MORE ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND LESS MILITARIZATION: ENDING THE CYCLES OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA'S 2027 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Electoral Integrity, Militarization, Electoral Violence, Democratic Consolidation

Abstract

Research Problem: *The persistence of electoral violence in Nigeria's electoral process from 2003-2023 has remained one of the greatest threats to conduct of credible elections.*
Methods/Theory: *Qualitative research design was adopted. The data were sourced from documentary secondary sources and they were analysed using thematic analysis. Democratic Consolidation Theory was adopted to explain that democracy becomes stable when citizens accept democratic rules as the legitimate means of acquiring political power instead of violence.*
Results: *This study found inflammatory speeches and mobilization along ethnic/religious lines fuel electoral violence. It reveals that from 2003-2023 over 2000 Nigerians were killed in election-related violence. It further found that Security agents (Army and Police) and non-state actors (political thugs, ex-militants and ethnic/religious armed militias) were complicit in committing electoral violence.*
Conclusion: *This study concludes that more electoral integrity and less militarization of the electoral process will offer the most sustainable pathway for peaceful elections in Nigeria.*
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *This study adds to an integrated evidence-based framework linking militarization and electoral violence in Nigeria; and how electoral integrity can end cycles of electoral violence.*
Recommendations: Avoiding inflammatory speeches, mobilization along ethnic/religious lines and combating partisan deployment of state and

non-state actors in electoral process; INEC should strengthen its internal mechanisms for transparency and accountability; establishment of a special tribunal to prosecute individuals who may like to perpetrate electoral violence.

1.1 Introduction

Election is one of the critical elements of measuring liberal democracy and the extent to which the electoral process produces the exact will of the people is of great importance. Credible elections are ideally, a non-violent competition where several groups of political actors compete with one another to seek voters support when making their choices. However, one of the challenges facing liberal democracies is electoral violence. Electoral violence is a threat to conduct of credible elections both in established and emerging democracies. In many developing democracies, elections often become periods of fear and violence. This has been a thorn in the body of polity that threatens and ended many democracies in Africa. Nigeria represents one of the most prominent examples where electoral contests frequently threaten the political stability of the country.

The Fourth Republic especially from 2003, virtually every electoral cycle has witnessed varying degrees of election-related violence. Igbuzor (2011) found that elections in Nigeria are constant tales of violence, fraud and bad blood. Hounkpe and Fall (2011) pointed out that some actors resort to certain actions either in the form of violence on other actors or in the form of fraudulent behavior, thereby provoking conflicts. Chikwem (2012) asserts that in Nigeria, politics is regarded as warfare and elections as battles and Abbass (2017) infers that rather than serve as a means and a process of exercising legitimate political rights; elections in Nigeria have since independence, turned out to be a serious political liability; causing serious political turmoil and threatening the survival of corporate Nigeria. Omotola and Oyewole (2023) pointed out that electoral violence persists because political actors perceive elections as 'winner-takes-all' contests.

The persistence of electoral violence in Nigeria's electoral process from 2003-2023 has remained one of the greatest threats to political stability and conduct of credible elections. As Nigeria prepares for the 2027 general elections, there are concerns over inflammatory speeches, political, ethnic and religious polarization that could lead to electoral violence. The killings of 29 people in 73 election-related violent incidents in the concluded 2026 Osun State off cycle gubernatorial election is a pointer that electoral violence may likely occur in 2027 general elections.

Studies such as Omotola and Oyewole (2023), Oyedokun and Akinwumi (2019), and Ezeibe et al (2026) have examined electoral violence and militarization in Nigeria. However, they have not developed an integrated evidence-based documentary framework that specifically examines trends of electoral violence in Nigeria and how electoral integrity can reduce electoral violence. This study therefore, assesses the trends of electoral violence and militarization in Nigeria's electoral process and proposes how electoral integrity and demilitarization can end electoral violence.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Electoral Violence

Birch and Muchlinski (2018) conceptualise electoral violence as coercive force directed towards electoral actors and/or objects within the context of electoral competition. Onimisi

and Tinuola (2019) refer electoral violence as a form of political violence exhibited before, during and after election which often take the nature of political motivated kidnapping, killing, ballot box snatching, armed attacks on perceived opponent and the officers of electoral umpire. Harry and Kalagbor (2021) define electoral violence as any threat of attack or actual attack meted out against persons or groups of persons in relation to an election, before, during and after the election.

These studies (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018; Onimisi & Tinuola, 2019; Harry and Kalagbor, 2021) only conceptualised electoral violence in relationship to act exhibited on others without involving the actors and the specific victims. This study therefore, conceptualises electoral violence as any act of infringement carried out by security agents (Army and Police) and non-state actors (political thugs, ex-militants and ethnic/religious armed militias) on candidates, supporters, voters, election personnel, party agents and election observers with intend to inflict injury and cause death during pre-election, Election Day and post-election activities.

2.1.2 Electoral Integrity

Modise (2025) conceptualises electoral integrity in terms of adherence to international norms and standards governing election management. James and Garnett (2026) refer electoral integrity from a human-empowerment perspective, arguing that elections should provide citizens with political voice, empower ordinary citizens in relation to powerful political actors, and contribute to political equality. Garnett and James (2021) posit that electoral integrity is fundamental to the delivery of democracy and that assessing elections requires attention to the actual conduct and administration of elections.

Norris (2014) associated electoral integrity with the credibility and legitimacy of elections, suggesting that failures in electoral processes can generate distrust and political conflict. This study therefore, conceptualizes electoral integrity as an election conduct that strictly adhere to electoral laws devoid of partisan involvement of state and non-state actors that intimidate, coerce, harass, attack and cause injury or death of citizens in electoral process.

2.1.3 Militarization

Richard (2009) conceptualizes militarization as a process in which "a society's institutions, policies, behaviors, thought, and values are devoted to military power and shaped by war". Akanibo and Duson (2021) sees militarization as where an electoral process becomes dependent on or subordinate to the military, or military in its attributes or practices, such electoral process is militarized and Bayer et al (2023) militarization as a matter of degree. The degree of militarization of state-soldier-society relations in a nation is a function of the extent to which the military takes on different roles and missions, and the extent to which the various resources of a society are placed in the hands of the military. These studies conceptualized militarization in regard to the broad working of the Armed Forces in a given State. However, this study conceptualises militarization as an act of excessive involvement of state actors (Army and Police) and non-state actors (political thugs and ethnic/religious militias) to intimidate, disrupt, attack and suppress citizens, opponents, party agents, election personnel, election observers and voters to gain undue electoral advantage.

2.1.4 Empirical Studies

Empirical studies show a link between electoral violence and militarization in Nigeria. Mezieobi et al (2017) examined the consequences of political election violence on democratic social order in Nigeria and found ethnicity and religion, manipulation of election results, massive electoral rigging, poverty and political thuggery as major stimulants of

political election violence. Ola (2018) studied electoral violence and arms proliferation in Nigeria. The research found a significant relationship between electoral violence and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons that politicians were reported to arm youths and political thugs during elections, thereby increasing insecurity even after elections.

Oyedokun and Akinwumi (2019) identify violence as a significant feature of Nigeria's electoral process, manifesting in forms such as ballot-box snatching, kidnapping and the assassination of political candidates. Onuoha et al (2020) found that the militarization of Nigeria's 2019 general elections heightened voter apathy, contributed to human-rights violations, and disrupted the electoral process. Ali and Ali (2022) examined the role of security agencies in managing electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. They found that, although security agencies play important roles in maintaining law and order, protecting electoral materials and preventing violence, their involvement in elections has also been associated with allegations of partisanship, intimidation, harassment of voters and opposition parties.

Oyewole et al (2023) studied political violence and democratic consolidation during the 2019 and 2023 elections and found that ethnic and religious sentiments significantly fueled violence in the electoral process. They argued that political elites manipulate identity politics to mobilize supporters for violent activities. Mbanusi and Osuagwu (2024) found that electoral violence constitutes a major impediment to democratic development and democratic consolidation in Nigeria, as recurrent electoral violence undermines the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. Oshinfowokan (2024) investigated electoral violence during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The study identified intense political competition, ethnic and religious mobilization, and weak institutional frameworks as major factors responsible for violence during the elections.

Ariyo and Akomolafe (2025) observed that patronage politics and elite competition have contributed significantly to political violence and democratic fragility in Nigeria. They pointed out that politicians frequently mobilize ethnic militias and armed youths to secure electoral advantages. Mbah et al (2025) examined the role of selected security agencies - the Nigeria Police Force, Military, and Civil Defence Corps - in securing the 2023 presidential elections in Oyo State. They found that while the deployment of multiple security agencies mitigated large-scale violence and ensured relative order, issues of partisan conduct, voter intimidation, and excessive militarization undermined public confidence in the electoral process.

Klaus and Turnbull (2025) introduced the concept of the 'joint production of election violence' arguing that election violence is often produced through collaboration between political elites and ordinary citizens. The study found that politicians mobilize unemployed youths and political thugs to intimidate opponents and manipulate electoral outcomes. Ezeibe et al (2026) examined the relationship between the militarization of Nigeria's electoral process and voter turnout in off-cycle governorship elections. They found that excessive security deployment was associated with declining voter turnout and that militarized electoral environments disproportionately benefited incumbents, ruling parties and political cronies while constraining opposition actors and discouraging voter participation.

Despite extensive literature on electoral violence in Nigeria. These existing studies focus on consequences of political election violence on democratic social order; electoral violence and arms proliferation; violence as a significant feature of Nigeria's electoral process; role of security agencies; political

violence and democratic consolidation; patronage politics and elite competition; joint production of election violence and relationship between the militarization of Nigeria's electoral process. They have not provided an integrated evidence-based framework linking electoral violence and militarization and how electoral integrity can end cycles of electoral violence. This study therefore, filled this gap by assessing trends of electoral violence and militarization in Nigeria's electoral process and proposes how electoral integrity and demilitarization can end electoral violence in 2027 elections.

3.1 Materials and Methods

This study adopted qualitative research design by relying on secondary documentary sources. The documents were sourced through an internet search engine and review of library archives focusing on INEC reports, election observer reports, Newspaper databases, and academic literature on electoral violence from 2003-2023. The data generated were analyzed using thematic analysis to document the trends of electoral violence in Nigeria from 2003-2023 as can be seen in table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1 Documentary Sources Checklist

S/No	Nature of Data	Sources	Number of Sources	Contributions to Analysis
1.	Election Observers Reports	EU EOM (2003, 2015 & 2023), NDI (2012), International Republican Institute (2014), ICG (2014), Nigeria Situation Room Reports (2019), KDI (2023)	6	Provided independent documentation of electoral violence
2.	National Dailies (Newspapers)	Daily Trust, Sunday Trust, HumAngle, This Day, Vanguard	8	Provided inflammatory speeches and contemporary accounts of electoral violence.
3.	Human Rights Reports	Human Rights Watch (2007)	1	Provided human rights violations related to electoral violence
4.	Academic Literature	Linz and Stepan (1996), Schedler (1998), Okorie (2003), Umaru (2003), Daniel (2015), Söderberg and Bjarnesen (2018), Omotola and Oyewole (2023), Ezeibe et al. (2026), Birch and Muchlinski (2018), Ali and Ali (2022), Oyewole et al (2023); Klaus and Turnbull (2025); Ezeibe et al (2026)	13	Provided theoretical and empirical context for the study

Source: Compiled Field Work, 2026

Table 3.1 above presented the nature and sources of data used in this study. However, despite the rich data from the Election Observers Reports, National Dailies (Newspapers) and Human Rights Reports, reliance on them provided a potential bias and incomplete data regarding electoral violence and militarization in Nigeria's election process. Nevertheless, academic literature were used to complement them.

4.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Democratic Consolidation Theory as a theoretical framework to explain the relationship between electoral integrity, militarization and electoral violence in Nigeria. The proponents of this theory include: Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan, Adam Przeworski, Larry Diamond, Lipset Seymour Martin, da Guillermo O'Donnell, Samuel Huntington, Valenzuela J. Samuel among others. Democratic Consolidation originated during the 'third wave' of global democratization.

4.1.1 Assumptions of Democratic Consolidation Theory

Linz and Stepan (1996) explain that a consolidated democracy is one in which democratic procedures become the "only game in town," meaning that political actors accept elections, constitutional rules and peaceful alternation of power as the legitimate means of acquiring and exercising political authority. Schedler (1998) rightly stated that originally, democratic consolidation was meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual reverse waves.

He explains further that this original mission of rendering democracy "the only game in town", added countless other tasks such as 'problems of democratic consolidation' like popular legitimation, diffusion of democratic values, neutralization of antisystem actors, civilian supremacy over the military, elimination of authoritarian enclaves, party building, organization of functional interests, stabilization of electoral rules, routinisation of politics, decentralization of state power, introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, judicial reform, alleviation of poverty, and economic stabilization (Schedler, 1998).

4.1.2 Application of Democratic Consolidation Theory

Democratic Consolidation Theory has been widely used to analyse democratic transitions and stability. However, this study applies it to explain the role of electoral integrity and demilitarization in ending cycles of electoral violence. It demonstrates how electoral integrity and reduction of partisan deployment of state actors (Army and Police) and non-state actors (political thugs, ex-militants and ethnic/religious armed militias) in election process can strengthen democratic consolidation by reducing incentives for violence. This theory provides an integrated evidence-based framework linking electoral integrity and demilitarization in ending electoral violence.

4.1.3 Critique: Despite this contribution, Democratic Consolidation Theory is too linear in undermining the role of informal institutions and political culture of a country like Nigeria where political contests are intense and mobilisation along regional, ethnic and religious lines are order of the day.

4.1.4 Theoretical Contribution: In spite these limitations, Democratic Consolidation Theory addresses how electoral violence and partisan deployment of state and non-state actors undermine electoral integrity in Nigeria. This study therefore, contributes by demonstrating that electoral violence and militarization affect democratic consolidation while electoral integrity reduces electoral violence and militarization that fuels it.

5.1 Results and Presentation of Data

5.1.1 Role inflammatory speeches in Fueling Violence

Existence literature such as Okorie (2003), Ali and Ali (2022); Ola (2018); Oyewole et al

(2023); Klaus and Turnbull (2025); Ezeibe et al (2026) linked electoral violence to politicians deploying state and non-state actors in Nigeria's election process. Okorie (2003) specifically explains that in 2003 general elections, politicians did everything possible to ensure success including kidnapping and assassination of opponents.

Inflammatory speeches by politicians during campaigns and refusal to accept defeat fueled some of the electoral violence experienced in Nigeria's electoral process from 2003-2023. For instance, in the build up to 2007 elections, Obasanjo at a PDP meeting in Ogun State declared that, "This election is a do or die affair for me and the PDP. This election is a matter of life and death for the PDP and Nigeria" (Bello, 2007). In 2011 elections, Junaidu Mohammed, National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians remark that "it must be a Northerner or no Nigeria … if Goodluck Jonathan wins the PDP's endorsement to contest the 2011 presidential election, there would be violence (Kabir & Dahiru, 2022). The post-election violence that erupted following the announcement of President Goodluck Jonathan in some Northern States can be linked to it and refusal of the losers to accept the election outcome.

In the build up to the 2015 elections, General Muhammadu Buhari threatened that if he got rigged out of the poll, 'dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood' and Bola Ahmed Tinubu threatened violence if their party did not win the presidency and if they did not see the election being free or fair. He said "it is going to be rigged and roast; we are prepared not to go to court but to drive them out" (ICG, 2014, p.7). On part of the PDP, President Jonathan's supporters also threatened violence if Jonathan did not win the election. The president's wife, Dame Patience Jonathan called for people to stone anyone that said 'change' referring to the APC (Frank-Collins, 2015, p.11). Mujahid Asari-Dokubo, a former militant leader and founder of the Niger Delta Peoples Salvation Front (NDPSF), threatened violence if Jonathan was not re-elected. He warned that "2015 is more than do-or-die. It is our very survival that is being challenged, and we must tell them: You are a man and I am a man, we are going to meet at the battlefield" (ICG, 2014, p.5). He also said "the day Jonathan is no longer the president; all of us who are on sabbatical will come back. There will be no peace not only in the Niger-Delta. If they say it is an empty boast let them wait and see" (Azu, 2013, p.1). Boyloaf issued a statement that "Jonathan's victory in the election is not negotiable" (Eze, 2015, p.4). He said, "For every Goliath God created a David. For every Pharaoh, there is a Moses. We are going to war. Every one of you should go and fortify yourself; keep grudges and sentiments apart; we are going to match them bumper to bumper" (Eze, 2015, p.4).

At the States level, the former Katsina State Governor, Barrister Shehu Shema told his audience not to worry about his opponents, whom he referred to as 'cockroaches' and asked his supporters to 'crush them' (Aminu, 2014, p.5). In the same manner, former Akwa Ibom State Governor, Godwill Akpabio, rhetorically echoed that, "those who want to take power through the back door will die. They will die! And the PDP will continue" (Maduekwe, 2014, p.16). In Sokoto State, the former Governor, Alhaji Attahiru Bafarawa categorically said, "I don't know why they are afraid of rigging when they know too well that they are products of the same mechanism. Let me tell them, that we will use force, rigging and our ballot papers to send them away… Wamakko's time is up; we will take over the State by hook or crook" (Auwal, 2015, p.11).

In 2019 elections, President Muhammadu Buhari's statement that persons who snatch ballot boxes risk paying with their lives was a political misstep. Instead of arrest and

prosecution in the Court of law, the Army used excessive lethal force especially in Rivers State. In 2023 elections, Kano State APC Chairman, Abdullahi Abbas's inflammatory remark in the presence of thousands of political supporters including some thugs brandishing weapons and yelling party slogans that his party must win the 2023 election "by hook or crook." The majority leader of the House of Representatives, Alhassan Ado Doguwa's remark that "if we catch you voting for any other party apart from APC, we will beat you to pulp" and the Kano State New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) Chairman, Umar Haruna Doguwa's remark that his party members are prepared to respond to violence with violence (Kabir & Dahiru, 2022) fueled some of the violence and death witnessed in Kano State.

The use of provocative inflammatory speeches have also emerged as a concern in the build-up to 2027 elections. For example, the Yobe State Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Muhammad Gadaka, reportedly urged women at a campaign rally in Nangere to divorce husbands who prevented them from voting for the APC, even offering to pay the bride price of women who left their marriages for that reason. Another inflammatory warning speech by Ebonyi State Governor, His Excellency, Francis Nwifuru that opposition parties would 'see real threat at the right time' and 'alleged directive to newly inaugurated local government chairmen to deal with opposition parties mercilessly'. Furthermore, the inflammatory remarks by Kuje Area Council Chairman, Hon. Danjuma Shekwolo threatening residents of his Area Council to 'leave if they would not vote for the APC' and Borno State Commissioner for Youth and Sports Development, Hon. Sainna Buba that, 'whoever shows us a finger, we are ready to cut off his fingers' and 'those who refuse to support the APC would be flogged' are concerns are capable of escalating electoral violence in 2027 elections.

5.1.2 Trends in Electoral Violence from 2003-2023

Electoral violence has been a recurrent phenomenon in Nigeria's electoral process. Reports on 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections showed that Nigerians were killed during pre-election, Election Day and post-election activities as can be seen in table 5.1.2 below:

Table 5.1.2: Trends in Electoral Violence from 2003-2023

S/No	Election Year	Number of Victims	Perpetrators of Violence	Sources
1.	2003 elections	An estimated of 105 election-related deaths were recorded.	Political thugs and ethnic non-state actors	EU EOM (2003)
2.	2007 elections	Approximately 300 people were reportedly killed in election-related violence nationwide	Political thugs and security agents	Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2019)
3.	2011 elections	Post-election violence after the presidential election led to the deaths of more than 800 persons, while about 65,000 people were displaced, especially in Northern Nigeria	Political thugs, ethno-religious non-state actors	International Republican Institute (2014)
4.	2015 elections	An estimated of 114 election-related violent events occurred with more than	Political thugs and armed non-	EU EOM (2015)

		157 persons killed	state actors	
5.	2019 elections	At least 626 people were killed during the period from the official start of campaigning in October 2018 until the final election in March 2019	State actors (Army and Police), political thugs	Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2019)
6.	2023 elections	An estimated records of 238 violence related cases and a total deaths of 109	Political thugs, state and non-state actors	Kimpact Development Initiative (2023)

Table 5.1.2 shows the trends of electoral violence from 2003-2023 in which more than 2000 Nigerians were killed. The conduct of the Fourth Republic elections from 2003-2023 fall short of credible elections because of thuggery, intimidation and coercion of opponents, voters, election personnel and innocent citizens. Politicians, security agencies, political thugs, ex-militants and ethnic/religious armed militias were complicit in committing electoral violence. The widespread incidences of electoral violence constituted threats to conduct of credible elections. Some of the high profile victims of election-related violence include: Funsho Williams (Lagos State), Harry Marshall (Abuja), Ayo Daramola, Tunde Omojola, Kehinde Fasuba (Ekiti State), Bola Ige (Ogun State), Dipo Dina (Ogun State), Samuel Doro (Plateau State), Ugonna Omerereonye (Imo State), Clever Orukwowo (Rivers State),Timothy Ageba Utta (Benue State), Chief Lawson Onokpas (Delta State) among others.

5.1.3 Militarization of Electoral Election

Security agents are vital instruments in election process. Election managers, candidates and voters must be guaranteed freedom and safety before participating in democratic elections. However, their role in Nigeria's election process has been questioned. Umaru (2003) posits that Nigeria's elections have witnessed the use of the police and security operatives to terrorise opponents and rival party agents. The police and the army allow themselves to be used to subdue political opponents provided money is involved not minding the oath of office taken by them. Daniel (2015) found that these officers were used in harassing and killing innocent, harmless and defenseless citizens as well as suppression and intimidation of media houses that were not in their support. Söderberg and Bjarnesen's (2018) show how electoral violence in Africa can emerge through interactions between political elites and local actors, including ex-combatants, youth groups, militant non-state actors and other local networks. Turnbull (2021) opine that political incumbents may rely on non-state armed groups, including ethnic militias, gangs, criminal organisations and paramilitary groups, to organize electoral violence.

Security agents and political thugs are usually deployed, hired, maintained and equipped by politicians to subvert the electoral process. EU EOM (2003) report on 2003 elections showed that during all election days, political thugs were used to intimidate voters and/or INEC officials. In 2007 elections, HRW (2007) gangs whose members are openly recruited, financed and sometimes armed by public officials, politicians and party officials or their representatives most often carry out electoral violence in Nigeria.

In 2011 elections, NDI (2012) reported that incidents of violence steadily increased in the lead-up to Election Day, with injuries and deaths resulting from clashes among party supporters, between party supporters and security services, and against candidates. In 2015 elections, EU EOM (2015) reported that both the PDP and the APC were accused of deploying thugs to intimidate opponents and

attack party rallies, convoys, members and offices. In 2019 elections, the military's response that they would obey the President Mohammadu Buhari's instruction to deal ruthlessly with ballot box snatchers fueled the killings experienced in Rivers State and in the entire South-South region. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2019) reported that violence was perpetrated by state actors, the Army and the Police in Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Benue, Delta, Kwara, Lagos, Plateau and Rivers States.

In 2023 elections, EU EOM (2023) reported assassination attempts and killings increased closer to the polls, creating a particularly insecure environment in the southern states. In several northern states, systematic attacks by political thugs on rallies and political opponents was observed. Use of violence obstructed the campaign, disturbed the elections, and suppressed voter participation. Vanguard (2023) report many observers have condemned the February 25th Presidential/National Assembly Elections and the March 18th Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections following the widespread violence and electoral irregularities that accompanied the elections. In fact, some described it as the worst in the history of electoral process in Nigeria. Youth political thugs like Yan Kalare (Gombe State), Sara Suka (Bauchi State), Ecomog (Borno State), Yan Daukan Amarya, Yan Daba (Kano State), Bani Israila (Taraba State) etc are recruited to aid perpetrating violence and rigging of elections. These groups have used violence to intimidate, coerce and kill citizens from 2003-2023 in Nigeria.

5.1.4 The link between Electoral Integrity and reduced Violence

Ending cycles of electoral violence in requires conducting more democratic elections with electoral integrity and less militarization of the electoral process. Omotola and Oyewole (2023) found that transparent electoral governance and efficient management of off-cycle elections contributed to relatively lower levels of violence in some Nigerian States. Credible elections can reduce political tensions while fraudulent elections can provoke violence, protests, and political instability. Inflammatory speeches before and during campaigns violate principles of fair competition and fuel electoral violence. INEC should exercise its civic duties without bias, the political actors should respect the electoral rules, and security agencies should remain neutral while none state-actors should be discouraged participating in election process.

6.1 Discussion of Findings

This study shows that inflammatory speeches and mobilization along ethnic and religious frontlines fueled electoral violence. Over 2000 Nigerians were killed in related-election violence from 2003-2023 and politicians, and security agents (Army and Police) and non-state actors (political thugs, ex-militants and ethnic/religious armed militias) were complicit in perpetrating electoral violence. The conduct of the Fourth Republic elections from 2003-2023 fall short of credible elections due to thuggery, intimidation and coercion in disregard of Nigeria's existing electoral laws and guidelines.

The finding that over 2000 Nigerians were killed in electoral violence from 2003-2023 supports the argument that democratic consolidation in Nigeria remains incomplete, as political actors continue to resort to use of violence rather than accepting democratic rules. The finding shows that excessive deployment and partisan involvement of security agents and non-state actors in electoral process transform elections into security-oriented activities that undermine democratic consolidation. This study agrees with Onuoha et al (2020) that militarization of

Nigeria's 2019 general elections contributed to human-rights violations, and disrupted electoral process and Mbanusi and Osuagwu (2024) who found that electoral violence constitutes a major impediment to democratic development and democratic consolidation in Nigeria, as recurrent electoral violence undermines the conduct of free, fair and credible elections.

The historical records of election-related deaths from 2003-2023 point to the direction that if politicians, security agents and political thugs continued with these violent approaches, there is no doubt the 2027 general elections will add to the statistical number of election related-deaths in Nigeria. Therefore, conducting democratic credible election depends on reduction of excessive involvement of partisan security agents and non-use of political thugs, ex-militants and ethnic/religious armed militias in the electoral process.

Avoiding inflammatory speeches, mobilization along ethnic and religious lines and combating partisan deployment of security agents and non-state actors in electoral process will end electoral violence. The more electoral integrity and less militarization of the electoral process will offer the most sustainable pathway for peaceful elections in Nigeria.

7.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

Election violence and militarization remain major threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The excessive involvement of security agencies and non-state actors using force and coercion instead of democratic civil process have contributed to recurring electoral violence in Nigeria. This article argues that more democratic elections and less militarization of electoral process can significantly reduce electoral violence during 2027 elections. It demonstrates that electoral violence in Nigeria is closely linked to militarization of electoral processes and excessive partisan deployment of state and non-state actors during elections led to voter intimidation and coercion thereby causing injury and deaths of citizens. This study recommended the following:

i) Enhance electoral integrity: INEC should strengthen its internal mechanisms for transparency and accountability, including the timely publication of results, the prosecution of electoral offenders, and the effective use of technology to prevent manipulation.

ii) Reduce militarization: The government should develop clear guidelines for the deployment of security agencies during elections, limiting their role to the protection of electoral materials and personnel, and ensuring they operate under civilian oversight. The non-state actors should be banned to play any role during elections in Nigeria.

iii) Prosecute perpetrators of electoral violence: The government should establish a special tribunal to prosecute individuals and groups responsible for electoral violence, including political thugs and complicit security agents.

iv) Promote issue-based campaigns: The National Peace Committee should mandate political parties and candidates to sign and respect peace accords at national and state levels, and to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and ethnic/religious mobilization.

v) Strengthen democratic institutions: The government should invest in civic education and voter education to promote a culture of peaceful political participation and respect for democratic rules.

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