

ARMS PROLIFERATION, SECURITY CHALLENGE AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN THE 2019 RIVERS STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

Rosenje, Musharafa Olapeju (PhD)¹

Contacts: rosenjemo@tasued.edu.ng; +2348074294124 & +2347065798489

Adeniyi, Oluwatobi Peter²

Contacts: oluwatobiadeniyi30@gmail.com; +2347035474264

Peju-Rosenje, Temitope O.³

Contacts: pejurosenjetemitope@gmail.com; +2348085196011 & +2349032310309.

**Department of Political Science
Tai Solarin University of Education,
Ijagun, P. M. B. 2118, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.**

Abstract

The increasing rate of arms proliferation which has accentuated the prevalence of electoral violence has triggered severe security challenge for the populace and government of Nigeria to grapple with. This paper examined arms proliferation, security challenge and electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic using the 2019 gubernatorial election in Rivers State as a focus. This paper adopted descriptive method, garnered information through secondary sources of data and as well adopted elite theory as its theoretical framework. The paper argued that many factors such as the practice of prebendal politics, phenomenon of do-or-die politics, absence of internal democracy, marginalisation, porosity of borders and weak security system, among others, accentuated the alarming rate of arms proliferation cum electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The paper further canvassed that arms proliferation has been a major factor triggering electoral violence, which constituted a major security challenge that has claimed many lives and destroyed valuable properties in the country. The paper contended that government efforts at curbing the trend of arms proliferation, which accentuate electoral violence was inadequate and thus yielded limited success. The paper thus recommended, among others, that the stakes of political offices should be downwardly reviewed in order to reduce the intense quest for political powers; that Nigeria should partner with neighbouring countries on effective management of its borders; that those who violate existing laws on arms proliferation and conduct of election should be sanctioned while the government should embark on increased orientation for the citizenry in order to cultivate the values of law abiding, peaceful coexistence and violent-free election with a view to checkmating the scourge of arms proliferation and electoral violence.

Keywords: Arms proliferation, Election, Electoral violence, Security challenges, Violence.

Introduction

Globally, elections remain one of the major pillars of democratic system of government because it accords the citizenry the opportunity to take active part in the decision-making processes of their country (Adesote&Abimbola, 2014). Elections play a central role in the success of democracy and as a corollary; the success of the country's democracy depends on the conduct of violent-free and successful election (Araba & Braimah, 2015). It is through election that the power which is entrusted by the people to their representatives is transformed with authority, that is, the right to govern (Abubakar, 2015). Elections accord government, the legitimacy or acceptability it requires from the people to govern peacefully and successfully, and through it accountability is enforced (Oladiran, 2013).

Ordinarily, the conduct of violent-free election is expected to enhance and entrench democratic tenets but the reverse is the case in Nigeria. This is due to the alarming rate of arms proliferation, which is clandestinely directed at reinforcing electoral violence and has pervasively featured in all elections conducted in Nigeria since independence (Agbu, Isa & Garba, 2019). Also, the Nigeria's electoral experiences since 1999 up to the most recent general elections in 2019 have remained sad memories marred with widespread electoral violence. The 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections were marred by widespread fraud and unprecedented electoral violence which inhibits the conduct of free and fair election as well as constitutes a significant security challenge that claimed many lives and destroyed property worth billions of naira in Nigeria (Isah, 2019).

Therefore, issues surrounding the electioneering process ranging from campaigns to the declaration of election results potentially relate to violence and violation of the rights of individuals rather than serving as a means and a process of exercising legitimate political rights. Thus, elections in Nigeria have turned out to be a serious political liability, causing serious political turmoil and threatening the security and corporate survival of Nigeria (Abah&Nwokwu, 2015).

It is important to note that arms proliferation accentuated the perpetration of electoral violence of various magnitudes. Such include political kidnapping and assassinations, political thug clashes, electioneering campaigns disruption, destruction of electoral materials, harassment of voters and electoral officials, among other perpetuated violence carried out through the use of firearms (Gofwan, Isaya&Danjuma, 2019; Soetan, 2017; GIABA, 2013) because it was reported that about 350 million illegal weapons were circulating in the country as at January 2018 (Odeyemi, 2018). However, after the conduct of election, the circulating arms are often employed to forcefully displace civilians, prevent development activities, obstruct humanitarian assistance, peace-building and peace-keeping endeavours in all sense as well as encourage social vices like armed banditry, stealing, kidnapping, oil bunkering, vandalisation, militancy, religious fundamentalism, cattle rustling amongst numerous other security challenges in Nigeria with little or no counter check by the government (Igbini, 2020; Abiodun, Ayo-Adeyekan, Onafowora&Nwanenaya, 2018).

Thus, the proliferation and misuse of arms in Nigeria threatens the electoral process, individual security, contributes to human rights violation, undermines social justice and weakens good governance, inhibits democratic consolidation, national security and sustainable development (Soetan, 2017; GIABA, 2013). Though efforts were made by the

government and its agencies to checkmate arms proliferation, such efforts appear to be infinitesimal and ineffective in achieving the desired goal. It is against this background that this paper examined arms proliferation, security challenge and electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic with specific focus on the 2019 Rivers State gubernatorial election.

The paper is therefore divided into six sections in order to achieve its aim. This first section discussed the conceptual clarification as well as the theoretical basis of the paper. The second section traced the historical evolution of arms proliferation and electoral violence in Nigeria. The third section scrutinized the factors promoting arms proliferation and electoral violence in Nigeria as well as discussed, the nexus between arms proliferation, security challenge and electoral violence in Nigeria. The fourth section examined the various efforts made by relevant agencies at stemming arms proliferation and electoral violence in Nigeria. The fifth section discussed arms proliferation and electoral violence in the 2019 Rivers State Gubernatorial elections while the sixth section centred on the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptualisation

Defining Arms Proliferation

Arms refer to force weapons that can be used by one person and which include firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as exploding bombs, incendiary bombs or gas bombs, grenades, rocket launchers, missiles, revolvers and pistols with automatic loading, rifles and carbines, machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns, (Malam, 2014; Gofwan, Ishaya, & Danjuma, 2019). As such, arms are considered as any means of lethality other than sheer use of physical force (Rana, 1994).

The 1997 report of the United Nations Panel of Government Experts on Small Arms conceived arms as weapons designed for personal use and for use by several persons serving as a crew. The report further indicated that arms are revolvers and self-loading pistols; rifles and carbines; sub-machine-guns; assault rifles; light machine-guns, heavy machine-guns; hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers; portable anti-aircraft guns; portable anti-tank guns; recoilless rifles; portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems; portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems; and mortars of calibers less than 100mm. Arms can, therefore, be defined as anything used by an individual to injure or cause the death of a person or persons other than sheer use of physical strength (1997 Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts, cited in Alimba, 2017).

Arms are thus weapons designed for personal use and include light machine guns, pistols, fully automatic and assault rifles such as the AK-47 and M16 series, and semi-automatic rifles (United Nations, 2001). These arms are small such that they are easy to move, hide, trade, and steal. They are equally durable, portable and light such that adults, children and security men can use them across the globe (Grip, 2017).

The phrase arms proliferation denotes the unregulated availability of small arms (Muggah, 2001 cited in Alimba, 2017). Lock (2001, cited in Alimba, 2017) described it as the uncontrolled spread of arms. These descriptions simply imply that arms proliferation is the degree of rapid increase in the quantities of arms existing in a place, be it a community, region, country or continent (Alimba, 2008).

According to Ogaba (2005 cited in Jibrin, 2019) arms proliferation refers to the excessive accumulation and illegal spread of weapons which could have destabilising effect on states. In other words, arms proliferation is the propensity at which individuals can easily get access to arms through illegal channels because of its excessive availability in a society (Alimba, 2017). In a nutshell, arms are defined as all sorts of weapons that are designed for the use of a single individual to inflict harm or any form of injury on another person. Thus, arms proliferation is the unabated rate of the illegal arms and weaponry within the society.

Security and Insecurity

The conception of security in modern times remains a task that has never been answered satisfactorily because various scholars worldwide have offered differing viewpoints on the concept of security while its perception even within one community varies in time (Ejogba, 2006). However, security is defined as the protection of assets including people against damage, injury or loss from internal and external causes (Macfarlane, 1994 cited in Udeh, Okoroafor & Ihezue, 2013). Security embodies the mechanism put in place to avoid, prevent, reduce, or resolve violent conflicts, and threats that originate from other states, non-state actors, or structural socio-political and economic conditions (Stan, 2004). Also, Albert (2003) posits security as involving the survival of the state and the protection of individuals and groups within the state.

In the opinion of Otto and Ukpere (2012), security relates to the presence of peace, safety, happiness and the protection of human and physical resources or the absence of crisis. Security is any laid down procedures toward the protection of persons and property against hostile persons (Akin, 2008). It is thus a situation whereby a conducive atmosphere is created within which people in the state can go about their normal daily activities without threat to either their lives or properties (Adeleke, 2013). Thus, security encompasses all approaches towards safeguarding human as well as material resources in the state against all forms of aggressions or violent conduct.

On the other hand, the concept of insecurity connotes different meanings such as absence of safety; danger; hazard; uncertainty; lack of protection, and lack of safety (Ewetan & Ese, 2014). Likewise, insecurity was defined from two perspectives; firstly, it was defined as the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury and secondly it was defined as the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Oboro, 2013).

Furthermore, Hasan (2005) defined insecurity as a fact of life for the poor urban citizens of many countries. According to him, it may arise from the lack of secure housing tenure, which means living with the constant fear of eviction or it may reflect high levels of personal insecurity stemming from police harassment, abuse in the hands of bureaucracies or the breakdown of public safety in the neighborhood. Insecurity is also defined as a breach of peace and security, whether historical, religious, ethno-regional, civil, social, economic, and political that contributes to recurring conflicts, and leads to loss of lives and wanton destruction of property (Ewetan & Ese, 2014). Therefore, insecurity constitutes all forms of actions directed towards causing harm and injury as well as threats to both lives and properties of people in a particular location.

Election and Electoral Violence

The concept election has attracted diverse definitions from various range of scholars based on their perspectives and usage. Election simply means the process through which eligible electorate cast their votes in order to choose from among political contestants that vie for various elective positions for the purpose of sound leadership, quality representation and good governance (Agbu, Isa, & Garba, 2019). Also, election is regarded as an integral part of a democratic process which empowers the citizenry to determine fairly and freely who should lead them at every level of government periodically and take decisions that shape their socio-economic and political destinies (Araba & Braimah, 2015).

On the other hand, according to Gilula and Daniels (n.d. as cited in Wikipedia), violence is 'destructive aggression'. This conceptualisation of violence implies the use of physical force to injure persons or property; and this is the core of most definitions of violence (Wikipedia, 1990). Violence has been defined as the use of physical force, usually accompanied by fury, vehemence or outrage; especially physical force unlawfully exercised with the intent to harm; it also means physical force unlawfully exercised, an act tending to intimidate by causing apprehension of bodily injury; it also means using or threatening force, causing injury which may be physical, emotional or mental and is caused by a person (or people) against others that results in pain, injury, humiliation and/or degradation (Tajudeen, 2017).

In the light of the above explication, electoral violence has to do with violence that takes place during (and after) elections in fragile democracy resulting from the failure to meet the rising expectations of the electorate (Gani, 2015). Electoral violence is thus any random or organised act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced 'protection', blackmail, and destruction of property or assassination'. The target of electoral violence can be people, places, data, or things. In an attempt to influence the electoral process, perpetrators of electoral violence may attempt to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll and determine the winners of competitive races for political office (UNDP, 2009).

Electoral violence could also be regarded as election-motivated crisis employed to alter, change or influence by force or coercion, the electoral behavior of voters or voting patterns or possibly reverse electoral decisions in favour of a particular individual, group or political party. It could be seen as any violence (harm) or threat that is aimed at any person or property involved in the electoral process, or at disputing any part of the electoral or political process during the election period (Okanya, 2001, cited in Nlemchukwu & Chioma, 2019).

Also, electoral violence could be before and during the election involving such activities that inflict any form of injury to the democratic system and its constituent, campaigns and actual voting. Such violence could also be a post-election phenomenon which comes consequent on the manipulation of election result, rejection of results and democratic transition i.e. from one leadership regime to another (Gberevbie, 2014).

There are different manifestations of electoral violence which include assassination of political opponents, burning down of public or opponent's properties, shooting or killing of individuals, partisan harassment by securing agents, arrest, forceful dispersal of rallies, killing and hostage-taking, bombing of infrastructure, forceful disruption by thugs at political and campaign rallies, (forceful seizure and) destruction of ballot boxes and papers from polling

agents, free for all fights, among others (Akagha, 2010). These acts are all perpetuated by individuals and groups with the intention of influencing the outcome of elections or deterring elected officers from consolidating their positions after elections (Nlemchukwu&Chioma, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the Elite theory as the explanatory framework. The elite theory was developed from the popular writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michels (1876-1936), and Ortega y Gasset. The elite theory assumes that any political community is divided into two: the few (elites) who are cohesive, well-organised and self-protective and above all, have the power to allocate values for the communities and the majority (masses) who are uncoordinated and confused without any political power to make policy (Onuoha, 2015).

It is further assumed that the elites are found among the higher socio-economic echelon of the society, who possess certain qualities of superiority over the masses. Again, the elites are essentially cohesive constantly defending the status quo, in order to ensure the protection of their gains at the detriment of the masses (Odubajo & Alabi, 2014). The channels of sustenance of group identity and interest include but not limited to coercion by security agencies, electoral violence and manipulations, militancy, manipulation of the media and schools, and the indoctrination of masses with deceitful ideologies and stereotypes. Finally, to ensure system maintenance of their interest, the elite avoids any sort of rebellion or revolt against their interest by creating institutional framework which permits gradual process to recruit and absorb tiny few individuals whom will also protect the general interest of elite (Onuoha & Ufomba, 2017).

Therefore, the political elites recruit unemployed and frustrated youths and armed them with weapons for their selfish aggrandisement during electoral processes like campaigns and the conduct of elections to serve as thugs for political kidnapping and assassination, disruption of electoral campaigns, snatching of ballot papers and ballot boxes, among others (Hassan, 2011). Elites, most especially the political class, who hold political power use various means in order to remain in power without considering the state of socio-political harmony of their respective societies (Adeosun, Ismail & Zengeni, 2016). Thus, these class of people recruit and sponsor armed thugs that show allegiance to them during political activities and consequently use them during political activities; and in turn, the thugs were motivated by little amount of money and other mind control drugs and arms to instigate electoral violence.

Historical Evolution of Arms Proliferation in Nigeria

Owing to the complexity in possessing a gun legally in Nigeria, the majority of arms are alleged to have been acquired by individuals or non-state actors illegally. Therefore, the illegality of arms possession makes it a herculean task to trace the flows and possession of arms because arms in form of weapons are smuggled into the country through land borders and via sea ports (Odoh & Nwankwo, 2015). However, the illegal possession of arms in Nigeria predates the colonial era because the first small arms came into general use at the end of the 14th century. Initially they were nothing more than small cannons held in the hands, fired by placing a lighted match at the touch hole but later, a stock was added- the match lock and the first real handgun (Osimen & Akintunde, 2015). Also, arms were introduced by the Europeans before colonialism to carry out legal and illegal trade of persons (slave) in Africa.

Afterwards, guns, ammunition, weapons and other arms were utilised by Europeans to actualise their imperial desires when they conquered and forced Africans into colonialism (African Union, 2017).

The gunboat diplomacy was readily used by the British to coerce African chiefs into entering several treaties with them. The West African Frontier Force (WAFF) was set up and used by the British to fight the British-Aro War of (1901-1902), and suppress other acts of resistance in Nigeria, West Africa, and Africa generally. These antique weapons or arms such as locally made guns and gun powder were subsequently utilised by the locals for hunting purposes and traditional festivities. They consequently became signs of strength and power, and were exhibited at funerals, burials, ceremonies and customary festivals amongst the locals (Soetan, 2017).

In contemporary times, guns and other types of arms have undergone some transformation as regards functionality, lethality, sophistication, ubiquity and motive behind ownership. They are now weapons used to perpetuate all forms of crime as opposed to their previous perception as just ornaments of prestige, or utilised solely for hunting and other mundane missions (Jaye&Amadi, 2017).

The 1959 Firearms Act was apparently passed to control the alarming rate of arms proliferation in Nigeria towards independence. The Nigerian police records after the civil war revealed a disturbing upsurge in occurrences of violent misconducts linked with arms as opposed to the era before the war. The inability of the Nigerian government to implement a robust disarmament and arms destruction programme after the civil war (1967-1970) intensified the proliferation of guns and illegal arms trafficking. It has however, been observed that there were growing concerns regarding the proliferation of arms which dated back to the period before the civil war and the passage of the Firearms Act but became more intensified after the civil war (The Wassennar Arrangement, 2017).

In addition, proliferation of arms has been associated with the period leading to the return of peace keeping forces and likewise one of the legacies of militarisation of Nigeria. Guns from returnee soldiers from peacekeeping missions and unrecorded rifles from the collapsed strike force under the command of Al-Mustapha during General Sani Abacha's military administration were reabsorbed into the society (Abdullahi, 2017). On the overall, based on evidence abounds on the proliferation of arms in Nigeria, as far back as 2002, the quantity of arms in Nigeria was projected by several reports and studies to be approximately 1 and 3 million. This included arms in lawful possession of the military, the police and those that were in the hands of members of the public. A recent research has disclosed that 80 per cent of arms in civilian possession were illicitly acquired given the stringent regulations (Okoli, 2017).

At the National Consultation on Physical Security and Stockpile Management which was organised under the auspices of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament and the Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PRESCOM) in 2016, it was noted that 350 million out of 500 million arms in West Africa are domiciled in Nigeria. A considerable number of these arms is not only unlawfully possessed but are also acquired to carry out criminal activities (Ebele, 2018).

Overview of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Nigeria has a long history of politically based violence which could be traced to the colonial period (Adesote&Abimbola, 2014). It was argued that colonial settings laid the foundation of future political conflicts in Nigeria because of the British political experiments in West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular among which were, the introduction of the elective principle in 1922 and on the emergence of the 1946 Richards constitution. For instance, the elective principle, though to a very large extent was non-violent, was too limited with income and residential qualifications which could be a potential basis for violence (Omotola, 2007).

The electoral politics in Nigeria right from 1964 till date have been characterised with violent conflicts, political thuggery, assassinations, and arson (Eme&Onyishi, 2011). During the 1964/65 elections, politicians were involved in wide scale murder, kidnapping and arson. For instance, in the Western Region, violent political conflicts, popularly referred to as “Operation Wetie “, were recorded from 1964 to 1965 following both federal and regional elections as well as rift between Awolowo and Akintola. There were also violent conflicts in parts of Northern region, the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) and supporters of other parties, mainly the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and Action Group (Alemika, cited in Olowojolu, Rasak, Ake, Ogundele&Afolayan, 2019).

In the 1983 general elections, electoral violence reared its ugly head again. The elections were massively rigged for instance, in the then Oyo and Ondo states, the two Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) controlled states were declared for the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN). The announcement led to the outbreak of violence (Babarinsa, 2002). The scandalous 1983 elections caused general apathy among Nigerians. It was not surprising when the military intervened by ousting President Shehu Shagari on December 31, 1983 (Olowojolu, et al, 2019).

The June 12, 1993 election was widely believed to be the freest and fairest election in Nigeria’s history. However, the hopes of many Nigerians were dashed when the military government annulled the presidential election which was followed shortly afterwards with nationwide protests, industrial strike action and civil disobedience that engulfed the country. The post June 12 crisis led military ruler, General Babangida to abdicate the headship position of Nigeria on August 27, 1993 and hurriedly relinquished power to an unpopular Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan (Olowojolu, 2015;Egobueze&Ojirika, 2017). However, the Interim National Government was sacked by General Sani Abacha on November 17, 1993 and paving way for Abacha’s authoritarian regime that expired when he died on June 8, 1998 under controversial circumstances. The demise of Abacha brought about the appointment of new military ruler, General Abdulsalami Abubakar which promised to return Nigeria to civilian rule in 1999 (Olowojolu, 2015).

Eventually, the military regime ushered in Nigeria into the fourth republic on May 29, 1999 bringing in Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the President of Nigeria. However, ever since the return of civil rule in 1999, Nigeria’s fourth republic has witnessed the conduct of general elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 respectively. These elections have been deeply enmeshed in series of violence before, during and after the elections. The 1999 transitional elections had minimal record of violence largely because the military supervised the electoral process that birthed the fourth republic (Adesote&Abimbola, 2014).

The first major consolidation election to be conducted by a civilian administration in Nigeria's fourth republic was in 2003 under the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The 2003 general election was not only said to have been one of the most corrupt and fraudulent elections to be conducted in the post-colonial Nigeria (Kurfi, 2005), the election was also characterised by different types of electoral frauds which ranged from ballot stuffing, intimidation, killing, and assassination, among others. The election was a triumph of violence which made a number of people to have argued that there were no elections in 2003 but merely the intimidation of voters and the selection of already decided winners by elites and caucuses (Adesote&Abimbola, 2012).

The second general election under the fourth republic was conducted in 2007. Unfortunately, rather than getting better, the 2007 general elections turned out to be worse than the previous elections in the post-colonial Nigeria (Adesote&Abimbola, 2014). There were several incidences of pre-electoral violence leading to political killings, bombings and armed clashes between supporters of rival political parties. For instance, evidences showed that between June and August 2006, about three gubernatorial candidates were assassinated in Nigeria's Southwest. These included Dr. Ayo Daramola, PDP gubernatorial candidate of Ekiti State (Omotosho, 2007; Animashaun, 2008). The outcome of the 2007 elections generated a lot of controversies and wide spread condemnation from both the local and international observers (Aniekwe & Kushie, 2011; Igbuzor, 2010). Even the elected President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua acknowledged that the election that brought him to power was characterised with flaws.

The 2011 general elections were generally acceptable by both local and foreign observers to be partially fair when compared with that of 2003 and 2007 general elections (Agbambu&Ajayi, 2011). The election witnessed two major stages of electoral violence, the pre-election period (that is, period of registration, campaign, election day) and the post-election period (that is, after the announcement of results) (Aniekwe&Kushie, 2011). There were several cases of electoral violence which claimed the lives of many people including about ten corps members in Bauchi state (Adesote&Abimbola, 2014). Also, it was reported that about 800 lives were lost as a result of the post-election violence while more than 65,000 people were displaced after the 2011 post-election violence (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

Towards the 2015 general elections, new measures such as the use of Card Readers and Permanent Voters Card (PVC) were introduced with a view to curbing electoral fraud and electoral violence during the general elections (Olowojolu et al, 2019). Still, high incidence of electoral violence was recorded during the conduct of the election to the extent that the INEC confirmed that there were 66 reports of violent incidences across the country. Out of these incidences, 16 incidents were recorded in Rivers State; Ondo (8); Cross Rivers (6); Ebonyi (6); Akwa Ibom (5); Bayelsa (4); Lagos and Kaduna (3 each); Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti (2 each); Katsina, Kogi, Plateau, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun (one each) (Vanguard, April 12, 2015).

However, the 2015 general elections were adjudged to be quite successful and more credible than every other election in the fourth republic, especially due to the noble character displayed by erstwhile President Jonathan when he accepted his defeat, congratulated his opponent and ensured a smooth transition process that ushered in Buhari's administration on May 29, 2015 (Olowojolu et al, 2019).

The 2019 general election was also reported to be marred by massive landscape of electoral violence to the extent that it was reported that about 626 people were killed during the 2019 Nigeria elections across the country (Sanni, 2019). For instance, in both the presidential election and gubernatorial elections across the country, disturbing cases of electoral violence was reported in Lagos, Zamfara, Kebbi, Kano, Nasarawa, Benue, Plateau, Ekiti, Bauchi, Kwara and Oyo States with scores of lives lost and property destroyed (CSSR, 2019). Thus, Nigerian electoral processes are characterised by violent struggle for political power among politicians which could be attributed to over-zealousness and desperation of political gladiators to win elections or remain in office at all cost and these misadventures have often been catastrophic leading to decimation of innocent lives, disruption of economic activities, destruction of properties and constitute serious security challenge among others (Ewetan & Ese, 2014; Olowojolu et al, 2019).

Factors Promoting Arms Proliferation and Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Several factors have been advanced for the increasing rate of arms proliferation and electoral violence in Nigeria. Firstly, the political notion of 'do-or-die politics' inherent in Nigerian politics is one of the major reasons for arms proliferation as well as electoral violence. The desperation among some Nigerian politicians to win elections at all costs and occupy political offices by all means is a major cause of the prevalence of arms proliferation and electoral violence in the body politic of the country. The "do-or-die" or zero-sum approach to politics became more pronounced and worrisome since the return to civil rule in 1999.

It was observed by Fabowale (2011) that Nigerian politics is not a game but a war. The blood-stained landscape of Nigeria's politics is conditioned and reinforced by arms proliferation, thuggery, violence, blackmail and vendetta which define the political behaviour of stakeholders towards their selfish ambition (Fabowale, 2011). The do-or-die politics of the country is thus largely responsible for the series of politically motivated assassinations across the nation many of which could not be successfully investigated and resolved (Falana, 2009, Peterside, 2020).

Another factor contributing to the unabated arms proliferation and electoral violence is the prebendal nature of Nigeria's politics which conceives politics as an investment. Thus, the politicians, having invested huge amount of money on campaigns and other political activities, coupled with the existing system of winner takes all, would want to win at all cost (Jega & Wakili, 2002). In view of this, they employ the use of arms, thugs and touts to cause chaos and manipulate the election process, especially when such politicians are not the popular candidates (Abba, 2004). In addition, refusal to accept electoral defeat in good faith is also a germane factor that breeds arms proliferation through the use of political thugs to trigger violence in politics (Akinfenwa, 2019).

Also, due to over concentration of power at the centre, there is therefore the mad rush to acquire power because it provides the holder the authority to distribute the allocation of natural and material resources which prompts the politicians to indulge in electoral violence as the last resort to satisfy their political urge (gain political power) (Ehinmore & Ehiabhi, 2013). In the same vein, marginalisation, incapacitation, intolerance, domination, apathy, absence of good governance and low political culture also contributed to the menace of arms proliferation and electoral violence (Isah, 2019; Ngboawaji, 2011). Likewise, the lack of internal democracy especially amongst the leading political parties in Nigeria contributed in no small measure to the prevalence of violence across the country. It is imperative to note that 809 pre-election cases

arose from the 2019 general election in Nigeria as a result of lack of transparent and credible primaries by the political parties, especially the two leading parties in the country (Onimisi&Tinuola, 2019).

Furthermore, the sit-tight syndrome nature of Nigerian politicians also intensified arms proliferation and electoral violence in Nigerian politics. This is a situation, in which the individual tries to hold on to power for personal aggrandisement or gains. Thus, in an attempt to hang on to power, leaders often create a regime of violence, repression and bloodshed (Nlemchukwu&Chioma, 2019). They organise political thugs, hooligans and scavengers, equipped them with firearms to intimidate opponents and kill them if they become intractable. The inordinate ambition of politicians to control, dominate and amass wealth for their progeny in the infinite future informs the emergence of the sit-tight phenomenon that prompted and heightened arms proliferation and violence (Jonathan, 2016).

The pervasive material inequalities and unfairness in the distribution of state resources also constitute a major factor that promoted the resort to arms proliferation, electoral violence and the consequent insecurity in Nigeria. The growing awareness of inequalities and disparities in life chances, which leads to the proliferation of arms towards electoral process to orchestrate violent acts by means of fighting for their rights. Such is the case of the various militia groups in the eastern part of the country (Ewetan& Ese, 2014). There is a general perception of marginalisation by a section of the people in areas of government development policies, political patronage, and these are triggers of disaffection, resentment, and revolt (Achumba, et al. 2013).

The porosity of borders cum weak security system also promoted arms proliferation as well as electoral violence in Nigeria. Achumba et al. (2013) observed that the porous frontiers of the country, where individual movements are largely untracked have contributed to the level of arms trafficking, electoral violence and insecurity in Nigeria. As a result of the porosity of borders, there is an unchecked inflow of arms into the country, which has aided militancy and criminality in Nigeria (Hazen & Horner, 2007). Available data shows that Nigeria host over 70 percent of about 8 million illegal weapons in West Africa (Edeko, 2013).

In addition, the porosity of the Nigerian borders has aided the uncontrolled influx of migrants, mainly young men from neighboring countries like the Republic of Niger, Chad and Republic of Benin, who were said to be responsible for some of the criminal acts perpetuated in the country (Adeola&Oluyemi, 2012; Soetan, 2017). Furthermore, the weak security system of the country, which can be attributed to a number of factors such as inadequate funding of the police and other security agencies, lack of modern equipment both in weaponry and training, poor welfare of security personnel, and inadequate personnel hinders the control of arms proliferation as well as the curbing of electoral violence in Nigeria (Achumba et al. 2013).

Arms Proliferation, Security Challenges and Electoral Violence in Nigeria

The advent of arms proliferation impacts on more than just individual well-being; they typically have the potential to challenge the very existence of the state (Eke, 2013). In a democratising polity like Nigeria where resources tend to be scarce and state capacity relatively weak, arms proliferation provides the politicians and ethnic warriors with the means and power to engage in criminal activities, and in the process severely undermine the rule of law and consequently, leads to increasing sense of insecurity as a result of lack of faith in the state's ability to provide personal protection (Omitola&Awotayo, 2016).

Without doubt, Nigerian politics has ever since independence, been characterised by incidences of electoral violence (Odoh&Nwankwo, 2015). Nigeria's politics manifests in acrimony, assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and killing that have led to the militarisation of the political environment (Wahab, 2014 cited in Umar, 2018). Thus, whenever elections draw near in Nigeria, there are usually palpable fears enveloping the nation in general and engulfing the well-meaning citizens of the country over the serious dangers that may trail the process. This is because elections are always characterised by cases of high incidences of political thuggery and uncontrollable violence always resulting in loss of lives and wanton destruction of property (Agbu et al, 2019).

For instance, a research conducted by the Nigeria Watch (cited in Jibrin, 2020) revealed that between June 2006 and May 2014, there were about 915 cases of election violence resulting in about 3,934 deaths. Aside from loss of lives, properties, both private and public, that have been lost to electoral violence cannot be quantified and this has spelt doom on overall development of the nation because violence breeds ecological problems, which in turn constitutes social, economic and health hazard (Jibrin, 2020). Also, Nigeria's 2019 elections were reported to be marred by electoral violence of various magnitudes at both the federal and state levels. These included intimidation and harassment of observers/voters, indiscriminate shooting and killings, snatching of electoral materials, possession/display of firearms at the polling unit (to harass and threaten the electorate), among others (Human Right Watch, 2019; CLEEN, 2019).

Arms proliferation and electoral violence usually prevents people from conducting business, leading to reduction in trade and foreign investment which has significantly affected the economic development and tourism in the nation (Omitola&Awotayo, 2016). In the same manner, the increasing availability of arms has strengthened a wave of insurgencies, ethno-religious conflicts, cross-border banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery and other violent crimes while arms build-up has equally fuelled violence in different parts of Nigeria, especially communal clashes and ethno-religious conflicts (Osimen&Akintunde, 2015).

Efforts at Stemming Arms Proliferation in Nigeria

A number of considerable efforts have been instituted towards checkmating the phenomenon of arms proliferation by government and various agencies both locally and internationally. It is pertinent to state that Nigeria has been an active participant in international and regional discussions on arms proliferation. The country has endorsed a number of international measures pertaining to small arms and light weapons. It supported in 2005, the adoption of the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, and has argued that this political document needs to be transformed into a legally binding instrument in order to control effectively and criminalise the illicit movement of small arms (Adekanye, 2006).

In July 2000, the government established a National Committee on the Proliferation and Illicit Trafficking in Small Arms and Light Weapons to respond to the proliferation of small arms and other growing crimes in the country. The purpose of the committee was to determine the sourcing of illegal small arms and collect information on small arms proliferation in Nigeria but the committee accomplished very little in five years due to lack of political will, financial support, technical expertise, and capacity (Alimba, 2008).

Also, increasing public awareness has been made about the need to control illegal armspossession with a view to curbing arms proliferation as well as electoral violence in the country. Information about the issue has been disseminated through public enlightenment campaigns or programmes often conducted by the UN through its specialised agencies such as the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDR) and the like. The UN has also supported governments of countries, such as Mali, Albania, Cambodia, Sierra Leone among others; private organisations and NGOs such as the Small Arms Survey, Human Rights Watch and others in campaigning against the illegal use and transfer of arms around the world (Alimba, 2017).

The amnesty programmewhich was a call to voluntary return of arms for freedom from prosecution has also been put into practice towards curbing arms proliferation in Nigeria. Thiswas a programme aimed at reducing the quantity of arms in circulation in Nigeria. The programmewas a fall-out from the recommendations of a technical committee set up on Niger-Delta headedby Barrister LedumMitee in 2008. The programme was initiated by President UmaruMusaYar'Adua in 2009, and was to operate within a time frame of August 6 to October 4, 2009. Thisimplied that 60 days unconditional amnesty period was granted to the Niger-Delta militants tosurrender their arms, renounce militancy and enjoy government pardon. The programme wasguided by disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration activities, and the targetedstates were AkwaIbom, Balyelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Riversand Ondo (Awotayo, Oladipo&Ilelah,2013).

The amnesty programme resulted in the demobilisation of 30,000 militants. At the expiration of 60 days for the disarmament, 2,760 guns of different forms, 287,445 rounds of ammunition, 18gun boats, 763 explosives and 1,090 dynamites caps were recovered. The committee, through its leader, AVM Alaibe, revealed that the highest counts of ammunitions of 130,877 were recovered from Bayelsa State. This was followed by Rivers State which recorded 82,406 ammunitions and Delta State with 52,958 ammunitions. The amnesty programme recorded huge success, based on the quantities and varieties of arms that were turned in by the militants. The success of the programme at the national level, possibly motivated its adoption by some state governments such as Imo state and Ondo State to reduce the arms in circulation in their domains (Alimba, 2017).

In the same vein, Nigeria enforces local laws on proliferation of arms such as the Firearms Act of 1959and also a signatory to UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) adopted in 2013, which is to ensure that arms are not imported illegally to Nigeria (Omitola&Awotayo, 2016).There is also the UN Illicit Fire arms Protocol, which promotes uniform international standards for the movement offire arms. It urges state parties to criminalise illicit manufacture and trafficking in fire arms and to also adoptpreventive measures. The International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace Illicit Small Arms and LightWeapons is also an important standard setting document regardless of its non-binding status. It was adopted inrecognition of tracing as a key mechanism in the effort to prevent, combat and eradicate illicit SALW (Jibrin, 2019).

Of recent, President Muhammadu Buhari approved the establishment of a national centre for the control of small arms and light weapons. The centre is similar to the counter terrorism centre and the cybersecurity centre, which will control the inflow of these weapons, work in compliance with the already laid down international standards and ECOWAS

moratorium on the control of small arms and light weapons as well as provide strategic framework to curtail the proliferation of arms in the country (Akinpelu, 2020).

However, there is need for a comprehensive, sustainable legislative and robust framework that will holistically address the issues of arms proliferation as well as electoral violence which will include stopping local manufacturing and illegal importation, distribution and brokering, mark and tracing, registration and licensing regime and criminalising all illegal activities and electoral related crimes. However, putting laws in place alone is not sufficient but what matters most is wielding the political will to practically enforce it.

Arms Proliferation and Electoral Violence in 2019 Rivers State Gubernatorial Elections

Elections have been a recurring driver of violence in Rivers state since the inception of Fourth Republic in 1999. The state was even reported to have had the highest number of violent incidents during the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria (Peterside, 2020). The electoral process in Rivers has been severely confronted by divergent forms of violence ranging from kidnapping, political killings, hate speeches, guerrilla warfare, burning of electoral body's (INEC) offices, stealing of electoral materials, snatching of ballots boxes, inflation of election results, among others (Human Right Watch, 2019). There were widespread of violence backed up by an alarming rate of arms proliferation in the conduct of 2019 gubernatorial elections in Rivers state. These violent crimes constituted a serious security challenge, which threatened the freedom of people and prevented them from exercising their civic rights, constituting a violation of rule of law as well as numerous constitutional breaches (CLEEN, 2019).

A significant example of electoral violence in Rivers is the correlation between activities by cult groups, militants and political thugs, especially as a result of the crises between Rotimi Amachi and Nelson Wike in the state. Rotimi Amachi happened to be the godfather for Nelson Wike, who is the head of particular cult which later transformed into political gangs. However, due to power tussle between Romiti Amachei and Nelson Wike, the conduct of 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial elections has been contentious and marred by massive use of armed gangs to propagate their respective political will (Ekpu, 2016; Nweke & Etido-Inyang, 2020).

In the lead-up to the March 2016 legislative re-run elections, cult-related violence became prevalent in almost all the Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Rivers state (Ebiri, 2016). During the three months prior to the March 16, 2016 legislative elections, cult-related violence resulted in over 100 fatalities across the state (Chinwo, 2016). In December 2015, over a dozen communities were reportedly attacked by cultists resulting in over 17 fatalities in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni (Ebiri, Godwin & Tsokar, 2016). Reported clashes between the rival Icelanders and Degbam cult groups caused three fatalities in Ikwere (Okoye, 2017). In January 2016, over 20 people were reportedly killed in series of cult violence-related incidents in Ahoada East, Ahoada, West, Obio/Akpor and Ikwerre LGAs (Joab-Peterside, 2018).

Separately, three fatalities were reported when security agents raided the home of an ex-militant leader (Bolanta, 2016). In a related incident, two days prior to the 2015 elections, police discovered a cache of arms in the residence of the same ex-militant leader who is now part of the caretaker leadership of Asari Toru LGA (Bello, 2015; Anucha, 2015). Also, the house of another ex-militant leader accused of gun-running was reported demolished by soldiers in Gokana. This was followed by clashes between soldiers and supporters of the ex-militant in Khana (Okoye, 2017).

Also, Rivers State recorded a monthly average of 19 killings between November 2014 and April, 2015. It further noted that out of 97 allegations of killings it received, 94 occurred between November, 2014 and April 11, 2015 which included 83 incidents of destruction of properties including acts of vandalism and arson. It is pertinent to point out that seven of the incidents occurred before the election while 77 occurred during the elections. A total of 275 different violations involving killings, injuries to persons and destruction of properties were reported to the Inquiry. Equally, 236 alleged properties were identified in testimonies (Odinkalu, 2015).

In tandem with the exposition above, the conduct of 2019 general elections in Rivers state was marred with divergent reports of electoral violence (Human Right Watch, 2019). For instance, a soldier and five other persons were killed while several others sustained injuries in the violence that trailed the presidential and national assembly elections in Abonnema, headquarters of Akuku Toru Local Government area of Rivers state (Chinwo, 2019). Also, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and former Chairman of Andoni Local Government Council, Chief MowanEtete was killed alongside his elder brother and cousin in Asarama by unknown armed gangs (Sahara Reporters, 2019).

No fewer than seven people were feared killed in Rivers state elections which resulted in low voters' turnout (Chinwo, 2019). One Michael Abedinigo was reported to be shot dead by thugs while resisting attempts to snatch electoral materials in Akinima, Ahoada West Local Government Area of the state. In Luawii, Khana Local Government Area, four persons were killed due to inter-cult rivalry (Adebayo, 2019). The Special Adviser to Governor Wike on Gender Matters and former Chairman of Andoni Local Government Council, Mrs. EmiliaNte was feared dead when she was shot and abducted from her home town in Unyeada (Nwachukwu, 2019). To further drive home the phenomenon of arms proliferation and its use in Rivers State 2019 elections, Table I shows the reported incidences of electoral violence orchestrated by arms proliferation in the 2019 Rivers State elections:

Table I: Incidences of the use of SALW in 2019 Rivers State Gubernatorial Elections

S/No	Incidences	Location	Causalities
1.	Election violence	Obonoma, Akuku Toru L.G.A.	2 soldiers and 5 other persons were killed
2.	Political killing of Chief MowanEtete alongside elder brother and cousin	Asarama	3 people were killed
3.	Killing of ex-official member of State Executive committee, Ignatius	Ajakaja, Andoni L.G.A.	1 person was killed
4.	Killing of Michael Abedinigo	Akinima, Ahoada West L.G.A.	1 person was killed
5.	Death of four persons in inter-cult rivalry	Luawii, Khana L.G.A.	Four persons were killed
6.	Abduction and killing of Mrs. Emilia Nte	Unyeadu	Some people were injured
7.	Snatching of electoral materials	Wards 2, 3, 11, 12, 13	Some people were

		and 17 of Gokana L.G.A	injured.
8.	Snatching of electoral materials	Ward 04 of Ikwere L.G.A.	Some people were injured.
9.	Snatching of electoral materials	Ward 1, 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10 of Ahoada West L.G.A.	Some people were injured.
10.	Election materials was carted away by thugs	Ward 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of Asari-Toru Local Council	Some people were intimidated and injured.
11.	Attack on National Youth Service Corps members by gunmen	Polling Units 2,4, and 9, Ward 8 in Ubima, Ikwerre Local Council	About four Corp members were hospitalised.
12.	Killing of a mobile police officer	Ward 6 of Unyeada in Andoni LGA	One mobile police officer was killed.
13.	Ballot box snatching	Wards 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12 in Abonnema community	Some people were injured.
14.	Snatching of the Observers' phone and handbag at gun point by political thugs	Polling Unit 2, Ward 03 of AsariTolu LGA	Loss of phones and other valuables.
15.	Destruction of Observer's mobile device	Polling Unit 30, Ward 5, ObioAkpokpor LGA	Destruction of mobile device and loss of memory card.
16.	Abduction of Mr. Chikodi Dike, Alex Wele and Dr. Lawrence Chuku by hoodlums	Obio/Akpokpor Collation Centre	Abduction of 3 people and stealing of electoral materials
17.	Sporadic shootings as political thugs hijacked ballot papers and other electoral materials.	Ward 9 of Akpajo, Ward 10, Unit 11 in Eleme Local Government Council	Hijack of electoral materials.
18.	Sporadic gunshots & snatching of electoral materials by thugs	Buguma-Kalabari, Asari-Toru L.G.A & Isiokpo, Ikwerre Council	Some people were injured leading to low voters' turnout.
19.	Thugs stormed and hijacked electoral materials	Unit 9, Ward 1, Khana L.G.A	Loss of electoral materials.
20.	Sporadic shooting	INEC Office Bonny, Bonny L.G.A	Many feared killed while many people were injured.

Source: Rosenje, M. O., Adeniyi, O. P., & Peju-Rosenje, T. O. (2020)'s Compilation from Nigerian Dailies

Thus, it is evident that the proliferation of arms has been a major factor stimulating these criminal acts in relation to the conduct of elections in Rivers states because the possession of arms instigated a lot of crime related crises. The arms proliferation cum electoral violence marred the provision for human security, bringing about loss of lives, wanton destruction of property, electoral offices and election materials. These massive violence occurrences exposed the people to high level of insecurity of lives and properties, which invariably hindered massive participation of the electorate in the electoral process. This situation thus reduces the credibility of the elections results and the legitimacy of power acquired through such process as well as inhibits democratic consolidation in the state.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper examined the relationship between arms proliferation, security challenge and electoral violence in Nigeria's fourth republic focusing on the 2019 gubernatorial elections in Rivers State. The paper started with the review of arms proliferation and electoral violence in Nigeria's political history. The paper examined several factors such as the prebendal politics, the 'do-or-die' phenomenon of Nigeria's politics, overconcentration of powers at the centre, lack of internal democracy, marginalisation, political patronage, porosity of borders and weak security system, among others, which complemented arms proliferation in the escalation of electoral violence in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study deduced that arms proliferation and electoral violence has prompted series of security challenges like assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and militarisation of the political environment, which has brought about loss of many lives, wanton destruction of properties and businesses thereby increasing the level of insecurity in the country. The paper thus concluded that arms proliferation constituted a major setback back in the electoral process accentuating electoral violence thereby violating the fundamental human rights of the people and thus denying them the avenue to participate in the decision-making process. Therefore, towards salvaging the nation from the consequences of increasing arms proliferation and electoral violence as well as to promote adequate security, the following recommendations were made:

1. Nigerian Constitution needs to be restructured to reduce the stakes of political offices in order to reduce the intense quest for political powers while any politician linked to electoral violence should be disqualified from the contest and made to face the law.
2. Government should create Security Situation Room to serve as a common security operations centre for various security agencies, institutions and experts thus serving as a platform for information sharing, planning, briefing and monitoring of the conduct of elections.
3. There is the need for inter agencies co-operation and collaboration among the existing security agencies on intelligence and information gathering and sharing with a view to improving and strengthening effective monitoring and control of Nigeria's borders (both on land, waters and airports) through the use of modern technology.
4. Stricter measures should be put in place to fight corruption because it renders the efforts put in place to combat arms proliferation and electoral violence fruitless in Nigeria and government at all levels should strengthen and promote peaceful co-existence amongst the diverse ethno-religious and political groups within the country.

5. There is need for effective collaboration with the international community and neighbouring countries on border management mechanism using modern and sophisticated detection equipment to reduce arms trafficking at the border check-points.
6. There is the need to domesticate all international and regional treaties and protocols signed by Nigeria to control arms proliferation, include local content for it to work effectively while the Nigeria's leadership should wield the political will to implement such treaties and protocols.
7. Government agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA), the Mass Media and Civil Society Organisations should take responsibilities for providing constant awareness, funding campaigns and enlightenment of the citizenry on the need for violent-free elections.

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