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# **Election Conflicts, National Security and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: An Interrogative Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the recurring phenomenon of election conflicts and its implications for national security in Nigeria. It interrogates the drivers for election conflicts and the attendant effects of such on consolidation of democracy in the fourth republic. Using a combination of observations, literature review and content analysis and the causal-driver theory as framework of analysis, the paper establishes and reaffirms the recurring conflicts that have trailed the conduct of elections in Nigeria as constituting major drawbacks for national security and consolidation of democracy in the world's most populous black nation. It argues that the intense struggle and contestation for power that often characterised Nigeria's electoral process creates a fertile ground for unbridled animosities among different factions of the political class with propensity to undermine national security and decelerate the country's democratic progress. Successive elections in the country have produced leaders that failed to give adequate attention to addressing the basic needs and collective aspirations of Nigerians resulting to heightened tensions and conflicts. The paper identifies renewed vigour and commitment to a more transparent election management as well as building of elite consensus that is anchored on political tolerance, fairness and unhindered inclusivity in the democratic game as pivotal to averting perennial conflicts associated with the conduct of elections in Nigeria.

## **Keywords**

Election Conflicts, Legitimacy Crisis, Democratic Consolidation, National Security.

## **Introduction**

Election constitutes a prominent feature of every democratic society. No society claims to be democratic without periodic and competitive elections. Hence, elections represent the bulwarks of any democratic nation because of the inherent and subsequent power, popularity, economic perks and influence that come with winning election. In modern democracies, election remains the most critical framework of the political process utilized for selecting leaders at all levels. As Okorie et al (2020) has asserted, elections constitute a veritable democratic tool for political mobilisation and ensuring accountability in the process of making the choice of leaders by facilitating seamless transition from one government to another as well as providing legitimacy for elected leaders. However, these assertions seem to have no place in Nigeria's democratic practice as the nature of intense struggles and contestations for power that often characterised the country's electoral process creates a hotbed for perennial animosities among the political class with propensity for undermining national security and decelerating the nation's democratic progress.

The overwhelming assumption according to Dahl (1999) cited in Okonkwo (2019, p.146) that "few men crave for power and when it is given to the few, they use it to oppress the many" has been the foundation of conflict occasioned by election in Nigeria. The extent by which the preponderant number of the people

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reacted to the oppression extended to them by the political officeholders often results into heightened tension and ultimately election conflicts. Unfortunately, the case with Nigeria is alarming because the political class has come to see elections as a do or die affair thereby subjecting hapless citizens to electoral fraud and violence that often leads to civil unrest and other forms of malfeasance.

Moreover, after every election in Nigeria, it is commonplace to witness post-election violence and turmoil as witnessed after the 2023 Presidential and National Assembly elections wherein Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Labour Party (LP) staged a marathon protest in Abuja to register their grievances on the outcome of the elections which they claimed to have been rigged by the All Progressives Congress (APC) in collaboration with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The opposition parties hinged their displeasure with the outcome of the election on the failure of INEC to upload election results real time on the IReV-portal as promised by the Commission. Politicians in the country are yet to come to the realization of the fact that all of them cannot win elections at the same time. Of course, inability to follow the rule of the game has consequential effects and exacerbates national insecurity. The Nigerian political class is usually fond of campaign of calumny orchestrated by divisive tactics, lack of sportsmanship and non-readiness to concede defeat. This was evident in the statement made by the former President Olusegun Obasanjo while leaving the office that win or lose in politics, is a matter of life and death (Okonkwo, 2019). There is no doubt that such dispositions and mindset towards the electioneering process breeds fear and public anxiety capable of inciting post-election conflicts.

From the forgoing, it is therefore empirically evident that a correlative relationship exists between election conflicts, national security and democratic consolidation. The barbaric deployment of force, thuggery and unnecessary phobia to gain undue advantage over others for the purpose of garnering more votes tend to have a positive correlation with the violence that follows the declaration of election results in the country. It has become the political culture of Nigerians to always witness conflicts, sometimes violent conflicts during elections; with varying implications for the country's national security and even the consolidation of democratic system. For these reasons, this paper seeks to interrogate the incessant incident of election conflicts within the contextual milieu of Nigeria's democratic practice, especially the factors driving election conflicts in the nation's political space.

The paper is organised into five sections; with section one consisting of the foregoing introduction. Section two captures the conceptual review and explicates the framework of analysis for the discourse. Section three interrogates the drivers for election conflicts within the ambits of Nigeria's democratic practice while section four explores pragmatic election management approach as a strategy for deepening democratic ethos and values, and for reducing election-related conflicts. Section five concludes the paper with reflections on the prospects of instituting a more transparent regime of election management capable of averting perennial conflicts associated with the conduct of elections in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Review and Theoretical Explications**

This section captures efforts aimed at contextualizing relevant concepts in this paper for proper understanding of the meanings ascribed to their usage in this paper. Special attention is given to the review of concepts and terms, including the framework of analysis from the extant literature in order to draw out their significance to the issues under review.

### **Competitive Elections as a form of Politics**

What comes to mind here is that politics is a competition which could be intense for the control of the public policy-making process inside the organized framework of government (Okuosa, 2016). In a similar orientation, Heywood (2013) posits that the existence of rival opinions, different wants, competing needs and opposing interests guarantee disagreement about the rules under which people live. This point to the fact that politics is all about competition among political actors. Of course, politics is itself a means of resolving conflict via compromise, conciliation and negotiation, rather than through force and naked power (Heywood, 2013). Sodaro (2011) avers that politics is a process through which communities work

together to achieve common goals and resolve disputes through authority of the state, that is, government. Therefore, disputes arising from competitive elections cannot be completely isolated from the persistent pattern of human interactions that involves power and influence (Dahl, 2013).

Drawing from the above in connection with the means through which politics periodically incorporate the entire electorates, that is; election. Election is the method of decision-making in democracies (Heywood, 2013). Ajayi (2016) clearly submitted that election is a method by which voters select qualified candidates for public office through the casting of the ballot. It is a democratic process of effective participation of the qualified electorates in the political process. Although, it has also been observed that not every election is transparently conducted, therefore leading to disputes that often results to electoral crises and instability. A free, fair and credible election legitimizes the government and consolidates democracy. It deepens the democratic tenets and promotes the democratic consciousness expected in a democratic setting. Elections provide a unique opportunity for the establishment of a legitimate government and system of governance, unlike other undemocratic systems where change is impossible, but democracy offers periodic change through elections based on the performance of the political party currently in power (Mallock, 2013).

It is apposite to state that the conduct and quality of elections can generate tensions and social insecurity, especially, if the contenders are powerful and prominent, and this can be a source of insecurity in the country. As earlier hinted in the course of this paper, political parties compete, but must admit the reality of a victor and loser. Yagboyaju (2012) has likened the relationship between political parties and the sustenance of democratic rule in a particular society to that which exist between the umbilical cord and the foetus (Yagboyaju, 2012). Orji (2013) asserts that political parties are at the heart of examining the health of any form of democracy. He maintains modern democracies revolve around competitive political parties. Their roles and activities are critical in any assessment of democratic nations (Momoh, 2013). In the case of Nigeria, competitive party politics is expected to deepen and consolidate the democratic transition, especially after over two decades of democratic practice (Jinadu, 2013).

Nigeria Democratic Institute (2016) reported that the source of electoral violence and societal unrest is directly tied to the results of elections in Nigeria and Africa at large. The aftermath of the contentious 2023 Presidential Election outcome serves to corroborate this assertion. In spite of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) effort at ensuring free, fair and transparent election, the glitches that prevented the body from uploading the results to the IRev-Portal was the main reason for the outcry. The resultant implication of a suspicious election is conflict and this could be explained with the uproar generated at the International Conference Centre by the party agents of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Labour Party (LP), which culminated into their eventual walkout from the national collation centre.

According to Robert (2011), election conflict is characterized by acts of violence, thuggery and other antisocial behaviour that occur during the voting process. Also, it can be viewed as any agreement or violence that occurs at any point (before, during and post-election) due to differences in beliefs, feelings and involvement with electoral processes (Balogun, 2013). Gbervbie (2014) gave a comprehensive analysis of the narrative of election conflict in the context of Nigeria's electioneering experience and argued that election violence during general elections include the snatching of ballot boxes to manipulate election results; creating pandemonium in polling stations to prevent voters from casting their ballots; beating up electoral officers and sometimes killing them in the process when weapons such as guns and cutlasses are used during the elections; and preventing voters from casting their ballots. Albert (1994) views election conflict as all forms of the coordinated act or threats aimed at intimidating, injuring or trying to blackmail politically interested parties before, during or afterwards to determine, delay or otherwise influencing an electoral process.

In contemporary Nigeria, ordinary political argument can be tensed and aggravated into uncontrollable conflict. It is not unusual in this clime for individuals to engage in a fierce political conversation that ends in open confrontation. The prevalence of election conflicts in the country has subjected the country's electoral process to the vagaries of pervasive political brigandage and manipulation. This is especially evident in the disruption of political rallies, making inciting statement, destruction of party secretariats, the utilization of small arms and ammunition to scare the eligible voters and violent removal of campaign billboards of rival political parties.

Nigeria is a country where politicians are fond of deploying political thugs to snatch ballot boxes and threaten the electoral officials all in a bid to sway electoral victory in their favour. The resultant implication of this is reactionary in nature which threatens democratic consolidation and escalates national insecurity in a multidimensional way.

There are numerous views on election conflicts in Nigeria because of its implication on national security and the peaceful co-existence of the people (Ogboji et al, 2022; Okorie et al, 2020; Adesote and Abibola, 2014; Enojo, 2010). However, the prevalence of post-election violence in the country cannot in any way disregard the efficacy of elections as means of implementing democratic ideals, such as ensuring participation of the citizenry in decision making and holding elected officials accountable for their actions (Alemika, 2017). For instance, voters' evaluations of their national elections and trust in political institutions create a strong link between citizens' contentment with democracy and national security. Shall (2016) strongly allude to the fact that Nigeria's national security has been significantly harmed by the conduct of elections. The outcome of every election in the country has been marred by electoral petitions arising from election rigging which overtime generate tensions with its attendant consequences on the national security.

Nonetheless, Sklar et al (2016) identified Nigerians kind of inordinate politics as the root cause of insecurity. To them, Nigeria's political landscape has been dominated by powerful godfathers who sit atop massive patronage networks at local, state and federal levels after decades of avaricious rule. They claimed that election results are always determined by titanic battles between these magnates who bargain among themselves and at the expense of the larger public within a political environment of numerous ethno-religious divisions. These godfathers hold the political orientation that "political power should be pursued legally, if possible, extra-legally if necessary and illegally if unavoidable" (Obiorah & Chiamogu, 2014, p. 60). This approach is counter-productive and stands grossly against the spirit of sportsmanship expected of any democrats.

In a similar manner, elections which harbour great incentives for peace and prosperity can also generate conflict components that undermine peace efforts and threaten peace if not properly managed. Certain factors often produced by flawed elections such as citizen dissatisfaction with election outcomes, weak electoral body, high stakes financial rewards for politicians, the sit-tight syndrome, godfatherism, manipulation of religious and ethnic sentiments, commercialization of ballots, rigging, and hate speeches that can ignite political violence with serious implications for national security (Obi, 2018). Nigeria's current security architecture has also been derided as fostering electoral violence. Abraham and Aghedo (2014) argue that the country's over-centralized and reactionary security structure with systemic dysfunctions is incapable of responding adequately and frontally to post-election conflicts and security challenges.

Taking into account Nigeria's conduct of elections in the last decade, many a time, insecurity and risks to life during elections pose a severe threat to the nation's peace and development. The centralization of the security architecture in the country is by every means a defective alibi for the failure or inability of security agencies to adequately address security concern during elections (Ebohon and Ifeadi, 2020). Over the years, good governance, strong and responsive national security architecture, and free and fair elections in a multiethnic society seem to have significant impacts on both peace and development of any

nation. In many instances, failed states are often the result of the inability to deal adequately with security issues before and after elections (Mou, 2018).

### **National Security and the Demands of Democratic Consolidation**

We believe that any attempt to discuss the concept of national security should begin with identifying the objective meaning of the word 'security'. By a simple operationalization, security is a state of being safe and the absence of fear, anxiety, danger, poverty and oppression. Zabadi (2005) views security as a state in which people or things are not exposed to the dangers of physical or moral aggression, accident, theft or decline. This perspective is coherently aligned with the traditional function of 'state' in its capacity to ensure the preservation and protection of its citizens and the survival of the state in its entirety. Hence, the state has the greatest responsibility of the sole commander of the use of force and power for the safety of its territory and its citizens. National security according to Held (1998, p.26) therefore is the "the acquisition, deployment and use of military force to achieve national goals". Similarly, Romm (1993) describes national security as the lack of danger or risk to held standards, values and ideals and the absence of fear that such values will be attacked now or in the future.

Buzan (1990) had enunciated five dimensions of the new concept of national security; these are: military, political, economic, social and environmental. He argued that military security covers the two-level interplay of the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of the state while political security captures the organizational stability of state, system of government, and the ideologies that give them legitimacy. Economic security demands access to the resources, finance and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power. Societal security provides the sustainability within acceptable conditions, patterns of language, culture, and religion and national identity and custom. Environmental security requires the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which other human enterprises depend. Nwolise (2009) however derides Buzan's five dimensions of security as eurocentric and too narrow to explaining the concept of national security in avaricious political culture such as Nigeria. He subsequently came up with ten new dimensions which are, physical, psychological, legal, people's power, treasury, technological, image, territorial, global and spiritual security.

According to him, physical security concerns the safety of the human person which must be guaranteed by the state. Psychological security involves the satisfaction and happiness of the people, without which loyalty and allegiance to the state, as well as willingness to obey laws, cooperate with law enforcement agents and perform civic duties will be jeopardized. Technological security requires mobilizing national resources as catalysts for technological development to enhance self-reliance in development efforts. Spiritual security demands liking citizens to God/gods, ensuring spiritual growth which promotes morality, fairness, equity and justice. National image security covers ensuring both government and citizens avoid acts that tarnish the national image which external forces or interests can capitalize on to incapacitate the ability of the country to defend its territorial integrity, maintain internal security or catalyst for development while territorial security consists of effective mobilization of the defense and security forces, citizens, allies and diplomatic assets to ensure that the nation is secure from external and internal hostile elements. Legal security concerns the supremacy of the constitution and laws of the land, application of the rule of law and due process, as well as the independence of the judiciary and incorruptible of judges. Treasury security demands the safety of the commonwealth of the citizens and involves ensuring that all public revenue go into the national treasury, that no money is appropriated without due process of legislative debate and authority. People's power security concerns the protection of the democratic rights of the people to elect their leaders, and determine public policies through elections. Global security concerns national contribution to world peace and security without which there can be no national security.

In this paper, we viewed national security as the strategic move by the state to assure and ensure the peaceful co-existence of the people, protection of the state's norms and values and their economic wellbeing for the purpose of national development and survival. It is an assurance of peace relatively devoid of violence, killing, destructive conflict, danger, phobia, which includes the state's capacity to protect the lives and properties of the people. It is the protection against both the domestic attacks from non-state actors and international attacks from state and non-state actors.

In a related development, democratic consolidation is completely averse to authoritarianism and undemocratic practices. Gasiorowski and Power (1998) posit that democratic consolidation is a process through which a newly formed democratic regime or government becomes effectively sturdy to the extent that the chances of democratic collapse are highly doubtful. In other words, the continuous entrenchment of democratic norms and values are important ingredients of democratic consolidation. It therefore suggests that a periodic change of government in an atmosphere of participatory democratic system is a symptom of democratic consolidation where the people are the driving force of leadership change and ascendancies. As Diamond (2019) has argued, it is a situation where the people have come to a collective realisation and thus agreed that the best form of government is democracy and they are ready to defend it not minding the challenges that will emerge in the struggle to protect and promote democracy.

Schedler (2002) argues that democratic consolidation goes beyond mere institutionalization and the internalization of democratic tenets and values. According to him, a consolidated democracy has eliminated all anti-democratic elements that serve as obstacles to its sustainability. Those elements identified include election violence; a refusal to participate in an election and the electoral process by any party owing to unfriendly atmospheres and conditions; others include any attempt to control, manipulate, and influence electoral outcomes as well as an infringement on the principles entrenched commonly in most liberal democracies. In Nigeria in particular, most of these maladies hold sway but accentuated by the political class through the prevailing high rate of poverty, economic inequality, weak institutions as well as the pervasive corruption, which continue to jeopardize the quest for democratic consolidation. It is glaring that the political elites are the main drivers of election conflicts in Nigeria with consequential effect on the entire security architecture of the country thereby threatening democratic sustainability.

To Oquaye (2020), democratic consolidation commences with the establishment of a new government following free and fair elections. It is visible however that election is an important event when discussing democratic consolidation. The collapse of a democratic process therefore starts with election that is prone to electoral malpractices in form of rigging and manipulation.

Democratic consolidation is the process by which a new democracy matures, such that it is unlikely to revert to authoritarianism. This process assumes two things; on one hand there is already in existence a system characterized by democratic principles such as periodic election, security of life and property, protection of citizen rights and freedom, constitutional stability as a fulcrum of societal and governmental stability; including opportunities for equality, justice and fair play. On the other hand, it assumes that there is a need to consolidate the base of the existing system of democracy. This implies making firmer, more solid and more resilient the base of the existing democracy (Obah-Akpogohaha, 2013).

Evidently, democratic consolidation is a function of party politics. In other words, the growth of democracy in any country is a direct derivative of the conducive environment created by healthy competitions among political parties. A situation of unhealthy competitions among political parties will not only undermine the electoral process and the constitution but capable of impacting negatively on deepening democracy. Conversely, positive interactions of political parties both on inter and intra party's levels will signal a geometrical growth on democracy. Democracy is a concept that revolves around the will of the people where the minority rights are protected. A negative interaction of political parties approximates politics without the people and could signal a drift towards the enthronement of autocracy.

### **Theoretical Explications**

This study adopted causal-drivers framework of explaining election conflicts in electoral democratic system. The Causal Drivers' Framework as espoused by Sisk (2012) is useful for analyzing electoral violence and underscoring the motivating factors behind several electioneering conflicts with its attendant effects on national security. It construes of election conflicts as being caused by the social and economic factors relating to the interconnectedness of need, greed and creed. Although, Sisk was more particular about the influence of the elites in fueling politically-motivated conflicts, certain underlining factors such as social and politico-economic indices ravaging the elitists' stakes, incentives and expectations after the electoral outcomes cannot be overlooked. This position is well captured by Yusuf (2019) while making reference to the four critical points of analytical discourse namely; the context of democratization or political change in which violence occurs; the political economy of state power and the nature and patterns of political mobilization; the political economy of state capture; and the electoral system, integrity of electoral administration, and effects of violence management efforts such as peace pacts and security-force performance.

The theory fits into the problematique of this paper especially in the context of unraveling the driving forces breeding election conflicts as well as their impacts on national security and democratic consolidation. Even though it is visible that the avaricious political elites are guilty of creating and heightening tension in the system, this theory is particularly useful for capturing the complex mix of undemocratic elements and forces fueling crises in the country. The democratic process of any state can easily collapse when the social, economic and political needs of the citizens could not be reached. As shown in the next section of the paper, the intentional pauperization of the masses occasioned by bad governance, corruption and the sectionalization of the polity along ethnic and religious lines among others by the political elites is identified as a major factor fueling election conflicts in the country.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

This section captures attempts at interrogating some of the factors identified as drivers of election conflicts in Nigeria. The fact remains that an unstable political atmosphere is a threat to national security of the state and is capable of igniting the collapse of the country's democratic process. A complex mix of factors has been identified as the driving force behind every electioneering conflict in Nigeria. Anifowose (1982) has grouped these factors into three categories, namely; relative deprivation, rising expectations and frustration aggression hypotheses, systematic hypotheses and group conflict hypotheses. To him, group conflict hypothesis has been a compelling factor for explaining political violence in the country as a result of a struggle for power among various groups within the society. The heightened tension that ensued between the Igbos and Yorubas in Lagos especially the inciting statements made against each other in the aftermath of the 2023 general elections can be understood from the standpoint of group conflict thesis. The apostles of this assertion draw attention to the differences within the society principally between tribal, racial and religious groups.

Flowing from the foregoing is the position shared by Marison and Stephen (1972) cited in Orhewere and Kur (2003) that cultural pluralism increases the likelihood of conflict between members of communal groups in black African nations and increases the probability of communal and elite instability in those nations. This is mostly true of large, heterogeneous and complex societies such as Nigeria with asymmetric political cleavages and character. This also explains the politically-motivated ethnic and religious conflicts in the country.

### **Interrogating the Drivers of Election Conflicts in Nigeria**

Some of these elements are explored as follow;

i. **Frustration with the Status Quo:** In Nigeria, one of the driving forces of election conflicts which has consequential effect on the national security is the interplay of citizens discontents and disillusionment

with the status quo. This is well-captured by the frustration-aggression theory. Desperation and lack of purpose in life are just a few of the motivating factors for individuals who are fed up with the government policies and developmental programmes to take to the streets and fight back against them. As Albert (2014) has argued, a disappointed youth is inclined to express his anger on society because frustration easily leads to aggression. Hence, one of the potent drivers of election conflicts in Nigeria is frustration on the part of the electorates and the disposition of different factions of the political class regarding who controls the instrument of the state power, particularly the public treasury.

**ii. Integrity Deficits of Election Management Bodies:** Huntington's institutional-functionalist approach provided an explicit narration to the importance of a strong institution in ensuring peaceful periodic elections and successful transition of power in any democracy. All institutions involving election management in general to include Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the case of Nigeria, security agencies, the media, political parties, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the judiciary are among the important institutional players in democratic process. In Nigeria, it is unfortunate that citizens do not trust the state institutions saddled with responsibilities of conducting elections because such bodies have been accused of partiality and partisanship in their operations. In an attempt at raising concerns and express dissatisfaction as to perceived misdemeanor of these institutions, certain political actors have resorted into taking law into their hands, properties are often destroyed, resulting in loss of lives and means of livelihoods with concomitant effect on national security of the state.

**iii. The Sprawling Largesse that comes with Winning Elections:** In Nigeria, an average politician construes of politics as the easiest and fastest means of accumulating wealth rather than service to nation. Hence, politicians have always toe the path of war during elections, not for the interests of their people but because of the sprawling largesse that comes with winning elections. The show of financial muzzle among the politicians is enough to cause serious threat to the already fragile ethno-religious entity like Nigeria. The salaries and emoluments of both the elected and appointed government officials have been gulping the public treasury with attendant effects on the poor infrastructural facilities, economic growth and development, provision of quality education and other necessary duties of the state.

**iv. Godfatherism:** The politics of godfatherism is not new under the Nigerian political atmosphere. Many Nigerian politicians especially the new comers often believe and even seek the assistance of godfathers to sway electoral victory in their favour. Most of these godfathers do offer the sought political assistance based on certain conditions to be fulfilled by the godsons. God-fatherism is seen as the complicated process of strategizing and determining the success of power seekers at any level of electoral contest, which can either be selective or appointive positions, using all the available means (Omotola, 2019). Many a time, godfathers have deployed every arsenal at their disposal to force their will on the political structure, resulting into violence. In related developments, any fallout or disagreement between the "godson" and "godfathers" could also lead to massive realignment and change in loyalty that can affect national security and threaten the growing democratic process before, during and after elections.

**v. Elite Manipulation of Religious and Ethnic Sentiments:** Nigeria's politicians are fond of using the seeds of religion and ethnicity as the political tools to manipulate the masses against one other with the sole aim of winning elections. Since the return to the democratic rule in 1999, most of the elections conducted have been marred by religious and ethnic discords (Yusuf, 2019). Many have lost lives while a greater number has been displaced as a result of election-related conflicts which sometimes create national security challenge.

**vi. Vote Buying and Commercialization of Ballots:** Prior to the introduction of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) into the electioneering process in Nigeria, politicians frequently use the ballot for cash popularly called 'vote-buying' to sway voters to the sides of their preferred candidates. This is often perpetrated on election day during which voters are propped to vote in exchange for cash



rather than candidates of their choice. Such a practice that is capable of causing animosity, disagreement and ultimately conflicts that could undermine the electoral process and as well threaten national security.

vii. **Rigging:** Nigeria's voting process is often plagued with the attempts to rig or actual rigging. Election officials, security personnel, and party officials frequently indulge in this unwholesome practice, usually in exchange for financial benefits. In many instances, outcomes of elections often contradict people's expectations which constitute a potential hotbed for unmitigated conflicts. In all of these, a security burden is placed on the nation which has great implications on the quest for democratic consolidation.

viii. **Role of the Media and the Unregulated Social Media Platforms:** In the current age and time, social media is key to the maintenance of peace and tranquility of any nation. Social media platforms are outlets used to provide information and education. Disintegration sets in when the media is believed to be biased, and the people begin to take the law into their hands. Unregulated social media can become a willing tool in hands of unscrupulous miscreants to foist grave security maladies on the nation, especially after declaration of results of keenly contested and disputed elections.

ix. **Hate Speeches:** Nigerian politicians have an unenviable history of inciting violence during political rallies and campaigns. In the just concluded 2023 general elections, media campaign organizations of the political candidates are used to inciting statements and speeches as a strategy of political propaganda to set supporters against one another. As evidences from so many nations have shown, hate speeches constitute a potent weapon for inciting ethno-religious crises and war.

#### **Pragmatic Election Management Approach: A Neglected Dimension of National Security**

In order to ensure and assure realistic election management to de-escalate national insecurity and consolidate democracy in Nigeria, there are key areas and institutions that must be fully incorporated in the whole process. Of course, election does not make democracy rather democracy makes election possible by returning power back to the citizens who in turn legitimate the power of the state with the utilization of their votes.

As noted earlier, electoral rigging, vote-buying, snatching of ballot boxes, political assassination and the unwanted destruction of lives and properties by political opponents are not unusual in the history of electoral politics in Nigeria. Over the years, national security is often threatened by massive disenchantment and apathy. The electorates that should be involved in the decision-making process and contribute to the entire growth and development of the polity are driven away by the political hostility created by the self-interested and desperate political players bent at arm-twisting the state to do their biddings. The fallout of such scenario is the emergence of illegitimate political leaders which in most cases threaten national cohesion and security. Most disturbing is the problem often encountered by such unpopular leaders occasioned by their inability to mobilize both human and material resources toward actualizing the goal of guaranteeing the greatest happiness of the people and as against the pain.

It is high time the country further invests on the institutions of the state to conducting free, fair and credible elections to avert violence during and after the whole electoral process. As part of the holistic managerial approach to the management of elections in Nigeria, the following are identified to be given prominence;

i. **Tolerant political culture:** One of the ways of nipping election conflicts in the bud is the enthronement of the culture of political tolerance in the country. The political players and the ethnic identities that made up of Nigeria should see themselves as one and embrace the democratic ethos expected of democrats. The exhibition of dictatorial tendencies among the Nigeria's political class is responsible for inordinate urge for election manipulation and violence in the country. The sportsmanship mien to accept election results even when it does not go one's way is a political culture required to building a strong and more

enduring democratic nation. This position is not in any way giving tacit approval for overt election rigging and crude subversion of the electoral process.

ii. **Rekindling of citizens' trust in public institutions:** The time is ripe to put in place confidence-building measures that will rekindle citizens' trust in public institutions especially the electoral body, judiciary and the security agencies. There is no denying the fact that Nigerians lack confidence in our institutions, they prefer to cause chaos and escalate unfettered rumours than to crave support for the self-serving state and pretentious democracy. The institutions too should demonstrative ethical re-orientations in line with the Electoral Act and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended.

iii. **Effective and transparent administration of elections:** Electoral bodies play a prominent role in averting election conflicts. If the electoral bodies live up to the provision of the law, then, there would not be any room for skepticism of the capacity of the body to conduct a rancour-free elections. An effectively administered and transparently conducted election hardly gives room for rancour or suspicion, which invariably limits the propensity for conflicts.

iv. **Giving more attention to internal democracy of political parties:** Political parties are expected to conduct primaries devoid of any discontents and dissatisfaction which ignite conflicts and thereby portend national security challenge. It is usually the case in Nigeria that political parties are confronted with the challenge of organizing and conducting party primaries. Many of the leaders of the political parties are fond of changing the delegates in favour of their own candidates. This has created worry and judiciary is now the last hope of the common man. Many pre-election as well as post-election conflicts in Nigeria find their roots in internal wrangling of political parties.

v. **Effective political education:** The democratic success of any state is dependent on the extent to which the electorates are properly guided and enlightened. This is very imperative and compelling for all the candidates, electoral officers, candidates, political parties and the press to be adequately educated on their roles as to what to do and what not to do. These principles if patriotically upheld by all will further the cause of democratic consolidation and put a stop to the violence associated with elections, including security challenges facing the nation. Sussman (1988) clearly admitted that effective communication to all sectors of the citizenry is thus a principal instrument of economic development and social cohesion.

vi. **Pragmatic economic and social welfare policies:** One of the means of ensuring non-violent democracy and participatory democratic process is the extent to which government consider the welfare of the people as paramount and citizens get to feel the positive of democratic government. This position is well captured by Sussman (1988) that economic development is essential to assure the wellbeing of a society and the sovereignty of the state.

vii. **Ensuring professional conduct of security personnel on election duty:** Nigeria's security agencies are critical to the conduct of election and protection of civil rule. That is why a regime of harmonious civil-military relation cannot be under-estimated. The security apparatus of the state should be deployed to serve the purpose of the people during elections rather than the interest of the ruling party. The men in uniforms should be conscious of the fact that they are instruments of maintaining peace, security and creating conducive atmosphere before, during and after the conduct of elections. It should be noted that indulging in electoral malpractices and compromising of security management while on election duty are anathemas to the electoral democracy.

viii. **Greater participation of the Civil Society Organizations:** Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are integral part of democratic consolidation. Nigeria needs CSOs with clear objective of safeguarding democratic process because it is when democracy is properly entrenched that they can effectively function through citizens-government engagement.

ix. **Realistic election conflict management approach:** The peace committee should be given constitutional recognition by amending the relevant provisions of the 1999 Constitution. Given the dynamism of Nigeria and advisory roles it has played over the years, the National Assembly should incorporate provisions that accord visible roles to the Peace Committee in the prevention and management of post-election conflicts into the country's constitution; this will invariably strengthen the conflict management mechanism and avert national security infractions the nation may likely experience after every election.

x. **Elite Consensus:** Another pragmatic effort at ensuring peaceful management of election in the Nigeria is embedded in the consensus building on the part of the elites with the nationalistic orientation.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This article identified the nexus among election conflict, national security and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It particularly established that periodic election is necessary for democratic survival and that it is through election that people choose their political leaders.

However, election can also serve as the catalyst for conflict and a breach of national security. The persistent electoral conflicts and insecurity such as deaths, destruction of properties as well as mass displacement of people and their livelihood occur when the entire electoral process is manipulated. It is visible anytime election is alleged to have been rigged; national security is often seriously threatened. In essence, Nigeria's experience in democratic elections since 1999 has offered little in terms of good governance and better living standards for the average Nigerians. More often than not, the democratic space has been decimated the inordinate activity of the country's power elite who often resort to winning elections using every means available not minding the grave consequences on the nation's security and democratic development.

Under the current democratic dispensation, high premium is placed on political power which makes individuals and groups seeking political power susceptible to taking the most extreme measures to either win anew or retain power. Politics has been to zero-sum games, where candidates and political parties always feel compelled to win at all cost. This atavistic mindset of Nigerian political players has not only constituted obstacles to economic development but has also continued to stiffen the nation's democratic progress and worsen its insecurity situation.

Moving forward, therefore, certain measures are necessary to be taken to minimize incidences of elections conflicts in Nigeria through the institutionalization of free, fair and transparent elections. The best starting point would be to appoint credible personalities with unblemished record, high integrity and reputation to run the affairs of election management bodies. This is needed to insulate election bodies from the vagaries partisanship for them to be able to serve as unbiased umpires. Measures should be taken to curb excessive monetization of the electoral process to prevent public offices from being mortgaged by fraudulent individuals acting as political merchants. In addition, concrete steps should also be taken to prosecute violators and offenders of electoral laws to serve as deterrent to others. It is obvious that achieving most of these propositions requires continuous constitutional review and electoral reforms. Thus, sustained efforts should be put in place for continuous engagements with relevant stakeholders and newly identified reform measures should be constantly incorporated into the country's electoral process.

Overall, the paper identifies renewed vigour and commitment to a more transparent election management as well as building of elite consensus that is anchored on political tolerance, fairness and unhindered inclusivity in the democratic game as pivotal to averting perennial conflicts associated with the conduct of elections in Nigeria.

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