

announcement on computation of time for filing election petition by supreme court on the relevant section of Electoral Act 2006, which had held in BUHARI Vs OBASANJO that Interpretation Act was applicable to determining

odyssey, preparatory to 2015 governorship contest one more time, a senatorial opening suddenly came up in his Niger East constituency following the passage of Senator Awais Kuta in 2014.

2007 was reportedly manipulated. And David was not to be declared winner again.

The anguish that followed was deep. But, at a press conference, David rhetorically asked: "Why is it that the PDP people who were de-

Now, that David Umaru is confirmed of the 7th Senate, congratulations to a spirit of excellence.

More grease to the elbow of a senator of consequence!

BY AYO AKINOLA

**T**he history of political development in Nigeria has recorded the growth of multidimensional forms of violence, as a major political behaviour in the quest by political-minded individuals and groups to attain state power and keep it. In recent times, Human Rights Watch revealed that over 2,000 Nigerians lost their life in post-election violence in the country.

As the campaigns for the 2015 general elections were rounding off, the governor of Osun State, Ogbeni Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola, had his convoy attacked in Ilase, Obokun Local government Area of the state. That was on Friday, March 13, 2015. The attack left at least one person dead, many injured and property worth millions of Naira destroyed. This is a sad footnote on our quest for a true democratic process, because it illustrates happenings in almost all states of the federation, in Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Imo and hosts of other states. Updated report has it that 66 violent incidents targeted at polling units were recorded nationwide during the April 11, 2015 governorship and House of Assembly polls.

The historical trajectory of electoral process in the post colonial Nigeria is characterised by violence. In fact, recent manifestations of electoral violence, most importantly since the birth of the Fourth Republic in 1999 have assumed an unprecedented magnitude and changing form, resulting in instability in democratic consolidation as well as the loss and displacement of many innocent lives.

I wish to historicise electoral violence and its implications on the survival of democracy in Nigeria with major emphasis on this Fourth Republic (1999-2015). The high incidence of electoral violence (pre and post) in the Fourth Republic in particular is closely associated with neo-patrimonial character of the Nigerian state, the nature and kind of party politics being played, the weak insti-

tutionalisation of democratic architectures and inefficient electoral management body among others. These were among the factors that led to the fall or collapse of the First, Second and Third Republics. I dare say that the survival of democracy in this Fourth Republic involves adherence to the ideals and principles of electoral process as practised in ideal democratic societies.

In every stable democratic society, election remains the essential ingredient of transitory process from one civilian administration to another. Elections have become an integral part of representative democracy that by and large prevails across the world. It is important to emphasise here that though violence has been a longstanding feature of the democratisation process in the post colonial Nigeria, its recent manifestations, especially since the birth of the Fourth Republic, has assumed an unprecedented magnitude, thus constituting a major threat to the survival of democracy. Fundamentally, there is no doubt the fact that electoral violence remains a major source of political instability in a democratic society with palpable threats of deconsolidation.

Nigeria, having survived decades of military dictatorship, which was characterised by despotism, violation of fundamental human rights, financial profligacy among others, eventually returned to democratic rule on May 29, 1999, which culminated in the birth of the Fourth Republic. The republic, which started amid great hope and expectations, is yet to significantly convince the generality of the Nigerian populace its democratic success especially with respect to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections devoid of election violence (pre and post). The block votes for failed President Jonathan recorded from the south east and south-south in the just concluded 2015 election leaves a sour grape in the mouth regarding incessant geo-ethnic

loyalty in voting patterns. This has however, put the zones in a disadvantage position, in the unfolding power sharing and political relevance. The threat of violence by militant leaders (especially by Asari Dokubo) in the zone is a sad commentary that must not be allowed to endure.

The conduct of free, fair and credible periodic elections by unbiased electoral body including its umpire as well as other electoral officials and the adherence to democratic principles of governance remain major factors responsible for the avoidance of electoral violence in any democratic society. These two major factors were the challenges, which the fourth republic had been contending with since its birth in 1999, with little departure from this norm in the just-concluded 2015 general election. It is against this backdrop that I shall examine various electoral violence vis-à-vis elections that were conducted in Nigeria since the birth of the fourth republic with major emphasis on the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections, and a peep into the just concluded 2015 experience.

Since the birth of the fourth republic in 1999, four general elections have been conducted under a civilian administration in the country in which one can say that democracy was actually consolidated. In other words, the years between 2003 and 2015 witnessed the successful transition of one civilian administration to another. For instance, in 2003, a presidential election was conducted and the incumbent president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP was declared the winner by INEC. In 2007, the late Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua of the same PDP was also declared by INEC as the president-elect, even though Yar'Adua was honest enough to admit irregularities in the election that brought him to power. In April 2011, another presidential election was conducted by INEC in which

Dr. Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP, who was initially sworn in first as Acting President following the health condition of Yar'Adua, and later as a substantive President after Yar'Adua's death also contested and was declared winner of the election by INEC. In his quest for a second term, President Goodluck Jonathan contested against candidates from other political parties, prominent among which was Major-General Muhammadu Buhari, a one-time military dictator, who had contested and lost thrice. The fact that elder statesmen led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, had to extract non-violence agreement from the two leading contenders (Jonathan and Buhari) lend credence to the fear of violence.

The early concession of defeat by incumbent President Jonathan has been applauded nationwide. This gesture did not permeate among other PDP contestants across the country. Pockets of violence, ballot-snatching and outright rigging were observed, despite assurances from security agents. This was corroborated by international observers especially in the south eastern states.

In spite of the fact that the just concluded elections for the Presidency, governorship of 29 states as well as national Assembly and state Houses of Assembly witnessed minimal violence, we should be on our guards to sustain this democracy. Thanks to national and international democratic institutions, Nigeria, for the first time, witnessed a smooth transition not only from a democratically elected government but also from one party to another. There is the need to strengthen our democratic institutions, like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) encourage internal democracy among political parties, de-emphasise money-politics and the need to play by the rules of engagement.

• Akintola wrote in from Lagos.

# Political violence as threat to democracy