

## **Electoral Violence and its Impact on Elections in Rivers State between 2009-2019**

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### ***Abstract***

*Free, fair and credible elections have remained that fundamental basis for attaining democratic stability. As such when an electoral process is impign it distorts the elections and it outcomes. This paper examines electoral violence and its impact on elections in Rivers State between 2009-2019. The paper is anchored on the Marxian political economy as its theoretical framework. The design of the paper is based on the sample survey research design. A sample size of 360 was derived from a population of 1,899,041 registered voters in Rivers State, using the stratified random sampling technique on the basis of the 3 senatorial districts of the state. Quantitative data was generated via 4 point scale likert structured questionnaire administered to the 360 respondents. While qualitative data was gleaned from documentary and textual materials. Data was analyzed via simple percentage analysis and via the use of statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS). While the use of qualitative content analysis compliment the method of analysis. The paper concludes among others, that; several arm twisting methods that are employed to rig elections in Rivers State is what leads to electoral violence. And that this has led to several loss of lives and has also led to the disruption of electoral processes. As such the paper recommend among others that there should be special court and agency specifically charged with the trial and prosecution of electoral offenders in a criminal proceeding. And that the trial of such cases should not take more than three months for final verdict.*

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***Keywords:*** Election, Violence, Electoral Violence Impact, Rivers State

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### **Introduction**

In any given society, once the nation attains independence and practices democracy, it becomes necessary to conduct one form of election or the other. Through this, the people decide who preside over their affairs (Gambari, 2008). Democracy dates back to pre-colonial Nigeria, which is to say that Nigeria has practiced democracy in her traditional institution before the attainment of independence, though not in the procedure of periodic election (Sampson, 2014). However, a foremost challenge facing democracy in Africa is electoral violence. This is antithetical to democratic development and attainment of dividend of democracy (Edet, 2015).

From political parties' formation and elections in pre-independent State, African states have been characterized by electoral violence.-This has regularly resulted in assassination/death and conflicts between rival interests (Adesote & Abimbola, 2014). Though, in the view of Aniekwe and Kushie (2011), electoral process violence is not limited to third world states alone, for it was witnessed in the eighteenth century America and England democracy.

Fisher (2002) refers to electoral violence and conflict as any action aimed at harassing or intimidating a political actor/participant in the process of election so as to obtain electoral advantage. These acts are committed by politicians and their beneficiaries. Igbuzor (2010, p16) views it as:

Violence committed by political interest holders, it happens in the pre, during and post election process. Its manifestation is in form of: thuggery, use of deadly weapons to intimidate voters, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person, with the aim of obtaining electoral advantage.

From 1999, violence has continued like previous era. The election of 1999 in the view of Aniekwe and Kushie (2011) was accepted just to ease out the military regime that has ruled for over 30 years, and not for its credibility (Adesote, 2014; Edet, 2015).

Similarly, the 2003 General Election witnessed killing of rivals, electoral malpractices, manipulation of results, use of thugs, harassing of voters and electoral officers (Durotoye, 2015). Also, according to the Human Right Watch Report (2004) over 100 people died and several others injured in the month of May and April 2003 due to the election violence. In 2007 general election, there were about 18 deaths between 13<sup>th</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup> 2007.

According to a report by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Report: The aftermath of 2011 General Elections include deaths, injuries, arson, seizure and destruction of election materials, assault and abduction of political leaders/their supporters, Jooting, among other forms of election-induced malfeasances (INEC 201 1:35).

According to same report, five of his offices in Bauchi were destroyed, including private houses. Over 50 innocent persons including Nine (9) Youth Corps Members were also killed. There was also several other killing and destruction of properties in Kano. Borno, Yobe, Kaduna, Niger State, Sokoto etc.

In 2015, the political tension was high, as the polity was heated up. The two major contenders were General Muhammadu Buhari of All Progressive Congress (APC) and Dr Goodluck Jonathan of the then Ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). INEC under Professor Jega introduced permanent voters card (PVC) for verification of voters' card (Lewis & Kew, 2015). This also created electoral challenge as the card malfunction in many instances, thus heating up tension and suspicion on the electoral body. The election itself was characterised by wide spread malpractice, as there was report of underage voting in the north and ballot box snatching in the south (Nwangwu, 2015).

European Union Election Observers Mission Final Report (2015), indicated over 41 incident of violence on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2015 General Election, which caused the death of 19 persons, 4 cases of terrorist attacks, While before January 2015, the number of death was put at 160. The menace of electoral violence has continued unabated even in the 2019 general elections.

Rivers State of Nigeria is not in any way isolated from electoral related violence has have been witnessed since 2010 to 2019. For instance, the Minister of Transport, Rotimi Amaechi in the presence of the President at Presidential Campaign in Port Harcourt the Rivers State capital declared war on the Rivers State Governor and his political party – Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (ThisDay, Feb. 14, 2019).

Electoral violence is a social problem which .on its own has become a societal problem requiring solution in order to bring about development of democracy (Dike, 2008). It is a social problem that is associated with injuries, deaths, arson, and destruction of election materials, harassment of political opponent and their supporters, including innocent citizens. These are perpetuated by interest holders for direct and indirect gains (Oyadiran & Toyin, 2013). These will not give room for free choice (credible election), and the development of democracy can only be achieved when we have election that is devoid of violence. When democracy is characterized by electoral violence, the resultant effects will be stagnation or regression of democratic stability and this in the long run will affect the overall development of the state, for development can only take place when credible people are in power (Omotola, 2010; Edet, 2015).

As a component of the Nigerian State, Rivers State was created on May 27, 1967, under the administration of Yakubu Gowon (Degree 14). The state under the scope of this study has witnessed five (5) general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015), including local government and other bye elections. Conducting a free and fair election has been a big challenge, thus necessitating this study in order to enhance democratic development.

Rivers State happens to be one States that has experience re-occurrence of electoral violence. According to INEC's Report (2011), violence in the 2011 election was relative low when compared to election held between 1999 and 2007. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room report (2015) described the 2015 general election in the state as one of the red spot for violence; it was intensive that it almost threatened the electoral process. Six (6) people, including a police officer were reportedly killed.

Following the nullification of most results by election tribunal/court due to alleged electoral short comings; rerun election was scheduled for 2016 to fill in those positions that were nullified. During the March 12 rerun election for the federal and state house of assembly. It was reported by Anucha, Kilete and John (2016) that unspecified number of people was killed. This includes a youth corps member (Samuel Okonta) at Ahoada West Local Government Area, who served as adhoc staff. The election also witnessed war of words between the Governor of the State Chief Barr Nyesom Wike of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) in the state as to the party that was behind the violence and killing.

Due to repeated violence, the election was declared inconclusive as election could not hold in some areas due to pre-electoral/during electoral violence. Thus, another date was fixed for the conduct of the election. December 19<sup>th</sup> 2016 was fixed for the rerun election; there was a reported case of killing, rigging etc. According to Omonobi et al. (2016), one DSP Alkali Mohammed was beheaded along with his orderly, while eleven NYSC members who served as adhoc staff were held hostage. Consequently, the election was again declared inconclusive in some local government like Etche and others. Following these successive and reoccurring violence in our elections, one is forced to ask if there can be stability of democracy under such

circumstance. As these have become hindrances to the stability of democracy in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

These acts have resulted in people being scared to partake in the process. Since there is hardly anyone who will risk death or suffer injury in the process of voting, which ought to be peaceful naturally. Similarly, credible and knowledgeable individuals who can deliver are 'made to shy away from contesting elective positions for fear of harassment/attack. The consequence however is' manifested in having these thugs and their principals as elected leaders. Democracy under such condition will not bring about the desired stability that is associated with it, for the process of the leaders' emergence is not democratic. This therefore constitutes a problem that requires urgent attention for the stability of democracy in Rivers State.

This paper is discoursed in five interrelated parts. The first part is the introduction which is just concluded. The second part covers the theoretical framework and a brief review of relevant concepts of the paper. The third part mentions the method adopted in generating data and analyzing same. The fourth part covers the presentation and analysis of data. While the fifth part outlines conclusion and recommendations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For the purpose of this paper, the Marxian Political Economy Theory was adopted. Generally, the idea of political economy was derived from two Greek words: oikos (meaning "home") and nomos (meaning "law" or "order"). Political Economy as seen by Nikitin (1983) is the foundation for the development of the society. Just as Adam Smith viewed it as 'A science, which is concerned with x the proper management of national wealth'. To Marx however, political economy is 'A historical process that shows the nature of relationship that exists in the ownership of means of production in the production cycle'. That is the science of development of social production and the relationship that exist between people in the production process (Fadakinte: 2014). Nwaorgu (2002) maintained that, there is a relationship between economics and politics. As political decisions have economic implications, in same way, economic policies have political/policy implications. Thus, political economy is multi disciplinary arid cuts across other disciplines.

In this paper however, the analysis shall be based on Marx's Dialectical Materialism, which was propounded by Karl Marx in 1859 (Abah and Nwokwu, 2015). To Nwaorgu (2002), this method of dialectical materialism is centred on the point that, to have a better understanding of production relationship, such understanding must be based on first understanding their evolution and how they develop, possibly how they phase out also.

The theory is premised on how societies change from one mode of production to another and this also plays out in the relationship between the superstructure and the substructure. In relation to this, Marx (as cited in Epelle and Uranta, 2014) stated that, the mode of production of material needs is the determinant of other aspects of human life.

To Marx, economic gains among other reasons are the causes of crisis. It therefore means that people struggle and might even use whatever means available to clinch to power for economic gain as this will enable them to determine how resources are shared (Abah and Nwokwu 2015).

No wonder Ake (1981, p.1-2) identified the material disposition of a man, as what determines the political system. In his views:

Once we understand what the material assets and constraints of a society are, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs how the goods are distributed and what types of social relations arise from the organization of production, we have come a long way to understanding the culture of that society, its laws, its religious system, its political system and even its modes of thought.

Marx conceived the dialectics as a “reality of the physical world”, unlike Hegel whose concept is on “ideas”. Using Marx’s concept of dialectical materialism with Ake’s position on material disposition will offer a better understanding of the reality associated with electoral violence. Ake (1981) raised important concerns: he began by emphasizing an understanding of the limitations of society, the nature of its material assets (resources/wealth), and the kind of relationships/interactions that take place in its production and distribution of such wealth (resources). Because it is believed that, when one gets an understanding of such process, he will have a better understanding of the ways of life of such people, including their culture i.e. their modes of operation/activities, political activity, religion etc.

This therefore provides a comprehensive insight on electoral struggle and why there is electoral violence. Nigeria is blessed with human and natural resources, yet the country still ranked 162 out of 188 (UNDP, 2016) Human Development Index (HDI) report. Actors in the political process and participants generally conceive political office to be an avenue for self enrichment and to boost their economic base (Akindele, 2012). It therefore means that, once elected, the material assets becomes asset for personal disposition even against the dictate of the laws.

Unfortunately, everyone cannot become a political office holder, because of obvious political constrains. Therefore, since there are limited positions of this route to wealth (politics), some people began to seek ways to alter the process for personal gain (Dike, 2008).

It could therefore be argued that, it is the culture of impunity among political office holders in their mode of distribution/allocation of goods and service (resource of the state) that gave rise to electoral violence. Thus, Ekekwe (2009, p.17), stated that:

If we want to understand social activity and society from the point of view of political economy, we must first of all “atomize” them into their different elements. In other words, we must first breakdown society into its smallest units which, obviously, are the individual human beings. To live he must produce the means to life. It is for purposes of individual and social maintenance and reproduction that productive activity assumes the very high degree of importance assigned to it. When these basic sources of material maintenance are lacking, man especially within the marginalized class, is bound to adopt a confrontation method (class struggle) to survive.

To these political actors, the means of life is political power, and in other to capture the power, they deemed the confrontation method most appropriate, and this they pursue in form of electoral fraud. Also, the opposition parties see the confrontation approach as a necessary reaction. This often time leads to post & electoral violence (Alabi, 2009).

To further suggest the suitability of this theory, Abbass (2008) conceived dialectic materialism to be related to issues of inherent motivations by man for economic gains and benefit. Elections are

characterized by violence, not because elections cannot be free and fair, but the material gains attached to such positions do not allow participants to play by the rules of the game (Atuobi, 2008). Because these actors see politics as a business that yield huge returns within a short while and since no other venture can create such wealth, they thus engage in electoral fraud for quick route.

In other words, power in Nigeria has become a means to self enrichment. The struggle to achieve this material gain leads to destruction of lives and properties etc (Ogbeidi, 2012). This happens because in the process of the struggle, violence is unleashed to eliminate whomever they perceive or imagined to be an obstacle on their path to power (Abah and Nwokwu, 2015). Take for instance, a first time political office holder, who barely owns a personal house, acquires choice properties home and abroad within months of being elected/appointed.

### **The Concept of Election**

Election is a selection process, which allows the people to vote for their choice candidate/party during elections without fear or favour (Kimberling, 1992). It's about consent, free will to exercise one's preference; it is a virtue in any democratic government. The essence of democracy is election. It gives the people the opportunity to periodically choose who will govern them in the next couple of years as specified in their constitution. It therefore means that election is a key feature of democracy (Nnanta, & Innocent, 2014), because democracy thrives when there is periodic election, and not just in any election, but in an election where the people will freely elect their preferred candidate/party.

Elections have been seen as an acceptable means of transition from one administration to the other (Dike, 2008). Though people can only come out to exercise their franchise/choice when the process is peaceful (Muheep, 2015). When elections are credible, the preferred candidate that will emerge will be determined by the electorate. When this happens, there will be democratic development, because those elected will be more cautious of the fact that the people are the ones that elected them and are thus accountable to them (Lindberg: 2003) . To Ojo (2007), election is a distinctive feature of democracy.

To Alapiki (2004, p.130), election is the “barometer to measure the political maturity, health, legitimacy and stability of a democratic government. It is generally held to be the single most important indicator of the presence or absence of democratic governance”.

Democracy however, is not new in Africa, because most of her traditional institutions were democratic in nature, but the concept of election and electoral process was not a usual practice. It was the Clifford Constitution during colonial era in 1922 that introduced the elective principles into Nigerian politics, which gave room for casting of vote in Lagos and Calabar, before its extension to other parts of Nigeria.

Cyllah (2014), identified three electoral cycles: pre-electoral period, election period and post electoral period. Registration of political parties/voters card, campaign and others fall into the pre-electoral period. Actual voting and announcing of results among others fall into the period of election activities (Alabi, 2009). While review, reforms and reactions as to accept/challenge the outcome of the election is considered as the activities that dominate the post-result announcement period (Edet, 2015). All must be properly managed to avoid acts capable of

derailing the process, as what happens in stage one will affect stage two and three also. Therefore, there is need for proper management of the activities of the three stages to avoid violence.

However, there are two types of elections; the primary elections (party's primary) and general election. There are also special elections (bye elections) etc. Under democracy, there are certain factors that aid/support credible election. Naturally, there are some levels of voter's apathy among the people. Since elections are considered a source of legitimacy, then, there is need for voters' education. The people should be educated on the importance of voting and why is it necessary for them to vote, as their votes is the power. There are cases and issue of nullified votes, this is due to poor knowledge of proper voting. Therefore, it is the duty of INEC to carry out proper voters' education/enlightenment.

### **The Concept of Electoral Violence**

Electoral violence has to do with anything that affects the conduct of an election. Thus, it is an organized action aimed at creating an atmosphere of fear/threat for the purpose of altering the outcome of an election. When such actions create fear, people will shy away from the process. Anifowose (1982) considers electoral violence to be any hostile action by individual and groups against another's life or property, with the intention of altering the result. To Albert (2007) it is a planned action or hostile act, which could be somatic, mental and organisational. The intention is to harass, inflame injure or dent the image/identity of a perceived rival to thwart or manipulate the arrangement of the election.

In year 2015, for instance, the INEC Chairman, Prof Jega, introduced Permanent Voter Cards (PVC) and Smart Card Reader (SCR). This replaced the manual accreditation and voting that was used for previous elections. Due to malfunctioning of this technology, many voters were disenfranchised, as they stood for hours without being able to get accredited by the device. This resulted in people losing interest in the process, as they interpreted the act to be intentional, thus, preventing them from voting for their own choice candidates (Fagunwa, 2015; Ogbidi & Agnes, 2017). However, it was only in subsequent time, INEC approved manual accreditation where the electronic failed, which was handled by the Presiding Officer in the each Polling Unit (Agbu: 2015). However, the adoption of the card reader and electronic voting is a wise decision, provided that it should be improve upon before the next general election.

Electoral processes in almost all emerging democracies have suffered a lot of setbacks following alteration of the electoral process, thus raising the question about the development of democracy in these countries (Nyuykonge & Omotola, 2015). This is because representative democracy can only be effective when elections are free, fair and credible. Taking a look on the African countries, from Kenya to Burundi, to Gambia to Mali and even here in Nigeria, electoral processes have been crisis-ridden, resulting in violence and loss of lives and properties (Bardall, 2015). The truth of it is that, election as a core component of democracy is meant to credible for only then can the best leader/representatives emerge. This will also build up the confidence of the people on the process in subsequent elections, but in situation where winners are announced which did not reflect their choices, and maybe in a process also that was not transparent, then there is bound to be protest which can lead to violence. This has often been the root cause of post electoral violence.

In Nigeria, electoral violence has led to the truncation of democracy over three times. According to the National Institute of Policy and Strategic Study. (NIPSS) Report in Ibrahim (2007), it was only the elections conducted in 1959 that of 1979 that did not witness much of organized electoral fraud. This was because; the 1959 election was under the colonial government, while that of 1979 was conducted under military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo. Both the colonial administration in 1959 and the then military regime of General Obasanjo in 1979 were neutral, and this accounted as part of the reasons why the elections were relatively free from electoral violence (Oromareghake, 2013). Other than these two elections, the rest elections till date been characterized by varying degrees of electoral violence. In line with this assertion, Okafor (2015) opined that violence manifested in high degree in the elections of 1951 and was worst in the case of 1964 and 1965 general elections. Due to the high level of violence and rejection of announced results popular uprising began to spring up, as people started using the slogan “operation Wetie”. As noted in Okafor, this resulted in the death of many and others wounded.

In a similar vein, 1983 general elections according to Bariledum, Abang and Nwigbo (2016), was characterised by electoral violence. Appointment of Justice Ovie-Whiskey as the Head of Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was alleged to be the beginning of such manipulation, as it was believed that he was loyal to the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN). Also, there was an allegation of inflation of the number of registered voters. As a result, Prof Ola Rotimi (1983) as cited in Bariledum, Abang and Nwigbo (2016) stated that, the federal government itself has decided to play a leading role in electoral manipulation and violence.

In the case of 1999 as noted by Aniekwe and Kushie (2011), the election was accepted not because it was free and fair, but it was generally accepted just as a way of easing out the military regime that had lasted for about 30 years. In 2003 general election, about one hundred people were killed (HRW, 2004). In 2007 election (HRW, 2007) put number of deaths at 300, including policemen.

The 2011 general elections was relatively peaceful, however, immediately Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) was announced the winner of the Presidential election, violence erupted in Northern Nigeria. Supporters of (CPC) candidate General Muhammadu Buhari took to protest and violence. According to HRW (2011), over 800 people were killed. The killing took place within three days of protest and violence in 12 Northern States.

According to European Union EOM Report (2015), the 2015 general elections witnessed one of Nigeria’s most tense campaigns, as misguided words were commonly used. The National Human Rights Commission Report (2015) on pre-election violence identified 60 incidents and 58 persons killed over a 50 day period.

The electoral body has significant role to play in the success of a free, fair and credible elections. It also seems that the electoral body: National Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) has not lived up to expectation. The Nigeria 1999 constitution and the Electoral Acts 2010 as amendment have mandated INEC to be in charge of elections and ensure free and fair elections according to the rules and procedures stated (Obianyo & Vincent, 2015). Take for instance, from Sections 117 to 132 of the Electoral Acts of 2010 as Amended identified various electoral offences and their penalties, but in all sincerity, these provisions are violated on daily basis, but



the body has been silent on this. Politicians have often engaged in corrupt practices to manipulate the process in their own favour. This justified the position by Ekekwe and Amadi (2014, p.166), which read thus with the return to democracy in the 1990s, corruption still remains in the mainstream public administration. Even African leaders that assumed democracy “Pundits” could rarely conduct free, fair and credible elections along “democratic” lines. Electoral fraud remains their substantial strategies in order to retain political power, such as Nigeria under President Obasanjo, South Africa under Jacob Zuma. Several years of misrule of President Omar Bongo of Gabon continued with the imposition of his son Ali Bongo etc.

There is therefore urgent need to set democracy back on track. This is because; electoral violence is capable of destroying whatever good democracy stands for. Due to reoccurring election related crisis, Amnesty International in their Report (2008), noted that even when there are no armed conflicts in Africa, desperation for power has made it look like there is one during elections. This is obvious in the pre, during and post electoral violence that has often been witnessed.

In the event of electoral violence, it is not only the targeted that is affected, but on a general note, it affects even the children and people who are not necessarily part of the process (Bardall, 2015). Electoral violence often time takes ethnic/religious dimension as the case in Mali between the Tuareg and non-Tuareg in Northern eastern town of Kidal. It also happened in Nigeria immediately Dr Goodluck Jonathan of PDP was announced winner of the 2011 presidential election. After the announcement, violence erupted in some Northern States, which lasted for about three days (Orji, 2012). The media houses are not left out, as reporters and observers are often affected in the course of covering the elections.

Atuobi (2010), identified several factors as being responsible for electoral violence in Africa, these include organisational ineffectiveness of the electoral body that is responsible for the conduct of the election, the patterns of the political operation, which create a scenario of complete winner and absolute loser, he also identified the unchecked executive power being exercised by the controller of the State Power and how they use the State apparatus to the detriment of perceived opponent. There is also insincerity on the part of most observers. In recent time, we have seen situations where an observer group will adjudge election to be free and fair only for another group to report same election to be marred by malpractices (Osinakachukwu & Jawan, 2011).

Similar to Atuobi’s view, Abah and Nwokwu (2015) identified eight factors as being responsible for electoral violence. These include: lack of fairness and transparency in the electoral process; non credibility of the electoral body; ineffectiveness of Jaws and enforcement agencies; inordinate political ambition; ethnic politics; unemployment; juicy nature of Nigerian politics and corruption.

A breakdown of these points shows that lack of fairness and transparency in the electoral process creates violence. In a situation where the electoral processes are transparent and fair to all, candidates’ confidence could be secured in the process, and this will help reduce tension associated with it (Onwudiwe & Berwind-Dart, 2010). On the part of law enforcement agencies, they have often taken side, and when they do. it will be to the detriment of the other party.

Another factor also that has led to electoral violence according to Abah and Nwokwu (2015) is ethnic politics, here every ethnic group want to support a candidate/party that presents a candidate from their ethnic group. When such a candidate loses an election, it leads to ethnic

sentiment, as one ethnic group begin to pick on the other ethnic group as was the case in 2011 General Election in Nigeria (INEC, 2011). In 2015 for instance, the Yorubas favoured the APC partly because of ethnic politics. As in their calculation, neither the PDP Presidential Candidate nor his Vice is a Yoruba man, so to them, is not a good politics. Similarly, the South South and the South East supported Dr Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP, not essentially because he is an incumbent, but same on the calculation that he belong to same region with them.

Unemployment is another factor identified by Abah and Nwokwu (2015), high a percentage of such segments of people will be vulnerable. Thus, they could be paid stipend to engage in electoral malpractice. There is problem of corruption and juicy nature of Nigerian politics as well, which creates a situation where people who are elected to manage the common wealth engage in act of embezzlement of public fund. Thus, the electoral process is now synonymous with electoral violence, as contestants do all they can to clinch to power and to have access to acquire and distribution the state resources.

Weak political institutions, if the electoral body is independent of the executive, f possibly, the idea of them be unbiased umpire can be achieved. This is in line with Justice Uwais Reform Report Committee, suggested:

The National Assembly should amend the 1999 constitution to provide appropriation of funds for INEC in a manner that will guarantee its independence. In this respect the funding of INEC should be first -charge on the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the Federation.

The point is that, only a system with strong electoral commission can make for improvements in its electoral process. INEC needs the legal frame work that can enable her carry out its statutory obligation without much interference from the executive. Funny enough, even when the provisions of the law gives some level of leverage for independence, fear of getting another job do not allow people to show bravely by standing up against evil or maybe resign when they feel authorities are going against the guideline or when there is need to expose an act.

Inokoba and Maliki (2011) (as cited in Okafor 2015) categorized electoral violence into two. In one category they identified the following as the causes of electoral violence: state institutions; culture of impunity; poor institutional and legal remedy for electoral violence; poor knowledge of what constitute electoral violence among the citizens; Prebendal politics. These causes, according to them are peculiar to Nigeria. They are in category one. The second category which is more general has the following: hate campaigns, rigging of election; thuggery; abuse of power; electoral corruption and fraud.

Without mincing words, state institutions e.g. Security and others have a role to play to ensure the conduct of free and fair election. However, due to lack of independence by these institutions, they end up playing partisan role in the electoral process (Mapuva, 2013). There is always a reactionary approach by those who feel the state bodies are not being fair. Among Nigerians, the culture of impunity is high, especially by the political class/incumbent. The laws of though well stated, but strictly enforcing its penalty on electoral offenders has been least effective. So the people feel the legal institutions will not offer remedy for their complaints, so they take the law into their own hands. Sad enough, average voter in Nigeria might not have seen a copy of the electoral acts, so, might not even know what constitutes an electoral offence and what is expected of him or her (Bratton, 2008). Therefore, those engaged in electoral violence are

blessed with free time of perpetuating electoral frauds. Probendalism is now a culture in the politics; the perception is that once you hold political office, that you are an automatic billionaire (Omilusi, 2014).

**Method**

Thus, for this purpose, a survey design was adopted. A survey is the systematic observation and recording of human behaviour in social systems for developing and testing social theories (Nsiegebe, 2020). A research survey is useful means of assessing the opinions of respondents on variables being investigated. Survey design deals with the present situations. It focuses on population or the universe. It adopts the use of research instrument like the questionnaire, interview etc. This is in order to determine the opinion and position of the respondents on the subject of the survey.

The focal population of the paper is the totality of eligible voters in Rivers State as at March 2015(that collected their Permanent Voters Card). According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the figure was put at 899, 041 (Eight Hundred and Ninety Nine Thousand, Forty One), this covered the 23 local government areas of the state. This paper adopted the stratified random sampling technique, which is a probability sampling, as against non-probability sampling technique.

The sample size of this paper is 360 (N=360), and was drawn from a population of 1, 899, 041 (P = 1, 899, 041). Using the random stratified method, the population was first stratified into three N<sub>1</sub> N<sub>2</sub>, N<sub>3</sub> (Kothari, 2004). This was based on senatorial districts. N<sub>1</sub> represents Rivers East Senatorial District, which comprises Emohua, Etche, Ikwerre, Obio-Akpor, Ogu-Bolo, Okrika, Omuma, Port Harcourt. N<sub>2</sub> represents Rivers West, comprising Abua-Odual, Ahoada East, Ahoada West, Akuku-Toru, Asari-Toru, Bonny, Degema and Ogba-Egbema--Ndoni. Lastly is N<sub>3</sub> this represents Rivers South East: Andoni, Eleme, Gokana, Khana, Opobo-Nkoro, Oyigbo and Tai.

**Fig 1: Strata 1 to 3 and their population**

<b>N<sub>1</sub> = Rivers East LGAs</b>	<b>N<sub>2</sub> = Rivers West LGAs</b>	<b>N<sub>3</sub> Rivers South East LGAs</b>
Total eligible voters 913,593	Total eligible voters 603,457	Total eligible voters 381,991

**Source: INEC, 2015.**

Where:

N<sub>1</sub> = 913593

N<sub>2</sub> = 603457

N<sub>3</sub> = 381991

Adopting proportional allocation, the sample size is obtained thus:

For Strata N<sub>1</sub> = 913, 593, we have P<sub>1</sub> = 913, 593 /1899041

Hence n =n<sub>1</sub>. P<sub>1</sub> = 360(913593/1899041) = 173

Similarly, strata N<sub>2</sub> = 603457, we have

N<sub>2</sub>= n. P<sub>2</sub> = 360 (603457/1899041) = 114, and

Strata N<sub>3</sub> = 381991, we have

N<sub>3</sub> = n. P<sub>3</sub> = 360 (381991/189904 1) = 73

Therefore, n<sub>1</sub> + n<sub>2</sub> + n<sub>3</sub> = n.

That is  $173+114+73 = 360$

Having stratified the population into three (3) strata, the sample was thus drawn randomly. In strata 1, a sample of 173 eligible voters was drawn. 114 from strata 2, while a total of 73 drawn from strata 3. In all however, a total of 360 eligible voters were sampled by the paper.

This paper made use of both primary and secondary data. The data obtained by the paper through questionnaire constitute the primary data. The secondary data were sourced from textbooks, internet, newspapers, articles, journals, conferences and seminars etc.

There are different methods of data analysis, like the t-test, ANOVA, regression, correlation etc. However, for the purpose of this paper, simple percentage analysis was adopted. This method of analyzing data looks at raw streams of data in the form of a percentage. The word percent is from two words, "Per cent". Cent means 100, just as in century. The symbol (%) is a simple way of calculating a denominator of 100 (per 100). Example, instead of saying 20 people strongly agreed they snatched ballot box during elections. We thus say, that 20% (20 per 100) of respondent strongly agreed they have snatched ballot box during elections. This is same as the fraction of  $2/10$ .

100% of 60 strongly agreed on an item is  $\frac{100}{100} \times 60 = 60$

Therefore, 20% of the 60 will be  $\frac{20}{100} \times 60 = 12$

The simple percentage method of data analysis can be used even when the items are not up to 100, but can be calculated over 100. Thus, the use of simple percentage in this paper allowed for the comparing and analysis of data obtained from respondents based on percentage. As the percentage was used to determine the effects of electoral violence on democratic stability in Rivers State. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

It is important to reemphasize here that this paper is centered on Electoral Violence and its impact on elections in Rivers State between 2010-2019. The aim is to examine how electoral violence impacts on democratic stability. However, in order to achieve the above stated aim a single hypothesis was used to guide the paper. That is

These questions are set to elicit information/answers from the respondents. In all, a total of three hundred and sixty (360) questionnaires were administered to various respondents that make up the sampled population. However, it was 329 of the questionnaire that was recovered. Thus, the data presentation and analysis is based on the figure of returned questionnaire.

**Table 1: Incidents of Electoral Violence in Rivers State 1999-2015**

<b>LGAs</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2015</b>
Abua/Odual	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters by thugs	Intimidation and harassment of INEC officials and voters by cult groups	Bribery/inducement of voters irregularities	Harassment and intimidation of electoral officers and voters
Ahoada East	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters by thugs	Intimidation and harassment of INEC officials and voters by cult groups kidnapping	Rigging reported	Harassment and intimidation of electoral officers and voters
Ahoada West	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters by thugs	Several people injured. Snatching of ballot boxes	Bribery/inducement of voters	Harassment and intimidation of electoral officers and voters
Akuku Toru	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters by thugs	Intimidation and harassment of INEC officials and voters by cult groups	Bribery/inducement of voters	Harassment and intimidation of electoral officers and voters
Andoni	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters by thugs	Intimidation and harassment of INEC officials and voters by cult groups	Bribery/inducement of voters	Harassment and intimidation of electoral officers and voters
Asari-Toru	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters by thugs	Intimidation and harassment of INEC officials and voters by cult groups	Bribery/inducement of voters	Harassment and intimidation of electoral officers and voters
Bonny	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters by thugs	Intimidation and harassment of INEC officials and voters by cult groups	Rigging reported	Harassment and intimidation of electoral officers and voters
Degema	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters by thugs	Intimidation and harassment of INEC officials and voters by cult groups	Bribery/inducement of voters	Harassment and intimidation of electoral officers and voters
Emohua	Ballot box snatching reported	Two persons killed, cars, houses burnt absence of electoral materials in most polling units	Intimidation and harassment of INEC officials and voters by cult groups	Bribery/inducement of voters	Destruction of electoral materials/cancellation of election in the whole LGA. Fixed for a later day
Eleme	Ballot box snatching reported	One killed. Low voters turn out	Intimidation and harassment of INEC officials and voters by cult groups	Bribery/inducement of voters	Harassment and intimidation of electoral officers and voters
Etche	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters	Harassment of voters, snatching of ballot box	Bribery/inducement of voters	One adopted many others assaulted, snatching of ballot boxes
Gokana	Ballot box	Intimidation and	Harassment of	Bribery/inducement	Theft of electoral

	snatching reported	harassment of voters. MOSOP activist adopted. Ballot boxes snatched	voters, snatching of ballot box	of voters	materials in 5wards, over voting.
Ikwerre	Ballot box snatching reported	Several people killed, clash between PDP and ANPP	Several people injured irregularities	One killed, snatching of ballot box	Many injured, snatching of ballot boxes
Khana	Ballot box snatching reported	Snatching of ballot box	Sporadic shooting, low voters turn out	Rigging reported	Harassment and intimidation of electoral officers and voters
Obio/Akpor	Ballot box snatching reported	Several people killed, others injured. Absence of voting materials at polling units	Several people killed, including police officers. Cars destroyed, this followed an attacked from Ateke's men	Rigging reported	Low voters turnout (10% accredited), yet, high results over 83% of Registered voters. APC obstructed voting over results
Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters	Kidnapping and ballot box snatching	Rigging reported	One leader killed, harassment of voters
Ogu/Bolo	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters	Massive rigging led by cult groups	Rigging reported	Irregularities of voters
Okrika	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters	Rigging reported	Rigging reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters
Omumma	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters	Rigging reported	Rigging reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters
Opobo/Nkoro	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters	Rigging reported	Rigging reported	Irregularities of voters
Oyigbo	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters	Rigging reported	Rigging reported	Rigging and snatching of ballot box
Port Harcourt	Ballot box snatching reported	Several people killed, low voters turnout, ill-treatment of reporters	Several people killed, including police officers, others injured	Rigging reported	One police officer killed, irregularity of ballot paper
tai	Ballot box snatching reported	Intimidation and harassment of voters	Rigging reported	Rigging reported	Intimidation and harassment of INEC officials

**Source: Adapted from Human Right Watch 2004, 2007, Bello 2015, and SDN 2015.**

As shown in table 1 above, electoral violence has consistently affected the electoral process in the state from 1999 general election to that of 2015. During the 1999 general election, election observers, including US-based Carter Centre noted that it was difficult to make accurate

judgement about the outcome of the election due to electoral fraud. However, the election was considered a positive step by International Community. The major political parties include: People’s Democratic Party (PDP), All People’s Party (APP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD).

In the case of 2003 general elections, different cult groups were used to snatch ballot boxes, and in the process both INEC staffs and voters were intimidated and harassed. The Human Right Watch reported that most observers were denied access to distribution and collation centres, thus were unable to obtain election results. The major political parties that contested the election in the state were People’s Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD).

Violence manifested in higher dimension during the 2007 general election as showed in the column for 2007. Take for instance; Medical personnel told Human Rights Watch that during the six-week period from July to mid-August, at least 145 people were treated for gunshot wounds in Port Harcourt. The large majority of those injuries were directly linked to the violence described above, as cult groups clashed; there were widespread violence, kidnapping, shooting and all manner of crime before the JTF intervention. Major political parties that took part in the election include: PDP, AC, ANPP and PPA.

As reported by INEC, the 2011 General Election in Rivers State was related peaceful when compared with the precious elections in the state. But there was still incidence of snatching of ballot boxes and intimidation of opposition parties by the ruling party. Major political parties include: PDP, CAN, Labour Party, APGA and CPC.

As showed in the table above (2015 column), it was a festival of violence across the state before, during and after the election, as several people were killed. The violence had a serious impact on voters, electoral officials, and party supporters. The APC allege that over 19 persons were killed, while many injured. The major parties that took part in the election includes: PDP, APC, Labour Party, APGA, etc.

**Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents**

Sex	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Male	170	51.7	51.7
Female	159	48.3	48.3
Total	329	100.00	100.00

*Source: Field Work, 2022.*

Table 2 above shows that 170 of respondents, corresponding to 51.7% were male while 159 of respondents, corresponding to 48.3% were female. This is skewed with more male than female. A total of 180 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to female respondents, but 159 of them were returned. While the case of males, a total of 170 out of 200 were recovered.

**Table 3: Marital Status of Respondents**

Sex	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Single	131	39.8	39.3
Married	170	51.7	51.7
Divorced	28	8.5	8.5
Total	329	100.00	100.00

*Source: Field Work, 2022.*

Table 3 shows that 39.8% (131) of respondents were single, 51.7% (170) of respondents were married, while mere 8.5% (28) of respondents were divorced/separated. In all, a total of 329 out of 360 of the respondents returned their questionnaire. This table above suggests that majority of the participants were married.

**Table 4: Age Distribution of Respondents**

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
21-25yrs	38	11.6	11.6
26-30yrs	38	11.6	11.6
31-35yrs	68	20.7	20.7
36-40yrs	70	21.3	21.3
41-46yrs	40	12.2	12.2
46yrs above	75	22.8	22.8
Total	329	100.00	100.00

*Source: Field Work, 2022.*

Table 4 above shows that 11.6%(38) of respondents were between the age bracket of 21-25years of age, 11.6%(38) of respondents were between the age range of 26-30years, 20.7% (68) of respondents were between the age range of 31-35years, 21.3% (70) of respondents were between the age range of 36-40years, 12.2% (40) of respondents were between the age range of 41-45 years, while 22.8% (75) were 46 years of age and above. This indicates that majority of the participants were below 46 years of age.

**Table 5: Occupational Distribution**

Occupation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Civil servant	69	21.0	21.0
Entrepreneur	98	29.8	29.8
Student	79	24.0	24.0
Others	83	25.2	25.2
Total	329	100.00	100.00

*Source: Field Work, 2022.*

The table 5 above shows that 21.0% (69) of respondents were civil servants, 29.8% (98) of the respondents were entrepreneurs, 24.0% (79) of the respondents were students, 25.2% (83) of the respondents were other occupations, majority of the participants were entrepreneurs.

**Table 6: Electoral Violence and the Outcome of Elections**

Question	SA	A	D	SD	Total
Electoral violence/fear prevented people from voting during election	205 (62.3%)	28 (8.1%)	38 (11.6%)	39 (11.9%)	329
There were experiences of shooting during elections	183 (55.6%)	17 (5.2%)	55 (16.7%)	64 (19.5%)	329
People are ever been intimidated to vote against their wish	119 (35.6%)	42 (12.8%)	66 (3.0%)	94 (28.0%)	329
There were card reader malfunction at your polling unit	185 (56.2%)	61 (18.5%)	10 (3.0%)	25 (7.6%)	329
Perpetrators of electoral violence	30	19	81	172	329



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are not being persecuted	(9.1%)	(5.8%)	(24.6%)	(52.3%)
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**Source: Field Work, 2022.**

As shown in table 6 above, 205 of the respondents, corresponding to 62.3% in row 1 under the table 6 strongly agreed that fear of possible electoral violence have at least prevented them once from coming out to vote. This shows that fear of electoral violence has prevented majority from voting at one time or the other. Just as 56.6% (183) of the respondent strongly agreed that have experienced shooting during elections in the state. Meaning that majority have experienced shooting during elections. Under table 4.6 row 1, 35.6% (119) of the respondents strongly agreed that such actions are forms of intimidation which push them into voting against their wish out of fear of attack. This indicates that majority have been intimidated to vote against their wish. On the functionality of the card reader that was used for accreditation, 56.2% (185) strongly agreed that the card reader malfunctioned in their polling units. This indicates that the card reader did not function properly in majority of the polling units. Unfortunately, 52.3% (172) of the respondents in table 4.6, row 5, strongly disagreed when asked if they had seen perpetrators of electoral violence being prosecuted in the past. That puts the figures of respondents who said perpetrators of electoral violence were not prosecuted in majority. This is part of the reason why electoral violence has continued over the years.

## **Discussion of Findings**

This section focuses on examining (testing) the research assumptions to prove their validity.

### **Testable Hypothesis**

These are testable statements that are subject to verification or falsification. The data collected for this paper is used to validate these testable hypothesis.

### **Electoral Violence will likely affect the Outcome of Elections**

This hypothesis examined the possibility of electoral violence affecting the results (outcome) of an election. The concern issue here or possible question is that, if there is electoral violence during election, what will be the possible outcome of such election, will it affect the outcome or not? From the data obtained from the respondents, 183 out of the 329 participants, which represent 55.6% in row 2, table 4.7 strongly agreed that they have experienced shooting during elections. Just as Aniekwe and Kushie (2011) as reviewed in the literature, stated that shooting is a major feature of Election Day violence. This has great implications for the outcome of such election

Shooting generally creates fear capable of causing people to shun voting during elections. To prove this, data obtained as shows in table 6, row 1 shows that 225 (68.4%) out of 329 respondents strongly agreed that fear of electoral violence have at least once prevented them from voting during elections.

Therefore, if fear prevents majority of the people from voting during elections, it will mean that the outcome of such election will not have been a product of a popular support. Majority of people that will participate possibly are the violence perpetrators (thugs) themselves, the outcome of such election cannot be a product of free and fair election. That automatically put the

credibility of the leaders in doubt, on one hand and in the other hand the credibility of the election.

Put differently, people will definitely shy away from taking part in an electoral process when they see that the whole process is characterized by violence, for no one will want to lose his life or his property in an attempt to vote or be voted for. The implication of this none participation (apathy) however, is that the perpetrators of the said violence will not be the ones that will emerge as winners. Under this kind of situation, the development of democracy will suffer setbacks. Through such faulty process, the people will not be able to hold their leaders accountable. Such leaders will like wisely not feel any obligation to deliver, believing that they worked themselves into the offices.

Therefore, we uphold the assumption that Electoral violence will affect the outcome of elections. It is only when elections are conducted under a free, fair and credible manner can the outcome be said to be democratic, because is only under such conditions, that the people will come out to cast their votes. Anything short of that can be likening to electing a democratic leadership through undemocratic means. The point here is that electoral violence has a possibility of altering the outcome of an election.

This data agrees with Aborisade (2006) who noted that, free consent is key ingredients that must accompany an electoral process. As only such outcome can be called democracy. Therefore, any act of trickery, manipulation, violence will amount to taking peoples consent by force or an act of illegitimacy.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

Electoral violence exists because of greed and over ambition of political office seekers. So long that overnight wealth is glorified in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular. This greed will continue to drive these political actors to seek for power through violence means. Therefore, what need to be done to curtail this abnormality is to adopt a proper sanction on electoral offenders.

The paper concluded on the note that is the attempts to rig election that leads to electoral violence. This happens before the election, during and after the election. Electoral violence alters the outcome of elections, because it reduces voter turnout and discourages many from participating in the process either as voters or those to be voted for. When this happens, stability of democracy and delivery of dividends of democracy will be short change for self and party interest. It is important to not here, that elections are not rig or manipulated by ghost and selfless individuals, rather, these malpractices and violence were carried out by individuals, groups and political parties, some of whom are highly placed and influential. However, appropriate sanction on electoral offenders and liberation of the electoral umpire (INEC) from the executive arm of government was considered to be a required step in conducting a free, fair and credible election in future. Also, it is very important for the elections to be conducted with the aid of a card reader and adoption of the electronic voting system. As this has the potential to serve as a control mechanism.

Experience of democracy in emerging democracies has not been perfect, but in the case of Rivers State, the prevalence of violence in the electoral process has been alarming. It was in line with this alarming rate of violence that INEC Report (2015) classified the state as one of the hottest spot for electoral violence. This has raised doubt about the credibility of elections outcome and

the products of such elections. Therefore, this study has deemed the following recommendations necessary and not only necessary but urgent to remedy the situation.

1. **Independence of INEC:** There is need for the electoral body to be independent in its operations, especially on finance and promotion. Therefore, there should be amendment to the act establishing the commission, to enable her access fund from the consolidated revenue fund of the federation. The body can have its own laid down rules and regulation on reward and punishment; it should be one that does not require the endorsement of the executive arm of the government.
2. **The card reader and electronic voting system should be use in all the polling units:** To avoid delay and challenges of malfunctioning card reader. INEC should ensure the card readers are tested before the Election Day, and there should be minimum of two card readers in each polling unit. Each INEC office in every local government should have provision for faulty card reader immediately it is reported.
3. There should be special court and agency specifically tasked with the trail and prosecution of electoral offenders. The trial of such cases should not take more than 3 months for final verdict.
4. INEC should ensure that the principle of internal democracy is carefully followed by political parties.
5. There should be greater awareness and voters' education on what constitute electoral malpractice and act of violence. Voters education/enlightenment is very importance, it will enhance free and fair election for the people are the first watch dog that are to guide their votes.

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