

# **Electoral Violence and 2015 General Elections in Nigeria: A Focus on the Ramifications of Political Developments in Ebonyi State**

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## **Abstract**

The phenomenon of electoral violence has been recognized as one of the major challenges confronting Nigerian democracy. These challenges, indeed, have become disturbing notoriety to Nigerian government and humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. What seems to be more worrisome is the staggering posture it has assumed in recent times. The phenomenon has continued to be pervasive to the extent that it is utopian to speak or contemplate of a nation, which was enveloped for many decades by the military. The extent of its pervasiveness as demonstrated in the 2015 general elections aroused the interest and focus of this paper. Essentially, the concomitant effect of the electoral violence is that Nigeria's democracy is still being questioned and even threatened 100 years after unification and 54 years after independence. Against this back group, the aim of this paper therefore, is to delve into the dimensions, forms, nature and character of electoral violence in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria with particular attention to Ebonyi state, highlighting and assessing the ramifications of political development and its attendant consequences in Nigerian democracy. In doing this, a critical examination of the forms and postures of electoral violence in Ebonyi State becomes imperative. This session is therefore, designed and tailored towards a panoramic and critical analysis of electoral violence in the 2015 general elections with focus on Ebonyi State.

**Keywords:** Electoral violence, election, Political Development, Democracy, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the developing democracies of the world especially Nigeria, electoral violence is not only glorified and expressed by desperate politicians but also has characterized the Nigerian state to the extent that the entire citizenry are held to ransom by the gladiators. The competitive nature of election naturally creates tension in underdeveloped politics. Nigerian electoral process had severally manifested so much violence as a corollary of our level of political maturity in the democratic game of politics (Elaigwu, 2006). To a large extent, the politicians in Nigeria have over the years become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power; more reckless and greedy in the use and abuse of power; and more intolerant to opposition, criticism and efforts at replacing them. Arising from this flagrant desperation of politicians, electoral violence in Nigeria has tremendously improved in sophistry (Okafor, 2015). Each time Nigerians approached elections, they had always been greeted with anxiety and trepidation about what was in stock for the citizens of Nigeria and for the country (Jega, 2006). For Nwobashi (2015), electoral violence has historically been the trade marks of Nigeria's election. This stems from the fact that Nigerian politics in general, has been enveloped by conflicts, seems to be the key norm in our electoral process.

Apparently, the conflicts in Nigeria's electoral process have continually increased in intensity, complexity and dimensions. Far from the above, Alemika (2011) opined that Nigeria electoral and governance system largely rests on logic and practices of organized criminal enterprises. Essentially, electoral violence in Nigeria has increased in number of incidences, in magnitude, complexity, and consequences.

Against this backdrop, this paper set out to investigate and unravel the degree of electoral violence and 2015 general elections in Nigeria with special attention on the ramifications of political developments in Ebonyi State. In doing this, the paper is divided into four sections. Section one captures the general introduction, section two dealt with the delineation of concepts and causes of electoral violence. Section three ventured into manifestations of electoral violence in Ebonyi State during the 2015 general election while section four rapped it up with policy alternatives and conclusion.

## **DELINEATION OF CONCEPTS**

### **Election**

At first glance, election as a concept would seem to be a term everybody understands. But the concept has proved to be both complex and dynamic, continuing to be interpreted and defined in a multiplicity of ways. However, election is a mechanism by which people are elected into offices. It is the procedure through which people are voted into power to represent the majority in a democratic milieu. Essentially, election constitutes the strategic might to and of the democratic process; hence, the widely held view that election is a major midwife of the democratic process (Nkwede, 2014). In a more amenable manner, Cohen (1983) conceptualized election as the formal process by which the electorate selects officials and determines the issues submitted to it. It is quite

obvious that elections are the means by which a wider body of persons chooses a smaller group of representatives to undertake specified task; and that elections can take place in a wide variety of organizations, both formal and informal as well as governmental (Udu, Nkwede and Ezekwe, 2015). Our concerns here are those elections by which representatives are chosen to occupy those governmental positions or offices that may be designated as elective. In this context election therefore, has become the most acceptable method by which the citizens of an ever-increasing number of political system choose their rulers (Ayeni-Akeke 2008). In its objective sense, there can never be a democracy without election. Consequently, Huntington (1965:661) maintained that: “a political system is democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote.” Corroborating the above, Nwolise (2007:155) posits that “election is a process of electing the officers or representations of organizations, parties or groups by vote of its qualified members.”

From this standpoint, it can be seen that election is very important in a political process simply because without the process of election, there would be the struggle for power which could either be in form of coup d’etat or radical change of government. In a nutshell, elections are universally a means of choosing representatives in a political system.

### **Violence**

Violence as a social science concept and as a phenomenon suffers from a surfeit of meanings (Rasheeduddin, 1981). There is no correct definition of violence nor is there any commonly accepted operational definition among social scientists. What seems prevalent is plethora of definitions that are largely commotional and propagandist in nature. However, attempt would be made to define violence in the context of this paper.

Violence is seen as force exercised with unnecessary intensity, unpredictability or unusual destructiveness. Violence per se, exists in societies where there are deliberate and sustained conditions in which people live below subsistence level.

Dunn (1972), Galtung (1969, and Camara (1970) have noted that injustice where it occurs is a form of violence and it can and must be proclaimed that it constitutes everywhere the leading form of violence. For Cohen (1961:42) violence is promoted by denial of democratic values. According to him,

*Violence and suffering are critical in a democratic society, in heightening anti-patty for violations of democratic values and in heightening sympathy for the victims of such violations.*

Violence occurs when any group in a political system oversteps into the constitutional bounds of another to the extent that some other groups experience some degree of constraints (Nkwede and Nwobashi, 2010). In this dimension violence is a force with unnecessary intensity, unpredictability, and complexity. In its typical and simplest form, violence is an eruption of pent-up passion (Galabe, 2009). This is because, when a person or group of people has been denied over a period of time, what he feels are his legitimate rights, when he is continuously burdened with feelings of impotence which corrode any remaining self-esteem; violence is the predictable end result.

Violence in this context can safely be defined as an explosion of the drive to destroy that which is interpreted as the barrier to one’s self-esteem, movement and growth. This desire to destroy may inexorably be completely taken over from the person that any object that gets in the way is destroyed. The person becomes so violent and strikes out blindly, destroying those for whom he cares and even himself in the process. Violence cuts across many dimensions of human existence and human activities such as political, physiological, social, economic, racial, cultural and religious. However our major concern in this study is electoral violence.

### **Electoral Violence**

Many scholars have made attempt to conceptualize electoral violence depending on their perceptions and orientations. However some of these etymological perceptions can be recapitulated to enable us put our bearing straight.

Fischer (2002) sees electoral violence as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced “protection,” blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination. Contributing, Igbuzor (2010) views electoral violence as:

*any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any*

*person connected with electoral processes.*

More so, the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES, 2011) conceptualized election-related violence as:

*any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at any person or property involved in the election process, or at disrupting any part electoral or political process during the election period.*

The above definition according to Aniekwe and Kushie (2011) captures the essence and stages of electoral violence as well as the act the make-up of electoral violence. The definition reveals the deeper nature of electoral violence and makes it easier for one not to continue to think that electoral violence is much more than that Election Day violence or overt manifestation of violence during election period.

Conventionally, election violence involves political parties, their supporters, journalists, agents of government, election administrators, and the general population, and includes threats, assault, murder, destruction of property, and physical or psychological harm (IFES, 2011, Fischer, 2002). A radical departure was taken by Hibbs (1973) when he looked at electoral violence as involving specific victim(s), perpetrator(s) and occurs within a time frame and location. Implicitly, electoral violence comes with motive(s) and the victim can be people, places, things or data. This suggests that electoral violence cuts across different segments of election commencing from the registration period to post election period. Nwolise (2007) defined electoral violence as all forms of organized acts or threats physical, psychological and structural, aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying or otherwise influencing an electoral process. For him, three dimensions of electoral violence exists viz; physical, psychological, and structural.

Essentially, Fischer (2002) summarized four descriptive categories of conflict and violence that emerge, suggesting a variety of motives, perpetrators, and victims which includes the following;

- i. Disgruntled voters against the state arising from perceived unfairness in the election process.
- ii. The state in conflict with voters who challenges election result or hegemony of the state.
- iii. Political rivals in conflict with each other in the quest to attain power and;
- iv. A combination of two or more of the above categories.

## **THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT OF THE STUDY**

The paper employed systems theory as its framework of analysis. Systems theory has its roots from the classical works of David Easton (1965). Systems theory is primarily concerned with the identification of behavioural reality in the political process. It tries to explain the general problems common to all political systems and the condition under which political systems as systems survive over long periods of time. David Easton's primary concern is the basic process through which a political system regardless of its generic or specified type is able to persist as a system of behaviour in a world either of stability or challenge.

Apparently, the systems analysis is built upon the notion of political life as a boundary maintaining set of interaction embodied in and surrounded by other social systems to the influence of which it is constantly exposed to. In other words, it is helpful to interpret political phenomena as consisting of an open system that must go with the problems generated by its exposure to the influences from these environmental systems.

According to Easton (1965), a political system is an activity in which input from the environment are converted into output through the authoritative allocation of values. For Easton, there are four (4) main processes involved in a typical political system via: the input process, output process, the conversion and the feedback processes. Thus, the theory is germane in the analysis of electoral violence and 2015 general elections in Nigeria, especially when a system has identifiable boundaries distinguishing it from the macrocosm within which it operates.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Content analytical approach was utilized in the paper. Data were collected from documentary sources, direct observation, media commentaries and from scholarly inputs on electoral violence in Nigeria.

## **DIFFERENT STAGES OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE**

Electoral violence emerges at different stages in the election process in the following order;

**Pre-Election Period:** Pre-Election violence is witnessed during registration period and can lead to massive disenfranchisement of voters due to psychological fear. For Aniekwe and Kushie (2011), this can in turn threaten the very target of achieving free and fair election in any political system. Observed irregularities in voters register, blurred, identity, and poor technical quality might lead to void registration and subsequently denials of voting right. This according to Fischer (2002) not only disenfranchised the voters but is also a trigger to bigger scale violence on the election day.

### **Campaign Period:**

Campaign period is a very delicate and important stage with high degree of electoral violence. This is because, conflict may occur during campaigns, political meeting and rallies, either inter or intra party conflict. In Nigerian democratic environment, the deployment of thugs to attack opponents is highly witnessed at this period with the sole aim of intimidating opponents and sending psychological fear to potential voters.

### **Election day violence result conflict.**

Election day violence includes burning of election offices and material including ballot boxes and papers, intimidation of voters, snatching of ballot boxes, rigging, and diversion of election materials. In developed democracies with contingency plans, alternative means of voting might readily be made available but in a developing democracy like Nigeria, there is already a problem.

### **Post Election Result Conflict**

Post result violence might occur where the judiciary is not leaving to its expectation. Of course, it might lead to loss of confidence on the judicial system by the candidate and consequently would opt for violence against the corruptible judicial system. It is this frustration and fear of partial judgment that leads them to the hard option of electoral violence and to a large extent, lead to higher scale violence beyond elections. The manner in which election result are announced might also lead to electoral violence and in some cases lead to targeting of setting group or ethnic origin in a multiethnic society (Fischer, 2002).

## **SOURCES OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA.**

In his causal analysis of the causes of electoral violence in Nigeria, Nwobashi (2015) citing Elaigwu (2006) aptly summarized the; causes in three broad categories thus; (a) structural or situational, (b) institutional (c) attitudinal or political culture.

### **1. Structural sources of electoral violence**

This refers to those societal cleavages which make electoral violence inevitable. The cleavages may predate and transcend electoral matters and yet impact on the electoral process. These sources can be systematically discussed hereunder;

#### **a. Revenue distribution**

Duddy (1965:21) observed that in Nigeria, "the shortest cut to affluence and influence is through politics." Politics means money and money means politics to be a member of ruling government party means "Open Avenue" to government patronage, contract deals and so on. Therefore, to access national power and assume position of governance in order to participate in the sharing of "national moi moi" is a source of electoral violence.

#### **b. Aggressive sub-nationalism and ethnic militias**

The existence of aggressive sub-national groups and ethnic militias in the country to a large extent, constitute various causes of electoral violence. The activities of MASSOB, OPC, Egbesu Boys and the Niger-Delta general tensions are likely to produce electoral violence.

#### **c. The federal Grid.**

The federal structure of Nigeria has continued to provide the basic sources for mutual fears, distrust and suspicions among Nigerians. A federal arrangement that allows Northern part of the country to account for 79% of the total geographical area and 54% of the population is structurally imbalanced and challenging (Jega, 2006:73). This has created North and South dichotomy in Nigeria's political system and has remained unresolved for several decades, hence, a serious source of electoral violence in Nigeria.

#### **d. Economic Factors**

Poverty and massive unemployment prevalent in Nigeria provides a fertile ground for the recruitment of the youths into regions of political thugs. As a corollary of this, the youths feed on the crumbs that fell from tables of the politicians, who in turn use them as thugs to perpetuate electoral mayhem.

#### **e. Local conflicts caused by actions of government**

The character of Nigerian state accounts for the primitive and primordial cleavages. This stems from the fact that decisions and actions taken without due considerations of the existing cleavages more often than not generate electoral violence. Notable examples are the Ife-Modeka and Warri, in which the creation of local government area and the citing of headquarters led to violent conflicts over a long period. In the face of such crises, there can be no violent free elections.

#### **f. Citizenship, Indigene/Settler Dichotomy**

Many States and communities recognize their indigenes and easily discriminate and isolate others classified as "Settlers." In a competitive political environment, this trend has reared its ugly head in the politics of Nigeria since independence. The resultant effect is electoral violence because of indigenes/settlers dichotomy as witnessed in the case of Jos-North violence, the Wuse case, Jukun-TIV case and many other cases of violence demonstrated the explosive nature of this issue in Nigerian

political firmament.

## 2. INSTITUTIONAL SOURCES OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

A number of institutions saddled with electoral matters and electoral processes hard continually grappled with some challenges. This is occasioned by weak institutions and lack of credentials to cope with the daunting complexities of a developing democracy like Nigeria. Consequently, these institutional challenges generate electoral violence in Nigeria. Some of these institutions can be examined with a view to ascertaining the extent of their involvement in electoral violence.

### a. **Political parties.**

Political Parties in a democratic centralism perform the function of interest aggregation and articulation. However, the existing political parties in Nigeria are generally weak with fluid internal structures and processes are undemocratic and as such have failed to achieve internal democracy. A situation where impositions of candidates are made during party primaries without recourse to rules is a direct invitation to electoral violence.

### b. **The Electoral Institutions**

The cardinal roles of the electoral institutions are to determine who has the right to stand in for an election and ensure the credibility of the elections. In carrying out these functions, the electoral institutions are expected to be truly independent. Of course, the integrity of the electoral institution is essential in order to ensure the legitimacy and credibility of the electoral process. However, it has been observed that these electoral institutions have been indicted in several ways as being generators of electoral violence in Nigeria (Elaigwu, 2006, Nkwede, 2015, and Nwobashi, 2015). Studies have shown that all the electoral institutions like **FEC 1958-1964, FEDECO 1978-1983, NEC 1987-1996, NECON 1996-1998 AND INEC1998-Date** were in one way or the other involved in electoral malpractices (odey 2007, Obasi 2009, Ujo 2000, and Edoh, 2003). The electoral institutions lack neutrality and this has resulted to the subversion of the will of the people. It is axiomatic that when people have lost their confidence in Public institutions that are expected to be neutral, the resultant effect is that they take laws into their own hands.

### c. **The Electoral Process.**

The electoral process according to Nwobashi (2015) helps in determining if those in governments have the right to rule. Unfortunately, violence has been the feature of Nigeria's electoral process since the colonial epoch. Soon after independence, electoral violence became more intense as struggle for power among politicians were amplified. Delivering his judgment in the treasonable felony against Obafemi and his accomplices, Justice Sowemimo (cited in Anifowose, 1982: 2-3) observed that:

*One evidence before me, it would appear that politics generally in Nigeria has been conducted with certain amount of bitterness, it appears that a person belonging to a party becomes an enemy of another who belongs to a rival political party are equivalent to warring camps. Elections are conducted with party thugs. Protecting the contestants or the campaigners. This State of affairs has been described to have assumed a pitch that no method would be spared, however, vindictive or extreme by any rival political party as against another score over one or another.*

Obviously, the above statement is clear from pandemonium that our electoral process has remained incapable of producing violent free election.

### d. **The Judiciary.**

Nigerian citizenry who felt unjustly denied electoral victories seeks redress at various election tribunals. Many election tribunal members were alleged to have taken bribes and had consequently given skewed judgments (Elaigwu, 2006: 83). Evidences at hand are the Anambra case involving justice Nnaji over the Ngige matter, the Akwa Ibom case involving justices Adamu, Selong and others where the problem of impartiality on the bench were witnessed. Again, in situations where case before the election tribunals last up to three years to be dispensed makes the judicial system to fall short of being the last hope of the common man. In this connection, judiciary contributes to the electoral violence in Nigeria.

### e. **Security Agencies.**

In every election, security agencies are always deployed to protect all the electorates, contestants and election officials as well as sensitive electoral materials. In Nigeria, the Nigerian police had been accused of complicity in electoral malpractice and being partisan. To a large extent, cases abound where the security personnel were reported to have harassed, intimidated, and coerced political opponents to the advantage of those in power. Such action from the security personnel invariably dovetails into electoral violence.

### **3. ATTITUDINAL SOURCES OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA.**

#### **a. Attitudes to Democracy.**

Nigerian democratic polity has remained inchoate. This has been attributed to long periods of military engagements in Nigerian body politics. To say the least, the limited time available has not been enough to build a virile political culture which can regulate, moderate and cushion the political process. For this reason, politics in Nigeria is again seen as a battle that must be won at all cost, hence, the winner takes all syndrome. In the face of the above, violence or threat of violence is accepted as a norm for enforcing their will or protecting their investments. In this dimension, violence is inevitable and serves as a means of acquiring power and sustaining political power (Elaigwu 2006).

#### **b. Election Mindset.**

Iyayi (2006) maintained that mindsets are very strong influence on people. For him mindset does dominate the thinking of people about social, economic, cultural and political issues. One finds it extremely difficult to convince someone with a different viewpoint that Nigeria's elections would possibly work better in a way different from his thought. Election mindsets are particularly consequential for free and fair elections simply because they shape the political attitude and behaviour of Nigerians before, during and after elections. These mindsets according to Iyayi (2006) involves the mindsets of voters, politicians, the officials of the election, the incumbents of power, the security operatives, the media, the civil society groups, and the judiciary, all combined together triggers off electoral violence in Nigeria.

### **MANIFESTATIONS OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN EBONYI STATE DURING THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

The political cold war between prominent political parties is one of the major challenges that threatened the 2015 General Elections in Ebonyi State from disturbing political killings to dare devil banditry, the result was the same helplessness as there were bizarre situation where the high and low were gripped by fear throughout the 2015 electioneering campaign and during the elections. The electoral violence that charged the political atmosphere raged hotly as all the political parties broke all the stereotypes that would see them through the uncommon rise to power. Invectives were hurled from both sides of partisan divide and most people were caught up on what and who to believe as truths, and falsehoods were all mixed up and served to Ebonyians by both sides of the struggle. Each day of the electioneering era carried its own maximum fear. It was as if Ebonyi would not exist beyond April 2015.

Across the state, significant incidences of shootings, protests, arson and fatalities were recorded in most geopolitical zones of Ebonyi State. Notable among them were in Afikpo South L.G.A of Ebonyi State were thugs reportedly intercepted the transportation of sensitive materials in a polling unit in Oso Ward 2 during the April 11, 2015 general Elections. At Onu-Nkwuda community, Ameka ward in Ikwo L.G.A, electorates and INEC personnel were attacked by hoodlums that disrupted the electoral exercise with machetes, guns and dangerous weapons. In Ishi Nkwo-Ukawu ward polling unit 003 and 007 in Onicha L.G.A, electoral materials were taken away by unknown persons, who attacked the ad hoc staff and some INEC officials. At Ngambo-Ukawu ward in Onicha L.G.A, some unknown persons who identified themselves as party agents disrupted the voting exercise and made away with the electoral materials including the ballot papers and 2 ballot boxes (<http://www.Channelstv.com/2015/04/12/Ebonyi-State-governor-displeased-with-violence-electoral-fraud>). At Abakaliki L.G.A, violence characterized the gubernatorial and state assembly elections as shooting rocked the Abakaliki-East constituency that lead to the run-off election subsequently. Pandemonium broke out at Uburu in Ohaozara Local Government Area on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2015 following an attack launched on labour party supporters including the council's caretaker chairman, Chaka Nweze by opposition party in the state (Amadinaeze and Uhwo, 2015). Similarly, the Peoples' Democratic Party nearly lost four of their supporters at Eke Market Square on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March during their rally in Ezza South L.G.A. The four injured persons were Mr. Ejiofor Aleke from Amaezekwe, Chibuike Nwafor, Obinna Otu from Onueke Urban and Chita Uchenna from Amana (Amadinaeze and Uhwo, 2015).

During April 11<sup>th</sup> 2015 election, Mr. Mike Ojon was killed at Noyo, Ikwo L.G.A by thugs while another Ocho Monday was stabbed to death for confronting suspected thugs involved in illegal thumb-printing at Ohage village square, and at Effium ward 1 in Ohaukwu L.G.A and in Nkalagu Ishielu L.G.A, the collation officer was also killed (Channeltv.com).

Nwaeze (2015) reported that Mr. Nworie Christopher from Ekerikwo village in Ndiagu Amagu Ikwo was shot dead by thugs, who besieged the village and started harassing some stakeholders loyal to peoples Democratic Party in the area on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2015. It was gathered that Mr. Nworie was shot at close range on the head at the left ear and the bullet pierced through the ear to the back part of the head and the deceased died at the spot. The attack was linked to labour party supporters in the state as they were shouting labour party

slogan.

Relatedly, the Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Ishielu Local Government Area, Hon. Emeka Nworie was killed by suspected political thugs in the early hours of 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2015. Hon. Nworie was shot in his house at Ezzagu, Ishielu L.G.A by his assailants after demanding for money which was given to them but they still murdered him (Adibe, 2015, Elechi, 2015).

More so, at Afikpo South L.G.A, a thirty six year old man, Udu Emegha of Amaigbo Etit Edda, was gruesomely murdered. According to Amandineze and Udodinma (2015:1) those connected to the killing includes the former Special Adviser to Governor Martin Elechi on solid mineral development, petroleum product, pricing and distribution, Mr. Chidi Ejem and PDP House of Assembly candidate for Afikpo South West state constituency and thirty six others. The group was led by Mr. Emmanuel Innocent from Amaigbo Etit Edda and they besieged the house of the deceased and attacked Udu Emegha who later gave up the ghost. The same Chidi Ejem was fingered to have masterminded the attacking of labour party supporters on the eve to their rally in Edda and canopies, tents, chairs were destroyed and one person was shot, while many others were seriously injured. The electoral violence reached its apogee following the burning of Ebonyi State House of Assembly (EBHA) on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2015. The Chairman peoples Democratic Party in the state Mr. Joseph Onwe accused the former Governor of Ebonyi State chief Martin Elechi of hobnobbing with opposition political parties and aided them in setting the house of Assembly ablaze.

During the house sitting, that same Tuesday February 24, 2015, after the fire incidence, the lawmakers at the plenary condemned in its entirety the incident; stressing that it was barbaric and a means to stop them from performing their constitutional duty as well as to frighten them not to continue in the probe of petitions brought before the house to investigate government alleged “economic and financial irregularities by he executive and other individuals” (Nwaeze, 2015). It would be recalled that before the fire incidence in the state Assembly, there had been a serious fracas between the former Governor of the state and Assembly members resulting to threats of impeachment of the Governor. The notice of impeachment released by the house attracted massive protests by Ebonyi women and Ebonyi youths against the plot to impeach the then state Governor, Martin Elechi (Oginyi, 2015).

Furthermore, at Onuenyim ward Ishieke in Ebonyi L.G.A, violence marred the gubernatorial and state Assembly elections as many motorcycles, vehicles and buildings were burnt to ashes. In the same vein, at Ezzaopu Inyimagu Izzi L.G.A, there was a confrontation between the PDP and Labour Party (LP) supporters that led to the killing of Mr. Augustine Mbam and two other persons.

Ultimately, the 2015 General elections in Ebonyi State brought some welcome surprise as there were abundant evidence of large scales disturbances, election irregularities and several high profiles killing with clear political overtones which led to the heightened security concerns. Reacting to the spate of electoral violence in Ebonyi State, Governor Martin Elechi in a radio and television broadcast to the people of Ebonyi state on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2015 said thus;

*The Presidential and National assembly elections conducted throughout Nigeria on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2015 have, if anything generated more fears than satisfaction in many states of the country. In our dear state Ebonyi, if the truth must be told, it was the worst election in recent times, judging by the quantum violence, destruction and bitterness observed and expressed Governor Elechi maintained that; shooting was effected in order to scare away potential voters, there by facilitating the snatching of election materials and the falsification of election results in favour of the political party and Izuegbu that organized the mayhem (Oginyi and Izuegbu, 2015:24).*

The above statement further reinforced the fact that there were galloping electoral violence in Ebonyi State during the 2015 general elections. In all the 13 local Government Areas of Ebonyi State, there were tales of woes. Apart from the obvious inadequacies on the part of the electoral body, namely: the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), such as the malfunctioning of the card readers, the late arrival or non-availability of all essential sensitive materials at the polling centers, there were in some cases, complete absence of INEC Staff and materials in certain centers.

### Victims of electoral violence in Ebonyi State during 2015 General Elections



Slain young man

Slain body of Mr Christopher Nworie



Obinna Oti

Ejiofor Aleke

Chibuikwe Nwafor

Source: Amandianeze (2015)

### LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE ELECTIONS

From the analogy, the possible alternative strategies for ameliorating electoral violence in future are set out below;

1. Extant laws relating to elections in Nigeria should be invoked on the people of Nigeria no matter how highly placed. Section 81 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) and section 227 of the 1999 constitution prescribes punishments for election offenders. A critical insight into these provisions shows that there is nothing wrong whatsoever with the law on electoral violence but the implementation. Nigerian government should muster the political will to deal with electoral offenders in accordance with the law.
2. The way and manner in which perpetrators of electoral violence go scot-free is highly embarrassing. As perpetrators are punished, the sponsors of such horrendous acts are brought to book. The current trend where only the direct perpetrators are arrested and subsequently released without even mentioning their sponsors does not support violent free elections in Nigeria.
3. Voting by political class and their cohorts; the frustrations created by the political class has drastically reduced the interest of the common man to vote during elections. To address this trend, community political education should be introduced in the school curriculum.
4. The lack of political will by government should be corrected by change of attitude to reflect national interest.
5. The law empowers INEC to arrest and prosecute electoral offenders. Unfortunately, INEC is technically



- incapacitated to arrest and prosecute electoral offenders to the extent that no serious conviction has been done in this connection. There is need for Independent Electoral Offences Tribunal to try electoral offenders.
6. Campaigns of calumny during electioneering must be outlawed. Enabling laws must be put in place against this.
  7. The issue of unemployment should be properly addressed in view of the fact that 80<sup>0</sup>/0 of electoral violence are masterminded and perpetrated by the youths arising from joblessness.
  8. Governments, stakeholders and politicians should ensure that weapons availability are checkmated in order to deny the youths access to the dangerous weapons used in perpetrating violent political activities and intimidations.

## CONCLUSION

Elections all over the world are no more than an opportunity for people to indicate their preferences as to who represents them either in parliament or in government. It is the process that calls for peaceful motivation of voters of their choice. An election is far from being the extortion by force of the people's mandate.

The 2015 general elections in Ebonyi State have fallen short of basic regional and international standards for democratic elections. They were marred by poor organization, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural irregularities, significant evidence of fraud, particularly during result collation process, voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal conditions for contestants and numerous incidents of violence. Basically, the elections have not lived up to the hopes and expectations of the electorates and the process cannot be considered to have been credible hence, the election petition tribunal sitting in Abakaliki received thirteen (13) petitions challenging the outcome of the elections.

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