SECURITY, ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: EVALUATING THE TRAJECTORIES OF SOUTHWEST NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract
While the electoral process in established democracies has been characterised by relative peace due to the adequacy and effectiveness of their security arrangement, among others, what has been observed in the history of elections in developing countries in Africa, especially Southwest Nigeria is that, it has often been replete with security crises of serious magnitude, resulting in the loss of lives, destruction of election materials and invaluable properties thereby threatening the consolidation of democracy. This paper investigated how security lapses accentuated electoral violence thereby threatening democratic consolidation in Southwest Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It made use of documentary data gathered through secondary data source. It observed that the consolidation of democracy in developed democracies to a large extent depends on the adequacy, effectiveness, discipline and non-partisanship of the security personnel. The paper contended that the nonchalant attitude of Nigerian leadership towards the security of the electoral process does not give room for the consolidation of democracy in the country. It further averred that these inadequacies of the security personnel, the politicisation, and manipulation of its deployment by the leadership as well as prevalent arms proliferation had posed challenges to peaceful conduct of elections. The various efforts made by stakeholders to strengthen security with a view to stemming the tide of electoral violence and ensuring democratic consolidation in the Southwest have yielded limited success. The paper concluded that in order to resolve the security challenges bedevilling the Southwest's electoral process, with a view to attaining a violent-free election that will guarantee democratic consolidation, there is the need to reconstruct security architecture of the country, sanction political leaders, political parties and individuals that violate electoral laws, restructure Nigeria's federal system, tackle the problem of arms proliferation and embark on political education and enlightenment that will encourage citizens to adhere strictly to democratic tenets.

Introduction

Globally, democracy is recognised by both the elite and the masses as the best form of government in contemporary era (Ogundiya, 2010; Diamond, 1987) because it encourages mass participation of people in governance thus indicating that ultimate political power belongs to the people. However, election, which is regarded as a viable instrument of instituting regime change (Anifowose, 2011) and the only acceptable means of either removing the incumbent or enthroning new leadership (Alao, Alao & Nwogwugwu, 2013) with a view to consolidating democracy is often characterised by violence, especially in developing countries and newly evolving democracies of the world.

In Africa, available records indicate that violence affects between 19 and 25 percent of elections conducted in the continent (Bekoe, 2010). This phenomenon of electoral violence is more prevalent in countries like Zimbabwe (2000; 2005; 2008), Kenya (2007) (Khadiagala, 2009; Chaturvedi, 2005), Nigeria (2007; 2011; 2015; 2019), Cote d'Ivoire (2011/2012) and Democratic Republic of Congo (Buchard, 2015). This is why some scholars like Mansfield and Snyder (2007) contend that democracy aggravates the risk of armed conflict in new democracies while Jarstad (2008) posits that it intensifies the probability of armed struggles in post-conflict societies. Collier (2009) also opines that it amplifies the risk of electoral violence in low income countries. Hence, scholars like Agbaje and Ajetunmobi (2006, cited in Adesete & Abimbola, 2014) averred that violence has permeated the political process of most new democracies in the 21st century Africa.

Since the emergence of multi-party politics under the third wave of democratisation in the early 1990s, electoral competition for state power has become highly intense, assuming a violent dimension in African states. For instance, the 2008 Amnesty International Report emphasised that the violent struggle for political power among the competing political parties, elite and candidates remains an integral part of political life in Africa. Hence, in almost all the elections conducted in Nigeria, especially in the Southwest, during the colonial, post-independence and the Fourth Republic elections, the incidences of electoral violence recorded have been very frightening.

The scope of electoral violence kept on increasing from Nigeria's First Republic, through the Second to the aborted Third Republic while that of the Fourth Republic has been unprecedented in scale and sophistication (Alli, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2014). Manifestations of electoral violence in post-independence Nigeria, particularly from the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999 have been of various dimensions. Such manifestations range from kidnapping to assassination, violent seizure and destruction of election materials and psychological intimidation of voters (Dundas & Ojo, 2014; Alemika, 2011). As a result of these developments, electoral violence is fast becoming a source of political instability, threatening the survival of democracy (Anifowose, 2011) and accentuating state fragility in some African nations (Albert, 2012). This terrifying situation has become worrisome to political analysts, scholars and stakeholders.

The predatory nature of post-colonial African states, especially the character of the Nigerian elite, which places high premium on political power as an instrument of plundering state resources make the political elite to conceive politics as a zero-sum game bedevilled with winner-takes-all syndrome thereby turning African politics into a do-or-die affair (Anifowose, 2011). This trend leads to the emergence of stiff and intense struggle among competing parties and candidates and also informs the use of force as a means of manipulating and influencing election outcome. Within the context of this

kind of national politics, the notion of "foul is fair" and "fair is foul" usually pervades democracy. This is why scholars like Ake (1996) averred that post-colonial African states (including Nigeria) could not behave differently because by nature they are fundamentally predatory. Due to the high value placed on political power, the control of state power is often used by the incumbent office holder to amass wealth while "those who win state power can have all the wealth they want even without working" (Ake, 1996 p. 24 cited in Omotola, 2011, p. 234).

It is instructive to note that these incidences of electoral violence do not ordinarily evolve but are often consequences of security lapses, which characterise government attitude to the conduct of elections in African nations. These lapses derived from either the declining state capacity, that is, the weakness of the leadership in instituting and ensuring effective and efficient security of lives and property by allowing small arms and light weapons (SALWs) to get to the hands of non-state actors or cleverly manipulating the security arrangement including the partisan deployment of security personnel on election day in order to realise its vested interest, that is, manipulate election outcome.

Though certain measures were put in place by the constitution, the electoral body, the Electoral Act, the security organisations, the media and the monitoring/election observers, among others, to guide the political behaviour of all stakeholders and ensure the conduct of violent-free elections, such efforts appear to be inadequate and ineffective in curbing electoral violence and ultimately ensuring democratic consolidation. In spite of the fact that the police and the military are often deployed during elections to monitor the electoral process in Nigeria, the manner of deployment, nature of engagement and the partisanship of its personnel have always been enmeshed in controversy. While some observers perceive it as a welcome decision, others, especially the opposition, regard it as a ploy by the incumbent government to manipulate the election outcome. The lapses in the security arrangement during elections, they argue, have often been responsible for electoral violence, which threatens democratic consolidation. This paper therefore investigates why electoral violence has always been a recurring issue and how we can genuinely keep it out of Southwest Nigeria's political landscape with a view to ensuring democratic consolidation.

Conceptual Framework
Security
Extant literature is replete with various definitions on security and as such there is no unanimity in the definition of the concept. Every perception has its origin in different historical and philosophical contexts (Haftendorn, cited in Sheehan, 2005). It is thus a controversial concept which lacks a broad consensus about its meaning but depends on peoples' ideas, culture and perceptions of reality (Iglesias, 2011 cited in Rosenje & Moliki, 2016). The concept of security was originally used in philosophy as referring to the security of the individual human but after the Second World War, the definition assumed a new dimension to designate the survival of the nation-state. New conceptualisations of security began to emerge, which include societal security, human security, international security, and homeland security (Rothschild, 1995 as cited in Jore, 2019; Baldwin, 1997).
Ordinarily, security could be perceived as protection from intentional and malicious harm (Jore, 2019). Akin (2008 cited in Agbo, Obarike & Sadiku, 2018, p. 207) perceives security "as a situation that exists as a result of the establishment of measures for the protection of persons, information and property against hostile persons, influences and actions". Urbanite (2001) regards security as safety, confidence or anything that gives or assures safety, freedom from harm and fear. For Mijah (2007, p. 2) security is "the freedom from danger, or threat to nation's ability to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values and legitimate interests and enhance the well-being of its people".

Invariably, the multidimensional nature of security makes it impossible to agree upon a consensus definition to apply to all levels and dimensions of security. Hence, the definition of security will depend on the historical and political context of the utilisation of the concept (Jore, 2019). In the context of this paper, it is instructive to note that security is conceived from the point of view of the individual, institutions and the nation-state.

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence is a concept that has been variously defined by different scholars and analysts. There is no consensus on the definition of electoral violence basically due to the contentious notion of "violence begets violence" developed by Frantz Fanon during the struggles against colonial domination (Obakhedo, 2011). The Fanonian argument that 'violence begets violence' implies that those resorting to violence against the government or established institution embark on such actions as a retaliatory measure against the persecution of the state.

According to *International Foundation for Electoral System* (IFES) (2011), electoral violence is conceived as any violence or threat of violence that is aimed at any person or property involved in the electoral process, or at disrupting any part of electoral or political process during the election. Electoral violence was defined by Majekodunmi and Adejuwon (2012, cited in Adesote & Abimbola, 2014) as:

> Any spontaneous or organised act by candidates, party supporters, election authorities, voters or any other actor that occurs during an electoral process, from the date of voters registration to the date of inauguration of a new government, that uses physical harm, intimidation, blackmail or verbal abuse, violent demonstrations, psychological manipulation or other coercive tactics aimed at exploiting, disrupting, determining, hastening, delaying, reversing or otherwise influencing an electoral process and its outcome (p. 141).

> In concurrence to the above perception, Albert (2007) is of the view that electoral violence has to do with:

> All forms of organised acts or threats-physical, psychological and structural, aimed at intimidating, harming and blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying otherwise influencing an electoral process. It is thus conceived as the deadliest form of electoral fraud and defined as 'clandestine efforts to shape election results' (Hoglund, 2009; Lehoucq, 2003, cited in Omotola, 2011, pp. 55-56).

From the array of definitions given by scholars above, one can discern certain salient elements: electoral violence is a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted phenomenon, encompassing series of stages, covering pre-election, election day and post-election period (International Peace Institute, 2010; Sisk, 2008); directed towards specific targets (USAID, 2010; Hoglund, 2009); designed to achieve specific goals (Bekoe, 2012; Fischer, 2002); involving different actors (UNDP, 2009; Laakso, 2007); and equally of various forms in nature-physical, psychological and structural (Omotola, 2011; UNDP, 2009).

Democratic Consolidation

It is apt to begin the conceptual explication on democratic consolidation from the operationalisation of the concept of democracy. In this paper, democracy stands for a people-centred system of government, which involves periodic popular elections, in which the sanctity of the electoral process is guaranteed. This position therefore, connotes that democracy does not only allows mass participation of the electorate in the selection of their representatives but also that democracy is nurtured by transparency and accountability in public administration (Yagboyaju, 2013). It is, therefore, instructive to emphasise

that democracy flourishes better in many parts of the world where there are strong democratic institutions. In other words, democratic principles flourish and are more effective when they are reinforced by strong institutions (such as security institutions) of modern government (Yagboyaju, 2013).

Just as there are a lot of varieties of definitions of democracy, there appears to be confusion about the meaning of democratic consolidation. Hence, this paper adopts the classical definition, which conceives a democratic regime to be consolidated when it is likely to endure (O'Donnel, 1996 cited in Ogundiya, 2011). The term democratic consolidation is therefore used to denote the process of ensuring that the 'new democracy' is secured beyond the short term and making it invulnerable against the threat of decline. In other words, it is the process by which a new democracy matures, in such a way that is unlikely to revert to authoritarian (Schedler, 1998). A consolidated democracy is aptly described as:

> "one in which none of the major political actors, parties, or organised interests, forces, or institutions consider that there is any alternative to the democratic process to gain power, and that no political institution or group has a claim to veto the actions of democratically elected decision-makers" (Linz, 1990, p.158).

The above perception is in concurrence with that of Diamond (1999, cited in Paul, 2017) which conceives democratic consolidation as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimisation such that all significant political actors believe that popular rule is better for their society than any other alternative paradigm. It is also in consonance with the perception of Oche (2002), who argued that democracy could be said to be consolidated when the preponderant majority of public opinion is constantly supportive of democratic procedures, processes and institutions as being the only suitable method of conducting governance and public affairs.

It is therefore, pertinent to note that consolidation of democracy requires the expansion of citizens' access to governance, development of democratic culture, broadening of political parties for leadership recruitment and training, functioning of active civil society groups, independence of the judiciary, respect for individual rights, and strengthening of the electoral system (Schedler, 1998; Valenzuela, 1990). Unarguably therefore, the existence of vibrant political parties is a sine-qua-non for democratic consolidation in any democratic regime worldwide. Democratic consolidation is therefore, not just a process but a system of defence. It is a system for defending the powers of the people against usurpation by political assailants, defending the hopes of a people against onslaught by sundry intruders. Hence, democratic consolidation is often regarded as a process and not just an accomplishment.

Theoretical Framework

Though postulations of elite theory could be gleaned from the works of Plato, Aristotle and other classical philosophers who focused attention largely on the concentration of political power in the hands of a few people in the early Greek and Roman societies (Albert, 2005), Higley (2010) argued that the origin of elite theory of power lies in the postulations propounded by three famous sociologists, namely Mosca (1939), Michels (1962) and Pareto (1935), in early 20th century. More illumination was, however, offered to the explanation of the theory through the works of Mills (1956), Hunter (1953), Domhoff (1967), Burnham (1960), Putnam (1976) and Dahrendorf (1964).

Elite theory seeks to describe and explain the structure of power or power relationships in contemporary society. Like class theory, elite theory accepts the division of the society into two broad divisions, of dominant and dependent groups. However, unlike the class theory, it perceives the division as natural. The theory posits that a small group of people usually a minority consisting of

members of the economic elite and policy planning networks takes major decisions, which have political implications in the society and as such, holds power in every setting and this power is usually independent of a state democratic and electoral process. Citing Ikelegbe (1994), Arowolo and Aluko (2012) further argued that elite theory posits that public policy reflects the values and preferences of the elite rather than the demands of the masses. For them, the elite is made up of few individuals who hold leading positions in strategic areas of life and thus by extension wield power. This notion is in tandem with Michels's assertion that "who says organisation says oligarchy" (Michels, 1962, pp. 342-356).

Categorically, Mosca posited that the society is classified into two groups namely the rulers and the ruled. According to him, the ruling class controls most of the wealth, power and prestige and by virtue of this status exercises all power in the society. He argued that, notwithstanding the form or nature of government adopted by the society, the ruled are always incompetent of replacing the ruling class. This notion, which is drawn from a famous passage of one of his works, portrays general elitist position thus:

> Among the enduring facts and tendencies that are found in all political organisms, which are so obvious to the most causal eye is the fact that in all societies…two classes of people appear: a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolises power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is more or less legal, more or less arbitrary and violent, and supplies the first, in appearance at least, with material means of subsistence and with the instrumentalities that are essential to the vitality of the political organism (Mosca, 1939, p. 50).

Mosca's perspective is supported by Robert Michels in his famous "iron law of oligarchy", which avers that, every organisation no matter whatever its original aims could be, is eventually reduced to an oligarchy, implying the rule of the chosen few. He expressed this notion thus:

> Historical evolution mocks all the prophylactic measures that have been adopted for the prevention of oligarchy. If laws are passed to control the dominion of the leaders, it is the laws which gradually weaken and not the leaders (Michels, 1962 cited in Eminue, 2005, p. 83).

The implication is that no mechanism could be effectively put in place to ensure or guarantee accountability of the leaders to the people while no ideology that enshrines the principle of majority will could checkmate the supremacy of the elite over all political matters concerning the state.

In elite theory, the elite possess distinctive qualities which set them higher than others in the society. Such attributes include intelligence and skills (Pareto, 1935), moral and material superiority (Mosca, 1939), manipulative skills, competence and experience, oratory power, persuasion and resort to sentiments (Michels, 1962). They are thus able to use these virtues to exert significant or overwhelming influence and power over policy decisions of corporations and government. These values differentiate them from the mass, significantly impacting on the prevailing public policy thus assisting them, in great measure, in maintaining the status-quo (Henry). Generally, elite are also regarded as those who are skilful in the use of the two modes of political rule namely force and persuasion (Higley & Burton, 2006 cited in Ogundiwin, 2015).

Mills, however, adopted an institutional approach to the issue of elite. For him, the status and composition of the elite cannot be properly explained in terms of the talents or the psychology of the individuals but must be located within the context of economic and social structure of a particular

society, that is, the position an individual occupies in life. Mills attached this phenomenon to a wider set of existing institutions he observed in American society such as the military, big corporations and political executive. He stated further that certain institutions occupy pivotal positions in the society and the uppermost ranks of the hierarchy in these institutions constitute the "strategic command posts of the social structure" (Mills, 1956, p. 4) which implies that the elite consists of those who hold the leading positions in strategic hierarchies. He emphasised that the cohesiveness of the elite will to a great extent be determined by the closeness of the links between institutional hierarchies stressing that:

> If these hierarchies are scattered and disjointed, then their respective elites tend to be scattered and disjointed; if they have many interconnections and points of coinciding interest, then their elites tend to form a coherent kind of grouping (Mills, 1956, p. 19).

Though this minority undergoes changes in its membership and composition over a period of time, such changes, affect only the form and not the content of rule, which remains at all times minority dominated (Olaniyi, 2001). It is important to state that within the context of power play, there is an established procedure of reproducing or recruiting elite into the system, which has come to be regarded as "circulation of elite", a process whereby a set of elites usually called "governing elite" is replaced by another referred to as "hibernating elite" though all possessing similar traits (Olaniyi, 2001). These alternating elite sketched by Pareto are likened to Machiavelli's lions and foxes (Ogundiwin, 2015). As opined by Adekanye (2006), the governing elite undergo renewals in its membership over a period of time. These renewals are achieved through recruitment of new members from the lower echelon of the society and sometimes via the incorporation of new social groups that emerged consequent upon certain developments in economic and technological advancement.

Many scholars such as Dahl (1958), Duncan and Lukes (1963), Bottomore (1993), Walker (1966), Bachrach (1967), Putnam (1976), Plamenatz (1973) and Macpherson (1973) have criticised the elite theory of state, some emphasising that the elites are the chief threat to the survival of democracy (Dowse & Hughes, 1983) possibly due to the fragmentation or factionalisation which occurs among them in the struggle for power and the subsequent heat it exacts on the polity. In spite of the frailties it exhibits, it has a lot of implications for this paper. The Nigerian elite irrespective of its fragmentation or factionalisation, which leads to the emergence of competing groups, still operates as a formidable team against the people, exploiting and oppressing them and denying them the dividends of democracy.

Evolution of Nigeria's Electoral Process
The evolution of Nigeria's electoral process and the crises associated with its electoral competition could only be understood by situating them within the context of the nation's historical experiences (Alabi, 2009). Nigeria's democratic journey began with the introduction of the Clifford Constitution of 1922, which signalled the commencement of party politics and Nigeria's electoral process with the conduct of Nigeria's first election in 1923 and the subsequent ones conducted in 1928, 1933 and 1938.

Though 1922 Constitution has its deficiencies, the elective principle provided awakened political consciousness, increased the tempo of political activities and ultimately encouraged the formation of political parties. These parties included the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) led by Herbert Macaulay and the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) under the leadership of Ernest Ikoli, and others (Oyediran, 2007). After much agitation by the nationalist leaders against 1922 Constitution, 1946 Constitution was introduced by Sir Arthur Richard to possibly meet the yearnings of the people, and satisfy the desire of the diverse elements of the country to grow at their own pace and as well promote the unity of Nigeria. A salient feature of this constitution was the division of the country into

three regions, namely Northern, Eastern and Western regions (Akanji, 2014; Bamidele & Ikubaje, 2004).

Further agitations and political developments led to the formation of another political party called the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) in 1944, which was renamed the National Congress of Nigerian Citizens under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay and later Nnamdi Azikiwe. Other political parties formed included the Northern People's Congress (NPC), in 1949 in the North with Alhaji Ahmad Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and Mallam Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as leaders (Oyediran, 2007). It equally led to the emergence of the Action Group (AG) in the Western region in 1950 under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), a radical Northern youth movement under the leadership of Mallam Aminu Kano also came into existence in 1951, while the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) came into being in 1954 under the leadership of J. S. Tarka (Akanji, 2014; Omotola, 2009; Oyediran, 2007).

The regionalisation of politics prompted by the 1946 Constitution encouraged the political class to resort to primordial sentiments of ethnicity and religion, a practice that later assumed a frightening dimension capable of endangering the unity and political stability of the country. Due to fierce agitation for an all-inclusive government, the 1946 Constitution eventually collapsed paving the way for the introduction of the 1951 Constitution. The frailties inherent in the 1951 Constitution and its enforcement did not allow it to stand the test of time as envisaged. Invariably, the 1951 Constitution was short-lived necessitating the introduction of 1954 Constitution by Oliver Lyttleton, which gave more autonomy to the various regions.

Suffice to say that from the 1959 general elections that ushered in political independence in 1960, Nigeria began to experience exacerbated electoral violence of varying forms and dimensions (Nwolise, 2007). It is worth mentioning that electoral violence was minimal during the 1959 elections because of the overwhelming presence of the colonial masters. If the 1959 elections had been hectic and keenly contested, the 1964 federal elections appeared to be more contentious. The latter was characterised by widespread complaints of fraud, intimidation and violence of serious magnitude (Osaghae, 1998), especially in the Western region (Southwest Nigeria) where the dynamics of politics and the struggle for political power between Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the AG party leader and the leader of the opposition at the centre, and his deputy and the Premier of the region, Chief S. L. Akintola had brought a new dimension to the electoral contest. The A.G. crisis deepened the political contradictions and the political crisis that engulfed Western Region led to 1964-5 election crisis, which culminated in the military incursion into national politics and truncated the democratic project (Dudley, 1973 & 1982; Adekanye, 1981; Nwolise, 2007; Ojo & Azeez, 2002, cited in Ojo, 2007).

Unlike the First Republic, the Second Republic (1979-1983) witnessed the springing up of more political parties, which appeared to be offshoots of the parties formed by the politicians of the First Republic. These parties included the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which was under the headship of Chief Adisa Akinloye, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the Nigeria People's Party (NPP) under the leadership of Nnamdi Azikwe and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) equally led by Mallam Aminu Kano being a re-incarnation of the old NPC, AG, NCNC and NEPU in that order. There was equally the Great Nigeria's Peoples Party (GNPP) and later the Nigeria's Advance Party (NAP), which eventually got registered in 1982 after failing to meet the registration requirements in 1978.

The 1979 elections were rigged by the NPN. However, due to the overbearing presence of the military, serious violence did not break out (Malu & Ogbu, 2006 cited in Ojo, 2014; Ojo & Azeez, 2006). The 1983 elections were contested by these parties within an atmosphere of rancour and acrimony, and unprecedented intra and inter-party crises, which engendered factionalisation thus giving birth to party defection of significant dimension, realignment of political forces and coalitions among the parties. The situation was, however, different during the aborted Third Republic. Due to Gen. Ibrahim Babangida's manipulation of the transition programme, the registration exercise of the thirteen (13) political associations jostling for registration was cancelled. In its place, the Babangida administration established two political parties called the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), which were expected to represent the two existing dominant ideological persuasions like Labour and Conservative parties in Britain and the Democratic and Republican parties in the USA.

The result of June 12, 1993 Presidential election widely acclaimed to have been won by Chief M. K. O Abiola of the SDP and adjudged the freest and fairest in Nigeria's history was annulled by the military government under the grand design of executing "a hidden agenda" in order to perpetuate military regime and elongate Babangida's tenure in office. This development signalled the abrupt end of the Third Republic democratisation process and paved the way for the installation of an interim government headed by Chief Ernest Sonekan, which collapsed and paved the way for another full-blown military regime under General Sani Abacha on 17th November 1993. The sudden death of General Sani Abacha in 1998, however, brought General Abdulsalami Abubakar ascendancy.

By 1999, Nigeria witnessed the re-emergence of multiparty democracy through a transition programme inaugurated and successfully concluded by General Abdulsalam Abubakar. Though a lot of political associations jostled for registration, only three of them, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Omotola, 2004). By December 2002, the number of registered political parties had risen to thirty (Okoosi-Simbine, 2005) while additional three parties were registered between January and February 2016.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that since 1954 election, several elections have been conducted in the country. The 1954 and 1959 elections were conducted by colonial masters while 1979, 1993 and 1999 were conducted by military regimes. The ones organised by civilian governments were the 1964, 1983, 2003, 2007 and 2011 (Akinwalere, 2013) as well as that of 2015 and 2019 elections. However, since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999 to date, six general elections have been held namely 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections.

An Overview of the Trends and Incidences of Electoral Violence in Southwest Nigeria

Historically, the use of violence in the electoral process is not peculiar to emerging democracies of developing nations of Africa and Asia. There are documented cases of electoral violence in England and America of the 18th and 19th centuries during which force and intimidation were used as tactics of winning elections (Seymour, et al, 1918, cited in Adesote & Abimbola, 2014). African states have, however, been confronted with the challenge of electoral violence since the emergence of the third wave of democratisation of the 1990s. This is more prevalent in countries like Zimbabwe (in 2000, 2005, 2008); Zanzibar (in 2005, 2010); Kenya (in 2007), among others (Chaturvedi, 2005; Khadiagala, 2009) and in Cote d'Ivoire in the 2011/2012 Presidential election between the then incumbent Lawrence Gbagbo and the current President Alassane Quattara (Adesote & Abimbola, 2014).

In Nigeria, the electoral process since inception of party politics has been characterised by violence. Each of the three regions created by 1946 constitution was dominated by a major ethnic group. This

development laid the foundation of tribal politics and the constitution of ethnicity into a potent factor in Nigerian politics. Invariably the parties that emerged from this regional configuration held sway in those enclaves. For instance, the Northern People's Congress represented the Hausa/Fulani interest and held sway in the Northern region while the Action Group which represented the Yoruba dominated politics in the Western region and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon, which later metamorphosed into National Council of Nigerian Citizens served the Igbo interest and controlled Eastern region politics.

The elections into the regional Houses of Assembly were bedevilled with violence and created a widespread dissatisfaction among Nigerians (Falola, Mahadi, Uhomoibhi & Anyawu, 1991, cited in Adesote & Abimbola, 2014). The attendant violence that trailed the election included arson, killing, looting, wanton destruction of properties and general collapse of public order across the nation, especially in the Western region and the Middle Belt (the second Tiv riot of 1964) (Osaghae, 1998). The situation was further aggravated by the rigging of the October 1965 election into the Regional Assembly in the West (Anifowose, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2007). The announcement of the said election results by the Federal Electoral Commission gave victory to Chief S. L. Akintola of the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) contrary to the wishes and expectations of the people who believed that the poll was won by Chief Dauda Adegbenro of the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA).

This development motivated the UPGA to embark on a spontaneous and violent demonstration popularly referred to as "Operation Weti e", which enveloped the entire Western region. This scenario eventually culminated in the first military coup of January 15, 1966 thus leading to the truncation of the fledging democratic process, and paved the way for the emergence of military rule in Nigeria. This incidence contributed in no small measure to the eventual collapse of the First Republic (Akinwunmi, 2004; Osaghae, 1998). From 1966, the military controlled the affairs of Nigeria till 1979 when it eventually handed over power to the democratically elected civilian government headed by Shehu Shagari of the NPN. At the expiration of Shagari-led administration in 1983, another post-military transition election was organised. Like the First Republic election, it was characterised by violence and massive rigging in connivance with FEDECO and the security agencies. Public reaction to the development was violent and more pronounced in the South leading to the second wave of military intervention in national politics in December 31, 1983. Since then, the military dominated Nigerian politics like a colossus till May 29, 1999.

Since the restoration of party politics in 1999, Nigerian politicians have not made meaningful and significant contributions to deepen and sustain democracy. Instead, they seemed to have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing about their historical past, the factors that led to the collapse of the First and Second Republics while electoral fraud and violence continue to manifest in a more pronounced manner in almost all elections. The 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections that brought President Olusegun Obasanjo to power and later President Umaru Yar' Adua were characterised by unprecedented violence and large-scale malpractices. This perhaps might not be surprising against the backdrop of Nigerian politicians' perception of politics and the state. The notion of winner-takes all and the zero-sum approach to politics constitute politics into a do-or-die affair in Nigeria. These high stakes heighten the fears of politicians in the electoral process and as well put a lot of heat on the polity. Winning at all costs thus makes violence and electoral fraud more attractive to the political parties and politicians.

Against the foregoing, various election observers and monitoring groups, both domestic and foreign have described Nigeria's elections in various ways. In the prelude to 2003 general elections President

Olusegun Obasanjo once described election as a do-or-die affair, indicating that fraud and violence are necessary ingredients of attaining success in elections. What is more, Human Rights Watch's report (2004) between April and May, 2003 revealed that about one hundred people were killed and many more injured during federal and state elections in Nigeria and that most of these violent acts were perpetuated by the ruling PDP and its supporters. The election was characterised by various forms of electoral fraud ranging from ballot stuffing, falsification of election results, intimidation, harassment, and assassination of candidates and political opponents. For instance, Chief Dele Arojo, a PDP gubernatorial aspirant in Ogun State was gruesomely murdered while Engr. Funso Williams of the same party was also killed in Lagos state during the campaign period

In the light of these developments, Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006) submitted that the electoral fraud displayed in 2003 general elections was more sophisticated and surpassed that of 1983 general elections. Instead of showing improvement on the negative reports that trailed the 2003 general elections, the 2007 elections turned out to be the worst to have been conducted in the post-independence era. In the run-up to the elections, there were several incidences of pre-election violence either within or among political parties. Thus, from various angles, the 2007 polls were severally condemned as the most violent, poorly organised and massively rigged in Nigeria's troubled electoral history (International Crisis Group, 2014).

In spite of its being adjudged by both local and foreign observers as fair in comparison to 2003 and 2007 general elections, scholars and analysts contend that the 2011 Nigeria's general elections remain the worst in the annals of electoral violence in contemporary Nigeria. Right from the period of electioneering campaigns, series of violence were recorded in various parts of the country ranging from attacks on candidates to disruption of party rallies, party primaries and the elections in some states and the escalation of violence after the announcement of election results. In Akwa-Ibom State for example, pre-election violence was pervasive, which was possibly accentuated by intra-party conflict that rocked the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), which eventually snowballed into mass defection that profited the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). As a result of this development, two prominent towns in Akwa-Ibom State, Ikot-Ekpene and Uyo were terribly engulfed in violence during which many lives were lost and several properties worth several millions of naira were equally destroyed.

The 2015 general elections were highly militarised. Realising the fact that through realignment of political forces by the four largest opposition parties the ACN, CPC, ANPP and APGA, and their eventual merger into a mega political party christened All Progressives Congress (APC), parties equation has been altered thus preparing Nigeria's political landscape for a 'Clash of Titans'. Unlike in the previous 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections that pitched the PDP against predominantly small and ethnic based political parties, the 2015 elections marked the first nationwide contest between two dominant parties-the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) since the return of democracy in 1999.

The electioneering campaigns were dominated characteristically by blackmail, hate speeches, mud-slinging, allegations and counter allegations, incisive statements, use of inflammatory speeches and propaganda instead of focusing on party manifestoes. The political tension preceding the 2015 election exhibited a lot of dimensions, ranging from North-South continuous claim to the presidency, religious sentiments, and the campaign of calumny and violence engaged in by the two dominant parties. While the northerners felt there was the need for power to shift back to the North because they were short-changed by the sudden death of President Umaru Yar'Adua in 2010 after serving for only three years

at the helm of affairs, the South-south geo-political zone claimed that President Goodluck Jonathan must be given another term in office.

These claims and counter claims turned into threat of violence with people from contending blocs issuing verbal threats that were capable of not only heating the polity but equally threatening the survival of democracy in Nigeria. In an attempt to manipulate religious sentiments in its favour, the PDP labelled the APC, whose two foremost leaders are Muslims as 'Nigeria's Muslim Brotherhood" and "a party of bloodthirsty, religious and ethnic bigots averse to the unity of the country" (*This Day*, January 8, 2014, cited in International Crisis Group, 2014, p. 5). In a highly inflammatory manner, Bola Tinubu in April, 2014 warned that, "it is going to be rig and roast. We are prepared, not to go to court but to drive you out…For every action, there will be a reaction" (*Tell*, July 7, 2014, cited in International Crisis Group, 2014, p. 7).

From the foregoing, one could argue that a characteristic feature of Nigeria's electoral process is that both intra and inter-party elections are fraught with manipulation, fraud and violence, cutting across all levels of government. Invariably, Nigeria as a country and its political elite seem to have acquired what in political parlance is referred to as 'culture of violence' because the phenomenon has always been cyclical in nature over the years. The statistics given in Table 1 illustrate the incidences of casualties involved in electoral violence across the Southwest geo-political zone.

Table   1: Incidences of Casualties of Electoral Violence in Southwest Nigeria (2003 – 2019)

S/N	Incidences of Electoral Violence	No. of Casualties	Dateof Occurrence	Name of LGA	Name of State
1	Assassination of Kunle Arojo a gubernatorial aspirant of the PDP in Ogun state.	1	2003	Yewa North	Ogun
2	Assassination of Funsho Anthony Williams a gubernatorial aspirant of PDP in Lagos state.	1	27 July, 2006	Ikoyi	Lagos
3	Assassination of Prof. Ayodele Daramola, PDP gubernatorial aspirant in Ekiti state.	1	14 August, 2006	Ado-Ekiti	Ekiti
5	Attempted attack on the former governor of Oyo state Senator Raheed Ladoja at Ibadan by 50 political thugs.	3	3 July, 2007	Ibadan	Oyo
6	Attack on Governor Adebayo Alao-Akala of Oyo state by hoodlums suspected to be sympathetic with Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu a PDP chieftain when the former was returning from a social ceremony.	2	11 September, 2007	Ibadan	Oyo
7	Assassination of Dipo Dina a governorship aspirant of the Action Congress of Nigeria in Ogun state.	1	26 January, 2010	Ado-Odo/Ota	Ogun

8	The killing of Lateef Eleweomo, a factional leader of NURTW during PDP primaries in Ibadan.	1	30 December, 2010	Ibadan	Oyo
9	PDP thugs stormed the AC rally of Senator Rasheed Ladoja in Ibadan.	2	6 April, 2011	All Ibadan LGAs	Oyo
10	Gunmen snatch ballot boxes in Sagamu	Disruption of the electoral process	29 March, 2015	Sagamu	Ogun
11	Shooting at the All Progressive Congress secretariat during a reception organised for the governorship candidate of the party	Death of Opeyemi Bamidele and one other person	1 June, 2018	Ajilosun	Ekiti
12	Heavy gunshots rang out between the police and suspected political thugs in Alekuwodo area of Osogbo during the re-run of 2018 Osun governorship election	Three persons were seriously wounded	24 September, 2018	Osogbo	Osun
13	Aide of PDP deputy governorship candidate in Ekiti shot dead	Death of Deji Akeredolu	30 December, 2018	Onala area, Ado-Ekiti	Ekiti
14	Political thugs chase SDP governorship candidate away from rally	Valuable empowerment gifts were carted away	12 January, 2019	Ijebu-Ode	Ogun
15	Violence forces Ogun State APC presidential rally to abrupt end	Many people were injured	11 February, 2019	Abeokuta	Ogun
16	Political thugs attacked members of PDP	Many people were seriously injured	14 February, 2019	Owo LGA	Ondo
17	Bloody fights between youths as unknown men distributed cash to waiting groups	Many people were injured	23 February, 2019	Yaba	Lagos
18	Political thugs attacked the collation centres	Three vehicles were vandalised	23 February, 2019	Akoko South West	Ondo
19	Political thugs murdered a serving member of House of Representative	Death of Mr. Temitope Olatoye	23 February, 2019	Lagelu	Oyo
20	Violence during the House of Assembly election	Death of two persons while others were critically injured	23 February, 2019	Akoko South West	Ondo
21	Hoodlums attacked INEC office and destroyed parts of its property	Destruction of valuable property	24 February, 2019	Oriade	Osun

Source: Rosenje et al. (2020).

The avalanche of evidence garnered from the overview of the trends of electoral violence in Southwest Nigeria testifies to the fact that electoral violence is well pronounced and entrenched in its politics and has become an integral part though an ignoble one, of its political system and practices, which requires

the collective attention of all stakeholders in the polity and therefore, should not be treated with levity glove-hands.

Security Lapses as Challenges to the Conduct of Violent-free Election and Democratic Consolidation in Southwest Nigeria

However, in order to remove the tendency towards electoral violence and ensure the consolidation of democracy in any nation, security among other values, should be cultivated by all stakeholders. Security is thus no doubt an essential precaution of ensuring a violent-free election and safeguarding democratic consolidation. Perhaps the most salient factor confronting Nigeria in terms of security is the fact that the nation is grossly under policed. By UN regulation, there should be one (1) to four hundred (400) ratio of police to the citizens in the protection of the population of a country. This becomes crucial when one considers the enormity of the Nigerian population put at about 200 million people (NPC, 2011) and the possible security crisis, which the inadequacy in security personnel could possibly engender. This is one of the reasons why crisis easily gets escalated beyond the timely intervention of the security personnel when they erupt.

In Nigeria, the security agencies exhibit partisanship in the discharge of their political assignments of monitoring political campaigns, rallies and the conduct of elections. More often than not, political party leaders, executives and candidates often dictate what is to be done by the security personnel on political assignment. There have been allegations and counter-allegations between the party in government and the opposition as to the partisanship of the police on several occasions. There is no gainsaying the fact that the police force has been grossly politicised. The loyalty of some police officers is not to the constitution they swore to uphold or the nation they pledged to protect. Rather, it is given to the political officials, political chieftains and stalwarts of the party in government due to the pecuniary gains which they derive from party machinery. As a result of this, they are inclined to doing the bidding of the incumbent power holder without minding the lethal consequences such action could propel in the society.

The leadership of the party in government has often influenced the posting of security personnel through the power of incumbency and secured the deployment of stern-looking security forces to the enclaves of their opponents with a view to intimidating, threatening and harassing them from voting for candidates of their choice on Election Day. This action is often calculated to scaring potential electorate away from the polling booth thereby reducing the electoral strength of the opponent in order to influence electoral outcome of such constituency. This perception is in tandem with that of Akinnaso (2014) who argued that the phenomenon of militarisation is prevalent within the confines of Nigeria's electoral politics. He posited further that:

> the phenomenon has come to acquire an extended cultural meaning, consisting of …. the deployment of security forces, consisting of military, police, men of the Department of State Services (DSS) and other security operatives; the deployment occurs during the election; and the election takes place in an opposition state (p. 5).

The porosity of Nigeria's borders has made the migration of foreigners into the country possible (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021). It should be recalled that the colonial masters in the process of partitioning Africa among themselves have split people of the same cultural background into different geo-political entities. For instance, some people of Yoruba extraction in the Southwest Nigeria, have been carved along with Benin Republic, while same situation applies to the Southeast, Northwest and Northeast areas of the country. Rosenje and Adeniyi pointed out that the porosity of Nigeria's borders has made the proliferation of small arms and light weapons inevitable. Since many of the countries of the Sahel region suffer political instability and turmoil, the situation makes lethal weapons to easily fall into the

hands of non-state actors who utilise them to perpetrate criminal activities such as banditry, kidnapping and armed robbery and even cause mayhem during elections.

More often than not, the party in power uses the established security outfits to harass and torment the opposition with a view to influencing election outcome. At times members of the security outfit are used on Election Day to intimidate party stalwarts in order to scare their supporters away from voting. Commenting further on the siege, which Nigeria's security forces laid on the prominent members of the opposition in the build up to the Ekiti elections in 2018, a former (APC) governor of Edo state, Adams Oshiomole, argued that the decision by Nigeria's security agencies to prevent him and other senior members of his party from attending the political rally was instigated by the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). He expressed his frustration thus:

> I have the right to go to any part of Nigeria and if you can stop a Governor, you treat him as a miscreant, it's not about me, it's about the office, then you reduce the country to something close to a 'Banana Republic'. These things happen all the time, that's why I always argue that we need strong institutions rather than strong personalities (Oshiomole, cited in *The Sun*, 22 June, 2014).

Lending their voices to the perceived militarisation of the Ekiti elections, civil society groups, under the aegis of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) also condemned the conduct of the law enforcement agent in a press conference addressed by the then Chairman of the Ado-Ekiti branch of NBA, Joseph Adewunmi, and the chairman of the Ekiti State chapter of NUJ, Laolu Omosilade (Okoro, 2014). They argued that "the heavy presence of security personnel in the elections could provide an avenue for the rigging of the election even if the electorate are scared of coming out to vote, there will be surplus ballot papers, which unscrupulous politicians can use to the detriment of one another and more importantly, the credibility of the election (Okoro, 2014).

This election witnessed an abuse of our security agencies and amounted to a corruption of their professional ethics and integrity (Aregbesola cited in Chukwu, 2014). In Osun State, Aregbesola argues that:

> The security agencies were unprofessionally utilised in Osun State to harass, intimidate and oppress the people whose taxes are used to pay their salaries and provide their arms. Hundreds of leaders, supporters, sympathisers and agents of our party were arrested and detained. Also, hundreds of other innocent citizens, including women and the aged, were harassed, brutalised and traumatised. In spite of this condemnable repression and abuse of human rights, the unflagging spirit of our people triumphed (Aregbesola, cited in Chukwu, 2014, p.   ).

From the above explication, it is instructive to note that security challenges actually hindered the conduct of violent-free elections and thus impacted negatively on democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Efforts Made by Stakeholders to Reduce Electoral Violence in Order to Ensure Democratic Consolidation.

Since electoral violence is regarded as a monster, which devours a democratic project, various concerted efforts have been initiated by stakeholders to tame it and ensure that it does not breach the peace of the nation. The Southwest Nigeria, in co-operation with other sections of the country, that is, geo-political zones that make up Nigeria, has called for constitutional reforms to ensure devolution of

powers from the various centres to other levels of governments in order to reduce the stakes attached to political offices and thereby reduce the quest for power at the centre, thus making it less attractive. Such reform has become inevitable due to the fact that in all culturally segmented societies of Third World nations, there is always the fear of the domination or marginalisation and consequent exploitation of the minority by the majority ethnic group. The Nigerian situation is even more complex on account of the political elite's zero-sum approach to politics. In spite of the fact that National or Constitutional Conferences have been convened on several occasions in the past to resolve these glaring challenges, the political class has not been able to put aside personal and parochial interest and place national interest and survival above of all calculations.

Furthermore, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria through its provisions gives the guidelines for organising, conducting and achieving a violent-free election. It envisaged that disaffection may occur among stakeholders on the way the election is handled and therefore provided mechanisms, processes and procedures for dealing with such aberrations. To this extent, the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 as amended, in specified provisions such as Part III, section 285 (1-3) provides for election tribunals to deal with post-election petitions. Explicitly, section 285 (1) affirms that 'There shall be established for the federation one or more election tribunals to be known as the National Assembly Election Tribunals which shall, to the exclusion of any court or tribunal, have original jurisdiction to hear and determine petitions (FGN, 1999). Furthermore, sub-section 2 addresses state elections for the governorship and legislative elections. Also, sub-section 3 treats the composition of the tribunals at all levels while sub-section 4 discusses what constitutes the quorum in an election tribunal. Other relevant provisions, such as the sixth schedule canvasses about the composition and membership qualification of the tribunals.

Though the provisions of this constitution are important landmark based on Nigeria's previous political cum electoral experiences, the fact remains that law is static while the society is increasingly dynamic and there is, therefore, no way these provisions could adequately cope with the ever-emerging dynamics of politics in Nigeria. Above all, the behavioural disposition and political culture of politicians in Africa, based on the need to realise vested interest will always constitute a hindrance to effective and successful utilisation of the document. After all, the Americans are still using their age-long constitution though with modifications on just few occasions implying that the fault may not necessarily be with the constitution but with the operators.

The 1999 Nigerian Constitution establishes the judiciary as the third arm of government, and in line with the prescribed presidential system of government, expects the institution to be independent of other arms of government and impartial in the performance of its duties. This, it is anticipated, will enable it interpret and adjudicate in legal matters with independent mind, free from fear or favour. In case of any electoral crisis, the judiciary is expected to intervene professionally without partisanship or bias with a view to promoting justice; after all, it is regarded as the last hope of the oppressed. In reality however, the ways and manners through which some members of the bench go about the job calls for questioning. Since the inception of multi-party democracy in 1999, petitions arising from elections have flooded the various tribunals and courts in Southwest Nigeria. Though some of the judgments delivered in this respect like that of the Ekiti and Osun states in regard to 2018 gubernatorial elections have been commended by the public, many others have been manipulated due to corruption among judges and delay in the dispensation of justice.In comparison, the Nigerian situation contrasts sharply with Ghanaian experience where the judiciary has been more proactive in the handling of election petitions (Frempong, 2008).

The media is an integral part of the society and a crucial instrument of disseminating information, and educating and mobilising the citizenry. The fundamental role of the media in political setting is to receive, communicate and impart information objectively on the people in order to enable them make informed choice in concurrence with its responsibility role to the society. Through various means such as jingles, cartoons, short drama, news casting and editorials among others, the media embark on peace education and advocacy to sensitise the public about the dangers of electoral violence and the need to be tolerant and peaceful during and after elections.

Though some segments of the media strive to abide by this notion, certain sections of the media in an attempt to satisfy the interest of their paymasters did not only carry bias and partisan information but also publish inflammatory and inciting speeches that are directed toward breaching the peace of the nation. A lot of this information is ethnically biased apart from exhibiting religious connotation capable of upturning the social equilibrium of the political environment. This position was corroborated by the report of European Union Election Observer Mission (EU-EOM) on the 2003 general election, which remarked thus:

> Media performance during the Nigerian elections was flawed, as it failed to provide unbiased, fair and informative coverage of political parties and candidates contesting the elections. Federal and state-owned media were biased in favour of parties and candidates in power (cited in Aghamelu, 2013, p. 161).

Generally, a lot of institutions, ranging from the electoral body called Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the media, government information agencies, non-governmental organisations among others engage in political and electoral education, and advocacy on the need for the people to play the game according to the established rules, shun violence and cultivate the culture of peace during and after elections. The Independent Electoral Commission had on several occasions organised workshops for political parties and candidates on peaceful campaign methods and media engagement on the problem of election-related violence among others (UNDP, 2009). Most of the agencies involved in peace education and advocacy apart from having limited economic resources to effectively carry out this assignment, are based in the cities or major towns where most of the elite reside leaving behind the majority of the uneducated poor who live in the rural areas thereby making their efforts ineffective.

The security agencies of the government are usually deployed to secure the electoral process, monitoring the electioneering campaigns and the conduct of elections. However, the numerical strength of deployed men and officers of the police and other security outfits are always inadequate to cope with the electoral exercise due to the fact that Nigeria itself is grossly under-policed by the consideration of universal standard. This situation gives the hoodlums, party thugs and miscreants the opportunity to disrupt the election process by intimidating and harassing the electorate, snatching ballot-boxes and disturbing the peace of the environment. Furthermore, it is pertinent to point out here that though the Electoral Act of 2006 made provisions for sanctions and punitive measures to be taken against electoral offenders, no one has ever been successfully prosecuted and lawfully punished (Songi, 2008).

On many occasions, civil society organisations and the public have taken the initiatives to champion voter education and awareness with a view to ensuring conduct of peaceful elections. Activities and programmes engaged in include consultations, organising several fora, rallies and campaigns emphasising the need to shun violence and be peaceful during and after elections. These efforts are usually inadequate and less effective considering its time-lag. More often than not, these campaigns

are usually organised around election period whereas, voter education and public awareness efforts are expected to be a continuous activity with on-going support for citizen education (Hoglund & Jarstad, 2010 cited in Rao, 2014). Instead of the 'one cap fits all' approach to voter education, they should be categorised and organised in phases. Special electoral education programmes, including those specifically designed for the youth can provide focused civic education on democratic values and processes (USAID, 2013).

A lot of efforts are being made on monitoring by all stakeholders to ensure that elections are peaceful in Nigeria. Election observers consisting of both local- the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) an amalgam of about 170 non-governmental organisations and international observers like the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU-EOM) are usually deployed to monitor election process, especially in conflict-prone or potentially volatile areas. Though these teams have been able to bring to the fore some salient issues about the conduct of election, such as late arrival of election personnel and materials to polling booths and the inadequacy of security men on ground, their contributions were however limited due to certain factors. Monitoring should be a continuous exercise to be able to uncover the information in volatile areas while adequate resources should be allocated for the training of the personnel involved in the monitoring and as well provide monitoring capacity like logistics. For monitoring to be effective and more credible, there is the need for observers to comply with the code of conduct on accuracy and integrity (USAID, 2013).

It is instructive to note that electoral management body, which is set up in every democracy to oversee the conduct of elections is expected to be independent and impartial. In Nigeria, the structure of the body has always been determined by the 1999 Nigerian Constitution and other enabling laws while it also has to comply with the 2010 Electoral Act and other regulations in the discharge of its duties. The composition and appointment of members of the commission is decided by the federal government on the approval of the Senate while it relies on funds given to it by the government to effectively discharge its electoral responsibilities.
However, the activities and performances of the body have been greeted with mixed feelings by the Nigerian public and stakeholders like the electorate, the political class, the media, election monitoring teams and the international community. While some have commended the body for conducting credible and somewhat free and fair elections, others notably the opposition parties, have criticised and condemned it on the grounds that its performances were below expectations. They accused it of being biased and partisan thereby making the outcome of the electoral processes controversial and debatable, acceptable to some and unacceptable to others leaving the aggrieved to seek redress in the tribunal or court as the case may be. It has on several occasions been accused of dancing to the music of and conniving with the government in power, which is responsible for its funding in consonance with the notion: 'he who pays the piper dictates the tune'.

The use of dialogue among the contending political parties and candidates to ensure peaceful elections has always been initiated and utilised in Nigeria's electoral process. The electoral body, INEC, had on many occasions organised workshops and held meetings with the different political parties, party stalwarts, candidates and their polling agents before elections are held with a view to emphasising the need to shun inflammatory statements, demonisation of political opponents and other acts that could cause electoral violence. They have equally been enjoined to accept and comply with the rules of the game, especially the Electoral Act and other guidelines governing elections, which could promote violence-free elections.

Prior to the 2015 Presidential election, the two major contestants, incumbent President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the PDP and Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd.) of the APC along with other party leaders signed the Abuja Peace Accord on January 14, 2015 in the presence of former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan and former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations, Emeka Anyaoku. This action was to enlist their commitment to free and fair, credible and peaceful elections. Another meeting, which was brokered by the National Peace Committee for the 2015 General elections led by Gen. Abubakar Abdusalami (Rtd.) was also designed to extract commitment to peaceful elections from these two major presidential candidates (Ibraheem, Ogwezzy-Ndisika & Adepoju, 2015). At the state level in the South-Western Nigeria, efforts were also made by the State Offices of INEC through dialogue to extract commitment to peace accord from the various contestants. In order to further deepen dialogue among political parties and thus enhance mutual understanding and trust, there is the need to implement the recommendation of Electoral Reform Committee on the setting-up of Political Party Regulatory Commission as it is presently practised in Ghana.

In spite of these warnings, it is pathetic to note that though the elections were successful, people, especially politicians continue to flout the electoral laws and regulations with impunity and without any sanctions. This is basically due to the fact that there has been much foot-dragging on the setting-up of Election Offences Prosecution Commission to arrest offenders and investigate such offences, and Electoral Offences Tribunals to enforce the law. The absence of these institutional and legal mechanisms has become a challenge to the prosecution of violators. Hence, the inability or failure to prosecute such election offenders and make them serve as deterrents to others continues to make electoral violence cyclical in nature.

From the foregoing expositions, it is glaring that stakeholders indeed made several conscious and collective efforts to curb or at least reduce electoral violence from the political landscape and practices of Southwest Nigeria. However, these efforts appear to be inadequate and ineffective, and as such require reforms as well as political will to implement them without showing any hatred or favour to individuals involved and not minding whose ass is gored. It should, therefore, be regarded as a continuous exercise requiring long time-frame and enormous resources to accomplish.

Conclusion and Recommendations
This paper examined the electoral process and x-rayed how security lapses engendered electoral violence that threatens democratic consolidation in Southwest Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It reviewed the concepts of security, electoral violence and democratic consolidation and adopted elite theory to put the paper in a proper perspective. It traced the evolution and trend of Nigeria's electoral process while an overview of the trend and incidences of electoral violence in Southwest Nigeria was attempted. The issue of security lapses being challenges to the conduct of violent-free election was also documented. The paper equally averred that the efforts made by the stakeholders to reduce electoral violence in order to ensure democratic stability were inadequate and subsequently ineffective. It therefore, revealed that security lapses have accentuated electoral violence which threatened democratic consolidation in Southwest Nigeria. These incidences of electoral violence have resulted in loss of lives, destruction of election materials and properties worth several millions of naira.
In order to resolve the security challenges bedevilling Southwest Nigeria's electoral process with a view to ensuring democratic consolidation, the paper recommends, among others, that:
(1)   the security architecture of the country should be reconstructed to accommodate the local needs of the grassroots so as to respond promptly to perceived security lapses;

(2)   there is the need to restructure Nigeria's federal system to enable every geopolitical zone cope with its peculiar realities;

(3)   the government should tackle the problem of arms proliferation in order to reduce and weaken the activities of the miscreants, political thugs;

(4)   Nigeria's borders should be effectively monitored by relevant agencies to forestall the entry of illegal immigrants into the country, who will likely constitute security risks to the nation;

(5)   the government should sanction political leaders, political parties and individuals that violate electoral laws;

(6)   efforts should be made to train the security personnel on the need to adopt a better civil military orientation and abide by more cordial social relations in the discharge of their responsibilities; and

(7)   government should embark on political education and enlightenment that will encourage citizens to adhere strictly to democratic tenets.

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