Electoral Violence in Nigeria: The Unwritten Pact Between Political Elites and Political Thugs

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Abstract

Electoral violence has been variously described as the bane of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The zero-sum game with which electoral process in the country is characterized has assumed a very dangerous dimension with all political gladiators preparing for an election just the same way armed forces would have prepared for a war. Politicians engage in recruitment and training of armed political thugs, stock-piling of ammunition, provision of fake security agents' uniforms, among others. The toll of electoral violence- in terms of number of lives lost, property destroyed and injuries sustained- continues to undermine the survival of the country's democratic experiment. This essay is an attempt to unravel the periodic alliance between the Nigerian politicians and political thugs during electioneering and its concomitant violent outcomes. It discusses the trends, patterns and causes of electoral violence in the country and how the phenomenon can be addressed.

Key Words: Election, Democracy, Violence, Elites, Political Thugs

Introduction and Problem Statement

Elections are a critical component in any system of democratic governance because they are a regular and direct means of citizen participation in governance. Democratic electoral processes and systems also help ensure that government is responsive and accountable to the people. Such systems and processes together set the ground rules for a two-way relationship based on participation and accountability between the elected and those they represent. They provide a mechanism through which competing interests are articulated and debated and policy options identified (Cheema and Maguire, 2002:16).

The nature and character of the ruling class is crucial in the determination of the rules for and process of political competition. This character shapes the forms of political organisations or parties that emerge or that are allowed to participate in the competition for state power (Iyayi, 2004). Orthodox political science says that liberal democracy works best with a strong middle class that plays its part in keeping the state and its political elites accountable. This is frequently through associational activity in civil society. A key point for African elites is that to date they have exhibited little autonomy from presidential 'big men' - a single point from where political and economic power emanates and therefore around which elites assemble (Orrner and Hewitt, 2006:13).

With regard to election security and violence, it is relevant to consider the nature and underlying purpose of election violence. Elections are a contest for power, and are therefore, inherently contentious; unless conducted fairly, they can (and often do) lead to violence. Political parties participating in an election use violence, intimidation and conflict to influence the results or timing of an election. This is particularly true when a particular side perceives the process as unfair or exclusive (Ndulo and Lulo, 2010:157).

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, violence and myriad irregularities have persistently marred the process of electing the country's leaders. Nigerian politicians have become habituated to fraud, corruption, intimidation, and violence, as if they consider these the necessary weapons of political winners. Nigerian voters have been denied the chance to count and be counted and, disturbingly, the

trend has worsened (Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart, 2010:2). This has led to a situation where electoral contests are seen as a *do or die* affair where contestants employ fair and foul means to win. Results declared in those situations are hardly acceptable to the opposition, and the country moves dangerously towards the precipice of confusion and anarchy after every round of elections (TMG, 2004:21). Such observations represent a stunning turnabout for Nigeria, Africa's most populous and second richest country, and reflect the deep frustrations of millions of Nigerians. In 2000, in the euphoric aftermath of Nigeria's transition from a long spell of military rule to democracy, 84 percent of Nigerians said that they were satisfied with democracy as practiced in Nigeria, according to the Afrobarometer survey. By 2005 that number had plummeted to 25 percent, lower than all the countries surveyed save Zimbabwe. Almost 70 percent of Nigerians did not believe elections would allow them to remove objectionable leaders, the survey found (Polgreen, *The New York Times*, 2007).

Since the end of the civil war in 1970, there has been little change of Nigeria's political establishment. Elections in the past forty years, when they happen, reshuffle familiar faces. Young, vibrant, and visionary youth don't have the space to operate in elite political circles. This means they don't have motivation to keep the federal structures, nor do they necessarily identify with the state as having authority over them because it offers them nothing in return. Instead they are unfrozen from the nation-state structure and vulnerable to radicalisation from outside influences. The negative by-products of this youth disenfranchisement have been manifest in Nigeria for years (Mellgard, 2014).

Beyond the issue of election and its violent nature, the perception of the political class towards democracy needs to be examined within the context of this essay. Jega (2007:28) explains that the Nigerian political class hardly sees democracy as being desirable if it means popular empowerment of the masses. Democracy is desirable if it can facilitate access to power, create a window of opportunity to loot public treasury and keep the people at their mercy. The Nigerian political class does not conceive of democracy as an ideal to be cherished, struggled for and defended, for the common good. Rather, they see it as an avenue, among many, for ruling with accompanying personal gain; political advancement and, above all, accumulation of wealth.

Democracy and Electoral Governance: A General Overview

Elections are increasingly accepted as a key component of establishing and maintaining state legitimacy, an important step on the path to forging an inclusive and stable political settlement (DFID, 2010:8). As noted by Richards (2004:3), "elections form a vital component of democracy and they differentiate a democratic form of government from a non democratic one. Therefore elections serve to elect representatives and to confer upon them authority in the form of a democratic mandate". Moreover, elections have become a feature of states along a fairly wide political spectrum, from established democracies to transitional democracies and semi-authoritarian forms of democratic governance, from very fragile to more effective contexts. In peaceful, established democracies, elections represent a crucial opportunity for citizens to select and to hold to account those that seek to govern. At the other end of the spectrum, in countries emerging from conflict, well-timed elections can contribute to conflict resolution and help to consolidate a peace agreement or power-sharing 'deal' between elites. As such, they can constitute a crucial step along the path to forging a stable and inclusive political settlement, provided that elites have first come to an agreement that they are ready to work together within a political system. However, poorly conducted elections – for example, those that are carried out prematurely, those without adequate inclusion, or without transparent procedures – can easily exacerbate violence (DFID, 2010:8).

Competitive elections in a healthy political environment are the hallmark of a modern representative democracy; however, the crafting of good institutions and effective electoral systems

that are in sync with the country context are crucial for attaining both democratic elections and a stable political environment. The electoral system, which is the basis of electoral democracy, must be representative of the different constituencies and particular circumstances that exist in a country at a given time. (Chiroro, 2008). According to Jinadu (2010:109), how to guarantee the independence of Nigeria's electoral management body has generally been a major contentious issue in the politics of electoral governance and electoral reform in the country:

> What complicates the design problem in Nigeria's case, when situated in a comparative African context, is that the logic of Nigeria's federal structure from time to time necessitates the creation of federal and unit-level electoral governance institutions and processes, and with them separate electoral management bodies at both levels. Among the challenges remain the system for appointing commissioners, the lack of a cast iron constitutional guarantee of independence from outside interference, and a history of military involvement in politics that still overshadows electoral management. The systems for funding the Electoral Commission and election activities continue to allow for executive interference in the election management process. Abuse of incumbency by monopolization of state resources to ensure re-election is routine. Election dispute resolution is highly problematic and effectively encourages impunity, through excessive focus on procedural technicalities rather than substantive issues.

Democratic governance, according to Cheema and Maguire (2002:11) has three distinct advantages over authoritarian regimes. First, democracies are better able to manage conflicts and avoid violent political change because they provide opportunities for the people to participate in the political process of the country. Second, democracies are better able to avoid threats to human survival because the checks by the opposition parties, uncensored criticism of public policies and the fear of being voted out of office. Third, democracies lead to greater awareness of social development concerns including health, primary health care and rights of women and minorities.

Though all democratic states share in common the general principle that political leaders are elected, there is enormous variation in the precise ways this general idea is translated into concrete rules that govern the actions and strategies of people in political systems. Democratic elections are such a good illustration of the general sociological idea of rule-governed activity precisely because the variation in these rules is so clear and the consequences of this variation so important.

While the regularity and frequency of elections has generated a sense of optimism, there has recently emerged a worrying trend of election-related violent conflict that threatens democracy, peace, stability and sustainable human development. The factors that propel such violence are multifaceted, ranging from flawed or failed elections to structural issues such as poor governance and exclusionary political practices, to name but a few. In many cases elections have either precipitated political disputes or have escalated simmering tensions to an outburst of conflict (Motsamai, 2010:1). While democracy is strongly associated with peace and the capacity for peace-building, what is not clear is democracy's role in establishing peace and prosperity. It is not clear how much democracy actually fosters peace and facilitates peace-building and how much democracy is the culmination of economic performance, societal development, and peace-building efforts. One thing seems clear from the evidence, democracy rarely, if ever, results from radical or revolutionary transformations of governing structures. Regardless of their stated intentions, these transformations have almost invariably ushered in extreme forms of violence and repression (Marshall and Gurr, 2005:20).

Electoral governance operates at three basic levels: rule making (defining the basic rules governing electoral competition), rule application (implementing electoral rules), and rule adjudication (lodging and disposing election petitions). In practical terms, electoral governance does not operate in a

vacuum, but in a political context characterized by competition among various political interests and constituencies for a head start (Animashaun, 2010:9). For instance, electoral planning cannot be limited to what happens on election day; effective election administration requires long-range planning, and efficient and impartial administrators. If the probability of rigging is to be reduced and the integrity of the electoral process enhanced, considerable weight must be given to the conditions on the ground leading up to the elections, not simply concentrating on what transpires on the voting day (Ndulo and Lulo, 2010:167).

As noted by Jinadu (2011:121) the federal system of government in Nigeria provides the basis for the creation of federal and unit-level electoral, i.e. regional governance institutions and processes in the country. This explains the general practice of the establishment of two types of electoral body, a federal electoral body and a separate electoral body in each region/state. But this duplication has not always been the practice, in that it has depended, since 1960, on whether elections are on the federal exclusive or on the concurrent or the residual legislative list.

For elections to have integrity, they must be *perceived* by voters as being conducted competently in a professional, non-partisan manner. The key institutions for promoting and protecting elections with integrity are professional, independent Election Management Bodies (EMBs) that conduct transparent processes. EMBs are responsible for ensuring that elections are both technically credible and *perceived* to be free, fair and credible. Their work includes a diverse range of activities, from determining voter eligibility, registering eligible voters, conducting polling and counting and tabulating votes, to campaign regulation, voter education, and electoral dispute resolution (Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, 2012:21).

Electoral Violence: Trends, Patterns and Causes

In unconsolidated regimes, Daxecker (2011:1) notes that leaders may manipulate the electoral process or rig election results when concerned about their chances of winning. Incumbents in these countries hold elections to please domestic and international audiences and reap international benefits such as aid or investments, but are willing to game the system in an effort to hold on to power. Yet since elections are held to transfer the right to govern, the failure to perform that function could lead to possibly serious and conflictual outcomes. Blunt manipulation of the electoral process by political authorities could conceivably lead to protests and riots by supporters of the opposition, or even all-out civil war between incumbents and their challengers. Electoral violence is more likely in a context in which institutions like the courts, the criminal justice system, the security forces, and the media are corrupt or too weak to carry out their roles in the face of violence and intimidation (Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, 2012:25).

For the purpose of clarity, electoral violence has to do with all forms of organized acts or threats – physical, psychological, and structural – aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process (Albert 2007:133). As explained by Omotola (2008:56), election day violence includes the snatching of ballot papers or boxes, assaults on opposition agents or parties, and harassment or intimidation by security agents. In the aftermath of an election, electoral violence may take the form of violent protests against electoral rigging, whether real or imagined, and of the state's deploying its apparatus of force in response to the protest, thereby further fuelling the violence.

According to Fischer (2002:8), electoral conflict and violence can be defined as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced "protection," blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination. The victims of electoral violence can be people, places, things or data. Conflict and violence need not be inflicted on a national scale. In fact, victims can be resident in target ethnic, gender, geographical, or political "hot spot" communities. "Conflict" and "violence" are

intentionally combined in this definition because their respective impacts on electoral processes are similar although the magnitude of the victimization is not equal. While conceptualizing political thuggery, Samuel (2011:29) avers that:

> Political thuggery can be defined as any act of intimidation, violence, hooliganism, brutality or gangsterism, whether leading to death or not, calculated to pose a threat or scale political opponent or perceived political opponents before, during or after elections and aimed at achieving an undue political result or advantage. Political thuggery, especially at elections may range from such acts as inciting or causing others to act in a disorderly manner, being in illegal possession of or usage of offensive weapon/s with the aim to scare or intimidate voters, snatching or destruction of election materials, acts resulting into undue influence as by compelling any person to vote or refrain from voting against his/her will, ballot stuffing

The expression of electoral conflict and violence, as noted by Fischer (2002:9-10) can occur at five intervals in an election chronology:

1. Identity conflict can occur during the registration process when refugees or other conflict-forced migrants cannot establish or re-establish their officially recognized identities. The result is that these populations can remain disenfranchised and outside of the political process and potentially provoke conflict within the process.
2. Campaign conflict can occur as rivals seek to disrupt the opponents' campaigns, intimidate voters and candidates, and use threats and violence to influence participation in the voting. As a survey of electoral events from 2001 will suggest, conflict among political rivals appears to have been the most common form of electoral conflict.
3. Balloting conflict can occur on Election Day when political rivalries are played out at the polling station. Steps can be taken to provide alternative means of balloting if particular groups or communities are exposed to violence or intimidation.
4. Results conflict can occur in disputes over election results and the inability of judicial mechanisms to resolve these disputes in a timely, fair, and transparent manner. The manner in which results are reported can also be a conflict issue. Election dispute mechanisms must also be in place to adjudicate grievances and serve as a conflict prevention and resolution role in certifying the outcome of an election.
5. Representation conflict can occur when elections are organized as "zero sum" events where "losers" are left out of participation in governance.

According to Iyayi (2004:9) "elections in Nigeria have shared a number of common characteristics. First, they have been particularly characterized by massive frauds, the intimidation of political opponents and controversy. The governments in power have had their own designs and used the instruments of the state in penetrating electoral brigandage, thuggery, violence and warfare. Secondly, while there has been continuity in violence and warfare, there has been lack of continuity in the political organisations through which both violence and warfare have been conducted". Five key causes can be identified as responsible for electoral violence in Nigeria. Among these are historical context of state creation in Nigeria; the structural imbalance of the Nigerian federation; the nature and character of the Nigerian state and its ruling elites; inter-ethnic competition; and the role of the military and militarization of the polity (Report of the Electoral Reform Committee, 2008).

From the Marxian political economy perspective, thuggery escalates because of the material benefit they derive from such practice i.e the service they render to their patrons, while the political godfathers or big wigs use them to achieve their ascendency to the corridor of power or political end. Marx sees political economy as the science for understanding society in its entirety (Haruna and Jumba,

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2011:113). The Nigerian state, as noted by Jinadu (2011:151) is seen as the site for zero-sum electoral competition for the acquisition of political power and the vast patrimonial economic power it confers. This partly explains why Nigerian electoral politics has over the years increasingly assumed violent, war-like forms, accentuated by the winner-takes-all tendency inherent in the first-past-the-post electoral system practised in the country since independence. It has turned politics into a huge business enterprise, where rules designed to ensure the indeterminacy of elections are openly and crassly violated, and where regulators become active or inactive collaborators in the grand larceny of the people's electoral mandate. Egwu, et al 2008 (cited in DFID, 2010:11) argue that:

> most observers conclude that elections in Nigeria were stolen. Widespread vote rigging across the country, entrenched rent-seeking and clientelistic practices, intimidation by armed youth gangs, and other such practices all undermined the integrity of the electoral process.

Problems of Nigeria's democratic politics with regard to the nature, dimension and violence that always characterize and accompany electoral process have fundamentally stifled the quest for democracy. Since electoral violence is a bane of democratic politics in Nigeria, elections conducted over time have significantly failed to produce legitimacy because as election results, in one way or the other, have been juggled or inflated or annulled (Abbass ,2008:17). Since the colonial period, Nigeria has organised about 20 elections. Apart from the inconclusive June 12 elections of 1993, they were all congenitally marred by electoral fraud (Inokoba and Kumokor, 2011:143). Rising violence, assassinations of candidates, more advanced weaponry, and misuse of security forces to intimidate candidates has continued to lower public expectations for elections in Nigeria. Members of the oligarchy manipulate ethnic, religious, and geographic cleavages to gain leverage in the inter-elite competition for resources (USAID, 2006:7).

Election-related violence directed at individual citizens is usually aimed at suppressing voter turnout to affect electoral outcomes. Sometimes it is used to coerce people to vote a particular way or as retribution for votes going 'the wrong way'. Violence directed at candidates and political parties is aimed at limiting voters' choices. Violence that targets electoral officials is usually aimed at disrupting the vote or setting the stage for capturing polling places or counting centres. These tactics usually involve small numbers of people and target individuals before or on election day (Global Commission on Elections, democracy and Security, 2012:26).

The armed militia, neighbourhood vigilante, community defence and sundry cult groups that have mushroomed in different parts of the country since the late 1990s also play a significant role in electoral violence. With the approach of every election, some are hired by local politicians, while others undertake independent acts of violence to demonstrate their capacities and thus capture the attention of any politicians who may need their services. In an atmosphere of almost total impunity, a thriving market for political violence has developed. The rules of supply and demand for political assassinations, kidnappings and other strategies of intimidation are freely applied throughout the country; those willing to enter this competitive market have to prove their competency and added value by using distinctive tactics and technology (International Crisis Group, 2007:11). Action aid Nigeria (2007:2) also concurs that electoral violence in Nigeria has both ethnic and religious connotations. Usually youths who are largely unemployed are used to score violent political points either in a bid to wrestle political power or in a reaction to some form of political failure. As observed by ICG (2011):

> Security is crucial to electoral integrity, but security forces have traditionally done little to prevent rigging or violence and have often been bought by politicians and complicit. Lower-level courts are often corrupt, impunity is insidious and the rule of law at best weak. No one has been convicted of an electoral offence since independence. Elections,

therefore, traditionally offer Nigerian politicians a choice: respect the rules and risk losing to an opponent who does not; or avoid the political wilderness by rigging or violence, knowing that to do so is easy, and you are unlikely to be punished.

Since political contests in Nigeria represent what may be regarded as the primitive accumulation of wealth with other new and old inherited built-up relationships, it must be realized that it is only through elections that power is used and abused to reengineer reward and punishments within and outside the ruling party with the flagrant use of the fraudulent activities and theft of state funds (Abbass, 2008:16). A cursory look at the five general elections conducted since the emergence of the present democratic rule, except that of 1999, reveal a similar pattern of electoral violence:

1999 Elections

As earlier observed, violence has always accompanied and marred Nigeria's politics and elections. Since the return of the franchise in 1999 and before the April polls, thousands had died in electoral violence (ICG, 2011:3). The electoral processes of the 1999 elections were similar to those of the 1979 elections as they were both supervised by the military and conducted with less violence which enabled the military to vacate political power (Abbass, 2008:14). Election-related violence occurred this year, though not as extensive as some had feared.

2003 Elections

The 2003 elections were conducted by the Obasanjo regime during which electoral violence added to the political assassination. The president himself warned early in 2002 that politicians were raising private militias that could make the 2003 elections bloody and indeed it was bloody. In fact, everything pointed to this, because a spate of violence had already preceded the elections (Adele, 2012:211). While Nigerians variously cried and shouted foul in the 1999 general election because of acts of thuggery, little did anyone knew that 2003 was going to be worse (Samuel, 2011:34). Every machinery of government was employed to aid the total rigging of the re-election bid of the incumbent as well as other PDP party faithful. Smuggling and snatching of ballot boxes, multiple tomb printing as well as intimidation and harassment of opposition parties went on full wide scale (Uwakwe**,** 2011). Violence during the 2003 election cycle was more blatant and widespread. Intraparty clashes, political assassinations, and community unrest in already volatile areas such as Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta, characterized these elections. This cycle also marked the unchecked proliferation of another worrisome development: the hiring and arming of militias to serve narrow political ends (Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart, 2010:3).

2007 Elections

These elections saw the same patterns of violence and intimidation from earlier elections. Merely declaring oneself a candidate was enough to put one's life at risk. In fact, by 2007, electoral violence had become such a credible risk despite Nigeria's return to democracy that the mere threat of it was enough to keep large swaths of voters away from the polls, as in Rivers state, where absent ballot materials and violent threats contributed to low voter turnout (Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart, 2010:3). As the 2007 election drew near, President Obasanjo told the surprised Nigerians, other Africans and the world at large that the 2007 elections would be a 'do-or-die affair' (Nwolise, 2007:165). Never in the history of Nigeria's general elections genealogy has any elections come close to the level of rigging and ballot paper snatching that characterized the 2007 elections been seen (Uwakwe**,** 2011).
2011 Elections

The pre-election and post presidential election violence witnessed in the 2011 general elections were unprecedented in the political history of Nigeria. Violence characterised campaigns leading to the primary elections of the mainstream political parties. Many people lost their lives and in some cases private and public properties were wantonly destroyed. Political thugs created, trained and sustained by politicians became the potent agents of intimidation and destruction used by the political parties and desperate politicians in the "do or die" battles to win primary and general elections at all cost and by all means necessary (Koko, 2011). Few, however, predicted the violence that erupted in some Northern states following the announcement of the presidential results. With over 1,000 people killed, the protests made the elections one of the bloodiest ever. The polls were also riddled with malpractices, logistical deficiencies and procedural inconsistencies. By most accounts, the perpetrators were mainly uneducated, poor and possibly intoxicated young thugs. Their ranks may have been swelled by some emerging Islamic fundamentalists and other young people angry that government has done little to help them (ICG, 2011:1). This violence represents a political failure in the face of what was largely a technical and administrative success. Losing candidates and party leaders failed to meet their responsibilities to restrain their supporters and accept the election results (Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, 2012:25).

2015 Elections

In the build-up to the polls, the National Human Rights Commission alerted the nation that more than 58 people were killed while many others were injured in election-related violence in 22 states between December 2014 and March 2015 (Kupoluyi, 2015).In Bauchi and Katsina States, for instance, there were reports of attack on the convoy of President Jonathan. Furthermore, in Rivers State, the APC secretariat was reportedly bombed while its campaign ground in Okirika was violently attacked on two occasions. There were equally pockets of violence in Akwa Ibom, Benue, Ebonyi and Edo. Lagos State had its fair share of violence. Most analysts have suggested that the hate speeches and vicious adverts that typified the 2015 electoral campaigns were partly responsible for the heightened tension that the election generated (Raji, 2015).

INEC's records show that there were 66 reports of violent incidents targeted at polling units, the commission's officials, voters and election materials (The Nation, 2015:6). It was reported that no fewer than 21 people were killed during the governorship/state assembly elections on April 11, 2015 (The Nation, 2015:5). Religion and tribal sentiments, according to Raji (2015), "were also used to further heighten and complicate the electoral process. In Lagos State, for instance, where indigenes and non indigenes have been co-habiting peacefully for years devoid of tension, the ethnic card was cruelly played by the People Democratic Party, PDP to cause division among the people". In a post-election crime wave, repeated cases of kidnapping for ransom have been reported in Ekiti, Kogi, Ondo, Imo and Bayelsa States while either assassins or armed robbers have serially struck in Lagos, Rivers, Cross River, Ebonyi, Benue, Kaduna, Ogun, Ondo, Enugu, Abuja, Osun, etc.

Between Politicians' Desperation and Political Thugs' Vulnerability: Implications for the Polity

The opportunism of the political elite and the ways it has often manipulated political structures through the use of thugs and processes to promote selfish and narrow ends is well known. Two issues are however fundamental, the deep divisions within the elite along personal, ethnic, religious, and factional lines, and the lack of a clear vision or common ideology for a broad social project (Haruna and Jumba, 2011:114). Many countries throughout the developing world have yet to hold credible competitive elections. Some countries have held a series of widely accepted elections, but have failed to develop representative political institutions. All too often, political parties in countries across the globe

are viewed as distant, elite organizations unable or unwilling to articulate or represent most citizens' concerns. As rightly observed by Obi (2009):

> Although the Nigerian political elite is a product of Nigeria's tumultuous political history, more recently, it has become an ally of a highly politicized fraction of retired brass-hats that has been incorporated into the dominant ruling elite fraction. Thus, the political elite is both made up of ex-military officers that have now been civilianized, and civilians that have imbibed some of the aspects of militarized politics, particularly the use of force in politics.

Although political violence is not historically new in Nigerian political contest, the swift from the traditional weapons such as accusation and counter accusations and use of light weapons to huge deployment of sophisticated guns and the establishment and use of armed gangs is new and unique development. The heightened political violence and extremism that characterized the general elections held in 2003 and 2007 are rooted in the dysfunctional patron-client politics (Oarhe, 2010:56). But unlike the patron-client politics where such clients are often rewarded with plumb appointments or contract awards, political thugs are recruited based on their vulnerability-usually given paltry sum of money- and often discarded after election. These patrons are referred to as godfathers in Nigeria. According to Albert (2005:83):

> Their main goal is to use their client to attain selfish goals; the latter too do the same. The relationship between the two of them thus has little or nothing with the larger society the two of them claim to lead. The relationship between the godfathers and their clients has little or no enduring purpose that could hold both of them together. It is thus common to find them going in separate directions shortly after a 'contractual agreement' is reached between them. The problem is that both of them lack a higher goal that could bind them together. Instead, they have often contradictory higher goals.

Samuel (2011:30) observes that in the past series of elections held in Nigerian between 1999 and 2007, activities of thugs have taken a centre stage thereby breeding a feeling of resentment among members of the public. The activities of thugs are not noticeable in only one party; all political parties are guilty of this. Each political party, in trying to wrestle power from the other or remain in power ahead of the other, engages in this condemnable act. Thuggery is not known or experienced in only one part of the country, it is everywhere in the country. According to Haruna and Jumba (2011:116) most of these groups of unemployed youths are sponsored by desperate politicians who entice them with extravagant promises of employment and other government patronage. Since 1999 to date, some of these youthful thugs have been sponsored by desperate politicians to protect their political interest. After elections, these boys trained to maim and kill political opponents are left helpless without any tangible means of sustenance.

While militia groups, justify their violent actions based on the physical, psychological or structural violence which they perceive to be suffering (Albert, 2005 and Adebanwi, 2004 cited in Abdul-Jelil, 2009:10), thugs are hired and instructed to carry out specific operation against identified political opponents. Thugs are usually hirelings of political godfathers. They are mostly recruited from "lumpen classes", that is; the unemployed and unemployable, mostly male, prone to criminal behaviour, petty theft, drugs peddling, drunkenness and other anti-social tendencies (Abdullahi, 2005 and Adisa, 1997 cited in Abdul-Jelil, 2009:10). The number of thugs a politician can keep serves as a determining factor for his electoral machinations and outcome. Put differently, the more thugs a politician has, the more relevant he becomes in the society. Thuggery has become a means to an end in Nigerian politics. It is a means of sustaining power and life, an asset that brings money for thugs for life sustenance while it

brings and sustains power for their barons. It is an indispensable instrument in the hands of hungry power seekers (http://www.globalrp.org/html).

Widespread illiteracy and poverty make the lower socio-economic classes readily available to be drafted into odd jobs, including acts of political violence. A majority of the foot soldiers of electoral violence are drawn from the teen and adolescent age groups. Large numbers of these vagrant, mostly jobless and potentially violent youths are found in Lagos where they are known as "area boys", but similarly large numbers are also in such cities as Warri (where they are also known as "area boys"), Port Harcourt in Rivers State ("ofio boys"); Ile-Ife in Osun State ("omoita renegades"); Calabar in Cross River ("agaba boys") and Kano in Kano State ("Yandaba"). These youths, some of whom work in urban transport, are the ready pool from which politicians recruit thugs to fight their opponents (ICG, 2007:11). These political thugs and gangsters undergo a sustained period of dangerous drugs, substance abuse and criminal indoctrination in readiness for their assigned tasks as ordered by their political paymasters. The end results of their dastardly actions are glaring; hundreds of innocent people mercilessly massacred and private and public properties destroyed before and after elections (Koko, 2011).

Concluding Remarks

It has been established that an electoral process is an alternative to violence as a means of achieving governance. When an electoral process is perceived as unfair, unresponsive, or corrupt, its political legitimacy is compromised and stakeholders are motivated to go outside of the established norms to achieve their objectives. Electoral conflict and violence become tactics in political competition (Fischer, 2002:7). However, it is important to note that conducting regular free and fair elections is not the only barometer used to determine whether a country is democratic or not. Rather, elections should be seen as a crucial part of the process of democratisation as well as an important element of sustainable democracy (Likoti 2007). It should be noted also that free and fair elections can be held only where there exists an environment which seeks to provide popular participation, promotes human rights and guarantees fundamental freedoms, ensures accountability of the government, freedom of the judiciary and freedom of the press (Ndulo and Lulo, 2010:162).

In countries where political parties engage armed groups in campaigning, demobilization programming can be undertaken. Such programming should adapt the technique employed in disarmament exercises or other policing programs (Fischer, 2002). As recommended by the Electoral Reform Committee (2009:60) there is the need to effectively police the election process and enforce rules and regulations by assigning well trained, impartial and honest law enforcement and security agents and agencies to help police and secure the electoral process. In particular, the Nigeria Police Force should wake up to its responsibility in law enforcement, in prevention as well as detection of crimes. Politicians found using thuggery or any form of election violence should be severely sanctioned. All offences committed within the electoral context should be prosecuted expeditiously. The prevailing atmosphere of impunity with regard to election offences should be ended by prosecuting and holding accountable those responsible for electoral offences, including those of a criminal nature. This would reduce the impunity which has marred Nigeria's electoral process to date, and which threatens to undermine citizens' confidence in the country's political institutions. There is the need for serious sanctions and punishment for electoral malfeasance. Political parties that show a proclivity to violence or intolerance in ideology, policy or the kind of candidates they field should be sanctioned.

As a long term measure, there is the need for political socialization of the youth in school and the political education of adults to understand the negative consequences of electoral fraud and

violence. There is the need to change the attitudes of the political class, to abide by the rules of the game, perceive politics as a game and not a battle, and to appreciate the dangers of the "winner takes all" approach. The police force should be strengthened to check the activities of hoodlums and thugs, and prosecute of all politicians with militias or armed gangs. There should be massive disarmament of all political touts, and curbing illegal possession of firearms and other instruments of violence. We should reverse the democratization of violence, and allow only the State to wield legitimate violence (ibid:60). Media organizations, coupled with the NGO community, can also serve educational purposes with messages and programs that can stem the culture of electoral conflict (Fischer, 2002). In other words, Civil Society Organisations should participate in INEC forums on the administration of the electoral process and disseminate information so as to minimize the risks of violence related to unjustified suspicions of fraud (ICG, 2007:1).

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