

## Election Rigging and Violence in Nigeria in Historical Perspective: A Case Study of 1959, 1964, 1965 And 1983 Elections



Ediagbonya Michael (Ph.D)<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Olumide Ogunrotimi<sup>2</sup>, Ukhurebor Aghahiusi Roland<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer, Department Of History and International Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Senior Lecturer ,Department Of English And Literary Studies

<sup>3</sup>Lecturer,Department Of Sociology and Anthropology, University Of Benin

**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines election rigging and violence in Nigeria in historical perspective. Particularly, the 1959, 1964, 1965 and 1983 elections came to focus. It discusses the nature of election rigging and forms of violence in Nigeria electoral process. The causes and consequences of election rigging and violence in Nigeria were demonstrated.

Data for the study was obtained through oral interview as primary sources and the secondary sources like books, newspapers, articles, journals, theses and dissertation were also used.

It was found that rigging is almost synonymous with Nigerian elections. It was also found that the aim of electoral rigging or fraud is to frustrate the democratic aspirations of citizens who have voted or would have voted into office someone other than the victor.

In conclusion, the elections between the period of 1959-1983 were bedeviled by several forms of violence which consisted of murder, assassination, arson, sabotage, armed attack, intra and inter-party clashes, hostility, thuggery and rage through physical force directed against persons or property.

**KEYWORDS:** Election, Rigging, Violence, Politics and Injustice.

### INTRODUCTION

Election in terms of origin is colonial in nature and outlook. Elections were used as early in history in ancient Greece and ancient Rome and throughout the medieval period to select rulers as the Holy Emperor and the Pope. The origins of elections in the contemporary world lie in the gradual emergence of representative government in Europe and North America beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, the holistic notion of representation characteristic of the Middle Ages was transformed into a more individualistic conception, one that made the individual the critical unit to be counted. The advent of colonial rule brought the issue of election into the country as nothing was heard about election before this time. Nigeria though democratic according to their levels of development was devoid of election and electoral processes.

In 1919, Sir Fredrick Lugard Governorship or term of office in Nigeria ended, Sir Clifford was appointed the new Governor and was the first administrator to devise the first written constitution for the country (Ediagbonya, 2020:242). The Clifford Constitution of 1922 introduced the elective principle into Nigerian politics which provided for voting in Lagos and Calabar. The new constitution made provision for a total membership of forty-five. It consisted of 26 official members and 15 nominated members. Four elected members who were Nigerians, were included in this council. Oyeleye posits that for the first time in Nigeria, Lagos and Calabar were granted the right to vote in an election to the Legislative Council (Oyeleye, 1998). What this meant was that the four elected Nigerians came from Lagos and Calabar. Three seats were allocated to Lagos and one seat to Calabar.

This concept of elective principle introduced by Sir Clifford encouraged the formation of political parties particularly in Lagos to contest election into the legislative council and Lagos town council. The first of such parties was the Nigerian National Democratic Party established in 1923. Ojiako notes that late Herbert Macaulay and his supporters like Dr. Adeniji Jones, Egerton, Shyngle, Thomas Horatic, Varimu Kotun, J. T. White and Baul Erick founded in 1923 the Nigerian National Democratic Party (Ojiako, 1981:10). This party was victorious in the 1923 elections to the legislative council as the party won the 3 seats for Lagos.

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An election is a formal group decision making process by which a population chooses an individual or multiple individuals to hold public offices. Election can be defined as the process or the act of choosing a person or persons for an office or for certain officers by the voters who are formally qualified to do so (Ojo, 2007:17). It is seen as highly organized channels of popular expression. It refers to the act of electing or choosing candidates to represent the people of a given state or country in the parliament executive and other governmental positions according to the constitution of the country (Ibid).

The people, world over crave for free and fair election. It is their expectation that votes would count. Free and fair election is a situation where persons are free to vote according to their wish without any coercion, inducement, harassment and intimidation. It is the position of Ojo that free and fair election connotes that the electorates are free to vote according to the dictates of their conscience (Ibid, 124).

Kurfi observes that rigging is almost synonymous with Nigerian elections (Kurfi, 2005:101). According to him the objective of electoral rigging or fraud is to frustrate the democratic aspirations of citizens who have voted or would have voted into office someone other than the victor (Ibid). Precisely because of this history of electoral fraud, elections in the country have often been associated with political tension, crisis and even violence (Adekanye, 1990:2)

It was perhaps Nigeria's pride that she achieved her independence with a minimum of disturbances (Tamuno, 1972). However, it is rather unfortunate that after independence Nigeria stumbled from crisis to crisis and near disintegration as the country witnessed a marked increase in the bitterness of party (Ibid, 40).

Infact, the quality of elections is part of the conditions for assessing the level of consolidation of new democracies. Despite the vital place that election holds in democratic government, the organisation of free and fair elections remain a critical obstacle for new democracies in West Africa particularly Nigeria.

The fragile condition of Nigeria democracy can be viewed from high profile assassination, clashes between and within a political party, violence in rallies and campaign grounds, thuggery and rigging elections.

In order to put the focus of this paper in its proper context, it may be necessary to have a clear meaning and understanding of the concept "violence".

Violence could connote militancy, coercion, destruction or muscle flexing. Corsini defines violence as the expression of hostility and rage through physical force directed against persons or property (Corsini, 1976). It is aggression in its most extreme and unacceptable form and most investigator conclude it has no therapeutic justification, since there are most constructive and human ways of expressing anger (Ibid).

The federal elections of 1964 and the Regional elections of 1965 in Western Region witnessed high level of political violence. The Nigeria's fourth republic (1999-2003) was bedeviled by several forms of violence and crime which consisted of murder, assassination, religious and ethnic disturbances, arson, sabotage, armed attack, intra and inter-party clashes, electoral violence etc. Punch Editorial attributed the problem of political and electoral violence to the rising number of idle youths paid for deployment as thugs as well as the worrisome arms build-up nationwide. Violence is the greatest threat to democracy in developing countries. Again, it is established that in Nigeria, the 1964 general election crisis and the western regions electoral crisis of 1965 contributed immensely to the collapse of parliamentary democracy in Nigeria.

So it is not subject to debate or argument that that nation's democracy has been plagued by electoral violence since independence. It could be said that electoral violence comes in the form of assassination, kidnapping, arson, looting, ballot stealing and armed struggle. Multi-parties in Nigeria have seen politics as a matter of 'do or die affairs'. That is why there have been several cases of electoral violence and crisis in Nigeria and it has affected Nigeria in various aspects especially in their socio-economic and political system (Nwolise, 2007:153).

From the inauguration on May 29, 1999 to the handing over May 29, 2003, the number of politically motivated murders was said to be equal to the number of people killed in the run-up to 1960s violence that tore Nigeria apart (Daily Independent, June 9, 2003). That demonstrated the increasing wave of political violence in Nigeria attacks on voting and collation centres. The principal actors of organized violence during elections may be non-state armed groups or political parties.

### **THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS IN 1959: RIGGING AND VIOLENCE**

There was plan for the federal election in December 1959 which was meant to be achieved in the political independence of Nigeria (Okoiguni, 2006). The federal elections of 1959 was conducted on December 12. The elections were held in 312 single member

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constituencies throughout the country. For the first time, voting was by secret ballot. In the Western and Eastern Nigeria, all adults duly registered were qualified to vote but only adult males registered in the North were eligible to vote.

Ojiako maintains that no less than 26 parties were registered to contest the election (Ojiako, 1981). But the main contest was between the Northern People's Congress of Northern Nigeria, the Action Group of Western Nigeria and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon's of Eastern Nigeria. The election for 8 seats for Southern Cameroons representative was suspended pending the outcome of the plebiscite on the future of the territory to be held before March, 1961 (Ibid, 67). It was the 1959 election that gave birth to three powerful regional parties such as Action Group for the west, the Northern People Congress for the North and National Council of Nigeria citizen for the Eastern Region (Yaqub, 2002:51).

On October 28, 1959 the Governor-General of Nigeria, James Robertson issued a proclamation announcing the dissolution of the Federal House of Representatives with effect from November 1, 1959 (Proclamation Issued by the Governor-General, James Robertson, October 28, 1959). The dissolved House of Representative was duly elected in 1954 and made up of 184 elected members and 6 special members to represent special interests of commerce, shipping, banking and so on. In January, 1959 the Premier of Eastern Nigeria, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo the Premier of Western Region indicated interest to contest the federal elections that would take place in December 12, 1959 (Ojiako, 1981:67).

By October 24, 1959, campaign started throughout the country. Unfortunately, it was not free of electoral violence. Against this background James Robertson called for an end to hooliganism in the political campaigning. In a broadcast, Sir, James Robertson warned that if the wave of hooliganism now sweeping the country was not checked by party leaders he would instruct police to use sterner measures (Broadcast by Sir James Robertson, October 28, 1959). He added that he had written in the most solemn language to leaders of major political parties to ask their party organisations to put an end to acts of violence or encouragement to violence (Ibid). The colonial last Governor-General, James Robertson expressing disappointment on the wave of violence during the campaign of 1959 elections, complained that on the eve of Nigerian independence, it was unfortunate that campaign meetings should feature lorry load of cutlasses, broken bottles and rods to beat up political opponents (Ibid). This is a confirmation that the rate of political and electoral violence is already visible before independence. Infact it is synonymous with the political history of Nigeria.

At a press Conference held in Lagos, Mr. K. Bovell, Inspector-General, of the Nigerian Police described actions which police were taking to ensure fair and orderly elections (Ojiako, 1981:74). According to the Inspector-General of Police, there would be 5,000 Nigeria Policemen, 1,200 L.A. Police, 6,000 special constables to maintain order (Ibid).

During the campaign, there were accusation of intimidation, bribery and violence. The parties involved in the elections made official statements and complaints to the government in powers about how they were badly maltreated in the regions controlled by the opponents (Interview conducted with Dr. Duyile on 16-10-21).

It was claimed by N.C.N.C that at Bida, their supporters were attacked. The Northern Government claimed that the disturbances experienced in the North during the campaign was due to visiting politicians for bad manners and lack of tact. Makaman Bida also commented on AG. Campaign with helicopter saying that it created unnecessary tension, anxiety and very unreasonable (Ojiako, 1981:74).

The Northern People Congress complained that during their campaign in Western Region there was Hooliganism and disorder caused by Action Group using unpalatable words on their opponents. However, on December 12, 1959, the Federal elections took place throughout the country. It was orderly to a reasonable extent. It must be put on record that the electoral campaign witnessed large number of people injured, houses destroyed in some areas. It was relatively peaceful despite the fact that many were arrested for electoral offences which could take the form of physical assault on individuals during campaign and when election results are released. It could also take the forms of organised acts or threats, intimidating, blackmailing or influencing an electoral process (Nwolise, 2007).

All the prominent political leaders in the country were returned. These included Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Azikiwe and all the members of the outgoing federal cabinet. After the election, coalition government was formed by N. P. C. and the N.C.N.C. So this new federal government was officially established on December 20, 1959. According to Barrister Charles Aiyamenkhue, this coalition government becomes necessary because no one single party could win enough seats to form the government alone at the centre (An Interview with Barrister Charles Aiyamenkhue on 1-2-2022).

An amendment to the constitution (orders) in Council provided for the establishment of a Senate consisting of not less than 56 appointed members plus those members of the Federal House of Representatives who were Ministers (An Amendment to the Constitution (Orders) in Council 1959).

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### **THE 1964 FEDERAL ELECTIONS: ELECTORAL RIGGING AND VIOLENCE**

The 1964 federal elections was a serious challenge in this country because of high level of election rigging, thuggery and violence. By the time of the general election of 1964 the pattern of alliances had changed, two major alliances were eventually formed to contest the election of 1964 which were NNA, the Nigerian National Alliance made up of NPC, NNNDP, Midwest Democratic Point and Dynamic Party of Dr. Chike Obi and UPGA, the United Progressive Grand Alliance made up of the NCNC, the AG, NEPU and the United Middle Belt Congress.

In June 1964, both the NCNC and AG announced that they would enter into an alliance. In the following month, the NCNC abandoned its coalition with the NPC and declared its decision to campaign jointly with the AG in the Federal elections of 1964 (Eluwa, Ukagwu Nwachukwu and Nwaunani, 2005). This change of alliances could be attributed to the census crisis of 1963/1964 in Nigeria. The census controversy was a very serious problem during this period. The politicians were very much aware of the significance of census as it determines the numerical strength of each region the federal legislature. In addition to that, it determines the revenue which each region collects from the federation account or from the central distributable pool (Ediagbonya, 2022).

Ojo maintains that one of the political issues that arose from census figures in Nigeria has always been that they determine the relative numerical strength of each region or state in the federal parliament and that the eastern region issued its first secession threat over the 1963 census controversy (Ojo, 2006). The tension created by claims and counter claims compelled the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to cancel the 1962 census results and he ordered a recount. The 1963 census created more confusion, anxiety and tension. When the result came out in February 1964, the North had 29.7 Million, East had 12.4 Million, West had 10.3 Million, while Lagos had 0.75 Million and Midwest had 2.5 Million (Ibid, 88-89). The 1963 census became very imperative because it is going to enable the Federal Electoral Commission allocates parliamentary seats to each of the regions on the basis of their population for the 1964 federal elections. The most surprising aspect of the census result of 1963 is that it affirms the population of the North was more than that of the east, west, midwest and Lagos combined. Hence the large scale condemnation in Southern Nigeria. The NPC accepted the result as a true reflection of what took place. The premiers of eastern and Midwestern regions, respectively, Dr. Okpara and Chief Dennis Osadebey rejected the result (Ediagbonya, 2022). In an editorial of February 27, 1964, the Nigerian Tribune described the results of the census as a mixture of surprise and riddle (The Nigerian Tribune, 1964).

It was therefore not a surprise that the N.C.N.C broke the coalition government with NPC and decided to enter into a strong political alliance with Action Group for the first time to contest the federal elections of 1964. Hence the emergency of UPGA, in reaction, the NPC decided to join hands with Akintola's NNNDP. In August 1964, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) was formed. This was followed in October, 1964 by the formation of the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) (Eluwa, Ukagwu, Nwachukwu and Nwaunani 2005, 258-260).

By the time of 1964 federal elections, there were too much irregularities and increasing incidents of thuggery and intimidation even before the elections (Ibid). Infact the election was declared as an election that is so well orchestrated with violence and so much norm-less by the then President of the newly declared republic (Falola and Ihouvbere, 1985). According to Mr. E. Esua, the Chairman of the Federal Electoral Commission; "strict security measures would be taken to avoid foul play. The ballot boxes were designed in such a way that the symbol of each party would appear inside and outside each box. It would also be impossible to remove party labels on boxes" (Ojiako, 1981:194).

The 1964 electioneering campaign was punctuated with appeals to ethnic sentiment and marked by thuggery, hooliganism and violence (Ojo, 2006:148) accusations and counter-accusations of evil intentions and fraudulent electoral practices also characterized the campaign (Ibid). The government authorities jailed the candidates of the opposition or opponent party, manipulating the nominating machinery in such a way that the UPGA candidates could not get registered, treating the candidates physically and physically in a such a way as to scare them away, withholding the necessary permission for campaign meetings by the local authorities or hiring thugs to break-up such meetings (Olav, 1970:41-46).

On December 19, 1964, nominations for 312 constituencies closed. 22 Million of Nigeria's was on the voter register (Ojiako, 1981:195). In a broadcast to the Nigerian nation on December 10, 1964, the President Azikiwe said that he was not happy at the political turn of events in our embryo republic (Broadcast by President Azikiwe on December 10, 1964). He also confirmed that he had received hundreds of telegram and letters from different parts of the federation pleading that he should use his good offices to ensure a free and fair election. They complained of victimizations, false imprisonment, malicious prosecution, denial of bail for trifling offences, refusal of permits to hold meetings and beating of political opponents (Ibid). On a wave of lawlessness, engulfing certain

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parts of our beloved nation, he said that it would appear that the instruments of power were being used in some respects not only to stifle opposition but also to prevent the forthcoming elections from being free and fair (Ibid).

Ojiako remarks that the election campaign was marked by many violent incidents largely caused by private armies of the two alliances and resulting in several deaths (Ojiako, 1981:201). The government of each region controlling the local police forces intimidated and subdued the opposition (Ibid). At the end of the election, the NPC wing of the NNA had won 162 of the 167 seats in the North which by implication means without merging with any other political party, it could on its own form a government at the federal level. The newly formed Nigerian National Democratic Party under the leadership of Chief Akintola won thirty-six seats in the West which was an additional boost to the NNA as it increased the electoral strength of the alliance (Ediagbonya, 2022).

This electoral victory of the NNPP in the Western region was not as a result of the general acceptance of the party by the electorates, it was partly due to UPGA leaders who asked their supporters to boycott the election and the high level of rigging by the government in power. By the rules of the game, it was the duty of the President to appoint as Prime Minister, the leader of the political party that had the majority in the House of Representatives. Dr. Azikiwe threatened that he would resign than to call on a person like Sir Tafawa Balewa to form a government (An Interview with Hon. Efosa Igunbor on 6-3-22). The issue became complex when the Prime Minister refused the advice of the President to set aside the results of the election. According to Falola and Ihonvbere, Dr. Azikiwe initially refused to call Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, to form a government (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985:70). This resulted in the absence of government for three days for the first time in Nigeria's political history. This was later resolved in the interest of national unity based on the advice of senior citizens of the country. The President later called on the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa to form a government. According to President Azikiwe:

*"All Nigerian Patriots must hang their heads in shame today. The first national post-independence general election had been the signal for assaults on the constitution and various acts of lawlessness hitherto unknown in the history of this country (Ojiako, 1981:205). In the same vein, Anglin argues that the "1964-1965 elections have often been referred to as a classic case of the politics of brinkmanship and that it was during these elections that the first plot for a military coup d'état by some members of the Nigerian army was planned (Anglin, 1965:173)*

### **ELECTION RIGGING AND VIOLENCE IN THE WESTERN REGIONS ELECTION OF 1965**

The first military coup received its immediate justification in the crisis that followed the massive rigging of elections in the old Western region (Ademoyega, 1981: 25-44). The attempt by the leadership of the defunct Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNPP) to impose itself on the people of the West led to violence in which the killing of NNPP supporters and the burning of their houses was the order of the day. The inability or unwillingness of the federal government to restore order provided the platform for the military intervention (Ibid).

Politics is the cause of a much number of deaths in Nigeria through the acts of violence, thuggery, political assassination and crimes that are linked with the quest for power. In the course of all these, many criminal offences are committed. Security personnel are often mobilized to harass or intimidate political opponents or take sides in undermining free, fair and credible balloting. The 1965 Western Region's election was not an exception.

The Western regional election of 1965 created more problems for the country. In fact it was the last straw that broke the camel's back. The desperation and inordinate ambition of Chief Akintola to remain in power in the Western region which was challenged by the people resulted in unmitigated disaster which will be discussed from generation to generation (Ediagbonya, 2022). This incident was the last in the chain of events that eclipsed the Nigerian first Republic.

During the campaign, both the NNA and the UPGA used violence, murdering their opponent or destroying their property. The UPGA accused Akintola's government of rigging the election since many of his candidates were returned unopposed even though the UPGA had put forward its own candidates in the constituencies concerned (Eluwa, Ukagwu, Nwachukwu and Nwaunani, 2005:265). When Akintola and his party were declared to have won the election, lawlessness broke out all over the West. Whole sections of towns were burnt including human beings (Ibid). It was impossible to travel on some roads even by day.

The Nigerian National Democratic Party government backed up the NPC used all available means to intimidate its opponents (Olav, 1970). The electoral commission went into hiding after having registered the NNPP candidates. Thus making it impossible for the UPGA candidates to register in some instances (Ibid, 45-47).

In the end of the election, procedures were made difficult for the UPGA to check and the results were extensively falsified. The UPGA claiming on the basis of the local counts that it had won 68 out of 94 constituencies as against the official results (NNPP 71,



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AG 15, NCNC (Ibid, 47). After these elections, the situation in western Nigeria got out of control as the supporters of the UPGA demonstrated violently against NNDP politicians. Law and order broke down and several persons were killed during the crisis that followed. This was sequel to the desperation of both the NNDP and Action Group in their bid to determine which of the two political parties that would rule the western Nigeria. The announcement by NNDP in September 30<sup>th</sup> that 15 of its candidate had been returned unopposed created more problems and challenge. The legal action instituted by Action Group to stop the 15 unopposed candidates failed.

More serious disturbances marred the election, on the eve of the poll, an electoral officers was shot dead in the electoral office at Ibadan and on the polling day, two electoral officer and two polling agents were equally shot dead (Ibid, 80). Also there were other contradictory election results which were heard in the radio and newspapers and at a time, Akintola was been announced the winner (Ibid). At the other hand, Alhaji Adegbeniro was announced (Ibid).

This October election in 1965 in Western region unfortunately produced more violence than had ever been witnessed before the electoral officers suffered greatly, so there was collapse of the electoral administration. Serious riots broke out in many parts of the region on Election Day and in some areas police opened fire and killed innocent civilians (Ediagbonya, 2022). Due to election rigging and federal government support, Akintola and his party NNDP formed the government after much intimidation and killing of political opponents (Ibid).

A common feature of that election was the serious riot and violence between the supporters of the NNDP and the UPGA. Many were killed and properties destroyed. Again one would have expected the federal government to declare a state of emergency hence there was a total breakdown of law and order, contrary was the case, as the government in power allowed the situation to degenerate to such a disgraceful and dangerous state, because the federal government was more interested in preserving Chief Akintola as the Premier of the region than to restore law and order. This is inspite of the appeal from the students of the University of Ibadan, Labour Unions, Civil Societies and other elites. The votes were falsified in favour of the ruling party.

In such a chaotic situation, Nigerian were not surprised when Major Kaduna Nzeogwu announced the coup of January 15, 1966, one of the factors that led to the Nigerian Civil War in 1967. In the early hours of January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966, a number of officers of the Nigerian Army carried out a coup detat by striking simultaneously at widely different centres, killing two Regional Premiers, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello (North) and Chief Samuel Akintola (Western Region and abducting the Federal Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the Federal Minister of finance Chief Festus Okotie Eboh (Ojiako, 1981:222).

These developments followed continued unrest in the Western Region where the authorities admitted that the October elections for the Regional Legislative Assembly had been irregular and where riots and clashes in which hundreds of persons were killed, led to a gradual breakdown of law and order (Ibid).

### **ELECTION RIGGING, VIOLENCE AND LITIGATIONS IN 1983 GENERAL ELECTION**

The fall of the second Republic of Nigeria has generated heated argument among the scholars of this contemporary period. While some expressed the view that the military coup of 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1983 has destroyed the most efficient democracy in the world others joined hundreds of Nigerians to congratulate the Military men for a job well done. Whatever the view of any scholar, one point is clear, our politicians made a mockery of democracy which eventually led to the sudden fall of the second Republic of Nigerian on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1983 (Ediagbonya, 1984:2).

The 1983 elections witnessed the worst election rigging in the history of our dear nation. The presidential, Gubernatorial, Senatorial, Assembly and Representative elections were characterized by rigging. No party was left out of the rigging exercise. The only political parties that could not complain of election rigging were those parties that lacked the resources to rig (Ibid, 25).

In the 1983 election in Nigeria, the Military had quitted the stage and did not supervise these elections. So those who could not demonstrate their acts of vandalism and thuggery during the 1979 elections now had the ample time to demonstrate the vices.

The wide spread accusations of ballot stuffing in the 1983 election led to another successful Northern official coup in 1983. The election had become a zero-sum gain and some of the losers as always would be advocate for military intervention.

In 1983 election infact the most violence of the mayhem took place in Ondo State where the carnage was so high. It was the same sad experience in Oyo State also considered to be stronghold of the Unity Party of Nigeria. Several persons lost their lives and large scale destruction of property was recorded (Alemika, 2011).

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### **ELECTION RIGGING AND VIOLENCE IN ONDO STATE IN 1983 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

It is recorded that more violence and election rigging took place in Ondo State during the 1983 general elections. The ostensible cause was the popular reactions against rigging gubernatorial elections which followed a National Party of Nigeria (NPN) candidate in an overwhelmingly Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) State (Adele, 2012:210).

In the violent demonstration, the entire families of politicians were wiped out and hundreds of houses were set on fire including the state headquarters of FEDECO (Ediagbonya and Aluko, 2020: 821). Isola Olomola argues that 1983 election in Ondo State witnessed political turbulence and complete turmoil caused not so much by prioritization between adherents of the UPN and NPN but by the rancour between the UPN and the decampers, the latter were a thorn in the flesh of the Party and its leadership (Olomola, 2005:153).

According to him, many of the fanatical critics of Governor Ajasin's government policy in regard to Ekiti changed gear in the couple of weeks preceding the 1983 State elections (Ibid). The main issue at stake in the political violence that followed the 1983, 16<sup>th</sup> August general election was the declaration of Akin Omoboriowo as the winner of the gubernatorial election by Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO). The supporters of the incumbent government, Chief Ajasin alleged that the election was rigged in favour of Akin Omoboriowo using the federal might (Olauyi, 2019:32). There was violent protest in various parts of Ondo State. Some reports claimed that the outbreak of violence was the worst in the history of post-independence Yoruba and exceeding the Wete' riots of the 1960s (Omotosho, 2016:13).

In the election, Ajasin had a clear lead but the NPN, intent on taking the state from the UPN had put Omoboriowo in a clear lead as the result was being announced. The state became a war front when Omoboriowo was declared the winner and political thugs and supporters of both parties turned the state into a theatre of war (Olauyi, 2019:33). At least 40 people were killed in Ondo including two NPN Congressional candidates, Olaiya Fagbamide and Kunle Agunbiade, who were set ablaze by an angry mob (Akin Omoboriowo NPN, Candidate, August, 1983).

Both Omoboriowo and Akerele had a narrow escape. However the house of Akerele was burnt down by angry protesters (Olauyi, 2019:34). The issue was challenged in court by Chief Ajasin. A panel of five judges of the Federal High Court sitting in Akure reversed the elections and declared Ajasin as the winner (Ibid, 33). The case was appealed by Omoboriowo and four of the five of Appeal judges that sat in Benin City returned a verdict in Ajasin's favour (Ibid, 33-34). Only Ayo Irikefe dissented and so Adekunle Ajasin was declared Governor of Ondo State for a second term.

In the end, Omoboriowo was driven out of the state and spent some time in exile. The 1983 violence was a repeat of the western region crisis. It provided a golden opportunity and an excuse for the military to put an end to a second Republic that was characterized by monumental corruption and reckless embezzlement of public funds. So it could be said that the Second Republic collapsed on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1983 because of the anti-democratic practices of the party leaders. These leaders used their positions to illegally acquire stupendous wealth through government contracts and other deals as well as a massively rigged election especially the 1983 election.

### **LITIGATIONS IN THE 1983 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

The so-called Federal Election Commission (FEDECO), the organ charged with the responsibility of conducting the election was not an efficient and effective organ. There were trouble here and there over the election results announced by FE DECO because the body was a toothless bulldog. The federal government led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari took over the responsibility of FEDECO as it became mere puppet and appendages to the government in power.

A case in point was Anambra State where there was serious dispute between the then incumbent Governor of Anambra State Jim Nwobodo and the Governor-elect Chief C. C. Onoh. It was a matter of life and death before Chief Onoh was declared by the Court as the Governor of Anambra State (Ediagbonya, 1984:25). Again, there was another election petition filed by Governor Ambrose Alli against FEDECO's declaration of Dr. Samuel O. Ogbemudia as the Governor-elect in the August 13<sup>th</sup> Gubernatorial election, 1983 (Ibid, 16). The hearing in the court began on Wednesday September, 7<sup>th</sup>, 1983 (An Interview with Hon. Influence Osagie on 16-6-22).

It is also fresh in our memory how the federal court of Appeal sitting in Kaduna struck out an appeal filed by FEDECO challenging an order of a Kano Court judge that fresh Senatorial election be conducted in the Kano South-West Constituency. The court rejected the appeal filed by FEDECO and also ordered the Federal Electoral Officer for the constituency and the Returning Officer to pay ₦400 cost to the Respondent (Cited in Ediagbonya, 2004:29).

The Head of the banned Unity Party of Nigeria, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, condemned the conduct of the elections and said it witnessed the worst rigging ever in the history of elections in Nigeria (Ediagbonya and Aluko, 2020:821). Another strong criticism came

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from the Owelle of Onitsha at the end of the general elections in September, 1983. He wrote a letter to the ousted President Shehu Shagari advising him to resign as President because the election results were falsified (Daily Times Weekly Publication, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1983: 14-15).

Considering the high level of election rigging thuggery, lawlessness and violence in the 1983 general elections in Nigeria, Nigeria observer comments that "if initial general euphoria exhibited by a great number of Nigerians is any reliable index, the latest bloodless change of country's political life is very welcome (Nigeria Observer, January, 1984). Even the National concord of Friday January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1984 captioned the military take-over as "The Coup of all coups" (National Concord, 1984).

The Head of State of Nigeria after the coup detat of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1983 General Buhari also observed the high level of thuggery, violence and lawlessness in the 1983 elections when he said in a world press conference on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1984 that:

"As for the objectives of this administration, I should like to emphasize that its basic pre-occupation is to revive the Nigerian economy by officially exploiting and harnessing all available human and material resources in order to improve the quality of life of all Nigerians. To this end, the administration shall "maintain law and order and ensure the security of life and property" (Major-General Buhari at a World Press Conference 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1984).

### **CONCLUSION**

Election in terms of origin is colonial in nature and outlook. Nigeria though democratic according to their levels of development was devoid of elections and electoral processes. Election is the process or the act of choosing a person or persons for an office or for certain officers by the voters who are formally qualified.

Violence could connotes every variety of protest, militancy, coercion, destruction, or muscle flexing. The 1959 election in Nigeria was not free from election rigging and violence. The federal elections of 1964 and the Regional elections of 1965 in Western Region witnessed high level of political violence. Even the Nigeria's fourth republic is bedeviled by several forms of violence and crime which consist of murder, assassination, arson, sabotage, armed attacks intra and inter-party clashes and electoral violence.

The widespread accusation of ballot stuffing in the 1983 election led to another successful northern official coup in 1983. Infact the 1983 general election witnessed high level of thuggery, violence and lawlessness.

In the 1983 elections, in Nigeria, the military had quitted the stage and did not supervise those elections. So those who could not demonstrate their acts of vandalism and thuggery during the 1979 elections now had the ample opportunity to demonstrate the vices in 1983 elections. Infact, the most violence of the Mayhem took place in Ondo State where the carnage was so high. It was the same sad experience in Oyo State considered to be stronghold of the Unity Party of Nigeria like Ondo State. Several persons lost their lives and large scale destruction of property was recorded.

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