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Civic Engagement and its Role in Mitigating Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Implications for the 2015 General Elections

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ABSTRACT

In May 1999, Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, made an epochal transition to democratic civilian rule following roughly thirty-three years of military dictatorship. Since 1999, Nigeria has held four successive elections, which have all been (more or less) undermined by electoral violence. Despite this recurrent and disturbing trend of electoral violence, few works have attempted to systematically engage with three key questions: why is electoral violence a recurrent phenomenon in Nigeria? Why have there been so few constitutional provisions to mitigate its recurrence? What lessons can be learned from Nigeria's turbulent electoral past, especially with regards to the role of civic engagement? These are the core questions this paper seeks to address. This paper draws its data primarily from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)-Electoral Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) programme, with which the authors were actively involved during the 2007 and 2011 general elections in Nigeria. To balance any inconsistencies, data derived from a content analysis of IFES reports and cumulative observations will be triangulated and cross-validated with reports of different Election Observation Missions to Nigeria (1999-2011), as well as reports from local and international observation teams and key International NGOs working in the areas of elections and democracy in Nigeria, including National Democratic Institute (NDI), Human Rights Watch (HRW) and International Republican Institute (IRI). The paper thus argues that as Nigeria prepares for 2015 elections, important lessons should be adapted from the IFES-EVER project to ensure robust civic engagement in preventing and mitigating electoral related violence. The use of electoral support networks, link with Nigerian police and other security agencies, constant engagement and information sharing between INEC and all relevant stakeholders as well as biweekly reportage and publication of incidents of electoral violence with names of perpetrators will go a long way in preventing and mitigating incidents of electoral violence in Nigeria 2015 General Elections. Furthermore, crucial attention should also be paid to Nigerian legal and constitutional provisions on electoral violence with the view to reviewing the standards and level of sanctions to perpetrators.

1. INTRODUCTION

In May 1999, Nigeria overcame an important political dilemma by finally returning its political and governance system to civilian democratic rule. This happened after years of protracted military rule, which had put an unpredictable stop to Nigerian democratic dreams after the independence of 1st October 1960. However, while it is imperative to celebrate the return to civilian democracy as opposed to military rule, Nigeria's democracy has not been without serious and serial challenges that are in fact antithetical to the very values and tenets of democracy. One of those challenges has been the consistent and regular occurrence of electoral violence in all of Nigeria's elections since the return to democracy in 1999. In short, violence at varying levels has been an unfortunate staple of Nigerian elections (Onwudiwe & Berwind-Dart, 2010). The Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2007) report in the lead up to the 2007 elections opined that Nigeria has not conducted a free and fair election since its return to democracy and that elections have been marred by widespread violence, intimidation, bribery, vote rigging and corruption. Since 1999, Nigeria has held four elections and is currently preparing for the fifth election in 2015. There is a sense in which one can argue that the Nigerian transition project has remained on track with the army keeping to the barracks. However, there remains a lingering question regarding the quality of the transition process and the extent to which those transitions since 1999 have complied with the fundamental tenets of credible and genuine elections. Despite the continued manifestation of all forms of electoral violence since 1999, the Nigerian constitution has continued to pay scant attention to the consequences of electoral violence even as the country prepares for the 2015 general elections.

This paper therefore examines the extent to which the Nigerian transition project has failed within the context of managing credible elections without incidents of electoral violence. Adding to that is the role of civic engagement in curbing and mitigating the scale of electoral violence in Nigeria since the start of the 1999 electoral transition project. The paper argues important lessons such as use of electoral support networks, link with Nigerian police and other security agencies, constant engagement and information sharing between INEC and all relevant stakeholders as well as biweekly reportage and publication of incidents of electoral violence with names of perpetrators should be adapted from the IFES-EVER project to ensure robust civic engagement in preventing and mitigating electoral related violence. Furthermore, crucial attention should also be paid to Nigerian legal and constitutional provisions on electoral violence with the view to reviewing the standards and level of sanctions to perpetrators.

2. METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1. Methodology

This paper draws strongly on two methods of data for its analysis. First, the paper uses the secondary method of data collection, which is based on past and present scholarly articles on elections, democracy and political transition in Nigeria. Within the same line of secondary data, this paper equally draws copiously on reports of different Election Observation Missions to Nigeria since the 1999 general election to the 2011 elections. There is also reliance on reports from local and domestic observation teams as well as reports from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) working in the areas of elections and democracy in Nigeria. Some of these INGOs provided assistance to Nigerian electoral institutions in the lead up to the various elections in Nigeria. Reports from institutions like IFES, NDI, HRW and IRI offered valuable insights in the analysis of the paper. Since we, as authors, worked on the IFES-Electoral Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) programme, we bring our wealth of experience as the team leaders and participants of the EVER project respectively to bear on the secondary data used in this paper.

2.2. Electoral Violence in Perspectives

There is a tendency in mainstream literature on elections to confuse electoral violence with political violence and conflict. Some authors lump electoral violence as part of electoral fraud. Whilst these are interrelated and could often result from democratic and political situations, they are not entirely the same, although they are co-extensive. Much of the literature on elections and democracy have a tendency of conflating electoral violence with other forms of political and conflict situations, and most fail to delineate clearly what electoral violence means within the broader sphere of political, electoral and conflict literature. In fact, most literature that dwells on electoral violence have failed to answer the basic question of what is electoral violence before delving into the discourse and analysis. To adequately position this paper, it is expedient to begin by distilling the related perspectives on electoral violence.

2.2.1. The Political Centred Perspective

The corpus of work under this perspective focuses on electoral violence as an outcome of the contestation for political power. This body of literature focuses more on the link between struggle for political power and electoral violence but leaves a blurred line in clearly delineating what is meant by electoral violence and its scope, limits, and timing. One such work is that of John Campbell (2010) who, while examining the political and conflict problem in Nigeria in the lead up to the 2010 election, dwelt on the conflict and power dynamics in Nigeria while critically appraising the danger of electoral violence with no attempt to define electoral violence. Although Campbell's work was good in synthesizing the intricate power dynamics and struggles in Nigeria and how they manifest in the form of electoral violence, its lack of definition leaves the reader in doubt on the meaning and scope of electoral violence. Similarly, Shola Omotola (2010), who this paper identifies within this perspective, argues that the rising electoral violence in Africa is deeply connected with the 'neo-patrimonial character of the African state, the nature of contestation for power the shadows of military cum authoritarian overhangs over the democratisation process, and the weak institutionalisation of democratic architectures, including the economic foundations of the democratisation process, political parties and electoral management bodies (EMBs)'. This perspective identifies electoral violence as a symptom of the political power struggle between competing groups.

2.2.2. Electoral Fraud Perspective

The electoral fraud centred perspective views electoral violence as part of broader fraudulent activities during an electoral period or in an election year. The perspective focuses on the concept of electoral fraud as the motivation for electoral violence. It wraps electoral violence within its broad types of electoral fraud (Lehoucq, 2003). Again, this perspective stops short of conceptualising electoral violence but confuses electoral fraud, electoral violence, and electoral malpractice as one and the same.

2.2.3. Conflict Centred Perspective

The third perspective in the literature on electoral violence is the conflict centred perspective, which views electoral violence as part of conflict within a particular context. Gabrielle Bardall (2011) while placing electoral violence within the gender perspective argues that salient identity lines are evolving under the forces of globalization placing tension and conflict at the fore of engagement. As a result, intra-state ethnic, nationalist, and religious tension and conflict have grown, thus, resulting in the increase of gender based violence some of which are products and remnants of electoral violence, which is very vulnerable to the conflict. An important dimension to this perspective is its assumption that electoral violence is synonymous to conflict, and that electoral violence can take place within an unstable political situation. However, if events such as the 2000 Bush v. Gore election was proven as electoral manipulation, it clearly counts as electoral violence within the electoral violence centred perspective.

2.2.4. Electoral Violence Centred Perspective

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) conceived electoral violence in an encompassing manner that transcends the political, conflict and fraud perspective. It looks beyond what occurs on Election Day to include harm or threat to the electoral system within the electoral cycle. According to IFES, in its Electoral Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) project, electoral violence is *“harm or threat of harm to any person or property involved in the election process or to the election process itself during the election period.”*^[1] From the IFES-EVER definition, electoral violence can be overt and covert and occurs within a specific time frame. It also transcends harm to electoral stakeholders or persons but also reflects on threats that could harm and/or undermine the integrity of the electoral process

There are similar definitions that adopt the electoral violence perspective. In his paper, Fisher (2002: p 3) defines electoral violence as ‘any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced protection, blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination.’ While this definition aligns mostly with the IFES definition, it fails to restrict the definition to a certain period within the electoral cycle. Whilst it opens the space for broader coverage of what electoral violence means, it also creates confusion between electoral violence and political violence. Another synchronized definition that falls within the same thinking of electoral violence as occurring during the electoral process is the one offered by Otiye Igbuzor (2010) who defines electoral violence as:

‘Any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of

[1] EVER is an IFES methodology, which uses reliable, systematic monitoring of the election process by on-the-ground civil society monitors to establish patterns of election violence for a specific election process. This data is shared with electoral stakeholders to enable development of mitigation strategies to counter the pattern of election violence observed through the EVER monitoring.

force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes”.

Igbuzor’s definition is problematic in at least three ways. First, while the instances captured in the definition clearly identifies core examples of electoral violence, it only focuses on the overt forms of electoral violence, which can be manifested in appearance. Second, the definition ignores other forms of electoral violence which cannot be detected but constitute more harm than overt violence. Psychological intimidations through threats, denial of rights, and other covert forms of electoral violence are overlooked. Third, the definition also subsumes electoral violence as part of political activity.

Clarifying electoral violence as a concept requires identifying the important components of electoral violence in order to avoid the problem of overgeneralisation. In trying to draw a line between electoral violence and general political violence, Höglund (2009: 412-427) calls attention to the characterisation of timing, motives, actor(s) as well as activities and targets. This is particularly important in order to distinguish between the conceptualisation of electoral violence as sub-activities within the larger group of political violence and electoral violence as uniquely distinct from political violence. However, while the type of activity, target and actors might occur in other types of general political violence it is particularly the timing and motive that makes electoral violence unique and distinct from political violence. Electoral violence occurs within a given period of time and the motive must be targeted at disrupting the electoral processes.

According to Fisher (2002), the underlying objective of electoral violence is to influence the electoral process and outcome. This definition brings forward the question of motive in conceptualising electoral violence. In other words, the motive of the actor must be targeted at a particular victim or property with the aim of trying to determine, delay, or otherwise influence the outcome of an electoral process. What is important here is the motive of the perpetrator irrespective of whether a perpetrator or actor is a participant in the election or not – if the motive is to influence the electoral process, such acts of violence can be classified as electoral violence. For instance, if some group of ethnic nationalities are opposed to the election the electoral system and intend to obstruct the electoral process as a way of showing disapproval for the electoral and electoral system in general, such acts of violence could be classified as electoral violence from the motive point of view. Additionally, if a particular candidate unleashes violence on an opposition supporter in order to deter their full participation in the electoral process as a way of seeking ways to influence the outcome of the election in his or her favour, such violence is also motivated by the aim of influencing the electoral process and as such qualifies as electoral violence.

Understanding electoral violence and the motive behind the act requires an understanding of the actor or perpetrator. Electoral violence can be perpetrated by a variety of actors such as the state (military, police, special security), political parties, militia, and even secessionist groups depending on the context. For instance, electoral violence can be a strategy used by neglected minority groups, militants and other secessionist groups to score political points and gain political recognition. The different actors to the electoral process have incentives to engage in electoral violence and there are cases where ruling parties, opposition parties, government through military and police as well as other actors have perpetrated electoral violence in different forms. Parties have been known to instigate their youth wings to perpetrate acts

of electoral violence during the election period in various ways and towards different electoral targets. During the 2007 elections in Nigeria, EVER (2007) reported cases where political parties (opposition and ruling) engaged in electoral violence through their youth wings.

The type and nature of activities and targets constitute to a large extent the classification of electoral violence. Harassing, assault, and intimidation of candidates, election workers, and voters; rioting; destruction of property; and political assassination when targeted towards an electoral stakeholders, electoral material, electoral facilities and electoral event during the election process constitute acts of electoral violence. Qualifying an act as electoral violence with regards to activity and target does not preclude non-physical violence. In as much as physical violence targeted at individuals could influence elections in a direct manner, covert psychological intimidation could do the same or even more by influencing voter decision to vote, but also in determining whom they vote for (Hoglund, 2009).

Conceptualising electoral violence within the premise of time requires an understanding of the electoral cycle. The electoral cycle encompasses three important periods: the pre-election, election and post-election periods.² These periods are critical to the notion of electoral violence because of the importance of time in deconstructing electoral violence. The beginning of the electoral cycle can be marked by different events, which could easily link to each other and from one election to another. However, in trying to decipher and underline electoral violence, it is crucial to underscore events within the electoral cycle that mark the beginning of electoral violence. The day on which voter or party registration begins or the day initiating the campaign period may represent such events that mark the beginning of electoral cycles and thus electoral violence. Fisher (2002) highlights that electoral violence can begin during voter registration and terminate at the post-election period in preparations for inaugurations. What makes these periods crucial is the imperative of ensuring that political conflicts are not interlinked with electoral violence and also to ensure that mitigation approaches are directed appropriately.

2.2.5. Working definition of electoral violence

Having reviewed the perspectives on electoral violence, this paper adopts IFES-EVER's electoral violence centered definition, which resonates with Höglund's definition and distinction between electoral violence and other forms of political violence. IFES defines electoral violence as harm or threat of harm to any person or property involved in the election process or to the election process itself during the election period.

The centrality of the IFES-EVER definition is that electoral violence can be overt and covert and occurs within a specific time frame. Within this context, electoral violence is not merely harm done to electoral stakeholders but also incorporates those threats that are likely to harm or undermine the integrity of the electoral process. Intimidation, verbal and psychological threats could be as or even more effective than physical violence, in influencing the voting behaviour of a voter or potential voter. It is interesting to underscore that electoral violence must happen within the electoral process. This definition implies that political violence outside the electoral process may not qualify as electoral violence. Although one might argue that since elections are cyclical and plans for the next begin where the last activity for the pervious cycle ends, it is difficult to distinguish electoral violence from political violence or conflict situation that happens during elections.

In clearly delineating electoral violence and political violence, IFES-EVER captured

[2] <http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/electoral-assistance/electoral-cycle>

the scope of electoral violence to mean violence that begins from the voter registration period of the electoral cycle to the period when electoral appeals or complaints regarding the election have been adjudicated (Sharma & Kammerud, 2010). Another important point in the IFES-EVER definition is that electoral violence is not only directed at a person but can also be directed at property. Destruction of campaign offices, tearing and defacing of electoral posters and stealing of ballot boxes are all within the confines of electoral violence (ibid).

There are a number of reasons why this definition is favoured in this paper. First, the definition transcends the goal-oriented or instrumental character of electoral violence as captured by the political, conflict and fraud centred definitions. Secondly, its element of electoral violence based on electoral cycle clearly helps in avoiding the muddling of electoral violence with other forms of violence. Thirdly, it also allows for coverage of electoral violence within a conflict situation but ensures that electoral violence is clearly delineated from conflict in general. Finally, it ensures the coverage of both overt and covert acts of electoral violence, which can impact on the electoral process.

3. DYNAMICS OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA SINCE 1999

Since Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999, after four decades of military rule, the country has struggled to hold free and fair elections (Adetula, 2014). Although Nigeria's return to democratic rule opened up space for civic engagement with the electoral process (more on this later), all Nigerian elections since 1999 have been marred by varying levels of electoral violence (Adetula, 2014; Aniekwe & Kushie, 2011). The level of financial investment and 'money bags' premiums from politics in Nigeria gives elections the stamp of a 'do-or-die' affair (Onwudiwe & Berwind-Dart, 2010). This is complicated by the fact that in Nigeria, 'the winners in the competition for power win everything, the losers lose everything.' Hence, 'everyone seeks power by every means, legal or otherwise and those who already control state power try to keep it by every means.' The result is 'a politics which does not know legitimacy, only expediency' (Ake, 1976: 7). The burden of this section is to explore the dynamics of electoral violence in Nigeria, with particular focus on the period between 1999 and 2014. The section then draws on previous electoral trends and current threats to shed some light on the forthcoming 2015 elections.

1999 elections: The elections of May 1999 marked the start of a transition from military to civil rule. While the registration process and all four rounds of the 1999 elections were tarnished, to varying degrees, by 'electoral irregularities' and 'outright fraud' (Carter Center & NDIIA, 1999), observers note that the elections were conducted without violence (Orji & Uzodi, 2012). In their final report entitled 'Observing the 1998-1999 Elections', the Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), which jointly monitored the 1999 elections in Nigeria, concluded that 'the transition from military to civilian rule was generally conducted without violence' (Carter Centre & NDIIA, 1999). According to NDI (1999: 32), 'to all of their credit, the elections proceeded on time, with limited disruption or incidences of violence, and achieved their primary goal of transferring power. The Commonwealth Observer Group (1999: 24, 27) supports this view, noting that 'there was no significant reports of violence that were election-related... As with the National Assembly campaign, we saw no evidence of violence that was election-related.' Having lived under a heavy-handed and high-handed military regime for more than three decades, Nigerians acceptance of the results of the 1999 elections was based on the 'lesser evil' principle (see Aniekwe & Kushie 2011).

Despite the reported general absence of violence by different Election Observation

Missions, the 1999 elections amplified the contradictions that have undermined previous democratic experiments in Nigeria, such as 'divided loyalties, manipulation of primordial identities and loyalties, corruption and other election malpractices, lack of political discipline, and limited attention to serious structural equations' (Ihonvbere 1999: 59). In particular, the massive use of money to buy influence, votes and acceptability was visible in the 1999 elections and remains an 'unresolved issue' in Nigerian electoral politics, as evidenced by the 2003 elections.

2003 elections: Violence during the 2003 elections was rampant and barefaced. The electoral violence took various forms, such as 'intra-party clashes, political assassinations, and community unrest in already volatile areas such as Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta' (Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart 2010: 3). A report by HRW notes that in April and May 2003, at least one hundred people lost their lives and many more were critically injured during federal and state elections in Nigeria (HRW, 2004). In some areas, results of elections were announced even though the local people complained that no elections took place. In other cases, political thugs and hired mercenaries snatched ballot boxes and thumb printed the ballot papers in favour of their candidates (see Aniekwe & Kushie, 2011). Research conducted by Orji and Uzodi (2012: 22) shows that during the 2003 elections, 'primitive accumulation of votes reached its apogee particularly in the South-West zone where the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) moved into states hitherto controlled by the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and dislodged the AD in five out of the six states it controlled in 1999.' Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of over 90 civil society groups joined in condemning the elections:

While the voters waited and persevered in the polling station to cast their votes, the political class and the political parties had different ideas. The politicians wanted to corrupt the process and rig their way into elective office. On the whole, the results can be said to marginally reflect the choice and will of the Nigerian people (as cited in Orji & Uzodi 2012: 23).

A troubling dimension of the 2003 elections was the implication of politicians and party bosses in the hiring and arming of ethnic militias to fulfil their political ends (HRW, 2004). For example, evidence from the 2003 elections shows how the incumbent state governor of Rivers, Peter Odili, through the PDP, subverted the electoral process by exploiting youths. In an interview with HRW, Tom Ateke, a leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), acknowledged the role he played in the 2003 elections when he noted: 'Governor Odili had promised cash and jobs in great quantities for me and my boys and in return any place he sent me I conquered for him' (HRW, 2007: 81). Hence, the use of 'money bags' to alter electoral outcomes, earlier observed in the 1999 elections, intensified during the 2003 elections. One report, titled 'Nigeria's 2003 Elections: The Unacknowledged Violence,' described the 2003 elections as 'a low intensity armed struggle' (HRW, 2004). In Gombe State, a group of boys known as 'Kalare' have proven 'easy prey for politicians who offer them small amount of money, drugs, alcohol and weapons in exchange for engaging in acts of intimidation and assaults or simply to accompany their campaigns in a demonstration of muscle' (Omeiza, n.d. 14). The activities of the Kalare boys have included assault, rape, harassment, and extortion of ordinary civilians. Many of the Kalare boys worked for the PDP as political thugs during the 2003 and 2007 elections (HRW, 2007). As Ma'azu, the PDP youth leader in Gombe State puts it, 'thank God we have more boys than the opposition' (HRW, 2007: 94). In the 2003 elections in the Niger Delta, Gaskia noted that:

Politicians from the major political parties mobilized and surreptitiously armed groups of unemployed and disenchanting youths, and deployed them to cause mayhem and manipulate the electoral process. In this contestation and competitive arming of young groups,

the party, which controlled the State government, got the upper hand. These political elite rivalries, coupled with a struggle for turf, contributed immensely to the rise of armed militancy and inter-militant armed violence, which preceded the 2003 elections and became consolidated in the period between the 2003 and 2007 general elections in the Niger Delta (as cited in Anifowose & Odukoya, 2013: 295).

Perhaps, Chief Hon. Omenazu Jackson, former National Publicity Secretary of the African Renaissance Party, had it right when he noted that in Nigeria, 'you kill and maim on election days and go about the streets unchallenged' (*National Mirror*, 2009: 9).

2007 elections: If the scale of electoral violence during the 2003 violence was bad, the 2007 elections proved that 'the worst was yet to come' (Orji & Uzodi, 2012: 23). The unprecedented level of violence during the 2007 elections was partly a function of small arms and light weapons still circulating from the 2003 election cycle, which 'increased the likelihood of violence [and] afforded youth militias new leverage through which to influence the very powers that had armed them in the first place' (Onwudiwe & Berwind-Dart 2010: 4). Research conducted by IFES-Nigeria reported a total of 967 incidents of electoral violence during the 2007 elections, including cases of abduction and kidnapping, murder and killing, protest, disruption, intimidation and physical attack (IFES Nigeria, cited in Aniekwe & Kushie 2011: 13). Between January 13 and April 2007, at least 18 killings were recorded (ibid). One report noted that 'merely declaring oneself as a candidate was enough to put one's life at risk' (Onwudiwe & Berwind-Dart, 2010: 3). Civil society organisations (CSOs) in Nigeria described the 2007 elections as the worst ever. Some of the gaps identified by CSOs include: (a) late commencement of election at majority of the polling stations due to late arrival of personnel and materials; (b) insufficient election materials and sometimes incomplete materials such as provision of ballot papers without enough result sheets; (c) lack of proper organisation of polling centres, with some equipped with dilapidated chairs and tables; (d) inadequate security arrangements to ensure orderly voting at the polling centres (as cited in Akinboye & Oloruntoba, 2007). There were also reports of cases where the security officials turned a blind eye to party agents, mostly PDP, engaging in ballot stuffing (ibid). In explaining the 'direct capture' that took place in the 2007 elections, Ibeanu (2009: 10) writes:

It does appear that government agencies and the ruling party pulled off one of the most brazen stealing of votes ever recorded in Nigeria's history. While in the past, rigging was regarded as an illegal act to be carried out subtly and covertly; in 2007 it was direct, brazen and daring. Indeed, it was an unprecedented direct seizure of votes and mandates. The people's mandate could not have been more directly captured.'

Aniekwe & Kushie (2007: 1) note that, in fact, 'since the 1999 to the 2007 General Elections, the Nigerian electoral and political landscape has fallen from par to below par and has moved from violence to greater violence.' Reports indicate that over 11,000 people were killed in hundreds of separate outbreaks of politically motivated communal violence in Nigeria from 1999 to 2007 (Orji & Uzodi 2012: 12).

2011 elections: Following the April 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria, HRW reported that over 800 people were killed and close to 65,000 people displaced in three days of violent protests in 12 states in northern Nigeria. The violence commenced with popular protests by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim from the Congress for Progressive Change, following the re-election of the incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta in the south, who was the candidate for the ruling

People's Democratic Party (HRW, 2011). The situation was not helped by evidence which suggests that since 1999, 'the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) through a combination of the control, manipulation, organised violence and deployment of federal state power, political institutions and resources, has successfully hijacked and subverted the electoral institutions and processes to consolidate its hold on to power and public resources' (Obi 2009: 9). The ominous signs of violence were there even before the 2011 polls. In Edo state, for example, a political contender was shot dead in August after announcing his intention to contest for a seat in the House of Representatives. A famous militant in the Niger Delta, Saboma George, accused of past electoral malpractice, was killed in Rivers State. In what many believed to be an attempted attack on the governor himself, a security aide to the Bauchi State governor was shot (Onwudiwe & Berwind-Dart, 2010).

4. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT WITH ELECTORAL PROCESS: A TENTATIVE ASSESSMENT

According to Prof. Attahiru Jega, INEC Chairman, "civil society organisations have an important role to play in mitigating violence through voter education and they should help to identify perpetrators of violence, who are generally well known to communities"³. Paffenholz & Spulk, (2006) also noted that civic engagement is the key to any functioning participatory democracy because it enhances political accountability and sustainable development. But what is 'civic engagement'? The term 'civic engagement' refers mainly to the participation of individuals in civil life and groupings (Putnam 2000: 31-180). This term has been used to date primarily in the context of younger people (Adler & Goggin, 2005). Diller (2001: 7) contends that 'civic engagement differs from an individual ethic of service in that it directs individual efforts towards collective action in solving problems through our political process.' Here, civic engagement is understood as political involvement. Relatedly, 'civil society,' the space of civil engagement, is defined in Hegelian terms, as the distinct sphere of public space separate from the state, which manages the social relations and communication between the state and its citizens (Young 1994, cited in Kew & Oshikoya, 2014: 8). CSOs are said to be 'a dense network of voluntary associations and citizens organisations that help to sustain community relations in a way that generates trust and cooperation between citizens and a high level of civic engagement and participation. Therefore, they create the conditions for social integration, public awareness and action, and democratic stability' (Newton 2001: 201).

This section provides a tentative assessment of Nigeria's recent experience in civic engagement with the electoral process.

Civic engagement in Nigeria dates back to, and even before, the colonial era under various platforms like political parties, student union bodies and labour unions. These organisations had a key role to play in the pushing for political independence. The various platforms adopted various strategies, including protests, propaganda, strikes and civil disobedience to press home their demand for change (Akinboye & Oloruntoba, 2007). The trade unions featured prominently in the 1990s. As Ninalowo (1995) observes, 'Trade unionism is supremely important in genuinely successful transition to civil rule. Just as the ideals of democratic culture are in turn inextricably tied with emancipatory interests, political, intellectual, economic as well as cultural forms of freedom, similarly, the ideals and the *raison d'être* of trade unionism and the labour movement all over the world, are interwoven with emancipatory and libertarian interests.' Since 1999, however, Nigeria has been without a civil society with an overarching 'democracy-

[3] A Press conference organized by INEC in the lead up to the 2011 Elections

deepening coalitions' (Kew & Oshikoya 2014: 16). This is not unrelated to the fact that prior to 1999, civil society had the military as a common enemy, and they used this as a rallying point to agitate for a speedy return to civil rule. Since the transition to civil rule in 1999, however, civic life in Nigeria has been dotted by what Kew and Oshikoya refers to as 'multiple issue-specific coalitions': 'election-reform coalitions, anticorruption coalitions, one for the passage of a Freedom of Information Bill, and others' (ibid: 16). While some CSOs belong to multiple coalitions, 'no central, sustained alliance' exists as in the 1990s through which a coordinated planning and response electoral violence could be channelled.

There were some signs of change when during the 2007 general elections, CSOs assembled under the umbrella of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) to perform specific roles aimed at guaranteeing civic education, increasing voters' awareness about the need for participation in the electoral process (Akinboye & Oloruntoba, 2007). In the pre-election period, the TFG organised several trainings for CSOs. The TFG also played a key role in mobilizing Nigerians to actively participate in the pre-election voters' registration exercise. As the elections drew near, CSOs in Nigeria united under the banner of 'Domestic Election Observation Groups' which included, but was not limited to: the TFG, Labour Monitoring Team (LMT), Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Women Environmental Programme (WEP), Muslim League for Accountability (MULAC), Center for Democracy and Development (CDD), Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE), Citizens Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR), and the Electoral Reform Network (ERN). These groups deployed approximately, 50,000 trained election observers and monitors throughout the country (Akinboye & Oloruntoba, 2007).

In its 2007 preliminary report on the Gubernatorial and State Assemblies Elections, the TFG stated that the key role of election observers is to observe 'the management of the various phases in the electoral process and reporting strengths and weaknesses... The participation of CSOs in Nigeria in the observation and monitoring of elections since the early 1990s has been informed by the need to develop and sustain an electoral process in the country that is open, inclusive, free and fair...' (as cited in Akinboye & Oloruntoba, 2007). However, the preliminary report noted that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) refused to collaborate with the CSOs during the voters registration exercise. Instead, INEC 'alienated, demonized and regularly misrepresented the CSOs to the public, government and security agencies' (ibid).

In January 2012, the emergence of a new media movement 'Occupy Nigeria' also showed signs of promise. The movement emerged to protest President Goodluck Jonathan's removal of fuel price subsidies, effectively doubling the prices of fuel across the country overnight. Using social media networks like Facebook and other online or smart phone technologies, the movement swiftly organised nationwide protests. Akin to past coalitions in Nigeria, the movement became massive once the trade unions joined but soon crumpled once the unions reached an agreement with the Nigerian government amid widespread accusations from other CSOs that union leaders had greased their palms (ibid: 16). However, many CSOs moved their protest online, where they continued their rapport and consolidated their coalition-building efforts. In 2013, sensing that public angst over PDP misgovernment have reached a turning point, the four main opposition parties merged into a single national party, the All Progressive Congress (APC), which may provide civil society organisations the political level that they need as a central assembling point (ibid: 16).

It is important to note that the engagement of the CSOs with the Nigerian elec-

toral process is weakened by a number of factors: (a) there are internal contradictions within the membership due principally to the differences in their socio-economic wellbeing, background, and ethno-religious compositions; (b) the work of the CSOs is undermined by the dearth of capacity in terms of knowledge, skills and methods of advocacy; (c) The lure of corruption and self-enrichment is also a major challenge facing many CSOs in Nigeria – a challenge which weakens their moral legitimacy to engage government head-on in the struggle for transparency and accountability in governance procedures; (d) CSOs struggle with poor access to capital, which reduces their capacity to conduct research-based advocacy and engagement with the state; (e) CSOs also suffer from a lack of national spread. Most of these organisations are based in Lagos and a few other state capitals in the country; (f) lastly, state interference in media activities impedes freedom of expression, especially during election campaign period (Akinboye & Olorunfoba, 2007; Adetula, 2014).

5. THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN MITIGATING ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF THE ELECTORAL VIOLENCE EDUCATION AND RESOLUTION (EVER) PROJECT.

There appears to be a consensus on the role of civil society in democratic consolidation in new and transitional democracies. Their role ranges from generating political pressure for reform, ousting of dictatorial regimes and liberalizing of political systems. The role of civil society in democracy can be classified under different roles. The first is their role in controlling state power. In some instances, the role of state and private is blurred. Therefore civil society plays a role in clearing the fragility between the function of the state and that of the private sector as well as gauge, manage separate and regulate their interaction. Therefore, civil society serves as an important watchdog to the state role in society. There is also the interest mediation function where civil society through various channels addresses the question of the content of decision making to ensure that competing political powers are balanced from an interest point of view. Apart from the previous role is the social integration role whereby civil society manages social relationships and social cohesion in a democratic setting to ensure that differences are balanced, maintained and managed in a democratic society. Political socialisation is also an important role of civil society in a democracy so that citizens are inculcated into the political culture of the society. The civil society by default also plays the non-profit function whereby civil society fills gaps created by state institutions and organised private sectors.

Within the broader functions of civil society, civic engagement in Nigeria's democratic and electoral process since its return to democratic rule in 1999 has been profound and glaring. For the past two decades in Nigeria, civil society has worked to ensure a return to democracy and also continued to advocate for increased democratic standards and public space in Nigeria by performing the various functions aforementioned. The case of the Electoral Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) Project is worth exploring in this regard.

5.1. The Electoral Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) Background, Objective and Methodology

According to IFES, the Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) Project is a targeted research and implementation initiative that identifies those conditions, causes, practices, or failures provoking electoral violence in order to prevent, manage, or reduce op-

opportunities for friction in elections and campaigns (IFES-EVER, 2014).⁴ EVER was developed as a civil society project aimed to effectively monitor and prevent election violence in conjunction with election management bodies, government institutions (including the parliament and the courts) and security forces. The project is aimed at tracking incidents of electoral violence and using data to effectively mitigate and prevent further incidents by engaging the relevant stakeholders.

The EVER project began in Sri Lanka in 2013 when an assessment conducted by IFES in September 2013 helped in the identification of the core needs for the IFES monitoring missions using the EVER methodology and the applications of the data for broader conflict mediation in Sri Lanka. After the initial pilot in Sri Lanka, EVER was further implemented successfully in other countries like Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Iraq and Timor-Leste⁵. EVER seeks to build electoral violence prevention and mitigation capacity for indigenous CSOs so that the source data and methodologies employed in monitoring incidents have some consistency and benchmarking through which evidence can be targeted for engagement with stakeholders.

In terms of methodology, EVER is a tailored combination of research, on the ground monitoring, and relationship-building between stakeholders. It consists of giving support and training to CSOs on monitoring and understanding electoral violence as well as on collaboration and dialogue with stakeholders to improve cooperation and capacity for prevention and/or mitigation of electoral violence⁶.

Overall, the EVER project aimed to build capacity of CSOs in four elements⁷. The first component of the EVER methodology is the assessment and research. Through assessment and research, EVER aims to develop an understanding of electoral violence, its impact, causes, actors, and variation within phases in the election cycle, conduct desk research and interview stakeholders in order to ascertain levels of preventive and mitigation measures in place. The second component of the EVER methodology is the observation and documentation of incidents and wider political context. The objective of this component of the EVER methodology is as follows:

- Develop an understanding of the definition of an incident of violence and what is indicated by each of the variables that can be used to characterize it
- Observation and monitoring activities ‘on the scene’ – through attending campaign / electoral events and visiting witnesses, sources, and scenes related to reported incidents of violence
- Corroboration of information and fact checking, getting at least two sources to confirm facts and supplementing media sources with another type: i.e. eyewitness, other interview, police or hospital reports/personnel.
- Follow-up of leads on incidents after the fact, to ensure more comprehensive data
- Documenting interviews and information in an informal monitoring log for later reference
- Filling out incident report forms and delivering to central office and for data entry (IFES-EVER, 2014)

[4] IFES-EVER project at <http://www.ifes.org/Research/Cross-Cutting/Election-Violence-Education-and-Resolution/Nav/Electoral-Violence-and-Mitigation.aspx>

[5] www.ifes.org/EVER

[6] Ibid

[7] <http://www.ifes.org/Research/Cross-Cutting/Election-Violence-Education-and-Resolution/Nav/Electoral-Violence-and-Mitigation/Methodology.aspx>

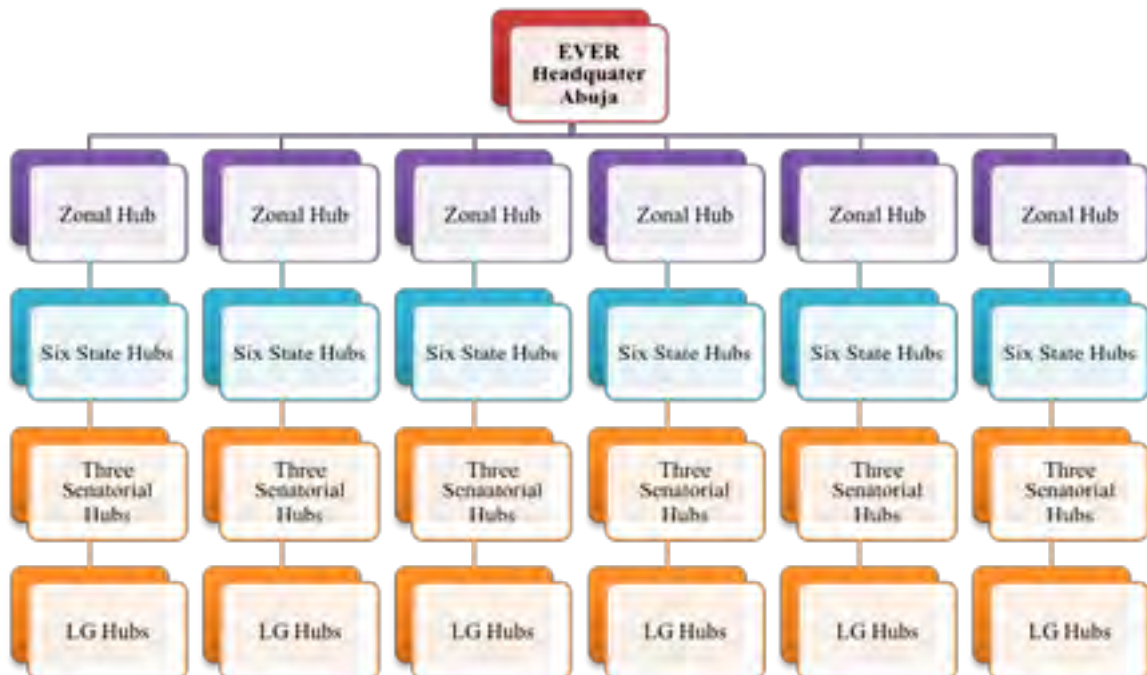
The third component of the methodology revolves around the need for reporting and information sharing. This is particularly important to ensure that data and information generated is disseminated to appropriate sources – i.e. internally, to stakeholders and externally to the public in order to ensure targeted response in preventing and mitigating electoral violence.

The last component of the EVER methodology, which is a culmination of the previous components, is the relationship building and dialogue through which targeted stakeholders are engaged to take specific action in preventing and mitigating electoral related violence.

5.2. Electoral Violence Education and Resolution; the Nigerian Case

The EVER project in Nigeria employed the same approach and methodology as other countries where the EVER project was successfully implemented. IFES partnered with a local civil society network called Nigeria Alliance for Peaceful Elections (NAPEN), which is an alliance of civil society organizations in Nigeria working to monitor and report incidents of election-related violence in the lead up to the 2007 elections in Nigeria. NAPEN was composed of six NGOs, one each from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria working on democratic governance and elections.⁸

Figure 1: The EVER Structure



[8] South-East: the Catholic Institute for Development Justice & Peace (CIDJAP);
South-South: the Center for Environment Human Right & Development (CEHRD);
South-West: the Women Advocate Research & Documentation Center (WARDC);
North-West: the Strategic Empowerment & Mediation Agency (SEMA);
North-East: the Forward in Action for Education, Poverty & Malnutrition (FAcE-PaM);
North-Central: the International Center for Gender & Social Research (Inter-Gender)

As a way of examining the role NAPEN played using EVER to mitigate electoral violence in Nigeria in 2007 and 2011 elections, an understanding of the structural arrangement of NAPEN exposes the cascading nature of the NAPEN-EVER structure and how such structural configuration aided in the successful implementation of EVER on one side and the use of EVER reporting and data to prevent and mitigate electoral violence. The NAPEN-EVER cascading structure starts at the headquarters where authority and methodological control flows down to the Ward levels but the structure starts from the wards level in term of reporting upwards to the headquarters level at the federal capital Abuja. The structural arrangement for EVER occurs at six different layers as follows, the headquarter which is based at the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja wields the overall coordinating function and ensures consistency and control in the implementation of the EVER methodology across the country. Below the HQ level is the zonal level, which is represented by the NAPEN NGOs who then report directly to the HQ. The zonal coordinating hubs have the direct responsibility to manage and support the state hubs, while the state hubs oversee the three coordinating hub originations established at the senatorial zones in that particular state. The state hubs were mandated to provide clarification to the local government hubs and exercise some degree of monitoring to ensure consistent application of the EVER methodology. However, in terms of direct management of the local hubs, the senatorial hubs wield the responsibility to manage the hubs at the local government while the local government hubs manage directly the EVER monitors spread across the various localities and wards in the local government. The EVER structure is presented diagrammatically (see Figure 1).

The effective management and outcome of the EVER intervention depends significantly on this cascading and chronological structural arrangement. The structural relevance to the overall goal of the EVER would be examined further in the following section that deals with areas of intervention.

5.3. EVER Programme Interventions

The Electoral Violence Education and Resolutions Programme were unique and specifically focused on using knowledge-based data to prevent and mitigate electoral violence. Although the programme focus of EVER was on preventing and mitigating electoral violence in Nigeria, its programme cut across supporting various electoral stakeholders to achieve the stated objective. To achieve its objective, EVER embarked on various interlinked activities, which included research on political context, partnership evaluation and selection. EVER also undertook the recruitment of EVER observers, training of observers and their deployment. This together formed the first part of the EVER programme activities.

In line with the EVER methodology discussed in the previous section, the training and deployment was subsequently followed by the main task of observing, documenting and reporting. Knowledge gathered from these activities became an engagement tool with various election stakeholders in Nigeria to prevent and mitigate incidences of electoral violence.

The interventions by EVER to prevent and mitigate electoral violence occurred at different levels and with different stakeholders. There were interventions through the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Nigeria Police, CSOs and community groups. EVER also engaged the local chiefs in different localities concerned, the media and the educational institutions, especially universities. EVER engagement with INEC in preventing and mitigating electoral violence occurred at different levels, but mostly through sharing of infor-

mation on possible threats and also by using INEC information to inform civil society organisations, which acted as the hub organisation on the best strategy to deploy in preventing electoral related violence.

One of the major problems in the lead up to the 2007 elections was the lack of trust between INEC and political parties on the one side and INEC and other CSOs on the other. There were allegations of executive and presidential interference in the electoral system. This is particularly important in Nigeria given the electoral history that is consistently shrouded by questions of integrity and fairness of the Election Management Body (EMB). The Global Commission Report on Election (2012) highlighted that electoral integrity is at the core of elections in Africa.

Adherence to the electoral code of conduct, international obligations and commitments as well as independence of the electoral commission are among the issues raised by the report that constitute a serious threat to electoral violence and also raise questions on the integrity of the electoral process. In the lead up to the 2007 elections, the Nigerian electoral process was suffering from integrity questions. There were issues of executive inference, throwing up the question of independence, trust and integrity. As a result, political parties, especially the opposition parties and the vast majority of CSOs, were unable to trust the capacity of INEC to conduct a transparent and fair election without fear or favour. Consequently, the relationship between INEC and the majority of other stakeholders was strained leading to a lack of information flowing between the two. To minimise risk emanating from a lack of trust and questions of transparency and integrity, EVER consistently gathered, reported and shared its weekly and monthly reports with the public and specifically with CSOs through the zonal, state and local hubs. The CSOs used the report to engage and advocate for political dialogue with different stakeholders across the different EVER operating levels. For instance, in Enugu, the zonal EVER hub organisation, the Catholic Institute for Development Justice & Peace (CIDJAP), presented the first three monthly reports to the different political parties and civil society organization in a consultative meeting and used the opportunity to bring to the fore the different acts of violence perpetrated by supporters of different political parties whilst advocating with political parties to instil a culture of non-violence in the minds of their supporters. The consultative meeting resulted in the reduction in electoral violence within a matter of weeks.

EVER interaction in preventing and mitigating electoral violence included engagement with the security agencies, especially the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). The NPF is an important stakeholder in the Nigerian electoral process given its role in ensuring electoral security. The NPF during elections in Nigeria is responsible for protecting the electoral material as well as managing clashes between supporters of different political parties. As the institution responsible for maintaining law and order, the NPF works to prevent electoral violence. EVER methodology recognized the NPF as an important stakeholder in preventing and mitigating electoral violence. During the official launch of EVER in Nigeria, the NPF was properly represented and discussions were further held on how EVER can support the police to prevent and mitigate electoral violence in the lead up to the elections. At the core of the engagement with the NPF was information sharing and incident reporting. Aside from the weekly and monthly reporting, EVER also had incident reporting, which was used to report incidents that require immediate action or preventive strategy. Therefore, EVER interaction with the NPF constitutes a good chunk of the EVER preventive strategy. Through information sharing and direct access to the police desk, EVER monitors and hub organizations provide quick information on on-going clashes between supporters of rival parties, hot spots and potential triggers to the police. This enables the police to react and prevent on-going clashes between political parties and also to arrive at the scene of

electoral violence as quickly as possible. This quick information sharing was done using a crowd-sourcing platform that enabled EVER monitors to input information and immediately analyse data to be used for intervention by different stakeholders. This platform was modelled along the reputable open-source platform *Ushahidi*, which was developed in Kenya.

As indicated in the methodology, EVER's objective is to disseminate information to appropriate sources for intervention. Aside from the engagement and intervention with the police, EVER also engaged other stakeholders to ensure systematic and adequate response to electoral related violence. The political parties were major partners in the EVER project and participated in ensuring that electoral violence were mitigated. In this case, it could be argued that political parties played a dual role within the overall EVER project and interventions. Most of the verified and recorded incidents were committed by political parties, while in the same vein, they supported the EVER project in preventing and mitigating cases of electoral violence that had a direct link to them or when it became obvious that perpetrators were supporters of the party.

CSOs were important stakeholders in achieving the EVER project objective. Methodologically, EVER aims to building relationship with key stakeholders and establish dialogue platforms through which election violence could be prevented and mitigated. Through its structural arrangement, EVER, which has at its peak the HQ and cascades through to the ward level, engaged with CSOs and community groups to mobilise and engage youth during the electoral process. Part of its strategy was to expose the risk of electoral violence as well as the benefits of peaceful elections. To do so, the state hubs organised several awareness campaigns in different wards in their respective states and recruited EVER ambassadors whose responsibility was to continue engagement with youth of the community and report any threats of violence to the EVER state office.

Engagement with CSOs and community groups was closely linked with the role of local chiefs in mitigating electoral violence. Local chiefs were used to achieve two objectives. First, chiefs were mediators who calmed situations by delivering messages of peace at the local level and also dialoguing with different political stakeholders. Second, local chiefs disseminated information to the local level. Although this did not always work in all the areas, it proved very successful in northern Nigeria with a centralised system of authority. In the south, faith based organisations were also efficient in this respect. Priests and pastors gave messages of violent free elections in different churches in Nigeria through EVER networks. This approach proved particularly successful in Enugu States where the state hub coordinating the states – the Catholic Institute for Development Justice & Peace (CIDJAP) – was impressive in using the church reach to spread messages of peace during elections and went further to set up catholic youth for peaceful elections. EVER tasked these youths to form groups and networks across the states. The aim was to ensure that politicians do not use youth as agents of electoral violence.

Universities were important outlets through which EVER spread its messages and engaged with direct perpetrators of electoral violence. Some university students were identified at the early stage of the project as perpetrators of electoral violence by EVER monitors. Through the EVER state hub organisations in some selected states where university students were identified as perpetrators, EVER engaged with the university student union, as well as different groups to prevent further student involvement in electoral violence. Student ambassadors were equally recruited and trained to organise awareness campaigns as well as work as EVER monitors by reporting incidents to EVER hubs in their various locations. These ambassadors were equally linked with police focal officers to ensure a speedy response to spot incidents

that required real time police response.

The scope of EVER also included collaboration with other domestic election observation groups in Nigeria. Groups like TMG, Labour Group (LG), among others, collaborated with the EVER project in terms of information sharing and organising joint awareness campaigns. EVER focus was to monitor and report incidents of electoral violence; as such observation groups shared information on incidents to EVER monitors. EVER monitors subsequently ensured verification and reporting. In addition to collaboration with domestic observation groups, EVER headquarters shared information generated by EVER monitors to human rights organisations. For instance, data on gross human rights abuses emanating from electoral violence and generated by EVER monitors were shared with HRW and local human rights organisations in Nigeria. HRW cited EVER reports as evidence of human rights abuses in their various reports. Lawyers for human rights in Nigeria also used EVER reports as evidence. Invariably, data generated by EVER monitors aided in the achievement of EVER methodology on research. EVER data served as research data for other research institutions and academic researchers examining electoral violence. It also helped in building a “glocal⁹” database on electoral violence that can be used locally and globally in addressing issues of electoral violence.

6. IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

The impact of the EVER project was felt across different areas and levels including capacity building, research, reform as well as in the improvement of political dialogue and the increased awareness of the impact of electoral violence in the electoral process.

The EVER project was the first of its kind in Nigeria to provide training specifically in monitoring electoral violence. Most observation in Nigerian elections focused broadly on observing the electoral process in order to assess its credibility and transparency. While both international and local election observation missions provided records of electoral violence in their observation reports, they nonetheless viewed this as part of broader irregularities in the electoral process. The distinctive and unique feature of EVER lies in its specific focus in monitoring and documenting electoral violence. Added to this is the unique training required in order to monitor electoral violence. Therefore, in terms of impact, EVER has trained around 500 electoral violence monitors who have gained the unique capacity to monitor electoral violence, as well as use the data to engage stakeholders in preventing and mitigating electoral violence.

EVER has contributed to research in different ways. It served as a reliable source of data for research institutions examining electoral violence. Human right groups relied on EVER report as evidence. Secondly, at the Headquarters, EVER had two academic researchers that used EVER data as evidence for their PhD thesis. In this way, EVER has contributed to the body of knowledge on electoral violence at the global level.

Furthermore, the awareness created by EVER also brought issues of electoral violence to the fore in Nigeria electoral reform debate. Prior to the introduction of EVER in Nigeria, electoral violence was totally silent in the constitution. However with EVER awareness and spotlight on electoral violence, Nigeria CSOs working on elections lobbied for inclusion of electoral violence in the constitution. Apparently the advocacy for inclusion of electoral violence eventually materialised with the inclusion of electoral violence in section 95 of the Nigeria Electoral Act, which provided regulations relating to political campaigns and expressly warned against

[9] Glocal as a term here means that it can be applied locally and globally

acts of electoral violence during campaigns in sections 96. It further, in sections 117, 118 and 119, provided for offenses relating to registration, nomination and disorderly behaviour at political meetings. This extends to sections 120, 121, and 122 for offences relating to card use, use of vehicles and impersonation. All other provisions including buying of vote and bribery was dealt with in section 131¹⁰

EVER also facilitated political dialogue, which culminated in the signing of the Code of Conduct by all political parties to prevent and mitigate electoral violence in Nigeria. The code of conduct committed political parties to report cases of electoral violence and also educate their supporters. Although there are questions on the extent to which political parties actually committed to the code of conduct, by facilitating the signing by all political parties, EVER set the stage for continuing advocacy and lobbying by CSOs in Nigeria with different stakeholders on improvements to the electoral system as well as electoral reform.

There are also important lessons from the IFES-EVER project. Despite the engagement with different stakeholders, the data generated by EVER monitors did little to contribute to evidence in the post election tribunal cases. The dissemination and publication of the reports were also very limited to certain quarters. Robust approach to data and report dissemination and publication would have aided in the identification of perpetrators for legal prosecution. In addition, this would have engineering greater advocacy for reform of the provisions on electoral violence in the Electoral Act.

7. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS: WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT FROM 2015 ELECTIONS?

Thus far, this paper has sought to examine the extent to which the Nigerian transition project has failed within the context of managing credible elections without incidents of electoral violence. In addition, the paper has explored the role of civic engagement in curbing and mitigating the scale of electoral violence in Nigeria since 1999. With the 2015 general elections fast approaching, the chances of electoral violence are very high, if not assured. The paper also argued that despite the history of electoral violence in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999, the legal instruments in Nigeria appear very lenient if not encouraging to perpetrators. This is particularly so as Nigeria struggles to turn the tide of a Boko Haram insurgency in the North East that has killed over 10,000 people since 2002 (Agbibo, 2014a), and maintain fragile peace in the South through the Niger Delta amnesty programme (Agbibo, 2014b). All over the country, the evolving threats of violence ahead of the 2015 general elections include: (a) the climate of insecurity in Nigeria leads to suspicion among communities; (b) attempts by a group of youth to seize a radio station and take over government in the South East; (c) indigenes-settlers and farmers-herdsmen's conflicts in North-central Nasarawa, Plateau and Benue state, as well as in the North-Central axis to eastern angle of Taraba; (d) the burgeoning terrorism of Boko Haram and its splinter group, Ansaru; (e) increasing corruption through which monies are siphoned from the public treasure to fund electoral campaigns; (f) the continuing wrangling and disputes within political parties leading to cross-carpeting and political disputes (as cited in CISLAC, 2014). If signs and trends are anything to go by, then the stage is set for widespread electoral violence in 2015. Already, the auguries of electoral violence are evident. Three Nigerians were killed in mid-October by political partisans. As reported by one Nigerian newspaper, 'The killing was as a result of a clash between thugs loyal to the All Progressive

[10] <http://jefcas.wordpress.com/category/democracy-elections/>

Congress (APC) and thugs loyal to the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)' (*The Sun Newspaper*, October 23, 2014). In Rivers State, there have been a number of skirmishes between Governor Amaechi's supporters and those who oppose him.

In April 2014, CLEEN Foundation – an NGO that promotes public safety – released a report entitled 'Third Security Threat Assessment.' The report claims that 15 states in Nigeria may be destabilized by electoral violence during the 2015 general elections. The criteria and parameters used by CLEEN include: history of violence; degree of control by incumbent and relationship with the Federal Government; stability of internal state party politics; existence of terrorists and militants; existence of communal and religious conflicts; bid for second term by the incumbent governor; jostle for federal and state legislative positions; proliferation of arms and increase in armed groups (as cited in CLEEN 2014). The states tagged by CLEEN as 'most volatile' are: Adamawa, Benue, Borno, Ebonyi, Ekiti, Enugu, Imo, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Osun, Plateau, Rivers, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara. Not surprising, three of these states, Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe, are under a state of emergency declaration due to the violent attacks of Boko Haram. Already INEC has said it may not hold election in these three states. That these affected states are under the APC already politicizes the issue and whatever analysis that will follow therefrom (see CISLAC, 2014). Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Zamfara were the site of recent bloodletting of hundreds of people by armed men yet to be identified. Accusing fingers have, of course, pointed in the direction of Boko Haram. However, one cannot rule out the likelihood of some elements hiding under the prevailing insecurity caused by Boko Haram to unleash havoc (ibid). The CLEEN report further identified 11 'mid-volatile' states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bauchi, Delta, Gombe, Kano, Katsina, Kogi, Niger and Sokoto. The remaining states, including Lagos, are tagged as 'low-volatile' states. States like Ekiti and Osun oscillate between most volatile and mid-volatile groups (CLEEN 2014).

Against this troubling backdrop, there are increased suggestions in some international quarters that Nigerians take a pledge against violence through the campaign 'Make a Public Pledge Now – Say 'No' to Violence in 2015 Elections' (United States Diplomatic Mission to Nigeria, 2014). Others however are convinced that civic engagement with the electoral process is a key ingredient for mitigating electoral violence come 2015. At the national level, civil society groups, like the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), Women Advocates and Documentation Centre (WARDC), Human and Environmental Development Agenda (HEDA) and Human Rights Advancement, Development and Advocacy Centre (HURIDAC), have urged international organisations, particularly the United Nations Human Rights Council and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Right for tougher punishment to perpetrators of electoral violence and to monitor closely the violation of human rights. The groups called on the Nigerian government to uphold the right to liberty and security of the citizenry: 'The government should ensure that no one is arbitrarily deprived of their life, or subjected to torture and to thoroughly and promptly investigate serious violations of human rights such as the right to life or freedom from torture, prosecute perpetrators after a fair trial, with proportionate penalties' (Channels, June 18, 2014).

In addition to these on-going efforts to rein in electoral violence in the 2015 general elections, we propose the following policy recommendations: First, there is a need for the Nigerian government to establish an early warning and early response mechanism. This requires the security agencies in Nigeria to work more closely with civil society organisations to set up and sustain a Community Intelligence Gathering System tailored to accommodate the specific needs of the different communities where it is deployed. Second, there is a need for democratic

oversight of the security forces through accountability mechanisms. This is particularly important in Nigeria where security operatives and perpetrators of electoral violence are less likely to be called to account for their excesses. A useful institution to be engaged in this regard is the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Third, there is a need to mainstream both traditional and social media for effective electoral education, advocacy and reporting. This is especially important in affected parts of the Northeast where the state of emergency, if still in place by 2015, is likely to restrict movement (see CSISLAC 2014). Lastly, there is the need for Nigeria to effectively reflect electoral violence in the electoral act for a proportionate punishment for perpetrators as a way of deterring potential perpetrators as well as ensure evidence are used to bring them to justice.

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