

## ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AS A BANE OF DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA'S POLITICS

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### Abstract

*This paper interrogated the interrelations between electoral violence and democratic consolidation in Nigeria between 1999 and 2023. Free, fair, and credible elections are hallmarks of participatory democracy. Developmental states in the world have, through legislation, enactment of relevant laws, application of technology, and establishment of strong institutions, managed to eradicate incidence of violence that could affect election outcomes. In Nigeria, however, the case is not the same. Elections have been held in Nigeria every four years starting from 1999, but it is worrisome that each one so far seemed progressively more violent than the previous. The study is anchored on prebendalism theory to explicate electoral violence as a phenomenon. The study relied on ex-post facto research design to gain insight into electoral violence in Nigeria. Data collection emanated from previous studies carried out by scholars utilizing the content analysis method. The paper concluded that electoral violence only depict or represent political and social nuances in the larger Nigerian society, which is hamstrung by systemic failure as a result of corruption. Also, ethnic, religious, sectional considerations and not popular policies give rise to electoral violence in Nigeria. Recommendations in the study include that: rampant and widespread public corruption should be nipped in the bud by legislation to drastically reduce salaries and wages of elected and appointed office holders to the level accruable to civil servants in Nigeria; meritocracy should be enthroned in all government businesses by prioritizing merit rather than such considerations as one's state, region or status in the society.*

**Keywords:** Democratic consolidation, Election, Electoral violence, Politics, Prebendalism.

### Introduction

Nigeria has been a sovereign state for a total of sixty-five (65) years (1960-2025), it has also maintained uninterrupted participatory democracy of some sort for twenty-six (26) years from May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1999. It is most likely that scholars, political observers and other stakeholders would have projected that by the year 2025 Nigeria would have been able to build strong self-regulating institutions that guarantee enduring democratic ethos and seamless political transition. But on the contrary, what prevails in the country are just strong men and women whose only legitimate claim to popularity is linked to the fact that they were courageous and fortunate enough to have stepped out to be voted for in elections since Nigeria's return to democracy. When the hopes and aspirations of the voting masses are dashed repeatedly by successive administrations, it becomes clear where the ship of the state is headed. Citizens seem to have lost hope in government institutions and the officials due to ineptitude which results in ethnicity, nepotism, endemic corruption, looting of the nation's treasury, and high rate of unemployment and poverty.

The different arms of government in Nigeria have also failed the masses; the judiciary which is seen as the 'last hope of the common man' has been manned by mostly puppets to the executive arm of government.

The legislature, from all indications, are contented functioning as 'rubber stamps' in the hands of the executive as long as their jumbo pay and outrageous allowances are paid regularly. The end result of these anomalies are certain, citizens began to see political offices as the shortest route to wealth accumulation through whatever means; legal or illegal. Consequently, elections being the only constitutional means through which public office could be held, becomes a 'battle ground' instead of a contest which should be free, fair, and credible. Public infrastructure which has been on a constant and rapid decline and deterioration over several decades are destroyed in election violence in the aftermath of most polls in all parts of the country. Nigerian youths have been the ones at the receiving end of the consequences of maladministration by elected officials over the years. Thousands of graduates are churned out from tertiary institutions yearly, unfortunately, as half-baked applicants who are mostly not skilled enough for entrepreneurship, and yet unemployable in today's technology-driven and globalized economy.

The youths at the end become ready tools in the hands of politicians who recruit them as thugs to disrupt elections and cause mayhem on the streets if and when their patrons lose out at the polls. Therefore, this study is concerned with how electoral violence from the 1999 to the 2023 elections has affected democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

The broad objective has to do with how electoral violence has affected democratic consolidation in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023, while the specific objectives were to examine the relationship between electoral violence and democratic consolidation in Nigeria; and examine the effects of electoral violence on Nigeria's political development.

## **Literature Review**

Scholars have focused their studies on the concept of electoral violence both in Nigeria and beyond. Incidences of electoral violence appear to be recorded more in developing countries where electoral processes are not yet well streamlined, and also the justice system is overwhelmed by the influences of corruption and other societal vices. However, it would be revealing to expose what violence is all about prior to researching on electoral violence. Hook (1934:236) views violence as "the illegal employment of methods of physical coercion for personal or group ends." This implies that violence is perpetrated against humans and/or their properties. However, sometimes violence may not be against individuals alone, it could be directed towards objects or properties of individuals or the state. This is pursuant to goals which the perpetrator(s) believe would be achieved through the acts. Violence in some cases is a manifestation of hostility and rage through physical force directed against persons or property (Corsini, 1999). Egwu (2013) studied electoral malpractices and political violence, the study traced election violence through the years in which Nigeria has held elections and its implications on national security. It also concentrated on the 2011 Presidential elections and the violence that followed afterwards. And finally, it advanced strategies through which electoral violence could be curbed. This study cannot be said to be the first to advance measures to curb electoral violence or its causes, but Egwu (2013:119) notes that "The involvement of the military should be discouraged, the role of the Police in providing the security of the electoral environment needs to be reviewed." However, this study is of the view that security personnel especially the police should not be stopped from performing election-related duties but that proper and in-depth supervision should be brought to bear in their activities in all polling booths or stations around the country during elections. Kalu and Gbervbie (2018) also focused their study on electoral violence and democracy in Nigeria with special interest on the 2011 and 2015 general elections in Lagos State of Nigeria. The study sought to establish interrelations through the pinhole of frustration

aggression theory. Inasmuch as we respect the depth of the study, it is also pertinent to recognize that humans everywhere have enough reasons which they could throw up as justifications for disrupting the system or unleashing violence on others when they feel electoral outcomes are not in their favour. But if and when the system is well articulated and works properly, such self serving and deviant behaviours are taken care of right at the stage of incubation. Also, Bekoe (2011) noted that the 2011 elections in Nigeria claimed 800 lives in Northern Nigeria alone and caused the displacement of about 65,000 persons making it one of the most violent in Nigeria's history at that time. That number could be worse if cases are reported instantly, however, many cases of post-election violence are under reported as a result of the dangers inherent in journalists performing their duties in such volatile environment. Campbell (2010) focused on electoral violence in Nigeria with particular reference to the 2011 elections when it notes that even in the unlikely event that the elections are broadly credible, some losing candidates will almost certainly have sufficient grounds to convince their supporters that victory has been stolen, especially if the winner has a different ethnic or religious identity. Campbell's study identified the inherent culture of violence as it concerns elections in Nigeria, which consequentially breeds lack of trust in the minds of electorates thereby militating against development and entrenchment of democracy. Mbaegbu (2015) averred that electoral violence could be classified into “(a) pre-election violence; (b) violence during election; and (c) post election violence.” It went further to cite Adoke (2011) which posits that pre-election violence occurs mainly at the stage of party primaries when contestants from the same political party jostle for tickets to become party flagbearers. Post election violence, manifest...through looting, arson, and wanton destruction of lives and properties by aggrieved stakeholders and opportunists as well as members of a political party that lost an election.

Majorly these stages of electoral violence cited above including post election violence only depict that democracy has not had a strong foothold in any country where such incidences take place. A situation where designated institutions set up for development of democracy are thriving, individuals and groups would not have to rely on violence in order to achieve victory at the polls. But even when incidences of violence occur in such states, the judiciary would be relied upon to ensure justice is served not minding whose ox is gored. Such believe in the system also helps to prevent post-election violence. Quite expectedly, many scholars have focused their studies on electoral violence in Nigeria. Nkwede and Nwogbaga (2015) focused on the different stages of electoral violence which they conceptualized as follows; violence in the pre-election period; campaign period; Election Day violence or result conflict; and post-election/result conflict. Among these stages of violence, the post-election violence tends to be the most devastating of all in Nigeria. Thousands of lives are lost and properties worth millions of Naira are destroyed as a result of post election violence. Post-election violence is so fierce because in a country like Nigeria, it is herculean to reverse declared results of polls in law courts so contestants tend to resort to doing all they could to be declared winners by INEC on the day of the polls.

Egwu (2013) explaining one of reasons behind the post election violence of 2011 notes that the then presidential candidate of the CPC Muhammadu Buhari felt that electoral justice could not be provided by the courts based on his experience in the 2003 and 2007 presidential elections. This confirms that weak and dependent judiciary could be one of the reasons that encourage candidates to resort to violence in elections. As earlier been stated, most elections in the history of Nigeria's political experience have manifested the incidence of violence which was most evident in the 2003, 2007, and 2011 general elections. Oni (2014, as cited in Isma'ila and Othman, 2016, p. 105) notes that violence in Nigerian elections depicts that “...democracy in Nigeria is not only growing at a very slow trend but also oscillates between stagnancy and backwardness, thus degenerating into a crisis level where democratic ideals become threatened and governance becomes privatized, if not personalized, by the powerful.”

Retrogressive development of democracy in Nigeria is obvious because the remunerations and allowances, and the misplaced prestige attached to the offices in the country have led to some sort of personality cult being built around political figures all around the country. These do not enhance the development of democracy, individuals end up becoming stronger than the institutions that are suppose to entrench democratic ethos in the country. Nkwede and Nwogbaga (2015:276) enumerated sources of electoral violence in Nigeria under different subheads thus: structural sources; revenue allocation; aggressive sub-nationalism and ethnic militias; the federal grid; economic factors; local conflicts caused by actions of government; citizenship, indigene/settler dichotomy; political parties; electoral institutions; the electoral process; the judiciary; security agencies; attitudes to democracy; and election mindset. Most of these sources or combinations of some of them serve as avenues through which electoral frauds are perpetrated, as a result, electoral violence also emanate there from. For instance, when electoral processes are lopsided, and aggrieved parties are certain not to access justice through judicial intervention (Egwu, 2013), then the electoral exercise becomes violent at the point of acceptance and declaration by the election umpire.

In the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, some states automatically became hot spots which were very susceptible to violence. These states includes those that are strongholds of the main opposition party the PDP, such as Rivers state and Bayelsa State, and those known as traditional PDP states but through one reason or the other find themselves under the rulership of a comparatively smaller parties such as APGA, AD and so on, for example Imo and Abia states. In Rivers state particularly, there were incidences of post-electoral violence which involved security personnel. Also in the 'off-season' governorship election in Ekiti state excessive securitization of the electoral process was reported which invariably resulted in pockets of violence in some places.

Manifestations of election violence in Nigeria have persisted over the years, some of them have been inter-party violence but recently there have been an upsurge of intra-party violence amongst party members who jostle for opportunity to stand for election under the platform of their parties. Nnamani and Iloh (2015:312) reports that during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria "...Ikot Ekpene and Uyo were engulfed by unprecedented violence... two supporters of PDP, Etop Nicholas Idiong, a trader and Daniel Udoh Akpan, a commercial motorcyclist were brutally murdered in Ikot Ekpene while some people sustained various injuries." Such mindless killings are basically unwarranted in a polity where electoral processes are well articulated. They went further to reveal that "...property worth billions of naira were destroyed during the politically motivated rampage like 200 brand new Peugeot 307 cars; 500 brand new tricycles; Goodluck/Sambo campaign office was burnt down by the rampaging mob; Fortune international high school owned by Senator Aloysius Etok was razed down with school children in session;....(p. 312).

At times when electoral violence commences, many innocent individuals and groups are targeted without any consideration as to their political inclinations. As a result of these many prospective electorates choose to stay away from election venues for fear of injuries or even death. Nkwede and Nwogbaga (2015:281) reveal that:

During April 11<sup>th</sup> 2015 elections (*in Ebonyi State*) Mr. Mike Ojon was killed at Noyo, Ikwo L.G.A by thugs while another Ocho Monday was stabbed to death for confronting suspected thugs involved in illegal thumb-printing at Ohage village square, and in Effurum ward 1 in Ohaukwu L.G.A and in Nkalagu Ishielu L.G.A, the collation officer was also killed.

These forms of killings indicate that it could most likely be as a result of inter-party violence aimed at manipulating election results in order to win. The above scenario is made clearer as Nkwede and Nwogbaga (2015:282) further that “at Ezzaopu Inyimagu Izzi L.G.A, there was a confrontation between the PDP and Labour Party (LP) supporters that led to the killing of Mr. Augustine Mbam and two other persons” In the 2019 general elections, The Vanguard Newspaper of June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in a column titled 'Corruptive party nomination fees' revealed that the two major political parties in Nigeria charged very outrageous fees for purchase of the various nomination forms which qualifies a member to stand for an election. It states that the APC charged N45m for the Presidential *nomination forms*: Governorship: N22.5m; Senate: 7m; Reps: N3.5m; and House of Assembly: N850,000. The PDP ..., charged N12m for Presidential *nomination forms*; Governorship: N6m; Senatorial: N4m; Reps: N1.5m; and State House of Assembly: N.6m. The sale of nomination forms to members of a political party at such exorbitant price lead to three evils at the same time. First, it could lead to the attitude of winning elections at all cost which encourages violence. Second, it could also encourage financial misappropriation in positions of authority by public office holders. Finally it could certainly be one of the reasons why democratic consolidation has failed to take root in Nigeria even after many years of democratic experimentation. Aside from lack of political development, it is disturbing when one considers the colossal loss in financial terms, and its consequential impact on the economy of the state. Funds that could have been channeled to the provision of critical infrastructure are expended on rebuilding destroyed properties and compensating relatives of the victims of such violence.

### **Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria**

Election remains an important hallmark of democracies around the world; it also constitutes one of the main features that distinguish it from other forms of repressive systems of government. It ensures that power changes hands, and fresh ideas are accessed by the people. Elections are meant to serve as mechanisms through which people who occupy positions of authority are selected. Therefore, an election is a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office (Headlam, 1891). Different forms of leadership or government exist such as monarchies, autocracies, dictatorships, et cetera, these systems of government may result to peaceful co-existence of citizens in a polity, and also may lead to economic and social progressive societies. Momoh and Adejumo (1999, as cited in Odigbo, 2015, p. 139) notes that “election serves as an instrument of legitimization for the state and those who manage the reins of state power, while on the other hand they ensure political accountability to the people.” However, elections alone do not guarantee consolidation of democracy in a polity. In some climes, though, periodic elections are used as disguise by authoritarian regimes to hold on to political power. In fact, Osuagwu (2018) points out that racial and ethnic democracies are regimes where certain racial or ethnic groups enjoy full democratic rights while others are largely or entirely denied those rights. The study further asserts that competitive authoritarianism may manifest all the trappings of democracy such as “regular free and fair elections, independent judiciary, elected legislature, and the media, but in actual practice these characteristics of democracy do not function as expected (p.116).” Many states especially in developing countries exhibited these characteristics for about three to four decades after achieving flag independence from the colonial masters. In such states as Somalia, Sudan, Congo Democratic Republic, Togo, Guinea, and Benin Republic, regular elections are conducted but political leaders persist in office, in most cases, beyond the constitutionally stipulated number of terms. Throwing more light on the fact that elections do not always guarantee democratic consolidation, Osuagwu (2018) notes further that there have been elections in Ukraine, Kenya, Zambia, Nicaragua and Ghana which have



come short of expectations of democratic nations. It confirms that enduring structures require to be consciously instituted to ensure consolidation of democracy in any polity.

In perhaps, a more detailed definition, Nwankwo (2008:249) stresses that election “is a process by which people belonging to a certain area, community or group choose, by popular vote, from among themselves persons for certain political offices or responsibilities after they have indicated interest and/or are duly nominated.” This succinctly captures what is obtainable in Nigeria every four years since 1999 excepting the fact that the electoral process may be inappropriate for arriving at desired results. Onwuanabile (2015:192) holds that election involves some fundamental elements which include demarcation of electoral constituencies, registration of political parties, registration of voters, nomination of candidates, campaign by political parties and candidates, voting, declaration of results, and electoral litigation. Of all these elements, voting stands out as the only means through which the people choose amongst all the candidates, those who will represent them.

One of the ways that the objectives of elections are truncated is electoral fraud, and electoral violence. These two electoral anomalies are self compensative; any one of them could lead to the other. The desperation by politicians in Nigeria to capture or hold unto power at all cost leads them to embark on activities which are inimical to achieving free, fair, and credible elections. However, we have to understand that those that embark on these acts either do not trust the system or are sure to arrive at their personal objectives by taking advantage of the dysfunctional political and social systems which are brought about by endemic corruption in the country.

Meanwhile, democracies around the world, as regards their history and length of practice, are at different stages of consolidation. Some of them in developed societies such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States of America could be said to have strongly consolidated. But that is not the case in the developing countries (DCs) especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, it is important the full meaning of democratic consolidation and its distinguishing features are grasped at this point. Ezeani (2015) holds that democratic consolidation is an identifiable phase in the transition from authoritarian rule to civilian rule and by extension democratic system that is stable, secure and enduring such that it can no longer revert to authoritarianism. This characteristic is sustained by stratified and well developed structures in such states that are capable of self-compensating for each other to ensure sustenance of the democracy or system. It is further argued that a democracy is consolidated when power is alternated between rival parties, support for system is continued during time of economic hardship, rebels are defeated and punished, the regime remains stable in the face of restructuring of the party system, and there exists no significant anti-system (Okoye et al., 2012).

Enumerating some of the features of consolidated democracies, Ezeani (2015) further contends that consolidated democracies are characterized by strong democratic institutions (e.g. the rule of law, regular elections, competitive party systems), internalization of formal rules of democracy by the political actors, development of civil political culture by the citizens and good governance. The foregoing sets apart democracies which could be said to have consolidated from those that have not or attempting to do so. The most significant issue associated with democratic consolidation is transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic regimes (O'Donnell, 1996). Though transition is pivotal to the stage at which a state is in its quest for democracy, but other characteristics are also important because a state's ability to transition cannot be said to be much more important than other characteristics. Most democracies in developing countries that witnessed transition from authoritarianism to civil rule many years ago are still manifesting fault lines that threaten its sustenance, thereby confirming that mere transition does not guarantee sustainability.

Studies have focused on Nigeria's democratic experience, and have come up with many characteristics of its politics that have prevented consolidation. Edet (2011) asserts that democratization in Nigeria is suppressed by the electoral fraud carried out by politicians in collaboration with electoral bodies and security agents... This speaks to the lack of advanced and independent institutions which are supposed to self-compensate to ensure sustenance. Certain characteristics which include the following; excessive premium on power which converts politics into warfare rather than a process of bargaining, discussion, and orderly transfer of power; absence of effective institutional mechanism for moderating political competitions *which* leads to conversion of political competition into warfare among ethnic groups; and overwhelming inclination towards personalization of rule *as a result of* limitless power and prestige they enjoy Ibeanu (1998:12), adversely affect democratic consolidation in Nigeria. However, the main preoccupation of this study is to address how democracy has fared in Nigeria in its democratic experience between 1999 and 2023.

Nigeria started out with parliamentary constitution which granted the four regions that existed then full autonomy as it concerns governance, and as a result, to develop at their own pace. Deep rooted mutual suspicion and the political disturbances of 1966 caused the military to stage an incursion into the country's political affairs. Little gains that were made changed as a result of the military regimes that took over and held sway, Dode (2019:342) notes that the military regimes "...through decrees arrogated to itself overriding powers over the states resources and land, thus destroying the democratic and federal structure that was in the process of consolidation." After some long spell on the political scene, the military finally exited the stage on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 1999 bequeathing a Federal constitution to Nigerians. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) has been the bedrock on which the fourth Republic of Nigeria has been operated. This study aims to concentrate on the outcomes of presidential elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 in order to elaborate on the impacts of electoral violence on efforts to consolidate democracy in the country.

The 2011 presidential elections held on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, 2011 was considered by many observers as free and fair. But electoral violence was recorded especially in the Northern parts of the country, Egwu (2013:116) notes that the election "shook 10 northern states and reportedly led to the death of over 800 people and displacement of thousands of people", many of whom were non northerners and people of political parties other than the CPC which had Muhammadu Buhari as its presidential candidate.

Just like in the previous elections that have been held in Nigeria, there were incidences of violence during and after the 2015 elections. In a report by Lemmy Ughegbe and Bertram Nwannekanma in *The Guardian* of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, they stated that the Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Dr. Chidi Odinkalu disclosed that "the voting process was not without some challenges, including pockets of violence and security breaches." The report went further to reveal that "acts of violence resulting in fatalities had been reported in Akwa Ibom, Borno, Bauchi, Edo, Gombe, Lagos, Osun, Rivers, and Yobe States." The Chairman of the human rights body stated further that "the number of persons killed in these attacks and incidents were over 50. This number includes one state legislator, a community leader and two adhoc staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) allegedly killed in the extremist attack in Gombe State."

The mere democratic and civic obligation of choosing leaders was turned into a dreadful exercise in Nigeria. And going further, in the year 2023 the presidential election results still manifested the effects of electoral violence and indifference towards political processes by the populace. The results received from the polls show that unlike the 2019 elections, which featured 73 candidates from 91 parties, in 2023 Nigerians had to choose one of 18 candidates from 18 parties. 93,469,008 people were registered to vote,

almost 10 million more than in 2019 (84,004,084), but the turnout in 2023 was only 27.7% (23,377,466 people, in 2019 - 35.6%), which can partly be explained by the lack of security of movement and the expected attacks on polling stations, which did occur in some areas ([www.inafran.ru/en/sites/default/files/news\\_file/nigeria\\_elections.pdf](http://www.inafran.ru/en/sites/default/files/news_file/nigeria_elections.pdf)).

The above data show that though a higher number of voters registered to vote, but much less number actually turned out to perform their civic obligation. Furthermore, most likely as a result of electoral violence and its consequences, the 2023 election results confirmed that democratic consolidation have not actually taken root in Nigeria. The statistics keep getting smaller as Bola Tinubu, the candidate from the ruling party All Progressives Congress (APC), was elected as the new president of Nigeria, receiving 8,794,726, or 36.61%, of the votes, much less than Muhammadu Buhari in 2019 (55.6%), and less than any other elected Nigerian head of state since the beginning of civil rule, i.e. since 1999.

The results indicate that the masses have lost hope in the entire electioneering process in the country, and this has severely affected the quest for democratic development in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study relies on the assumptions of the theory of prebendalism to establish interrelations among variables. Prebendalism is a framework of analysis developed by Richard Joseph (1998) to describe the nature of political leadership in Nigeria. The theory was derived from the word 'prebend' which is defined by the Catholic Encyclopedia as the “right of member of chapter of a church to his share in the revenues of a cathedral”. Put differently, it is a stipend allotted from the revenues of a cathedral or a collegiate church to a canon or member of the chapter. According to the theory of prebendalism, state offices are regarded as prebends that can be appropriated by office-holders, who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their constituents and kin groups (Asogwa & Okibe, 2015). Joseph (1987, as cited in Ugwuani and Nwokedi, 2015, p. 19) see prebendalism as the pattern of political behaviour which reflects, as its justifying principle, that the offices of the state may be competed for and then utilized for the personal benefit of the office holders as well as that of their reference or support groups. State political offices are primarily regarded as prebends that can be appropriated by the office holders to generate material benefits for themselves and for other ethnic, cultural or community groups.

Though the study by Richard Joseph focused primarily on political developments in Nigeria, but prebendal culture is not exclusively Nigerian. Scholars like Ken Post and Michael Vickers had carried out a general study on certain aspects of prebendal attitudes by political office holders but under different circumstance and nomenclature. Also Weber in the middle ages had focused his study on prebendal manifestations in China, a study which was later revised by Hans Gerth in 1951 under the same title. However, in Nigeria, as observed by Joseph (1987) political office holders view their offices as prebends and so seek or compete for them for prebendal purposes. That accounts, substantially, for the manner in which political offices are monetized and contested for in the country. Asogwa and Okibe (2015, p. 135) relate further that Richard (1987) advanced that Nigeria's “political culture was strongly influenced by the fact that holding public office provided officials with access to resources and that the theft of such resources went largely unpunished.” Entrenched prebendal culture has the capability of corrupting all the sectors of the polity, and one of the manifestations of prebendalism is, according to Ugwuani and Nwokedi (2015:20) the unjustifiable stupendous salaries and allowances which the political office holders at the various tiers of government in Nigeria approve and pay to themselves. For instance, a national legislature takes an average of N186 million naira annually as salary in a country where the minimum monthly salary for workers has



just been grudgingly raised to N18, 000 and which translates to a meager N216,000 annually (*Tell*, 2011) and were the income of the majority of the citizens is below \$1 a day.

Elections in Nigeria have been characterized by massive electoral fraud and violence over the years. These are, largely as a result of the fact that the acquisition of political offices in Nigeria has come to be seen primarily as a means to some form of economic empowerment, secured material life, influence and affluence and not as an opportunity to serve the people. Indeed, acquisition of political offices is perceived more as a means for personal economic aggrandizement than for public services. This, no doubt, intensifies unhealthy rivalry and competition for political offices that do trigger election rigging, violent conflicts and even coup (Ugwuani and Nwokedi, 2015:20).

As for the consequences of the culture of prebendalism in Nigeria's politics, Ugwuani and Nwokedi (2015, p. 22) links “the incidence of “sit-tight” syndrome among incumbent political office holders in Nigeria, and their manipulation of the institutions of the state to win elections to remain in office” to the door step of prebendal attitudes in the polity. Also as a result of prebendalism in Nigeria's politics, electoral contests have become do-or die affair where victory must be achieved by any means possible. Many contestants in different political parties in Nigeria have lost their lives to assassins whose main objective were to eliminate them in order to make way for some political cronies designated for the office in contest. Again, pervasive exhibition of prebendal attitudes in Nigeria seem to have caused the citizens to develop negative attitude towards elections and electoral conducts. This, basically, is political apathy amongst the people in which case they no longer willingly want to come out on election days to exercise their constitutional guaranteed rights to vote out of fear of losing their lives or properties.

### **Application of the theory**

Prebendalism as a political theory is well suited to explicate the prevalence of electoral violence in Nigeria's politics. How else could anyone explain why simple electoral contests which in other climes are seen as one of the ways to exercise ones civic responsibility, has been turned into spheres for violence, assassinations, and other forms of criminal activities. Also it is troubling to find that in Nigeria, people dissipate so much energy and resources to be nominated, sometimes politicians impose themselves or their cronies on the electorates, or illegally bribe them out-rightly for elective positions. Yet in other times they go as far as initiating litigation processes at different law courts just so that they could be given the opportunity to 'serve' the people. Service to one's father land cannot and ought not be a 'do-or-die' affair, people ordinarily should freely choose from among eligible candidates the most suited for an office in an election. But what plays out in Nigeria is the total opposite, hence it is clear that the ulterior motive for such warfare-like atmosphere in elections is purely personal gains through primitive accumulation of wealth when elected into such offices. Also, because prebendalism has been raised to the level of political culture in Nigeria, it has given rise to political clientelism and political jobbery in the acquisition and exercise of privileges in public offices in Nigeria. People go as far as selling off landed properties, and acquiring high interest loans from banks in order to finance their political ambitions or those of their surrogates or stooges who get into office and the first thing they do is to criminally siphon public funds that goes with the office in order to pay back the loans, and then go on to amass ill-gotten wealth out of the peoples' commonwealth.

Prebendalism helps us to understand why all efforts at ensuring democratic consolidation in Nigeria have not yielded the desired results. It explains the reasons behind the fact that officials in all arms of government in a third world country like Nigeria receive stupendously fabulous salaries and allowances which, when weighed side by side with the level of underdevelopment and shortage of basic infrastructure

in the polity, cannot be justified by any means. Hence, democratic consolidation is difficult to achieve as Asogwa and Okibe (2015) concludes that a prebendalized system is inherently unstable. Not only that such societies are unstable, but most importantly that aspirations to build a capable state, a democratic system, and a coherent nation are ultimately foiled by prebendal practices.

### **Methodology**

The study made use of ex-post facto research design. It relied on the documentary method of data collection. Secondary data were sourced from different kinds of documents including books, book chapters, journal articles, official materials, and other sources. For data analysis, the study depended on the qualitative descriptive method of analysis, which involves the application of content analysis and systematic logical deductions. The main advantage of this method is that it simply exposes, interprets and summarizes relationships contained in a given data thereby explaining a particular phenomenon for deeper understanding.

### **Results**

After analysis of data generated in this study, it is evident that the spates of violence which have bedeviled elections in Nigeria over the years, especially since its return to participatory democracy have inhibited political development in the country. Instead of strengthened institutions that would eventually result to entrenched democratic culture, what is being propagated is individualized politics where institutions become weak and only function as pawns in the hands of strong individuals.

Also, electoral violence has resulted in political apathy by the people. This is confirmed by the fact that accredited voters in elections have continued to decrease even though Nigeria's population continues to increase. Lack of interest and faith in government policies and programmes is another outcome of electoral violence. When public office holders loss credibility and acceptability which are suppose to be attached to their offices, the end result is nonchalant attitude towards whatever that has to do with the personality and the office itself.

### **Conclusion**

Electoral violence in Nigeria only mirror or represent happenings and occurrences in the larger Nigerian society which is hamstrung by systemic failure as a result of corruption. Corruption itself is fed by the endemic culture of prebendalism in the Nigerian polity. Also ethnic and sectional considerations, and unpopular policies or ideologies espoused by politicians give rise to electoral violence in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Consequent upon the detailed investigation into the causative factors of electoral violence in Nigeria's political experience since its return to participatory democracy, this study recommends that; first, rampant and widespread public corruption should be nipped in the bud by legislation to drastically reduce salaries and allowances of elected and appointed public office holders to the level commensurate to those of civil servants in Nigeria. That would discourage prebendal tendencies among public office holders, and also

make such offices unattractive to political jobbers who do not have the intention to serve the people.

Second, meritocracy in all government business at all levels of public administration should be enthroned by prioritizing merit in appointments and other forms of allocations. Again, cross-carpeting from one political party to another among politicians in Nigeria should be outlawed through appropriate legislation, also only parties with distinctive ideology and direction should be registered to contest in any election in Nigeria.

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