and lessons for future general elections. The rest of the paper is divided into a theoretical framework, methodology, conceptual and historical analysis of electoral violence, lessons for the future elections and conclusion.

Theoretical Framework: Securitisation Theory (ST)

The study adopted securitisation theory. Securitisation theory synthesises the constructivist and classical realist approaches to security. It was postulated by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver of the Copenhagen School (Otukoya, 2024). They view security as a construct, and it requires the state's utmost attention. Just as classical realism commits resources to curbing security threats, any matter that is securitised receives proportionate attention and resources. According to securitisation theorists, security is dynamic, contested and multifaceted process which challenges narrow conceptions of security in the light of threats involving the military from other states (Kayotis *et al.* 2025). Securitisation commences with a speech act whereby decision-makers frame and seek to persuade an audience that a specific issue constitutes a security threat. When the audience acknowledges and agrees with this perception of threat, extraordinary measures may be implemented. Thus, a framed issue becomes a securitised and legitimised action. However, securitisation can fail if the audience does not accept the characterisation of the issue as a security threat. As a post-Cold War postulation, securitisation theory aids in understanding decision-makers' perceptions and responses to issues. In this sense, matters termed 'security threats' are given utmost attention. Despite a huge budgetary allocation for the election, electoral violence marred the principles of democratic elections. Electoral violence resilience in Nigeria implies that Nigerian leaders are yet to frame it as a national security threat or Nigerians is yet to accept it.

Methodology

The research adopted historical descriptive design. The study is limited to Nigeria. Nigeria is a pluralistic independent country with distinct political system and culture. Understanding the logic of electoral violence in Nigeria is essential for comprehending its origins. Primary

and secondary sources of data were employed. The primary was generated through observation of elections in Nigeria's fourth republic. Secondary sources were sourced from journal articles, textbooks, organisations and election observer reports. The primary focus of the study is general elections (presidential in the second and fourth republics), which are the elections that are conducted nationwide, and it has an impact on all elections.

Conceptualisation

- i. **Election:** Elections may be delineated from a community and an academic standpoint. The former denotes the choice of a person for a post. Viewed intellectually, an election is a mechanism through which competent members of a group or organisation choose their officials or representatives. The latter bestows legitimacy upon the leader and government when they are elected democratically in a democratic society (Nwolise, 2007). From either standpoint, one can conclude that elections are a part of state and national affairs. From either standpoint, it can be concluded that elections are a significant aspect of state and national affairs. Aligning with Nwolise (2007), Genyi (2019) asserted that in a democracy, elections are the only mechanism by which governance power is conferred upon representatives of the populace. The electoral process is a defining characteristic of democracy and a mechanism for voters to wield their sovereignty. Thus, the maintenance of democracy must hinge on the standard of electoral processes. According to Erameh *et al.* (2021), elections are essential to the democratisation process of a nation, allowing citizens to select their desired candidate or disapprove of one they view as unsuited to achieve the expected outcomes of democracy. Saha (2022) contended that elections represent a vital facet of democracy, serving as a conduit for the exchange of power. Elections resist the notion of hereditary succession and violence while fostering engagement between political leaders and the general public. The author further indicated that, unfortunately, even in a democratic regime, elections may incite violence, causing a decline in democratic governance and the potential emergence of authoritarianism.
- ii. **Violence:** The concept of violence is one of the most contested concepts in humanity. Several scholars have attempted elaborating on the concept. Among them is Bufacchi (2005), who emphasises the importance of etymology in a discourse community. Bufacchi argued that 'violence' is derived from the Latin word '*violentia*', which means 'vehemence', a passionate and uncontrolled force. The author further observed that no one is immune from political violence. On what violence is, the author acknowledged two views: the comprehensive and minimalist conceptions of violence. Violence can be understood from a force lens as the exercise of physical force to inflict injury on or cause damage to a person or property, which is the perpetrator's perspective or minimalist conception of violence. Violence from a violation perspective is defined as infringing, transgressing or exceeding some limit or norm. This is from victims' conceptions of violence or comprehensive conceptions of violence. The lacuna associated with this view is lacks of scientific criteria and a spectator view which could harmonise the two was not provided. Onyinye *et al.* (2022) affirmed the etymology of 'violence' as argued by Bufacchi (2005) from the Latin word '*violentia*'. Violence connotes illegitimacy and unauthorisedness, a passionate and uncontrolled force, and the use of physical force that injures, damages, violates, or destroys people or things purposely to effect decisions against the will or desires of other people in the society. From Onyinye *et al.*'s perspective, they suggest that any act of violence committed by the authority is not violence. Another deficiency in their perspective is the reduction of violence to only

physical acts. Galtung (1969) conceived violence through the lens of influence. Thus, violence is the gap between what could have been and what is. Galtung further differentiates between physical and psychological violence. The former entails hurting to the point of killing, while the latter includes lies, brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds, threats, etc. that serve to decrease mental potentialities. To this end, violence can be said to occur when people are influenced in a way that their actual mental realisations fall short of their potential realisation. Galtung's conception captured the dominance dimension of violence, including both physical and psychological aspects, which scholars such as Onyinye *et al.* (2022) did not address. Furthermore, Galtung's elements of psychology are essential in understanding political competition.

- iii. **Electoral Violence:** Nwolise (2007) defined electoral violence as physical violence to rig elections or against the theft of elections. The author further cited Albert (2007), who defined electoral violence as 'all forms of organised acts or threats: physical, psychological, and structural, aimed at intimidating, harming, or blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during, and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process'. Electoral violence hinders democratic elections, the process of democratisation, the consolidation of democracy, the growth of democratic culture, and the internalisation of the best democratic practices in any country. In another sense, electoral violence limits people's participation in the electoral process and enables the imposition of candidates, programmes and policies, which, in turn, engenders violent reactions from losers and the electorates. Electoral violence produces a legitimacy crisis. According to Birch *et al.* (2020), literature on conflict and political violence, on the one hand, and electoral misconduct and on the other hand gave birth to the study of electoral violence in political science. Electoral violence is a subtype of political violence which takes place during the campaign period, on polling day or in the aftermath of voting. The authors identified the goal as influencing election outcomes whereby the perpetrator wins the election. They further opine that such candidates can be incumbent or opposition candidates, in either way are often unpopular. Some scholars, such as Daxecker (2020), consider election violence as a campaign strategy to influence the electoral process through the coercion of candidates or voters with threats and violence. As a long-time plan, she observed that 'malapportionment' refers to the discrepancy between the shares of legislative seats and the shares of the population in electoral districts. Electoral apportionment can produce over-represented, equally apportioned, or under-represented results. It's an incentive for electoral violence. While in short time, she concluded that electoral violence seeks to reduce voters' turnout among opponents' strongholds. It takes various forms, including partisan clashes, communal violence, and armed groups. From a democratic principle, Genyi (2019) observed that competitive, regular, free and fair elections underscore the will of the people in choosing representatives, whereas electoral violence is the direct attack in favour of a few. It's a form of political violence that seeks to manipulate election results. Election violence is essentially motivated by influencing elections. He attributed the causes of electoral violence to institutional factors, including the desire to win elections, as well as structural elements related to social and political characteristics of societies, such as ethnicity, religion, and class differences. Electoral violence occurred before, during, and after the election, affecting not only voters but also candidates. From 1959 to 2019, electoral violence has been a

prevalent issue in Nigerian electoral history, with power acquisition and resource allocation serving as incentives for aspirants and voters, respectively. He concluded that the situation has worsened in Nigeria's fourth republic, as seen in the increase of physical assault, murders, assassinations, bombings, shootings and destruction of properties belonging to individuals, political parties and public facilities.

Historical Overview of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Elections can occur without democracy, but in a democratic context, they are meant to change administrations or establish representatives of the people. In contemporary, Nigeria election is a legacy of colonialism. One of the early steps of the colonial master toward political freedom, or so-called independence of Nigeria, was the opportunity that the 1922 constitution gave Nigerians to be elected into the legislative council (Nwolise, 2007; Genyi, 2019). Elections conducted for the legislative council then were nonviolent. The conduct of elections and the manifestation of electoral violence in the light of Nigerian nationhood began during 1951 elections. Kurfi (2005) observed the absence of a uniform national election management body and policy. He further argued that in the north it was indirect election, in the Eastern part it took universal suffrage, while in the Western region voting was limited to natives and residents who have paid tax for twelve months and are twenty years and above. According to Taft and Haken (2018), during the Nigerian colonial epoch, there were incidents of electoral violence. A notable crisis in the era was the Kano riot of 1953. In May 1953, the Action Group (AG) launched a campaign for Nigeria's independence. In May 1953, violent attacks greeted the AG campaign for Nigeria's independence in Kano (Nwankwo, 1992). The attack was reprisal following mob mockery of Sardauna of Sokoto in Lagos when the northerners opposed the motion for the independence of Nigeria. The omen was the killing and destruction of properties in Kano, mostly of southerners, especially in Sabon Gari (Nwankwo, 1992; Edafenene & Peter, 2022).

In 1954, the House of Representatives was raised to 182 members, and the sharing formula between the northern and southern regions of Nigeria was 50-50. According to Kurfi (2005), this sharing formula gave the Northern People Congress (NPC) a great advantage in the House of Representatives. The election was carried out through an electoral college which made manipulation minimal but there were instances of systematic electoral violence including the exclusion of suitably qualified candidates like Malam Aminu Kano in Kano (Kurfi, 2005). One of the significant efforts to address the national electoral lacuna was the idea of a federal election management body that was decided during the 1957/1958 constitutional conference. The mandate of the commission was general supervision of the preparation for voter registration and the conduct of the 1959 election (Kurfi, 2005). The 1959 election brought the colonial administration's favouritism of the north to the limelight when Sir Abubakar Tafawa Belewa, under the NPC, was directed to form a government by Sir James Robertson, the then governor-general, while vote counting was ongoing (Nwolise, 2007). There was electoral violence, such as organising an AG campaign on the market day by believed supporters who deceived the party leadership, absent Abuja native authority and the emir, and throwing stones at Chief Obafemi Awolowo of AG; women in the northern region were not registered on religious grounds, and the phenomenon of voter buying and selling, as well as women pregnant with ballot papers, emerged (Kurfi, 2005). However, there was no protest because the major goal of the nationalists was independence (Nwolise, 2007; Genyi, 2019). Nigeria gained independence in the quest for national unity, a pursuit shaped by the nature of colonial rule. Taft and Haken (2018) argued that British indirect rule fostered identity-based politics, resulting in divisions among Nigerians along ethnic, religious,

and regional lines. These ethnic groups coexist with an underlying atmosphere of suspicion and conspiracy (Yoroms, n.d.). Consequently, the political landscape of early independent Nigeria was significantly influenced by major ethnic affiliations, with the NPC representing the Hausa/Fulani, the AG associated with the Yoruba, and the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) aligned with the Igbo (Anyika & Ani, 2022).

Political consolidation is an inherent nature of man as a political animal. The 1964 election was conceived by the NPC to consolidate her domination of Nigerian politics at the federal level (Omotola, 2011). The political tension midwife alliances, which in turn made the election bitter and violent (Kurfi, 2005), and consonance with ethnic rivalries, the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) partial boycott prevented 51 constituencies in the Eastern Region from opening polling places, and in Lagos, Kano and Jos, there was a partial boycott (Kurfi, 2005; Taft & Haken, 2018). Strategy of election official hiding themselves to avoid collecting opposition candidates' nominations and denial of campaign venues were recorded (Kurfi, 2005). The overall political atmosphere were characterised by assassination, hired thugs, disrupt campaign rallies, disruption of voting in opponents strongholds, arson, kidnapping, snatch ballot boxes, burning houses and ballot papers inter alia resulting in loss of lives and properties (Kurfi, 2005; Nwolise, 2007; Taft & Haken, 2018; Genyi, 2019; Anyika & Ani, 2022). The alliances and political upheaval of 1964 at the federal level significantly influenced the 1965 election in the Western region. The 1965 election in the Western region mirrored the alliances and political upheaval of 1964 at the federal level. In the 1965 election in the Western region, Chief S. L. Akintola's collaboration with the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) enabled him to consolidate power in the Western region, vehemently opposing Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). In accordance with this strategy, electoral officials concealed themselves to obstruct UPGA members from submitting their documents to them (Nwankwo, 1992). During the vote- counting process, sixteen NNDP candidates were declared re-elected unopposed. Violent protests from October 1965 to January 15, 1966, were perceived as an indication of purported electoral manipulation.

The political crises of 1964/1965 ended with military intervention. In 1979, the military transferred authority to the duly elected president, Alhaji Shehu Shagari. The 1979 election was tranquil owing to the military's retention of power, which instilled fear (Genyi, 2019; Omotola, 2011; Kurfi, 2005). Kurfi (2005) contended that in Lagos, non-Yoruba individuals were assigned polling stations distant from their residences; more than 300 candidates were disqualified due to non-payment of taxes, incarceration, and dishonesty. Kurfi further noted that Colonel Ojukwu's candidacy for the Nnewi House of Representatives under the Great Nigeria People's Party was disqualified due to his dismissal from the army, lacking substantiation. The political parties that participated in the presidential election won by Shehu Shagari include the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigerian People's Party (NPP), People Redemption Party (PRP), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and Nigeria Advance Party (NAP). The candidacy of Shehu Shagari for the NPN was scrutinised regarding the stipulation that the party's candidate for the 1983 election should originate from southern Nigeria (Taft & Haken, 2018). In the 1983 elections, the NPN aimed to consolidate national power through incumbency while also expanding its influence in other states, resulting in the UPN losing two states to the NPN (Kurfi, 2005 Omotola, 2011; Anyika & Aki, 2022). Opposition parties were obstructed from accessing media outlets, including the Nigeria Television Authority, Radio and newspapers such as daily times. Incidents of vote buying and intimidation occurred, and the FEDECO and police offices were

set ablaze in Akure, Ondo State. Some voters were denied ballot papers. Litigations were lost on technical ground and time factor, used of security agencies and election management body and thugs were recorded during the election period (Kurfi, 2005; Nwolise, 2007; Omotola, 2011; Genyi, 2019). First-time voters were summoned by politicians to defend their votes (Yoroms, n.d).

The electoral violence of 1983 precipitated a subsequent military regime, which maintained authority from December 1983 until May 1999. Despite attempts in June 1993 to hold elections for the unsuccessful third republic, the elections were marred by violence. In contrast, the 1998/1999 elections experienced a reduction in violence. Retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, who had previously transferred authority to a civilian government in 1979, secured the presidential election as a candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). President Olusegun Obasanjo's initial four-year term ended in 2003. The 2003 presidential elections have two former heads of state contesting the presidential seat: the incumbent president under PDP and late Muhammadu Buhari, the coup leader of the December 1983 military intervention, as major opposition candidates under the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP). Prior to the 2003 elections, poverty and youth unemployment were on the rise (Genyi, 2019), and there was a proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) (Genyi, 2019; Taft & Haken, 2018; Alao, 2021). The former made the youth vulnerable, and the latter intensified the violence before and during the election. Another consequence of the SALW was the creation of criminal gangs. Politicians employed thugs during the 2003 elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security agencies were used by the incumbent as instruments to secure victory in the election (Nwolise, 2007; Taft & Haken, 2018). Furthermore, state media exhibited partiality in their coverage, favouring the incumbent PDP. There were clashes between supporters of the different parties, intimidation, and disruption of the voting process, resulting in the deaths of 105 individuals (Alao, 2021; Anyika & Ani, 2022). Prior to the 2007 general election, President Olusegun Obasanjo unsuccessfully attempted to amend the 1999 Nigerian constitution to contest for a third term. The zero-sum game of Nigerian politics had metamorphosed into a do-or-die affair. The People's Democratic Party had psychologically secured victory in the presidential election even before it took place. This is encapsulated in the former president Olusegun Obasanjo famous statement that 2007 election will be a do or die affair (Omotola, 2011; Nwolise, 2007). Similar threats were evident at the state level. For instance, in Oyo State, Alhaji Lamido Adedibu declared that only those who were aligned with him would win, while in Kwara State, Dr Olusola Saraki stated that the vacancy in the state was reserved for his son, Dr Bukola Saraki (Omotola, 2011).

The political climate of 2007 deterred several reputable candidates from running (Yoroms, n.d.). The use of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) has manifested as structural violence, complementing the established deployment of security agencies and the INEC (Omotola, 2011; Genyi, 2019). The phenomenon of political godfatherism became more pronounced in the 2007 elections (Nwolise, 2007; Omotola, 2011). During the election, there were instances of ballot stuffing, delayed arrival and non-distribution of electoral materials, disenfranchisement, and result falsification (Genyi, 2019; Alao, 2021; Anyika & Ani, 2022), leading to a decline in voter turnout (Taft & Haken, 2018) and the deaths of 300 individuals, in addition to property destroyed (Genyi, 2019). The states of Ekiti, Ondo, and Oyo exhibited greater volatility (Omotola, 2011). Former President Yar'Adua acknowledged that he benefited from the manipulation of the 2007 presidential election. After his abrupt demise, Goodluck Jonathan completed the

remaining term and ran in the 2011 presidential election as a candidate for the PDP. The candidacy of President Goodluck Jonathan reinvigorated the colonial legacy of the South-North and Christian-Muslim dichotomy, as well as the 1983 power rotation between Nigeria's northern and southern regions (Taft & Haken, 2018). There were four major political parties - ANPP, PDP, Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) - among 63 that contested. Structural violence included the denial of venue and access to media, while physical violence manifested in clashes between party and candidate supporters. Late former president Muhammadu Buhari, the CPC candidate, urged voters to defend their votes, reminiscent of Adegunle Ajasin's actions in 1983. The repercussions of Buhari's call led to destructive violence following the announcement of former president Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of the 2011 presidential election by INEC in northern Nigeria (Alao, 2021; Genyi, 2019). There were bomb blasts at INEC offices in Bauchi and Borno states. Before the situation was brought under control, both private and public properties were destroyed, approximately 800 people were killed, and 65,000 were displaced (Alao, 2021; Anyika & Ani, 2022). Physical electoral violence during the election period increased from 2003, reaching its peak in the 2011 general election.

The resultant effect of the 2011 electoral atmosphere, combined with U.S. predictions that Nigeria would be dismantled in 2015 and the ongoing insurgency, rendered the 2015 general elections alarming (EU-EOM, 2015; Yoroms, n.d.). The presidential race was competitive, featuring incumbent the then president Goodluck Jonathan and the late former Muhammadu Buhari as the main opposition candidate. Government media outlets were biased in favour of the incumbent party. All political parties engaged in hate speech. The requirement for voting in the election was possession of a Permanent Voter Card (PVC), which was unequally distributed among geopolitical zones. Yoroms (n.d.) asserts that the Southern regions expressed their displeasure regarding the distribution of PVCs, feeling that the north was favoured. The European Union Election Observers Mission (2015) noted that 100,000 PVCs were not produced a day before the election on 28 March 2015, despite the postponement from 14 February. During the 2015 elections, there was arbitrary rejection of aspirants during the screening process (EU-EOM, 2015), which was a modification of practices from 1964 and 1965 designed to evade the collection of nomination forms. The change of the election date from 14 February to 28 March was viewed by the opposition as a tactic employed by the incumbent to gain an advantage (Yoroms, n.d.). The European Union Election Observers Mission (2015) reported that, in addition to 160 deaths resulting from incidents of election violence, there were 41 instances of physical violence on 28 March, leading to the deaths of 19 individuals. Complaints regarding underage voting, ballot snatching, and the stuffing of ballot boxes on election day, were recorded. Former president Jonathan accepted defeat, contributing to post-election peace, despite the complaints made by the PDP.

The 2019 presidential election was characterised by incumbency and the presence of a single strong opposition candidate. The All Progressives Congress nominated the late president Muhammadu Buhari as its candidate, while former vice president Atiku Abubakar represented the PDP. Leading political parties faced criticism for failing to rein in their supporters, which contributed to violence and intimidation resulting in the deaths of 150 individuals (EU-EOM, 2019). The European Union Election Observers Mission (2019) further noted that INEC staff and facilities were targets of violence and there were cases of sexual assault. The phenomenon of government media being used as a tool by the incumbent political party recurred during the 2019 elections. The use of political thugs was prevalent

throughout the 2019 election cycle. Voters find it difficult to identify logo of the party of their choice (Sule, *et al.* 2020). The European Union Election Observers Mission (2019) reported that the majority of polling units opened extremely late, and approximately 2.8 million votes were cancelled without sufficient justification. The mission warned that such actions could adversely affect future political participation.

The 2023 presidential election race was unique. Unlike the traditional two-party system of the fourth republic, the 2023 election featured third and even fourth contenders. Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the former governor of Lagos, was the APC flag bearer; former vice president Atiku Abubakar emerged as the PDP flag bearer; Peter Obi, the former governor of Anambra State, represented the Labour Party; and the New Nigeria People Party (NNPP) had Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, the former governor of Kano State, as its flag bearer (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025; Owonikoko & Ashindorbe, 2025; Ojukwu *et al.*, 2023). The seven general elections conducted by INEC have also manifested the established Nigerian electoral norm. The European Union Election Observer Mission (2023) reported 21 incidents of attacks on INEC's staff and facilities in the year preceding the election date. Political thugs were deployed against opponents' rallies. During the campaign period, there were 101 incidents of violence and 74 fatalities (EU-EOM, 2023) with an increase in assassination attempts as election day drew near. Incumbency factor continued to influence the 2023 general election, as seen in previous elections. Cases of vote buying were prevalent, serving as an alternative to ballot snatching (Ogunbanjo, 2024). The use of partisan community vigilantes, under the guise of electoral security, was observed by the EU-EOM (EU-EOM, 2023).

Lesson for Future Elections

Electoral violence is an inherent aspect of the Nigerian political culture (Anyika & Ani, 2022). In the fourth republic, despite being the longest in Nigeria's democratic history so far, elections are characterised by electoral violence. Electoral violence mitigation is critical for Nigeria to consolidate her democracy. This will boost her regional and continental leadership. Nigerian leaders have securitised banditry and kidnapping, among other insurgencies. Electoral violence is threatening Nigerian state, democracy and fundamental right is not securitised. Undemocratic politicking was a significant factor for military coup in 1965 and 1983 (Genyi, 2019; Omotola, 2011; Kurfi, 2005). The resurgence of a coup in the Sahel and the alleged attempt in Nigeria called for political elites to look inward in order to deter a coup. Another effect of election-related violence is the loss of lives and properties. In the fourth republic, incidents of election-related violence increased from the 2003 to 2011 general elections (Taft & Haken, 2018; Genyi, 2019). The loss of lives and properties has negatively impacts economic stability, interpersonal relationships, and national integration. Nigerians political elite should emulate the political disposition of former President Goodluck Jonathan, who prioritised Nigerian lives over his political ambitions (Ogunbanjo, 2024).

Fear of death during elections accounts for low political participation. From 1999 to 2023, there has been an increase in the number of voters' registrations (EU-EOM, 2023). The increase in voter registrations has not led to sustained voter turnout; instead, a decrease in turnout has become the norm (Owonikoko & Ashindorbe, 2025). Electoral security, which involves the safety of voters and their votes, ought to be the top priority of INEC and formal security agencies. Lack of a unified and neutral electoral body has conferred undue advantage to political parties and individuals (Kurfi, 2005; Nwankwo, 1992). INEC is, in principle and legally, independent, while in practice the status quo is questionable. INEC has undergone numerous reforms and innovations capable of improving the administration of elections and curbing election-related violence (EU-EOM 2023). INEC should be independent,

transparent, neutral and fair to all political parties from their registration and electoral processes.

Conclusion

The political evolution of Nigeria is deeply rooted in electoral violence. The art of violence associated with elections has been master by the government, institutions, political parties, and individuals. The state and its citizens have been significantly affected by this violence in all respects. The will of the citizens is necessary for authority to mitigate electoral violence. Nigeria is obligated to promptly address electoral violence.

Recommendations

Survival of Nigeria and its democracy called reorientation in addition to the following recommendations:

- i. The federal government should declared electoral violence as state emergency with capital punishment for the perpetrators.
- ii. The federal government should ensure INEC constitutional independent.
- iii. INEC in collaboration with security agencies should ensure electoral security.
- iv. Politicians and electorates should priorities Nigeria survival than myopic interest.

References

- Agah, B. E. (2017). *Electoral violence and democracy in Nigeria's fourth republic: A study of Delta and Oyo states*. (Unpublished doctoral Thesis). Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. <https://www.delsu.edu.ng/clt/ELECTORAL%20VIOLENCE%20AND%20DEMOCRACY%20IN%20NIGERIA%E2%80%99S%20FOURTH%20REPUBLIC%20A%20STUDY%20OF%20DELTA%20AND%20OYO%20STATES.pdf>
- Alao, A. A. (2021). Electoral violence in Nigeria's fourth Republic: Implication for democratic development. *Journal of Administrative Science*, 18(2), 320-344.
- Ani, K. J., & Uwizeyimana, D. E. (2022). Introducing elections and electoral violence in Africa. In J. A. Kelechi, & O. Victor, *Elections and electoral violence in Nigeria* (pp. 1-10). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Anyika, V. O., & Ani, K. J. (2022). Historical review of electoral violence in Nigeria. In J. A. Kelechi, & O. Victor, *Elections and electoral violence in Nigeria* (pp. 21-34). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Arinze, A. I., Obum, A. S., & Obasi, T. N. (2021). Election violence in Nigeria and the way forward: 2019 general elections in perspective. *South East Journal of Political Science (SEJPS)*, 7(1), 120-131.
- Birch, S., Daxecker, U., & Hoglund, K. (2020). Electoral violence: An introduction. *Journal of Peace Research*, 57(1), 3-14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319889657>
- Bufacchi, V. (2005). Two concepts of violence. *Political Studies Review*, 3, 193-204.
- Daxecker, U. (2020). Unequal votes, unequal violence: Mal-apportionment and election violence in India. *Journal of Peace Research*, 57(1), 156-170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319884985>
- Edafenene, O. R., & Peter, E. (2022). Elections and electoral violence in Africa: Causes and implications. In J. A. Kelechi, & O. Victor, *Elections and electoral violence in Nigeria* (pp. 11-20). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Erameh, N. I., Oni, E. O., & Ojkorotu, V. (2021). International Election Observation and the democratization process in Nigeria. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 17(2), 125-147.
- European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria, (2015). Final report. European Union observation mission.
- European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria, (2019). Final report. European Union observation mission.
- European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria, (2023). Final report. European Union observation mission.
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-191.

- Genyi, G. A. (2019). Electoral violence and Nigeria's democracy: a comparative analysis of trends in the fourth republic elections. In Mohammed I. Kida & George A. Genyi (Ed), *Delivering democratic promises in Nigeria: Prospects and challenges: a festschrift in honour of Senator Umaru Tanko Al-Makura*. Makurdi, Gwatex Publishers.
- Kayotis, G., Paterson, I., & Judge, A. (2025). Understanding securitisation success: A new analytical framework. *International studies Review*, 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaf006>
- Kurfi, A. (2005). *Nigerian general elections 1951-2003 (My roles and reminiscences)*. Ibadan Spectrum books limited.
- Madueke, O. & Enyiazu, C. (2025). Electoral integrity and election management in Nigeria: The case of the 2023 General Election. *World Affairs*.
- Nwankwo, B. C. (1992). *Authority in government: Nigeria and world politics in focus*. Almond publishers.
- Nwolise, O. B. C. (2007). Electoral violence and Nigeria's 2007 elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 6(2), 155-179.
- Ogunbanjo, B. (2024). A critical review of democracy and the aftermath of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. *Integral Research*, 1(7), 137-177.
- Ojukwu, U. G., Umeifekwem, U. T. & Okeke, V. O. S. (2023). Democracy and 2023 general elections in Nigeria: Retrospect and prospects. *Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies*, 11(4), 54-66.
- Omotola, S. (2011). Explaining electoral violence in Africa's 'new' democracies. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 51-73.
- Onyinye, A., Ani, K. J., & Ugbudian, L. I. (2022). Political violence in Isuokoma clan 2007–2019. In J. A. Kelechi, & O. Victor, *Elections and electoral violence in Nigeria* (pp. 241-262). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Otukoya, T. A. (2024). The securitisation theory. *International Journal of Science and Research Archive*, 11(1), 1747-1755. <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2024.11.1.0225>
- Owonikoko, S. B. & Ashindorbe, K. (2025). Trend analysis of voter turnout in Nigeria's general elections, 1999–2023. *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs and Policy Studies*, 114(1), 18-33. DOI: 10.1080/00358533.2025.2469078
- Saha, K. K., (2022). Election Violence. In Kurtz, L. R. (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, (vol. 2, Press, pp. 357–366). Elsevier. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-820195-4.00298-3>
- Sule, B. Adamu, U. & Sambo, U. (2020). The 2019 general election in Nigeria: Examining the issues, challenges, successes and lesson for future general elections. *International Journal of Social Sciences Perspective*, 6(2), 100-113. Doi:10.33094/7..2017.2020.52.100.113
- Taft, P., & Haken, N. (2018). Beyond hashtags: Leveraging networks for the prevention of election violence in Nigeria. Fund for peace.
- Yoroms, G. J. (n.d). Electoral violence, arms proliferations and electoral security in Nigeria: lessons from the twenty-five elections for emerging democracies.