Research Article

MASS MEDIA, ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND VOTER TURNOUT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES FOR POLICYACTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the significant role that the media play in swaying public opinion which in turn affects voters' behaviour. Issues of voters' apathy or low turnout because of social media reportage of violence, before, during and after elections has been documented. Incidences of political assassinations, ballot box snatching, thuggery and heavy mobilization of security personnel are reported, which forms an impression with suggestive tendencies. As such, people become apprehensive with election related violence when repeatedly reported by the media. The paper therefore proffers those legislative intervention and policy options to address the issues under discuss: The National Assembly, through its Committees, should mandate the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to liaise with the Nigerian Guild of Editors and the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) with a view to improving professionalism in reportage, particularly on electoral related matters, amend the electoral law to include automatic disqualification of candidates of political parties found culpable of electoral violence and thuggery during party primary elections or in the general elections and mandate the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to float a non-stop voter education programme and security campaigns before, during and after elections.

Keywords: Mass Media, Electoral Violence and Voter Turnout.

INTRODUCTION

Mass and social media alike have been used to spike off citizens' protests, revolution, riot and fear amongst members of the society Aleyomi and Ajakaiye (2014). Nigeria over the years have experienced electoral violence and low voter during its elections. This has been attributed to lack of trust in the credibility of the electoral process; poor voter education and citizens' enlightenment; unnecessary interference by incumbent government; partiality of the electoral commission; ethno-religious sentiments; lack of electoral reforms and incidences of pre-election crisis to mention a few. Studying electoral violence is relevant as it affects democratic consolidation (Bleck & van de Walle, 2019; Burchard, 2015). When elections are characterized by the malpractice of election violence the system support tends to be low in that voters tend to lose confidence in the legislature and government and they are less likely to be satisfied with democracy and to obey the law (Norris, 2014).Violence has been significant in African elections. Of the several hundred competitive legislative and presidential elections that have been held in Africa since 1990 (Bleck & van de Walle, 2019) about 25 percent have been violent (Fisher, 2002; Straus & Taylor, 2012). Violence has been part of elections in Nigeria (Bratton, 2013; Sisk, 2012), Côte d'Ivoire (Boone & Kriger, 2012), Sudan (Sisk, 2012), Kenya (Burchard, 2015; Mueller, 2012), Ethiopia (Smith, 2012), Zimbabwe (Boone & Kriger, 2012; Bratton, 2015), Uganda (Blattman, 2009), Togo and Zanzibar (Boeke, 2012); and more recently in Zambia in 2016 (Bleck & van de Walle, 2019; Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018) and Mozambique in 2019 (Shenga & Howe, forthcoming).

The quality of elections is a multidimensional concept that include electoral malpractice (including electoral violence) and electoral integrity (Norris, 2014). When elections are violent, they are characterized by a malpractice and are of low quality. In the first objective we are concerned with the malpractice of electoral violence per se, as it is a relatively new phenomenon in Africa with limited studies on it, but in the second, instead of being minimalist on the concept of electoral malpractice, we broaden and expand it. In doing so, we look at the whole package that includes electoral malpractice and electoral integrity to represent it as the quality of elections. Elections are of high quality if they are of low malpractice and of high integrity.Voting is a right of every eligible citizen, which is a prominent feature of a free and fair election where voters are allowed to choose their candidates without fear of victimization Obasi, *et al.,* (2014). Voter apathy refers to low turnout of electorates on election days. Several factors such as hijacking of the election process by the incumbent government; riot and thuggery; election rigging; suspicion of partiality of electoral commission; vote buying and compromised or inadequate security have been attributed to be responsible for voters' apathy in Nigeria."The reality was that Nigerian politicians perceived politics and political office as investment and as an avenue for the acquisition of extra ordinary wealth (through corruption) which they think is not possible through other forms of legitimate vocation and enterprise. Thus, in Nigeria, the shortest cut to affluence is through politics. Politics means money and money means politics...to be a member of the government party means Open Avenue to government patronage, contract deals and the like".

Under the FPTP which is a winner-take-all, there is no incentive to reach out to opponents or build cross-party support. Negative campaigning is often a sensible and effective strategy which in turn breed bad blood and culminate in crisis and violence. Since independence especially from 1983, Nigeria has witnessed several

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crises emanating from the subsisting electoral system in the country where winner takes-all. Every state of the federation has its own fair share of this crisis. Of all these crises, the event of April 2011 post-presidential election violence is unfortunate one which should be nipped in the board. This refers to the very deadly election-related violence that erupted in 12 northern states of Nigeria following the outcome of the April 2011 presidential election that culminated in the death of over 800 people including serving Corp Members (Human Right Watch, 2011). It started with a widespread protest by the supporters of the candidate of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Muhammad Buhari following the victory of the incumbent Goodluck Jonathan. This has also degenerated into burning of religious houses such as Churches, business centres and homes (Human Right Watch, 2011). The 2015 and 2019 general elections resulted in several deaths in the southern Nigeria (especially, in Rivers, Delta and Lagos states) as well as in the Middle Belt and Kano state. Nigeria now has about 18 registered political parties following deregistration of about 73 political parties after the 2019 General Elections. Prior to the 2019 General Elections, Nigeria had 91 registered political parties out of which 73 participated in the elections. Regrettably, 71 out of these parties each did not scored up to 1 percent of the total valid votes. Also, at every level of government, the proportion of minority party elected officials lags far behind these groups' share of the electorate. When members of an ethnic group make up a majority of the electorate in a FPTP (Winner-Take-All) election, they tend to elect a member of their ethnic group. In fact, this is shown clearly in APC/PDP dominated NASS, 108 of 109 Nigerian senators are either APC or PDP, while YPP has one senator and the continual occupation of the presidency by the Hausa/Fualni and Yoruba ethnic blocks to the dismay of other major and minor ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Most ethnic minorities clearly prefer representatives of their ethnic groups, but Winner-Take-All elections associated with FPTP often deny them a realistic opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. The above discussed problems arise in the nation's political space due to some persisting elections related challenges. These identified challenges include among others:

Voters' choices are restricted to two parties:
Winner-Take-All elections prop up our two-party monopoly. Since 2003-the beginning of multi-party practice, new parties in Nigeria are almost completely shut out of representation, whereas elections-after-elections, new parties are formed and 98% of these parties have not won a single seat neither do they have influence and organizing ability that comes from electoral viability.

No-Choice Elections:
One-party dominance of most Nigerian State Legislative Houses provides a more subtle, but more sweeping, indictment of our *Winner-Take-All* system. Most Nigerians, often times, experience "no choice" elections for state legislature, and the National Assembly elections. Since many areas are dominated by a single political viewpoint, winner-take-all voting systems will often result in no-choice elections where one party has a permanent monopoly on power, and the winner is effectively predetermined. So, the system generally leads to one-party state as the incumbents who determine to win elections usually outspend their opponents. Unfortunately, because money follows power, to gain access, most major campaign contributors invest in candidates they expect to win.

Severe under-representation of women:
Women comprise over 50% of the population of the Nigeria but make up only about 4% of NASS and State Assemblies. After 2019 elections, there are 7/109 (6.4%) women senators, 11/360 (3%) women representatives and 38/944 (4%). These statistics represent a real problem. Women in Nigeria have an extremely weak presence in

NASS. So, legislation that is being handed down directly affects their lives, careers and bodies, yet they have little influence on these laws. The winner-take-all election system is what prevents women from legislative upward mobility. Under a system which protects incumbents, it is very difficult for women to find viable seats to stand for. Often parties will not run qualified women candidates because they believe it disadvantages them in the general elections.

High percentages of "wasted votes:
Winner-take-all elections frequently result in more than 50% of votes being wasted. These are valid votes cast for candidates who do not win in an election. More voters will be represented by someone who they did not help to elect than under PR and even any other system.

Under voting/Low voter turnout:
Under at-large systems in particular, voters who feel strongly about a single candidate will be likely to "bullet vote" (that is, use only one of their votes) to help their preferred choice win election. In this way, winner-take-all discourages voters from expressing their full range of political preferences. Also, with limited choice, and little chance of influencing the outcome of an election under winner-take-all rules, many people will unsurprisingly choose not to participate.

Conceptualization and Review of Empirical Literature

Election form the bedrock of a genuine democratic system. Osumah and Aghemelo (2010) see election as a process through which the people choose their leaders and indicate their policies and programme preference and consequently invest a government with authority to rule. Roberts and Edwards (1991) cited in Omotola (2007) view election as a method of selecting persons to fill certain public offices through choices made by the electorate; those citizens who are qualified to vote under the laws and procedures of the electoral system. Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary (2006) defines election as "the act or process of organizing systematic (s) election (permitting mass participation and method of choosing a person or persons by vote for a public office position in which state authority is exercised". According to Albert (2007), electoral violence involves all forms of organized acts of threats aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder or opponent before, during and after an election with an intention to determine, delay or influence a political process. Ogundiya and Baba (2005), see electoral violence as all sorts of riots, demonstrations, party clashes, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping spontaneous or not, which occur before, during and after elections. Fischer (2002) defines electoral violence (conflict) as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, and physical assault, forced. Voter turnout is the percentage of eligible voters who cast a ballot in an election. After increasing for many decades, there has been a trend of decreasing voter turnout in most established democracies since the 1960s. Certain factors are leading to the decrease in the number of voters such as disenchantment, indifference, or contentment. Another contributor to lower overall turnout, is the larger percentage of the population who are simply not eligible to vote; non-citizens, incarcerated and non-self-registered individuals. Despite significant study of the issue, scholars are divided on reasons for the decline. Its cause has been attributed to a wide array of economic, demographic, cultural, technological, and institutional factors. There have been many efforts to increase turnout and encourage voting "protection", blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination. Electoral violence affects electoral turned-out. Systematic studies of the impact of electoral violence on electoral participation show a negative association between the two. A cross-sectional study revealed that voters who have experienced threats of

election violence at the polls were less likely to vote in Nigeria (Bratton, 2013). A cross-national study also found the same globally (Norris, 2014). In this case, it can be argued that electoral violence is used by the incumbent to prevent the opposition supporters from turning out (Hafner-Burton *et al.,* 2014).Another cross-national study showed that "electoral violence affects willingness to [not] vote, but this effect differs by partisan attachment and specific electoral context" (Burchard, 2015, p. 143). In cases where opposition supporters were exposed to electoral violence, they were more willing to vote. Although not significant, in cases where the incumbent supporters were exposed to violence, they were less likely to vote (Burchard, 2015, p. 139). Depending on the type of violence (whether strategic or incidental, the identity of the perpetrators and or the message that it is meant to convey to voters) and how it affects directly individuals, electoral violence can be used to mobilize voters to vote (see Travaglianti, 2014), to prevent them to turnout or to punish victors (Bekoe & Burchard, 2017; Burchard, 2015).These studies measured electoral violence and electoral participation only by single items. Burchard (2015) and Bratton (2013) measured electoral violence by threat of violence at the polls. Norris (2014) did the same but her measurement of electoral violence was integrated in the scope of an electoral malpractice index together with other items. On electoral participation, they measured it by voting participation (Bratton, 2015; Burchard, 2015; Norris, 2014).The quality of elections, in general, has an impact on electoral participation. "Elections work well (when) they can provide the main opportunity for most people to participate in politics" (Powell, 2000). Norris (2014) found that voter turnout tended to be high when there was electoral integrity that is, when votes were counted fairly, elections were fair, voters were offered genuine choice in the elections and journalists provided fair coverage of elections. It tended to be low when there was electoral malpractice, for example, rich people bought elections, television news favored the governing party, voters were bribed, opposition candidates were prevented from running and voters were threatened with violence at the polls. Norris (2014) notes that "too often elections around the globe are deeply flawed" meaning that they do not have integrity. In Africa the scenario is also of concern. As Bleck and van de Walle (2019) described it: "extensive intimidation of the opposition" and suspension of the opposition newspaper took place, respectively, in the 2016 Gambian and Zambian elections (pp. 2-3). Districts were gerrymandered in Zimbabwe ahead of the 2008 election (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018,); and candidates in Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana and Kenya were found to distribute largesse and buy votes (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018).Electoral participation can be also predicted from the habit of participating in politics in general. Bratton et al. (2005) found that the act of participating in politics after elections by contacting and communing led Africans to participate on Election Day and even in other forms of political participation like protesting. They also found that participating on Election Day led voters to contacting and communing (Bratton *et al.,* 2005). Bechtel et al. (2018) found that the long-term and spillover effects of compulsory voting in the Swiss canton of Vaud (1900-1970) increased turnout in federal referendums by 30 percentage points. Access to news media is another driver of electoral participation. Based on studies suggesting that media exposure has a sizable impact on voting behavior (Bratton *et al.,* 2005, p. 297; Norris, 2001; Verma & Sardesai, 2014), one would state that voters who often access news media will be more engaged in electoral participation than others. Due to recent development of news media, where we can distinguish traditional media from new news media, different outcome could be expected: as the new news media tends not to be regulated across the world, including in Africa, and thus with less ethics on its use (Martens *et al.,* 2018), scholars would expect it to have more a negative influence than traditional ones.

The social structure also shapes people's behaviors. Modernization theory suggests, for instance, that urban dwellers will be more likely to participate in elections, as they are more exposed to the information necessary to know the role of elections and how society functions. In contrast, in the African context, rural residents are more likely to vote (Bratton *et al.,* 2005); and they do so for the ruling parties (Bratton *et al.,* (2013). With respect to gender, women are less likely to be interested in public affairs and discuss politics (Afrobarometer & CPGD, 2013; Pereira et al., 2005; Shenga & Pereira, 2009), to be represented in parliament (Shenga, 2014, p. 113) and more likely to be victim of violence (Bachman, 1994). Although initial evidence from Afrobarometer found no evidence of the impact of gender on voting, African women were less likely to commune and contact (Bratton *et al.,* 2005).In addition to electoral participation, it is also important to review the relationship between the quality of elections and democratic consolidation, as the former has implications on the later. The quality of elections has an effect on democratic legitimacy. Norris (2014) found that perceived electoral integrity had a positive impact on satisfaction with democracy while perceived malpractice had a negative effect (Norris, 2014). Greenberg and Mattes (2013) found that the perceived freeness and fairness of elections affected positively the supply of democracy, indicated by satisfaction with democracy and the extent of democracy. Greenberg and Mattes (2013) measured the quality of elections only by free and fair elections; but Norris (2014) included a battery of items. For electoral integrity, she used the following items: votes are counted fairly, election officials are fair, voters offered genuine choice in an election, and journalists provide fair coverage of elections. For electoral malpractices, she used: rich people buy elections, television news favors the government party, opposition candidates are prevented from running and voters are threatened with violence at the polls.

The Role of the Media in Elections

In the nature of modern politics, it is impossible for politicians to reach all the voters in their constituencies and to solicit their support to win elections without the help of the media. Thurber, Nelson, and Dulio (2000, cited in Swigger, 2012) noted that television advertisements have become ubiquitous features in American political campaign at every level of government, and it is also one of the most expensive tools of a political campaign. The news media are now the modern platforms from which party candidates disseminate information to voters and solicit their support to win elections. According to Kurfi (2010), "It is arguable that without access to the full range of information about their world, citizens cannot fulfill their roles, and democracy will wither". Nevertheless, the aims and objectives of the media are sometimes different from what politicians actually use the media for during elections. Balkin (1999) agreed with this assumption. He said that politicians and the mass media do not necessarily regard the public as an adversary. Rather, as politicians are seeking to shape and draw benefits from public opinion, so also it is that the mass media seek to entertain the public and maintain public attention and influence. Although both the government and the citizens have the constitutional right to establish and run media organizations, the fact remains that the media institutions are established to facilitate the socioeconomic and political development of the society. This is why Nigerian journalists should provide enough information on political parties and their candidates during elections through their editorials and news coverage, and feature stories that would enable Nigerian voters to make intelligent decisions on the candidates to vote for in the elections. Konkwo (2003) advised that the media should provide information that would enable the electorate to decide wisely on who to vote for in an election, not on the basis of what the candidates can immediately provide for the people, but on the basis of public

assessment of the capability of the candidates to perform in public office. Most politicians, who are in the habit of using the media for whatever reason, do so with the intention of retaining public support to maintain and advance their political career because they are aware that most citizens usually gravitate toward the direction of the media position on public issues. Nigerian journalists should endeavor to provide sufficient and balanced information on the personality profiles of political aspirants so that the public would be conversant with the history of each of the candidate concerned while deciding on the candidates to vote into public office or parliament. The public often rely on the media for information on the ideologies and manifestoes of political parties, as well as on the competence of the candidates contesting for elections (Egbuna, 2012). Some Nigerian newspapers usually do not provide the public with balanced and objective accounts of the integrity and competence of candidates, which would otherwise enable the voters to cast their votes intelligently for deserving party members. This is one of the dysfunctional implications of voters having to rely on the media to make judgments on the party and candidates to vote for in the elections. Okpoko (2003) emphasized this point when he stated that the mass media should provide adequate political education to enlighten the masses on the appropriate electoral procedures that would enable them to shun the evils of the "money bag" politicians, and to avoid the disadvantages of voting along the lines of ethnicity and religion (p. 76). Although there are many factors that could influence voters' attitudes and choice of candidates in any election, the competence and integrity of political candidates are among the major variables that voters take into consideration while casting their votes for candidates during the elections. During voting exercise, the media should closely monitor the events regarding the election by visiting intermittently the polling booths in their operational environments to get an on the-spot assessment of the voting exercise. Such visits would enable the press to ascertain the degree of commitment of the electoral officers and the law enforcement agencies toward the conduct of the elections. For example, the Nigerian Police will often get tip off on how and where an electoral fraud may occur during the elections. Therefore, where the police were unable to prevent politicians from rigging the elections, the media should at least have been able to provide the background information on the major electoral irregularities that occurred during the voting exercise that could assist the court to review the petitions filed by the candidates who lost in the elections. Unfortunately, apart from a few private media houses in the country, most government-owned media organizations are not in the position to investigate the cases regarding government-sponsored electoral misconduct, except now that the government has passed into law the Freedom of Information Bill. Even at that, it might still be relatively difficult for the public media in Nigeria to report without bias on the activities of the government in elections. This is because the government finances the public media and appoints the members of the editorial boards of the media, including the general managers of the government-owned media stations. The government will therefore expect the journalists working for the public media stations to support the government's policy agenda for development as they are staff of the government Information Ministry. Although the Code of Conduct guiding the activities of the media makes it mandatory for journalists to uphold truth and objectivity in their reports, some newspaper editors and the general managers of broadcasting stations in Africa have had their appointments terminated for reporting the true accounts of government's involvement in electoral misconduct. This was the major reason why the Nigerian Union of Journalists fought to ensure that the Federal Government approved the Freedom of Information Bill. The Act now enables journalists to gain access to public information, and to publish any news so long as the publication does not violate the rights of anyone, including those of the state. However,

it is important to mention that it is strictly unconstitutional for the Nigerian media to publish a parallel version of election results that contradicts the results released by the INEC as the commission is the only authorized body empowered by the constitution to conduct and release the results of elections. Nevertheless, the press can keep a record of the observed discrepancies between the media version of the election results from the official results released by the electoral commission. The results of the elections compiled by the media could serve as evidence when the court and the Electoral Tribunal will be evaluating the claims and objections raised by the candidates who unconstitutionally lost their seats to their opponents in the elections. It is the duty of the Nigerian judiciary to review the petitions filed in by the candidates who believed that they were deprived of their victory in elections. It is worth noting that the verdict of the Nigerian judiciary on any election result takes precedent over the result of the election approved by the INEC. Hence, it is pointless for politicians to fight over election results, particularly as the Nigerian judiciary has restored public confidence in the Nigerian Electoral System, following the impartial judgments the court and Electoral Tribunals delivered on the petitions filed in by the candidates who contested in the 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections.Studies have extensively shown the contributions of the media to political processes within the context of democracy Norris and Odugbemi (2010). Elections being a critical democratic process cannot be effectively conducted without the mass media. The media and publicity get the biggest chunk of electoral budgets because of the need for accountability and transparency of the entire process. The mass media including television, radio, newspapers and magazines facilitate the formation of impression and public opinion. Media reports largely influence and direct the attitude of prospective voters either for or against the election Aleyomi and Ajakaiye (2014). The advent of social media and fake news syndrome have proved to be powerful instruments for collecting and disseminating information that shapes public opinion or mobilizing for action during or after the elections Edwards and Moody (2011). Reports of violence by the media during an election period could be used to negatively influence public opinion, promote tension and instigate hate Dan'Azumi, S. and Bichi, M.H. (2010).

Trends and Patterns of Electoral Violence in the Fourth Republic

Nigeria's fourth republic has witnessed the conduct of general elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2919 respectively. These elections have been deeply enmeshed in series of violence before, during and after the elections. The 1999 elections had minimal record of violence largely because the military supervised the electoral process that birthed the fourth republic the 2003 elections were conducted by President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration who was seeking his second tenure. The 2003 elections were characterized by manipulation, rigging, thuggery and the assassination of perceived political opponents. The ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) swept the polls as it consolidated it hold on the Nigerian political landscape. After the completion of two terms as President, Obasanjo's administration conducted perhaps the worst election in Nigeria's history. Prior to the 2007 elections, the outgoing President Obasanjo asserted that the election was going to be a "do-or-die" for the ruling PDP. Animashaun (2008), argued that there were massive irregularities in the 2007 elections and it was characterized by inflation of voting figures, declaration of results where elections were never held or not conclusive, intimidation of voters as well as manipulation of the security services. Results of elections conducted in some were totally different from those announced in Abuja contrary to the provisions of the 2006 Electoral. Act (TMG, 2007). The Human Rights Watch (2007) noted that there were scores of political killings, bombings and armed clashes between rival political groups. The outcome of the 2007 elections

generated a lot of controversies and wide spread condemnation from both the local and international observers. The winner of the presidential election, late Umaru Musa Yaradua admitted that the electoral process in 2007 was highly fraudulent. Shortly after assuming office as the Executive President, Yaradua instituted an Electoral Reform Committee headed by Justice Uwais with a view towards correcting the ills in Nigeria's electoral system. Some of the recommendations of the Electoral Reform Committee were included in the amended Electoral Act. It is also on record that Yaradua's administration promoted non-interference in the judiciary. This was evident in the various judgments dispensed at both the Tribunal and Appeal courts over electoral disputes. Gubernatorial elections in states such as Ekiti, Osun, Edo and On do that were initially declared to have been won by PDP were upturned in favour of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and Labour Party (LP) respectively (Aniekwe, *et al.,* 2011).The 2011 general elections were adjudged by many observers as the most credible election organized by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) since 1999. For example, Terence McCulley, U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria praised the National Assembly election as the first-ever 'credible, transparent, free and fair general election' in Nigeria, and declared that it provided a 'historic opportunity for Nigeria to consolidate its democracy and further expand its voice on the world stage' (Agbambu and Ajayi, 2011). In the same vein, EU Election Observation Mission to Nigeria said 'the 2011 general elections marked an important step towards strengthening democratic elections in Nigeria, but challenges remain' (EU EOM, 2011).Prior to the presidential polls, some Northern politicians including Adamu Ciroma, Iyorchia Ayu, Lawal Kaita, Bello Kirfi, Yahaya Kwande, and Bashir Yusuf Ibrahim wrote a letter to the PDP National Chairman on 17 September 2010 requesting the party leadership to restrain President Goodluck Jonathan from contesting the 2011 elections under the party's platform. The group argued that eight year, two-term presidency ceded to the North in line with the PDP, which began with former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2007, must continue through another Northerner following Yar'Adua's death. The group warned that the failure of the ruling PDP to apply the principle of zoning would threaten the stability of Nigeria, saying; 'we are extremely worried that our party's failure to deliver justice in this matter (power-shift to the North) may ignite a series of events, the scope of magnitude of which we can neither proximate nor contain' (Abdallah, 2010, Obia, 2010). Inflammatory messages sent through the social media worsened the tensions created by religious and ethnic campaigning by supporters of President Jonathan and Muhammudu Buhari (Harwood and Campbell, 2010).The Northern states of the country were thrown into chaos and anarchy after Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was declared the winner of the 2011 presidential election. Human Rights Watch (2011) reported that about 800 lives were lost as a result of the post-election violence. Similarly, the Human Rights Watch (2011) claimed that more than 65,000 people were displaced after the 2011 post-election violence. The Nigerian Red Cross Society released a slightly lower figure indicating that the violence displaced 48,000 persons in 12 states (Omenazu and Paschal, 2011).In the run up to the 2015 elections, the security challenges had become worrisome most especially in Northern Nigeria and Abuja the Federal Capital Territory. This is largely due to the meteoric rise in the Boko Haram Insurgency. The CLEEN Foundation Security Threat Assessment published in March 2015 found that 15 states were on red alert level. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in its Pre-Election Report stated that at least 58 persons have been killed even before the conduct of 2015 general elections (CLEEN, 2015). There were changes in the political configuration of the country as could be seen in the formation of a mega opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC). Formed in 2013, APC was the amalgamation of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC); the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN); the All Nigeria

People's Party (ANPP) and a faction of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). Former military ruler, General Muhammudu Buhari (retd) was picked as the presidential flag bearer for APC. On the other hand, the PDP which has dominated Nigeria's political space since 1999 chose the incumbent president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as the presidential candidate. Prior to the 2015 polls, PDP suffered setbacks due to the mass exodus of key political players to APC. Jonathan who hails from the Ijaw ethnic group in the South-South region was perceived as the candidate of the South East and South-South of Nigeria. New measures were introduced with the view towards curbing electoral fraud and electoral violence during the 2015 general elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under the leadership of Prof Attahiru Jega introduced the use of Card Readers and Permanent Voters Card (PVC) for the upcoming 2015 general elections. The technology of the Card Reader system has ensured credible elections in Ghana, Kenya and Sierra Leone (Vanguard, February 25, 2015). According to INEC, there were 66 reports of violent incidence all across the country. The violence were recorded in Rivers State (16 incidents); Ondo (8); Cross Rivers (6); Ebonyi (6); Akwa Ibom (5); Bayelsa (4); Lagos and Kaduna (3 each); Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti (2 each); Katsina, Kogi, Plateau, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun (one each) (Vanguard, April 12, 2015). The European Union Election Observation Mission reported that about 30 people were killed on April 11, 2015 Election Day as a result of inter-party clashes and attacks on election sites (EU EOM, 2015).The roles of some stakeholders and the international community in ensuring a peaceful election cannot be overemphasized. A former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi appealed to the major contestants of the presidential election to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will commit them to control their supporters against violence after the 2015 general elections (Punch, December 22, 2014). Similarly, the National Peace Committee for the 2015 General Elections led by former military ruler, General Abdulsalami Abubakar (retd) facilitated peace accord between General Buhari (retd) and President Jonathan (Punch, March 26, 2015). Concerned that Nigeria could burst into flames, America's Secretary of State, John Kerry flew to Lagos to discuss about the 2015 elections with President Jonathan and General Buhari (retd) respectively (Gordon, 2015).Overall, the 2015 and 2019 general elections were adjudged to be quite successful and more credible than every other election since the commencement of the fourth republic. The APC made history at the 2015 polls by becoming the first opposition party to defeat the ruling party in Nigeria. Thus, former military dictator, Gen. Muhammudu Buhari (retd) who had previously contested for the presidency in 2003, 2007 and 2011 upstaged the incumbent president, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The finest hour during the general polls was the noble character displayed by erstwhile President Jonathan when he accepted his defeat and ensured a smooth transition process that ushered in Buhari's administration on May 29, 2015.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Election and electoral process is perhaps the greatest invention of the 21st Century. The media is an important factor in ensuring the effectiveness of dissemination of political consciousness and civic education. Both factors are inseparably required to strengthen the democratic process. This brief identified that reportage of cases of electoral violence by the media could on its own create anxiety and voters' apathy. This paper has attempted to review the trends in electoral violence and voter turnout in Nigeria. It identified the economic interests of politicians as the major force behind electoral violence using Dialectical Materialism as its theoretical standpoint. The outcome of the 2015 polls in Nigeria is considered as the beginning of a new chapter in Nigeria. Nigeria only needs to build on

the good legacies left behind by Dr. Good luck Jonathan's administration and INEC under the chairmanship of Prof. Attahiru Jega for a brighter future. It recommended legislative considerations of voters' education, deemphasizing violence during electoral periods and minimized security presence for electoral duties.

- The policymaker should mandate the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) through its Committees to liaise with the Nigerian Guild of Editors and the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) with a view to improving professionalism in reportage, particularly on electoral related matters;
- The lawmakers through its relevant Committees may liaise with the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), to that ensure media outlets are well censored before election reports are sent out to the public.
- The legislators should amend the electoral law to include automatic disqualification of candidates of political parties found culpable of electoral violence and thuggery during party primary elections or in the general elections; and
- The National Assembly through its resolutions should mandate the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to float a non-stop voter education and security campaigns before, during and after elections

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