

The use of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria's election: An assessment of the 2019 general elections in Benue State

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Abstract

The study analyses the 2019 general election in the Benue State of Nigeria looking at the challenges that characterised the electoral process. To effectively carry out this assessment, the paper made use of both primary and secondary materials, while the approach was historical, narrative, analytical, and descriptive. The study built its analyses on Small Arms Demand theory, and Failed State theory to drive home critical points for scrutiny. The study unveils that during the 2019 general elections in Benue State, desperate politicians sponsored and supplied thugs with SALWs to distort the electoral process. This problem led to the cancellation of election results in four council wards of Tiv extraction, while the gubernatorial election was declared inclusive. To stem this tide, the paper suggests a collective fight against the proliferation of SALWs in Nigeria; discouraging 'god-father and god-son' partisan politics, provision of youth empowerment programmes, and the adoption of an electronic voting system.

Keywords: Small Arms, Light Weapons, General Election, Politics, Benue State

Introduction

Elections are the trademark of democratic governance; they serve as a medium through which there is peaceful transition and legitimisation of a new government in any democratic setting. Unfortunately, the history of elections in Nigeria is synonymous with electoral violence. Nigeria has had its general elections since 1959 and 2019 despite various military interventions that truncated the electoral and democratic processes.¹ Scholars, election observers, and political analysts have variously justified some of the causes of electoral violence in Nigeria. Gbamwuan, Kwarkye, Yusuf,² among others have noted the peculiar character of the Nigerian politicians to 'win or die' in course of election hence the inevitability of electoral violence in the Nigerian state. To Sisk cited in

¹ First, R. (1970). *Power in Africa*. New York: Pantheon Books. Omoigui, N. Nowamagbe. 'Special Branch Report: 'Military Rebellion of 15th January 1966''. Gamji.com. accessed on 15-03-2022.

² Gbamwuan, A. (2013). 'A History of Post-Election Violence in Nigeria since 1979', M.A. Thesis, Department of History, Benue State University, Makurdi. Kwarkye, S. (2019). 'Roots of Nigeria's Election Violence', Relief web. Accessed on <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/roots-nigeria-s-election-violence>. 23-03-2022. Yusuf, M.I. (2019). 'Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Disentangling the Causes'. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 9, No. 10.



Yusuf³, election violence must be understood in the 'context of democratization or political change in which violence occurs; the political economy of state power and the nature and patterns of political mobilization; the political economy of state capture; and the electoral system, integrity of electoral administration, and effects of violence management efforts such as peace pacts and security-force performance'. Sisk⁴ justify the fact that electoral violence in Nigeria is a consummation of various political and socio-economic reasons, and this justifies why elections become 'Do or Die' affairs.

From 1959 to the fourth democratic dispensation a good number of electoral violence has been recorded. For instance, Anifowose⁵ recorded the 1964 and 1965 western election crisis, and the Tiv crisis of 1963 and 1965 which all contributed to the collapse of the First Republic in 1966. These conflicts recorded the official deaths of 153 people out of which 64 were killed by direct police combat. In the 1983 general elections, Oyo and Ondo witnessed the toughest violence. This story has been captured elaborately by Yoroms⁶ in the following sentences:

In Ondo state, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) declared Chief Akin Omoboriowo of NPN as the elected Governor. However, a counter announcement was made over the state radio by the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) pronouncing Adekunle Ajasin as the true winner. The latter allegedly went around Akure, the state capital in an open van calling on his supporters to come out and defend their votes. In Oyo State, Chief Bola Ige and Sam Mbakwe of Imo state both held press conferences and radio broadcasts threatened that if NPN went ahead to rig that election as planned the wives of those who helped them will become widows and their children orphans. Indeed both Oyo and Ondo states experienced monumental violence that eventually led to the collapse of the second republic

The story of electoral violence was the same in 1993 with the annulment of the Presidential election presumed to have been won by Chief Moshood Abiola, and his running mate Ambassador Babagana Kingibe. The post-election violence that emerged led to the death of several people, while nationwide protests, industrial strike action, and civil disobedience, in the final analysis, drove

³ Yusuf, M.I. (2019). 'Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Disentangling the Causes'. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 9, No. 10.

⁴ Sisk, T.D. (2012). "Evaluating Election-Related Violence: Nigeria and Sudan in Comparative Perspective", in Bekoe, D.A. (ed). *Voting in Fear: Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

⁵ Anifowose, R. (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba Experience*, Nok Publishers Enugu.

⁶ Yoroms, G. (2019). 'Electoral Violence, Arms Proliferation and Electoral Security in Nigeria: Lessons from the Twenty – Fifteen Elections from Emerging Democracies'. Unpublished Conference Paper, Department of Political Science, Bingham University, Karu, Nasarawa State. Accessed on; <https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Conference-Paper-by-Gani-Yoroms1.pdf>. P. 17.

General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida out of power.⁷ The resurgence of democratic governance in 1999 witnessed numerous incidences of electoral violence leading to the death of hundreds of thousands of people. Bakare⁸ reported how the 2011 election claimed over 800 lives over three days in Northern Nigeria and displaced 65,000 people. Alao⁹ corroborated this argument which summarises the incidences and fatalities of the 2019 general election in Nigeria in the following way:

North Central: 23 incidents, 111 people killed, North East: 16 incidents, 146 people killed, North West: 20 incidents, 172 people killed, South East: 7 incidents, 14 people killed, South-South: 59 incidents, 120 killed; and South West: 36 incidents, 63 killed when the incident and fatality numbers are phrased on a state-by-state basis, Benue, Borno, Kaduna, Rivers and Zamfara, lead the casualty figures. From an analysis of the period of study which covers a period of 127 days, about 15% of all incidents, and 20% of all fatalities occurred on Election Day.

From the forgoing narratives of electoral violence in Nigeria, the use of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) is not out of place. The use of lethal weapons made some people have no interest in Nigerian politics.

Therefore, this paper is a stock-taking exercise on the 2019 general electoral violence in the Benue State of Nigeria with the use of SALWs. The study is a radical departure from the avalanche of historical documents on electoral violence in Nigeria including the works of Albert (2007); Aniekwe and Kushie (2011); Animashaun (2008); Babarinsa (2002); Ettanibi (2004); Abiola and Olaopa (2008); Tamuno (2003); Sisk (2012); Gbamwuan (2013) Yusuf (2019); Kwarkye, (2019) *et cetera*.¹⁰ The above studies look at the causes, nature,

⁷ Olowojolu, O. et al., (2019), Trends in Electoral Violence in Nigeria. J. of Social Sciences and Public Policy, Vol. 11, Number 1, Pp. 37-52. Olowojolu, O. (2015), 'Ethnicity and Religion: Key Indicators in Nigeria's Electoral System', International Conference on Social Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey.

⁸ Bakare, T. (2018). 'Boko Haram Releases Kidnapped UNIMAID Lecturers', in the *Guardian Newspaper*, accessed on; <https://guardian.ng/news/boko-haram-releases-kidnapped-unimaid-lecturers/>. 09-03-2022.

⁹ Alao, A. (2021). 'Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Implication for Democratic Development'. *Journal of Administrative Science*, Vol.18, Issue 2. pp. 335-336.

¹⁰ Albert, I.O. (2007). Reconceptualizing electoral violence in Nigeria, In I.O. Albert, D. Marco and V. Adetula (Eds). Perspectives on the 2003 Elections in Nigeria. Abuja: IDASA and SterlingHolding Publishers. Aniekwe, C.C. and Kushie, J. (2011). Electoral violence situational analysis: Identifying hotspots in the 2011 general elections in Nigeria (A Report Submitted to National Association for Peaceful Elections in Nigeria (NAPEN), Abuja, Nigeria. Animashaun, M.A. (2008). The 2007 elections and the imperative of electoral reform in Nigeria. *Covenant Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 1 and 2, 123-141. Babarinsa, D. (2002). The house of war. Lagos. Tell Communication Publishers. Ettanibi, O.A. (2004). Elections as Organized Crime: Nigerian Experience. Paper presented at the Centre for African Studies Seminar, at the University of Cape Town, on May 12. Abiola, A. G. & Olaopa, O. R. (2008). 'Economic Development and Democratic Sustenance', in Ojo, E.O. (ed.) *Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria*. John Archers. Tamuno, T.N. (2003). "Historical Antecedents of Political Violence in Nigeria", in Jega, A.M; *The Sun Newspaper*,

dynamics, and impact of electoral violence in Nigeria, while adequate attention has not been given to Benue State. Also, the above studies did not focus on the use of SALWs as a factor for electoral violence in Nigeria hence the potency of this study filling the existing vacuum.

A Note on Conceptual Thrusts

Election

An election is a process of choice agreed upon by a group of people. It enables them to select one or few people out of many to occupy one or several authority positions. This process of choice usually involves rules and regulations designed to ensure a certain degree of fairness and justice to all concerned.¹¹ Therefore it is the modern form of recruitment of personnel into offices and it is deemed to be a very crucial aspect of the democratic process irrespective of the type of democracy that is practiced. It is in light of this argument that Iyayi¹² affirms that; 'Election provides the medium, by which the different interest groups within the modern nation-state can take and resolve their claims to power through peaceful means'. Elections, therefore, determine the manner and methods by which changes in the social order may be brought about. We must not reduce the process of election to the act of voting alone as Transition Monitoring Group (TMG)¹³ has pointed out in 'Do the Votes Count? Final Report of the 2003 General Election in Nigeria' thus:

...elections are a complex set of activities with different variables that act and feed one another. It can be defined as a formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of concerned antecedent and subsequent behaviour. It involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their participation in governance. Elections are not necessarily about Election Day activities although it forms an important component. It encompasses activities before, during, and after elections. It includes the legal and constitutional framework of elections, the registration of political parties, party campaigns, the activities of the electronic and print media in terms of access, it includes campaign financing and the activities of security agencies and

Lagos: January 9th. Sisk, T.D. (2012). "Evaluating Election-Related Violence: Nigeria and Sudan in Comparative Perspective", in Bekoe, D.A. (ed). *Voting in Fear: Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press. Gbamwuan, A. (2013). 'A History of Post-Election Violence in Nigeria since 1979', M.A. Thesis, Department of History, Benue State University, Makurdi. Yusuf, M.I. (2019). 'Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Disentangling the Causes'. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 9, No. 10. Kwarkye, S. (2019). 'Roots of Nigeria's Election Violence', Relief web. Accessed on <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/roots-nigeria-s-election-violence>. 23-03-2022.

¹¹ Gbamwuan, A. (2013). 'A History of Post-Election... p.16.

¹² Iyayi, F. (2004). 'The Conduct of Elections and Electoral Practices in Nigeria', A Paper Delivered at the MBA Conference in Abuja on 24th August.

¹³ Transition Monitoring Group (2003). 'Do The Votes Count? Final Report of the 2003 General Elections in Nigeria', *Abuja Transition Monitoring Group*.

the government in power. It includes the authenticity and genuineness of the voter's register; it includes the independence or lack of electoral agencies and organs. It includes the liberalism or otherwise of the political process in the country and the independence of the adjudicating bodies of elections.

However, in Nigeria elections have become a 'do or die affair', as Obasanjo¹⁴ asserts: 'We fight, and sometimes shed blood to achieve and retain political power since for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for long been the gateway to the economic kingdom'. The foregoing statement captures the content and context of political thuggery and violence in Nigeria and Benue State in particular. The statement demonstrates how blood is being spilled for political power in this area against the tenets of democracy. The use of thugs in Nigerian politics has not only led to the waste of human resources, but has also resulted in the death of able-bodied men who might have been useful in the future, and political apathy. Elections should therefore embody the ethos of a true democracy. There should be the legal equality of all the electorates existing side by side with their freedom to choose which of the political aspirants to represent them, while the candidates as well should exercise their freedom of speech to represent their views to the electorates. There should be the freedom of the press to disseminate information. This is because of the divergent views they expressed on electoral issues, especially on the qualities of the political aspirants and the breadth of the news they reported at this time. Election, in essence, typifies the democratic process, hence the abolition is often interpreted as the abolition of democracy.

Electoral violence

Electoral violence is a global challenge, especially in those emerging democracies of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Fisher cited in Adesote and Abimbola¹⁵ defines electoral violence as "an organized activity that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, misinformation, physical assault, forced protection, blackmail, and destruction of property or assassination". In a similar position, Ogundiya and Baba¹⁶ see electoral violence as all sorts of riots, demonstrations, party clashes, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping spontaneous or not, which occur before, during, and after elections. Reinforcing the above definitions, Birch and Muchlinski¹⁷ unanimously assert that:

Electoral violence is a coercive force, directed towards electoral actors and/or objects, that occurs in the context of

¹⁴ Obasanjo, O. (2002). '42nd Nigeria Independence Anniversary National Broadcast' in *Tell Magazine*, October 14, No 41, pp. 50-51.

¹⁵ Fischer, J. (2010). "Electoral Conflict and Violence: A Strategy for Study and Prevention". Washington, D.C: International Foundation for Election Systems, p.141.

¹⁶ Ogundiya, S.I. and Baba, T.K. (2005). 'Election Violence and the Prospects of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria'.

¹⁷ Birch, S. and Muchlinski, D. (2018). 'Electoral Violence Prevention: What Works?' *Journal of Democratisation*, Vol. 25, p. 2.

electoral competition – can occur before, during, or after elections and it can target a variety of actors, including candidates, activists, poll workers, election observers, journalists, and voters.

Electoral violence generally takes place at three stages, namely; pre-election, election proper, and post-election. In all these stages, there is often a conflict of interest arising from the dissatisfaction of the participants in the electoral process. The result of such conflicts lead to instability, chaos often characterized by the destruction of lives and property. Most times, the jobless youths are the perpetrators of such violent acts, while the contenders sponsor and ensure that destruction is coordinated and carried out. In the final analysis, the participants in such conflicts bear the brunt, be it death, injury, enmity, or even imprisonment.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs)

The *Encyclopaedia Americana* Vol. 25¹⁸ tries to give a separate definition of this concept. The book argues that Small Arms are “firearms whose calibre is not greater than 79 inches (20mm). There are few exceptions, but generally, Small Arms can be carried in the hand in combat’. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) conceives Small Arms as the crew's portable direct weapons of less than 50 mm. This includes the secondary capacity to defeat armour and helicopters.¹⁹ The preceding definitions are not far apart from each other, they attest that the destructive magnitude of small arms is limited to some extent, using different ranges in millimetres to explain their point for the point of emphasis. SA is also referred to as handheld small calibre firearms, usually consisting of handguns, rifles, carbines, short guns, manual, semi-automatic, and full-automatic weapons, and man-portable machine guns.²⁰

On the other hand, the meaning of Light Weapons (LW) according to the ECOWAS Report of the Panel of Government Experts²¹ is: Light weapons are weapons that are portable arms designed to be used by several people working together in a team such as heavy machine guns, portable grenade launchers, mobile or mounted; portable anti-aircraft cannons; portable anti-tank missiles launchers; mortars with a caliber of less than 100mm.

The conceptualization of SA and LW is intertwined, probably because the understanding of what constitutes these categories of weapons has undergone

¹⁸ *Encyclopedia Americana*, (1995) Vol. 25, p.44.

¹⁹ ECOWAS Convention on SA and LW, 2008. Audu, B.J. (2014), “Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria: Implications on National Security”. In Osakwe, C.C.C. et’ al, *Nigerian Defence and Security*, Kaduna: NDA, p.348.

²⁰ See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/small=Arms>, Accessed 24-03-2022.

²¹ ECOWAS Report of the Panel of Government Experts, 1997.

some technological changes due to the dynamics of technological development. Concerning the above matter, Honwana, and Lamb²² jointly opined that:

There seems to be a lack of consensus in the literature for identifying a small arm as opposed to a standard conventional weapon. This has led to the formulation of an alternative concept 'light weapons which emphasize a more technologically sophisticated category. However, despite the emergence of the concept of the light weapon defining small arms still lacks clarity and even the distinction between 'small arms and light weapons' is a matter of debate. There seems to be a certain amount of uncertainty as to where small arms end and light weapons begin or whether there is an overlap between the two.

No matter what has been said by scholars of Military History, International Relations, Strategic Studies, Security Studies, agencies, and policy analysts, it should be noted that both of these weapons serve as destructive agents thereby posing a serious threat to Nigeria's national security.

A Theoretical Review on the Examination of Small Arms and Light Weapons

In their study, Jurgen and Muggah²³ propounded the theory of Small Arms Demand. They contended that the demand for the use of SALWs is anchored on motivation and means of getting them, thus:

The ultimate expression of the demand for small arms acquisition is governed by the interplay of motivations and means. In the extreme, a surfeit of means will not result in arms acquisition if accompanied by an utter lack of motive; conversely, the highest degree of motivation will not result in acquisition if the means – as broadly defined as we propose – are lacking. Both aspects must join for a choice to be made, for demand to be expressed, and for acquisition to take place.

To demonstrate the efficacy of this theory, Jurgen and Muggah²⁴ drawn examples from countries that experienced wars, and apartheid systems like Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, and Brazil where there was a demand for the use of SALWs. Buttressing the theory of Small Arms Demand,

²² Honwana, J. and Lamb, G. (1998), "Small Armed Proliferation and Drug Trafficking in Southern Africa". Paper Presentation at the Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

²³ Jurgen, B. & Muggah, R. (2006). Completing the circle: Building a Theory of Small Arms Demands. Journal of Contemporary Security Policy Volume 27, Issue 1: Future directions in small arms control.

²⁴ Jurgen, B. & Muggah, R. (2006). 'Completing the circle: Building ...'p.36.

Idehen and Subair²⁵ isolated some of the factors that often necessitated the demand and motivation for the acquisition of SALWs to have included: The activities of law enforcement agents whose job has to be accomplished with the use of SALWs; the increasing number of conflicts (communal conflicts, ethno-religious conflicts, farmers-herders conflicts, non-state actors like terrorist groups, bandits, militants, kidnappers, notorious criminals, cultists, *et cetera*); the volatile security situation culminating to its privatization; the crude nature of the Nigerian politics, and issues of governance which is characterised by leadership failure. All these and other related factors accentuated the demands for SALWs in the Nigerian political arena.

However, Jurgen and Muggah's thesis did not adequately address nor answer the question of why there is the circulation of SALWs in Nigeria. In advanced countries, there are tight laws and regulations that undermine the circulation of such weapons in a given state. Nigeria also has welcomed the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALWs in all its aspects, which took place in New York in 2000.²⁶ The conference provided a rare opportunity for the UN to raise public awareness about the need to control the spread and misuse of SALWs in Nigeria. Domestically, in 2000, the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo set a National Committee on the Proliferation and Illicit Trafficking of SALWs which was inaugurated in May 2000, in Abuja.²⁷ The committee was charged with the responsibilities of unravelling the sources of arms in illegal hands and gathering information on the extent of proliferation and trafficking of SALWs within and around the borders of the country. Similarly, in 2009 President Umaru Musa Yar'adua established the National Task Force to Combat illegal importation and Smuggling of Goods, Small Arms Ammunition, and Light Weapons (NATFORCE), which was inaugurated in June 2009.²⁸ NATFORCE was given the power to control arms by arresting those found guilty of the offence in the country. Also, there is in place a Task Force in the 12 zones of the federation to recover illegal weapons.²⁹ It is being manned by an appointed officer of the Nigeria police with obligations to control the proliferation of arms in the country within their jurisdiction among numerous other majors. However, there are a lot of SALWs in the country, and this calls for the investigation of the theory of the failed state.

²⁵ Idehen, R. O. and Subair, A.A. B. (2021). 'The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons: A Re-Emerging Threat on Nigeria's National Security'. In *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)*, Vol.4 No.2 June.

²⁶ Alimba, C. (2017). 'Controlling the Proliferation of Small Arms in Nigeria: Emerging Issues and Challenges', In *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 5, No. 10, p.44.

²⁷ Atoyebi, O.A.(2003). Ethnic Militia Groups, Public Security and Police Role in Nigeria. Paper Presented at S.A.S.A Congress, South Africa, 29th June- 2nd July.

²⁸ Ben-Ze'er, E. (2010). 'Imposed Silences and Self-Censorship: Palmach Soldiers remember 1948'. In Ben-Ze'er, E; Ginio, R; & Winter, J. (eds). *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁹ ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, 2008.

The failed state thesis as coined by Robert³⁰ is 'when states are consumed by internal violence and cease delivering positive political goods to their inhabitants'. To Anyanwu³¹, a failed state is perceived as having failed at some of the essential responsibilities of a sovereign government. This means, that such a state is unable to hold its social and political structures which are rather characterized by failures. Common characteristics of a failing state are when a central government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory, non-provision of public utilities or services, widespread corruption and criminality; refugees and involuntary movement of populations, and sharp economic decline. Nigeria has exhibited these attributes; Boko-haram terrorism, banditry, secessionist movements, and communal violence are lucid features of a failed state like Nigeria. Others are unemployment, hunger, poverty, and diseases, which all stimulated the youths to take arms and commit criminal activities. The youths are also cheap and available tools in the hands of the politicians to commit electoral frauds including electoral violence.

Political Parties and Political Contenders in 2019 General Election in Benue State

Benue state is in North-central Nigeria with an estimated population of about four million people. The state was created in 1976 and has the Tiv, Idoma, and Iggede as major ethnic groups and their languages spoken predominantly. Politically, there are three Senatorial Districts in the state namely; Benue South for Idoma and Iggede, Benue North-West, and Benue North-East for the Tiv. The state also has twenty three LGAs out of which nine has been occupied by the Idoma and Iggede, and fourteen by the Tiv. The state is a hotbed for electoral violence since 1976 as a result of multi-party system practiced by the Nigerian State.³² Therefore, during the 2019 general election, Nigeria has ninety one political parties registered by INEC to contend for elective posts. In Benue State, the major political parties that featured gubernatorial candidates were the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which produced Dr. Samuel Ortom/Benson Abounu in a competitive primary election.³³ The All Progressive Congress (APC) produced Hon. Barrister Emmanuel Jime/Samuel Ode, while other remaining twenty-nine smaller political parties variously produced their desired candidates. For example, the Peoples' Redemption Party (PRP) featured Hon. Pastor Frederick Ikyaan Lanshima, Social Democratic Party (SDP) featured Hon. Hwande Stephen Terungwa, Labour Party (LP) brought in Hon. Barrister Angya Paul Tavershima, All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) showcased John Aondohemba Tseayo, African Democratic Congress (ADC) featured Tyohemba Simon Korape, and Action Democratic Party (ADP) featured Jim Okewu *et*

³⁰ Robert, R. (ed.) (2000). *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp.302-318.

³¹ Anyanwu cited in Gbamwuan, A. (2013). 'A History of Post-Election... p.19.

³² Gbamwuan, A. (2013). 'A History of Post-Election Violence in Nigeria since 1979', M.A. Thesis, Department of History, Benue State University, Makurdi.

³³ Mercy Corps (2019). *Will Nigeria's 2019 Elections Be Peaceful? Warning Signs of Political Violence and International Preventative Action Needed*. Available on; https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Nigeria_Elections_Brief_January_2019.pdf. Accessed 01-05-2022.

cetera.³⁴ At the level of the senate, PDP featured Hon. Patrick Abba Moro who represented Benue South, Rt. Hon. Gabriel Suswam, represented Benue North-East, and Hon. Emmanuel Yisa Orker-Jev represented Benue North-West. The APC, another powerful political party in the State featured their senatorial candidates including Senator Dr. George Akume for Benue North-West, Chief Mrs. Mimi Adzape Orubibi for Benue North-East, and Hon. Stephen Lawani for Benue South.

At the level of the House of Representatives, PDP favoured candidate for Ado/Obadigbo/Opkokwu Federal Constituency was Hon. Francis Agbo while APC took Hon. Michael Unogwu and three other contenders in other political parties. For Apa/Agatu Federal Constituency, LP produced Godday Samuel, while for PDP was Adamu Entonu and 7 other candidates from other political parties.³⁵ In Buruku Federal Constituency, PDP featured Hon. Kpam Sokpo while APC show-cased Hon. Joseph Ityav and other ten candidates in other political parties. In Gboko/Tarka Federal Constituency, APC's favourite candidate was Hon. John Dyegh, while that of the PDP was Hon. Bernard Nenger with seven other contenders. In the case of Guma/Makurdi Federal Constituency, the contest was between PDP's Hon. Benjamin Mzondu and APC's Hon. Conrad Utaan and eight other candidates from other political parties. Coming to Gwer-East/Gwer-West Federal constituency, the heated contest resided with PDP's Hon. Mark Gbillah and APC's Hon. Victor Torsar together with the other seven party candidates.³⁶ For Katsina-Ala/Ukum/Logo, Hon. Richard Gbande was for PDP, Hon. Solomon Wombo for APC, and with other seventeen candidates. Konshisha/Vandeikya Federal Constituency produced Hon. Barrister Hemen Hembe in APGA, and Hon. Dorathy Mato in APC and with other eleven candidates from other parties. Also, Kwande/Ushogo had Hon. Robert Tyough in PDP, Hon. Benjamin Wayo in APC and eleven other contenders. Furthermore, Oju/Obi Federal Constituency, APGA featured Hon. David Ogewu while PDP Produced Hon. Samson Aja with other eleven party candidates. Finally, in Otukpo/Ohimini Federal Constituency, APGA produced Hon. Blessing Onuh, while PDP on the other hand produced Hon. Egli Ahubi and eleven other party candidates.³⁷

Coming to the level of the State Assembly, the following candidates emerged victoriously in their various political parties as captured in the *Concise Newspaper*³⁸, thus:

³⁴ See Independent National Electoral Commission Report on Benue Elections. Available on; 2019https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Benue_State_gubernatorial_election#:~:text=The%202019%20Benue%20State%20gubernatorial,and%20several%20minor%20party%20candidates.

³⁵ See Benue INEC, 2019.

³⁶ See Benue INEC, 2019.

³⁷ See Benue INEC, 2019.

³⁸ Karrem, B. (2019). 'Benue State: Full List Of 9th House Of Assembly Members Plus Parties', in *Concise Newspaper*, 4th June. Available on; <https://concise.ng/benue-state-full-list-of-9th-house-of-assembly-members-plus-parties>. accessed 24th, 04-2022.

Hon. Agnes Uloko (Ado, PDP), Hon. Edo Godwin (Agatu, PDP), Hon. Abu James (Apa, PDP), Hon. Bunde Torkuma (Buruku, PDP), Hon. Agaibe N (Gboko East, PDP), Hon. Terna Achir (Gboko West, PDP), Hon. William Marange (Guma, PDP), Hon. Agbatse Geoffery (Gwer East, PDP), Hon. Chemetyo Damian (Gwer-West, PDP), Hon. Agbidiye Akute (Katsina-Ala East, APC), Hon. Orban Terungwa (Katsina-Ala West, APC), Hon. Dyako Tavershima (Konshisha, ADC), Hon. Tertsea Gbishe (Kwande East, PDP), Hon. Sugh Abanyi (Kwande West, PDP), Hon. Yagba Victor (Logo, PDP), Hon. Kwaghzer-Kudi Thomas (Makurdi-North, APC), Hon. Terwase Aondoaka (Makurdi-South, PDP), Hon. Onche Peter (Obi, PDP), Hon. Peter Enemari (Ogbadibo, PDP), Hon. Christopher Adaji (Ohimini, PDP), Hon. Ogbu Otumala (Oju I, APC), Hon. Okanga Okponya (Oju II, PDP), Hon. Anthony Agom (Okpokwu, PDP), Hon. Odeh Baba (Otukpo/Akpa, APC), Hon. Michael Audu (Adoka/Ugboju, PDP), Hon. Mngutyo Bem (Tarka, APC), Hon. Thomas Mlanga (Ukum, PDP), Hon. Abass Akoso (Ushongo, PDP), Hon. Ucha Dominic (Vandeikya-Tiev, PDP), and Hon. Uba Titus (Vandeikya-Kyan, PDP).

Generally, the contest in the 2019 general election was tough looking at the calibre of people that were in the election race. For example, at the gubernatorial level, the incumbent Governor of Benue State Dr. Samuel Ortom was in the race for PDP. The APC featured Hon. Barrister Jime, the former Speaker of the Benue State House of Assembly in the Third Republic, and a man whose political party was in corridors of power at the federal level. Another powerful contender for the Senate was Hon. Dr. George Akume, two times Governor of Benue State (1999-2007), three times Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2007-2019), a former minority leader in the House of Senate, god-father to numerous Benue politicians, and the founder of APC in Benue state and North-Central at large. Another big-time politician in the 2019 Benue politics for Senate seat was Hon. Patrick Abba Moro, former minister of interior during President Goodluck Jonathan's administration. Also, Rt. Hon. Gabriel Suswam, the two times Federal House of Assembly member (1999-2007), and two times Governor of Benue State (2007-2015) was also in the contest.³⁹ Lastly, was Senator Barnabas Gemade, former PDP National Chairman, and two terms Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2011-2019). As an African syndrome, the 'Do or Die Affair' was not out of place in the contest arising from the verbal and body language of most of these politicians hence the accumulation, and distribution of SALWs to the jobless Benue Youths. Arising from this fact, the National Peace Committee convened political parties and their presidential candidates to sign two peace accords. The first, signed on Dec. 12, 2018, committed the candidates to running issue-based campaigns. The second, signed on Feb. 13, 2019, committed the

³⁹ CLEEN Foundation (2015). Electoral Violence Risks in the 2015 Gubernatorial Elections. A Policy Brief, Election Security Brief 012.

candidates to respect the outcome of the elections.⁴⁰ Despite these accords, politically motivated violence rose and political actors used increasingly inflammatory language as Election Day approached as shall be seen in course of the analysis of these events in the proceeding sections.

Pre-Election Violence in 2019 General Election in Benue State

Any electoral violence which occurs before Election Day is simply referred to as pre-election violence. According to Alao⁴¹ 'Pre-Election Day violence can occur in three critical aspects of voter registration, campaign, and party primaries'. This indeed was the scenario in the Benue pre-election process in 2019. It has been observed that the stage of the primary election can also trigger electoral violence on the day of the election proper or in the aftermath of the general election.⁴² At the close of 2018, INEC brought out the general election timetable which stipulated party primaries from 18th August to 7th October 2018. The roughness of political campaigns started with the party primaries. In PDP for example, twelve aspirants kindly contested for the primaries while other political parties adopted a consensus strategy to resolve their issues. Dr. Tivlumun Nyitse, a top contender in the PDP primaries recounted the root of this challenge for the party:

... Nine out of the 12 members of Benue State PDP who are hoping to become the state's governor in 2019 met with Ortom, who recently defected from the APC to the PDP, and is seeking to get the PDP ticket to be elected for a second term in office... at the meeting, Ortom told the PDP governorship aspirants that he had the intention to run for a second term... We told him he was welcome and that he should toe the line. Ortom can't eat there (APC) and come back to also take other people's food. These people have laboured so hard and remain committed to the party till now. I don't know what the national leadership of the party is thinking about the candidature of Ortom but we in PDP in Benue would not allow any decision not palatable to stand.⁴³

The emergence of Ortom in the final analysis as the PDP Gubernatorial candidate pushed dissatisfied aspirants to cross-carpet to other political parties with their supporters and also put a stiff opposition to PDP during the period of the

⁴⁰ IRI/NDI (2019). *Nigeria International Election Observation Mission Final Report*, Available on; https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/iri.org/2019-6-18_final_nigeria_eom_report.pdf. accessed, 26-04-2022.

⁴¹ Alao, A.A. (2021). 'Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Implication for Democratic Development, in *Journal of Administrative Science* Vol.18, Issue 2. Available online at <http://jas.uitm.edu.my>. Accessed 25th 04-2022, pp. 324-325.

⁴² Albert, I.O. (2007). Reconceptualizing electoral violence in Nigeria, In I.O. Albert, D. Marco and V. Adetula (Eds). *Perspectives on the 2003 Elections in Nigeria*. Abuja: IDASA and SterlingHolding Publishers.

⁴³ Charles, J. (2018). 'We Won't Step Down for Ortom, 12 PDP Aspirants Insist'. Available on; <https://punchng.com/we-wont-step-down-for-ortom-12-pdp-aspirants-insist/>, accessed 29-04-2022.

electioneering campaigns. Mercy Corps (2019) was more forthcoming when they observed that; 'Disagreements over candidates in the primaries created animosities within parties. Aggrieved candidates are likely to use violence and intimidation as election tactics during the campaign period as well as around the declaration of results'. We shall revisit this issue in the next section of this paper.

The scheduled 90-day campaign periods began on 18 November and 1 December 2018 for federal and state-level elections. The campaigns were characterised by intimidation, abusive songs, and so forth. Both APC and PDP crafted some derogatory political songs to tarnish the image of each other. One of the APC song versions of the attack on the incumbent governor, Dr. Samuel Ortom is captured by Tsavmbu⁴⁴, and it goes:

Tyô yam oo! me vaa sha ciki u Tiv. Jugu Dajo Kanshio fatyô
ga. Tor Dajo oo! Benue a de saan ze oo! I na se Jime. Mvaan
ciki u Tiv, mo m vaa ci u tar wam. George Akume oo! Mo mfe
tar je or hemba tom sha Ikyu ior ga ka hiin yam je ne oo!
Mpine salary ii? Ior kpem oo! U ngu governor u er nyi? M ii
ikyon deli anieni Ior kpem oo!

Translated in English below:

My people oo! I will lament for Tiv. Jugu Dajo "Incapable"
(governor) can't do anything. King Dajo oo! Let Benue not
perish oo! Let's vote for Jime. I lament for Tiv. I lament for
my nation. George Akume oo! I have never known someone
to excel in People's deaths. This is my first-time oo! I ask
about salary? My people have died oo! (response). What
have you done as governor? I have buried eight hundred
corpses, My people have died oo! (response).

The song captures the dilemma of the Benue people by the PDP-led government. The composer alleged that the significant achievement of the PDP government was burying people en mass who were killed by the Fulani herdsmen in Benue State. This according to the APC is not an achievement. Another APC derogatory song against PDP led-government as documented by Tsavmbu⁴⁵ is reproduced below:

Chris Dura Aondo oo! U pine capital u Benue U kela faga
Dura. Anema dugh, kera ka Makurdi ga. Buhari ka una kende
tativ ve tôô. Hingir gbimin tyô i vaan ye. Benue oo! Nyaregh
yasev yen China ve! Jime oo! Emmanuel Jime va oo! Ior
mbela ka ior I China oo!

Translated in English as

⁴⁴ Tsavmbu, A. A. (2020). 'The Phenomenon of Hate Speech in Tiv Oral Literature: A Study of Selected Political Songs of Mikel Mfater Kaha (El Stuffy)' unpublished paper, Department of Languages and Linguistics, Federal University, Dutsinma, Katsina State, Nigeria, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Tsavmbu, A. A. (2020). 'The Phenomenon of Hate Speech...' p. 10.

Chris Dura Aondo oo! If you ask for the capital of Benue You
will no longer know, Dura. Umbrellas (PDP) removed it: no
longer Makurdi. When Buhari provides anything, the PDP
snatches. Darkness prevails. That's why people are crying.
Benue oo! Our money has gone to China! Jime oo! Emmanuel
Jime come oo! Those (PDP) people belong to China oo!

The above song again captures how the PDP led-government failed to pay salaries, pensions, and gratuities despite huge monthly allocations, bailout funds, and London Parris Club funds among other monies gotten from the federation account by the Benue State government. Although, PDP also made their songs composed against APC contestants cum supporters. The songs spread misinformation on the social media, print, and online publications have brandished false casualty figures as well as circulation of various footages of old and inaccurate propaganda videos.⁴⁶ It is on this basis that a coalition of the news organisation in Nigeria collaborated with the United Kingdom-based First Draft to cheek-mate such kinds of false information online come into force. Whether they were able to achieve this goal is another topic for intellectual engagement. The implications of the above stem from their potency in generating political violence in Benue State in the 2019 general elections.

Arising from the above background, the pre-election violence in Benue State took various dimensions like the destruction of campaign vehicles, posters, billboards, and campaign offices, attacks of opposition supporters, and so forth with the use of SALWs. For example, in the Sankera Axis of the state (Logo/Ukum/Kastina-Ala LGAs), a notorious criminal Mr. Terwase Akwaza (A.K.A. Gana) recruited a good number of criminals who were heavily armed with SALWs. Those notorious criminals were cheap tools in the hands of desperate politicians in the State to perpetrate electoral violence. Besides, Gana's wife was also in the race for the State House of Assembly under the auspices of APC. Some sources also established that Gana god-fathered Hon. Agbideyeh Akute who represented the APC in Katsina-Ala East constituency.⁴⁷ To install his wife and Hon. Agbideyeh Akute as some sources established, Terna Iornem⁴⁸ asserted that; 'Gana was so upset that he stopped some politicians for daring to participate in the 2019 election'. He also stressed that; 'Gana's men during the 2019 general elections decided who among the politicians from Makurdi and Abuja to come home to exercise their franchise'. Richard Ternumum⁴⁹ reinforces that; 'what they did during the 2019 elections was that a few days to the polls, they sent messages to their sponsors' perceived political foes to stay clear or they would regret coming home'. Therefore, the Sankara Axis became a hotbed for pre-election violence leading to the deaths of local politicians in the State.

⁴⁶ Roby, C. (2008). 'Nigeria's Brewing Pre-Election Violence', in *Democracy and Governance*, available on; <https://www.devex.com/news/humanitarians-work-to-stem-nigeria-s-brewing-pre-election-violence-92804>. accessed 28-04-2022.

⁴⁷ Uja, E. (2018). 'Police Nab Benue Assembly Member'. The Nation Newspaper, 23rd October, Available on; <https://thenationonline.net/police-nab-benue-assembly-member/>. Accessed 30-04-2022.

⁴⁸ Oral interview with Terna Iornem, interviewed in Kastina-Ala Town on 30-04-2022.

⁴⁹ Oral Interview with Richard Ternumum, Interviewed in Katsina-Ala Town on 30-04-2022.

Issues, Problems, and Challenges on the Days of the General Elections in Benue State

The circumstances that surrounded the 2019 general elections in Nigeria and Benue State, in particular, were tension-ridden for political participants and observers. The first challenge was the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) unclear decision to postpone the elections scheduled to the detriment of the electorates. Originally, the general election was scheduled to hold on February 16 and March 2 for the Presidential/National Assembly and Gubernatorial/State Houses of Assembly respectively. Preparations were on top gear when INEC broke the sad news of the election shift a few hours to the commencement of the exercise. The INEC boss, Professor Mahmood Yakubu pointed out logistic problems as a justification for the postponement of the scheduled general election, thus:

In preparing for the 2019 general elections, we have come face-to-face with the realities of conducting such an extensive national deployment of men and materials in a developing country like ours...It is therefore not unexpected that such a tremendous national mobilisation of men and materials will encounter operational challenges and we have had our fair share of such challenges... There have been delays in delivering ballot papers and result sheets for the elections which are not unusual... Unfortunately, in the last week flights within the country have been adversely affected by bad weather. For instance, three days ago, we were unable to deliver materials to some locations due to bad weather... Apart from these logistical challenges, we also faced what may well attempt to sabotage our preparations. In a space of two weeks, we had to deal with serious fire incidents in three of our offices in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area of Abia State, Qu'an Pan Local Government Area of Plateau State, and our Anambra State Office at Awka... Faced with these challenges, we initially thought that we only required a maximum of 24 hours to resolve the logistics issues involved and complete our deployment for the election.⁵⁰

The new dates announced were February 23 for the Presidential/National Assembly, and March 9 for the Gubernatorial/State Houses of Assembly respectively.⁵¹ Although, the implication of this action were region as recounted by several Observer Missions including; 'low voters turnout and apathy, confusion over the duration of the candidate and party campaign, loss of public

⁵⁰ Babalola, A. (2019). 'Rescheduled Election Date and the Law'. Vanguard Newspaper of 20th February. Available on; <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/02/rescheduled-election-date-and-the-law/>. Accessed 01-05-2022.

⁵¹ Awofeso, O. (2020). 'Observers Report and the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria: A Focus on Electoral Violence and Lessons for Future Elections'. In Global Journal of Political Science and Administration Vol.8, No.4. p. 24.

confidence in INEC sincerity of purpose, additional costs for the government, Observers and Nigerian electorates who travelled from far distances to cast their votes in their constituencies.⁵²

he second issue was the unceremonious suspension of the Chief justice of the Federation, Justice Walter Onnoghen barely three weeks before the general elections. To the government, the decision was due to the failure of the Chief Justice to openly declare all his assets as a public servant. However, many political analysts, foreign government officials, and Nigerian electorates smelt a rat.⁵³ Thirdly, was the refusal of President Buhari to give assent to the bill which seeks to amend vital aspects of the 2010 Electoral Acts in December 2018 because the timeframe was very close to the election period and too short for INEC to successfully implement them. The general opinion of most Nigerians was that the bill if passed into law would enhance transparency and accountability in the 2019 general elections. Therefore, these pending issues were a time-bomb that led to irregularities in the general elections in 2019 in Nigeria.

On the day of the elections, sponsored thugs used different kinds of SALWs to distract the electoral process in some LGAs including Ado, Tarka, Gboko, Ukum, Gwer-East *et cetera*. In Ado LGA, the Nation Newspaper⁵⁴ captured this scenario, thus:

Leaders of the PDP in Apa Ward, Ado LGA of Benue State have appealed to the State Police Commissioner over the alleged assault and intimidation of their members during the March 9 governorship election by soldiers on the orders of one Agbese Philip. It alleged that Nelson Ogbu, Comrade James Oche, Emmanuel Aboh, Ogbu Ogaba, Innocent Egegwu, Susan Onmonya, Kingsley Onmonya, Otse Unazi, Udah Okibe, and the entire PDP Ward executives in the ward were harassed, intimidated by the soldiers led by one Corporal Echo Omerigwe alias Tension. According to the petition signed by their lawyer M.S. Agaku, the soldiers also intimidated innocent voters who were sympathetic to the PDP, adding that Agbese who brought them, bragged publicly that they were assigned to him by the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) Lt.-Gen. Tukur Buratai.

Agbese Philip claimed to be a consultant to the Nigerian Army as such accrued the authority and capacity to violate the electoral process with impunity. In a similar view, the Mbalon ward in Gwer-East LGA, Yandev North ward in Gboko LGA, and Manger II ward in Tarka LGA witnessed different degrees of electoral violence leading to cancellations of votes. The CDD West Africa, an Election

⁵² Awofeso, O. (2020). 'Observers Report and the ..'p. 24.

⁵³ See NCS Situationroom Report, (2019), p.4.

⁵⁴ *The Nation Newspaper* (2019). 'PDP Accuses Soldiers of Brutality, Electoral Violence in Benue' Available on <https://thenationonline.net/pdp-accuses-soldiers-of-brutality-electoral-violence-in-benue/>. Accessed 30-04-2022.

Analysis Centre (EAC) that deployed observers to 17 politically charged and violence-prone battleground states for the election made a brief tweet of this development on their Twitter handle @CDD West Africa,⁵⁵ thus:

Armed hoodlums razed down a Roman Catholic primary school in Aya containing electoral materials meant for Mbalom ward in Gwer East Local Government Area of the state. However, no election official was hurt. Also, in the Manger II polling unit of Mbanyagber registration area in Tarka local government area which has 538 registered voters and a youth corper was taken, hostage. In the Registration Area Centre (RAC) at Yandev North in Gboko LGA, election officials were attacked twice. The number of registered voters affected by the disruption is 8,437.

In line with this report, the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) Dr. Yilwatda Nentawe cancelled all the election results in the affected LGA and insisted that:

The election in Mbalom is rescheduled because of the burning of electoral materials by thugs while in Yandev North and Manger II wards the elections will be rescheduled because our electoral officers were held, hostage⁵⁶.

The rescheduled election was for governorship and state house of assembly in four affected council wards. While the governorship election was declared inconclusive in Benue and other election volatile states like Rivers, Kano, Sokoto, Plateau, Bauchi, and Adamawa.⁵⁷ The supplementary elections in these states especially in Kano and Benue turned out to be a war rather than an election. Thugs were sponsored by brandishing and unleashing all forms of SALWs against any perceived opposition of the constituted authority in the respective states.⁵⁸ For example, in the Ukum LGA supplementary elections, Chito the headquarters of the Azendeshi council ward was disrupted by the alleged APC militia. Dura⁵⁹ again captured this story succinctly:

Youths in the early hours of Saturday overpowered security personnel and disrupted the supplementary election in Chito the headquarters of Azendeshi council ward, in Ukum LGA of Benue state. The rampaging youths were alleged to

⁵⁵ See the Twitter Handle of CDD West Africa @CDDWestAfrica.

⁵⁶ Dura, P. (2019). 'INEC Reschedules Elections in Parts of Benue over Electoral Violence'. In Vanguard Newspaper, May 19th. Available <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/03/election-ambode-harps-on-culture-of-one-man-one-vote/>. Accessed 30-04-2022.

⁵⁷ Sule, B., Adamu, U. and Sambo, U. (2020). 'The 2019 General Election in Nigeria: Examining the Issues, Challenges, Successes, and Lessons for Future General Elections'. *International Journal of Social Sciences Perspectives*, Vol. 6. No. 2, p. 110.

⁵⁸ Sule, B., Adamu, U. and Sambo, U. (2020). 'The 2019 General Election...' p.110.

⁵⁹ Dura, P. (2019). 'INEC Reschedules Elections in Parts of Benue over Electoral Violence'. In Vanguard Newspaper, May 19th. Available <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/03/election-ambode-harps-on-culture-of-one-man-one-vote/>. Accessed 30-04-2022.

have attacked the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, officials, PDP agents, and observers after which they snatched all the electoral materials meant for the election, and burnt them thereby disrupting the entire process in the area. The member representing Ukum state constituency in the Benue State House of Assembly, Mr. Paul Biam alongside, the Commissioner for Industry, Trade and Investment, Kachina Merga, Adviser to the State Governor on Revenue and Taxation, Mr. Jerome Zaye who were agents of the PDP in the area were all attacked by the irate alleged APC youths.

From the forgoing stories and testimonies, the 2019 general election in Benue state was not devoid of violence using SALWs. It should be noted that Politicians quipped the jobless youths with SALWs which they used in disrupting the electoral process in some of the few places cited in this paper. It has been on record that there were over 350 million illegal SALWs in Nigeria during the period under review.⁶⁰ On this note a retired Commissioner of Police and former spokesman of the force, Frank Odita cited in Olafioye⁶¹ lamented that:

The crop of politicians a country has at any given time dictates what happens. In the past, Nigerian politicians were not as ambitious as we have now. The issue of wealth was not a major issue. A good number of them wanted to serve then and we could see patriotism written all over them... The truth is that the present-day politicians are different from the politicians of those days. So we need a new orientation for everybody to understand that life is precious and sacrosanct. You don't just carry arms because you want to win an election.

Benue State politicians like their counterparts in the Nigerian state have acquired massive SALWs to kill, intimidate, and oppress their political opponents hence politics is a big time business in the state. The use of SALWs created political apathy with serious implications for democracy and good governance.

Conclusion and Policy Options

The 2019 general election in Benue State was characterised by electoral malpractices and violence. The competition was majorly between the PDP and APC who had strong Benue politicians that wanted to maintain their political relevance in the schema of Benue politics. To accomplish this purpose, the use of SALWs was their available option hence most of them knew that they could not

⁶⁰ *Daily Trust Newspaper* (2018). '350 Million Illegal Weapons In Nigeria, FG Laments'. Available on; <https://dailytrust.com/350-million-illegal-weapons-in-nigeria-fg-laments>. Accessed 01-05-2022.

⁶¹ Olafioye, O. (2018). '2019: Concerns Mount Over Arms Proliferation'. In the Sun Newspaper, 4th November. Available on; <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/2019-concerns-mount-over-arms-proliferation>. Accessed 01-04-2022.

win votes even in their constituencies. The use of SALWs is a clear demonstration that Nigeria is a failed state which has nothing to offer after over two decades of tortuous democratic resurgence. To move out of this mess and achieve credible, transparent, and violent-free elections in Nigeria, the following strategies must be adopted:

Firstly, the federal government in conjunction with other tiers of government should fight the proliferation of SALWs to reduce the high level of its circulation in the country. In line with this fact, a National Commission for the Prohibition of Illegal importation of Small Arms, Ammunition, and Light Weapons and other related matters should be established as already done by other west African countries. For this to be successful, every meaningful Nigerian citizen must resolve to report cases of stockpiling SALWs to the constituted authorities. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to fight the proliferation of SALWs which is a potent weapon for truncating the very essence of the electoral process in Nigeria.

Secondly, the politics of god-father and god-son has been the problem of electoral violence in Benue State since 1999. When a god-father imposes a candidate for an elective post, he ensures that his candidate wins the election either by hook or by crook hence the financial kickbacks that come thereafter. Therefore, it is the opinion of this study that Benue state politicians should stop seeing politics as a lucrative business that instils into them the spirit of a 'do or die game'. Rather, they should have a new orientation that the electoral process is a civilised way of exercising one's franchise, and also an avenue to seek an elective post to serve our fatherland selflessly. With this kind of mindset, the issue of god-son and god-father will be over. A situation where god-fathers recruit the jobless youths and armed them with SALWs would be out of place. After all, this kind of strategy has made certain parts of Benue State volatile as a result of 'use and dump thugs' in previous elections in the state hence underdevelopment.

Thirdly, the youths who are 'engine room' for electoral violence in Benue State and Nigeria at large and should be given a new orientation. This is the point where academia, faith-based organisations, the clergy, traditional rulers, and parents have very crucial roles to play. They should collectively discourage the youths from their infamous parts in the electoral process. They should make the youths ponder why politicians' sons and daughters are not involved in any electoral violence in the state. This kind of new orientation could only be achieved when the youths are empowered through job creation and engagement in Medium and Small Scale Businesses or enterprises among others. Finally, INEC should adopt new methods of conducting elections as it is done in advanced countries. Through the use of information and communication technology, INEC can adopt a partially electronic voting system, especially in Nigerian towns and cities. This as well will reduce such issues as snatching of ballot papers, vote-buying, and attacks on the Nigerian electorates who resolve to exercise their franchise.