

# **2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF ABUJA PEACE ACCORD**

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## **Abstract**

The paper examined Abuja Peace Accord aimed at preventing violence in the 2015 election cycle in Nigeria. The Peace Accord under the watch of Mr. Kofi Annan and Chief Emeka Anyaoku was signed on 10 January 2015 in Abuja by the two leading presidential candidates, President Goodluck Jonathan of Peoples' Democratic Party, and General Muhammadu Buhari of All Progressive Congress (APC) as well as twelve candidates of other political parties. The Accord was an attempt to prevent recurrence of the 2011 post-election violence that led to the death of over 800 persons and created tensions in the country. The candidates especially President Jonathan (PDP), and General Buhari (APC) renewed the Accord by pledging to restrain their supporters and accept the outcome of the election on 26 March 2015 in Abuja. Consequently, National Peace Committee (NPC) under the leadership of General Abubakar was set up to monitor and promote dialogue between the two leading candidates. The paper revealed that the first major impact of the Accord was seen in gubernatorial candidates in Lagos, Oyo, Rivers, and Niger signing Peace Accord to prevent violence before, during and after the election. Despite the presence of pockets of violence in the election the acceptance of the outcome of the election by President Jonathan on 31 March 2015 could largely been seen in the burden put on him by the Peace Accord which had NPC E.U, United States, ECOWAS, UN playing key roles. Data were generated from primary and secondary sources analyzed qualitatively using historical approach.

## **Introduction**

Election is one of the pillars of democratic governance, thus in every democratic society regular election at fixed interval is a common feature. Nigeria returned to the comity of democratic states on 29 May 1999 after almost two decades of military rule. The new democratic experiment is termed Fourth Republic, because it is the fourth attempts in entrenching democratic governance in the country. The previous attempt beginning from when the country gained independence in 1960 failed when the military took over in 1966 (Ikime, 1980 Diamond, 1988). The same happened in 1983 and the early 1990s efforts were short-lived, following the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election by the General Ibrahim Babangida regime (Osaghae, 2002).

One of the major reasons for the collapse of previous democratic experiments in the country could be traced to the violence that pervaded the electoral cycle. Electoral violence deal with any random or organised act or threat to intimidate, physically harass, blackmail, or abuse political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence an electoral process (Jeff (2002). Albert (2012) observed that electoral violence in Nigeria lies in the deeper socio-political and economic structures of the country coupled with poor election management. The combination of the foregoing often makes the political class to rely on and use any means to emerge victorious in electoral contest.

The Fourth Republic in the country witnessed electoral violence occasioned by the perceived compromised of the electoral process. The period has seen the use of armed youth employed by the political class to engage in election malpractices that led to loss of lives (Human Right Watch, 2014). The prevalence of electoral violence in the 2007 election that was termed do or die by former President Obasanjo worsen in 2011 when the violence that following the presidential election led to the death of over 800 persons and destruction of properties.

The process through which violence could be transformed is peace accord. Peace accords are formal agreements aimed at ending violent conflicts and creating the conditions for durable peace. They include “ceasefire agreements, interim or preliminary agreements, comprehensive and framework agreements, and implementation agreements” (www.gsdr.org). Peace accords are usually aimed at bringing hostile parties together towards promoting peace. The attempt to

avert the recurrence of 2011 electoral violence and the unprecedented threat of violence that heralded the electioneering campaigns of the Nigerian 2015 elections alarmed national and international stakeholders led to the signing of peace accord by the political parties and presidential candidates. The paper therefore examines the role of the Abuja peace accord in the 2015 general election. Following introduction is conceptual analysis; historical context of electoral violence in Nigeria, background to the 2015 general elections and the Abuja Peace Accord; the impact of the Peace Accord on the election; and conclusion as well as suggestions.

## **Conceptual Analysis**

### **Democracy**

The concept of democracy still remains contentious among scholars and analysts. Democracy is generally regarded by scholars and analysts to have commenced in Athens, one of the ancient Greek city states. The word democracy is a coinage of two Greek words “Demos when translated says “people” and “Kratos” means “rule”. In other words, democracy in the minds of the ancient Greek is rule by the people (Cambridge Encyclopaedia 1990). The size of the modern states has made the involvement of all the people impossible thus power is exercised on behalf of the people by elected agents (Raaflaub, Ober and Wallace, 2007).

Inter-Parliamentary Union adopted in 1997 Universal Declaration on Democracy conceived democracy “as an ideal government aimed to protect and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual, instill social justice and foster economic and social development. Democracy is a political system that enables people to freely choose an effective, honest, transparent and accountable government”. Democracy as a system of governance is made up of four major features, namely:

A political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections;

The active participation of the people, as citizens in both politics and civic life;

Protection of human rights of all citizens; and

A rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens (Lijphart, 1999)

There is no doubt that democracy involves periodic elections and promotion and protection of fundamental human rights of the citizenry within a state. In the same vein, democratic governance gives opportunity for the citizens to determine who led them through the process of election. Thus election is one of the critical aspects of democratic governance. The major criticism of democracy is that once the representatives are elected they can make their own decision without recourse to the people. The people will however determine his/her fate in the next election

## **Election**

Election is one of the pillars of democratic society. Election in a democratic society is usually periodic and is a process of determining and choosing the representatives of the people in a given society. Thus election could be described as a systematic way of managing the process of electing the few that will govern in the interest of the larger population. According to Anifowose (2003) election is a process of elite selection by the mass of the population in any given political system. The emergence of the selection process is an attempt to overcome the challenges created by the geometrical rise in population, occupying huge landmass that made mass population participation directly in decision making without a representative impossible. The aforementioned challenges made representative election inevitable in democratic societies.

Samuel Huntington (1991) submitted that election is “of greater importance in all democratic regimes the principal officers of government are chosen through competitive elections in which the bulk of the population can participate. Democratic systems thus have a common institutional core that establishes their identity”. Okoye (2003) believes elections are complex set of activities with different variables that act and feed one another. Furthermore, he defined it as a formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedent and subsequent behaviour. The process involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their own participation in governance. Election is 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 election, registration, of political parties, party campaign, the activities of the electronics and print media in terms of access; it includes party financing, the activities of the security agencies and the government in power. It includes the authenticity and genuineness of the voters register

In the same vein, Ojo (2007) believed election is an institutional mechanism that implements democracy by allowing citizens to choose among candidates or issues. Agbaje and Ajetumobi (2007) contended that election is a viable mechanism for consummating representative government. Joseph (1991) espoused that election is the prime purpose of elections will remain the legitimation of whatever regime that currently holds government power... and are far from being autonomous operation; they reflect the character of the political order and especially the degree of risk incumbent are willing to tolerate. To him, election is a game changer in the differential democratic and non-democratic societies. Kambudzi (2008 cited in Ugbudian, 2015) postulated that through the mechanism of election citizens seek to improve their lives by listening to views and options offered by political candidates on vital issues of national life and making weighted choices among them. Citizens use elections to keep government up to task of providing for basic societal needs and pursuing unrelenting improvement of the country. This is how properly conducted elections play a role as a development asset in any given country. Oche (1997) defined election as institutionalized procedures for the choosing of office holders (representatives) by some or all of the recognised members of an organisation (or society).

### **Electoral Violence**

Violence according to David (2007 cited in Ugbudian, 2011) is the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. The process of achieving the incompatible interests among political actors often generates into threat of violence or actual violence. Political violence is the manifestation of political differences that could end up in threat to peace in the society. This, Anifowoshe (1982) conceived electoral violence as the “use of threat use or threat of physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals, and/or property, with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction to property; and whose objective, choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation, and effects have political significance, that is, tend to modify the behavior of others in the existing arrangement of power that has some consequences for the political system”.

Balogun (2003) conceived electoral violence as the employment of force by political parties or their supporters intimidate opponents and threats to a democratic government, and has often accounted for seizures of power by the use of undemocratic means, force. In some cases, the violence was used to intimidate opponents in order to force them not to freely express their

freedom of choices of candidates; whilst in others, violence was in reaction to rigging of election. Ladan (2006) described electoral violence as any conduct and act of violence perpetrated in the course of political events covering pre, during and post -election period, and may include any of the following acts: use of force to disrupt political gatherings or voting at polling stations, thuggery, 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. Jegede (2002 cited in Ugbudian 2015) dwelled on the many forms of electoral violence including abduction, arson, murder, illegal and violent seizure and destruction of electoral materials, and assault. The objective of the perpetrators is to determine the outcome of elections or preventing elected public officers from consolidating their positions. Electoral violence is described by Karim (2011) as any behaviour that encompasses the use of physical force to promote the destruction of lives and properties, and maim persons of rival groups in the attempt to advance the electoral interest of their candidates or parties.

In the light of the foregoing, election often brews political instability which is caused by several factors including violent conduct among political groups. The escalation of conflicts among different political groups often takes its roots in perceived manipulation of the electoral process by the rival group(s). In Nigeria, electoral violence has contributed to political instability. Since independence whenever violence in election cycle happens, it usually creates instability in the polity. For instance, the Western region electoral crisis culminated in the January 15, 1966 military coup. The same can be said of the electoral violence that happened in 1984 governorship elections in parts of the country which also led to political instability. The Fourth Republic has also witnessed one of the worst electoral violence in the country especially the 2011 post-election that somewhat questioned the continued existence of the country.

### **Peace Accord**

Peace accord or agreement is a major aspect of conflict management that involves third party intervention. The third party acts as a mediator to the conflicting parties in attempt to deescalate and transform the conflict. International Relations and Security Network Reports (ISN, 2010) defined peace agreement (accord) as a negotiated contract that falls under various categories however with the same objective of making conflicting parties to follow the path of peace which will play key role in the societal development ([www.isn.ethz.ch](http://www.isn.ethz.ch)). The ISN further stressed that

peace agreements are usually more encompassing than a cease-fire agreement as it covers political elements. The success or otherwise of an agreement tends to depend on the local knowledge, history and custom hence these element must be factored into the peace agreement to ensure it is effective. Peace agreement is described as a treaty that involves two or more hostile parties. The parties are often governmental or non-state actors with which the peace agreement would formally bring the state of conflict to an end ([www.gsdrc.org](http://www.gsdrc.org)).

Put differently, peace agreements “are formal agreements aimed at ending violent conflict and creating the conditions for durable peace. They include ceasefire agreements, interim or preliminary agreements, comprehensive and framework agreements, and implementation agreements. The way in which the conflict ends – whether by compromise, or a one-sided victory, for example – typically has implications for the nature of the peace”Nita Yawanarajah and Julian Quillet (2003) believed peace agreements are special contracts aimed at ending a violent conflict or strongly transform a conflict towards a comprehensive solution. The authors also stated that there are different types of peace agreements that can be decided during the peace process. The different peace agreements sometimes are inter-woven thus making clear cut distinction almost impossible. ‘An agreement or accord is a formal commitment between hostile parties to end a war. Sometimes peace accords can capture the broad spirit or framework of peace and guide the next steps without addressing issues in detail’ (International Alert: 2009)

The different authors seem to conceive peace agreement from the perspective of transforming and deescalating high intensity conflict. They dwelled much on the process that will bring about enabling environment for further interactions that would make for sustaining peace. However, none of the work captured peace agreement in the perspective of preventive escalation of conflict in terms of election.

### **Historical Context of Electoral Violence in Nigeria**

Electoral violence predates the independence of Nigeria but the mode of perpetration was strengthened and entrenched, thereby making every election to be worse than the previous one (Sklar and Whitaker, 1966; Albert, 2012). Indeed, election in the country since 1960 has been confronted with the challenges of violence and several irregularities. The 1959 general election in the country witnessed some degree of violence that created some level of tensions. The

country was to experience more complicated violence in 1964-65 following the Western regional and general elections which put the unity of the country under strong questions. The general election of 1964 led to boycott by the Eastern Region ended in a stalemate. The Western regional election was a fall-out of the leadership crises that the Action Group (AG) faced. The crisis led to the balkanization of the AG and emergence of political party's realignment and alliances. Consequently, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) slugged it out for the control of the political power in the region. The election was however marred by poor election management that culminated in deliberate denial of candidates from contesting, rigging, fraud and use of physical force which led to the death of over one thousand persons (Dudley, 1982). The 1965 Western Regional election violence remained the worst political violence in the country. It led to the first military coup d'état in January 1966 (Dudley, 1982; Albert, 2012). To Ochoche (1997) the Western Regional crisis of 1965-1966 remains the worst single period of electoral violence in the history of Nigeria.

At the same time, the Second Republic between 1979 and 1983 also witnessed intricate electoral violence that made the military to intervene. Although the 1979 general election was competitive and generally low in violence, that of 1983 was characterized by violence especially in the south western states of Ondo and Oyo. The military intervention, a direct result of the electoral violence and maladministration truncated democracy in the country for the second time that was to last for several years. On the eve of the twenty-first century, the country returned to democratic governance after the crises that engulfed the country following the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential elections of the short-lived Third Republic.

Democratic governance re-emerged in Nigerian on 29 May 1999 when the military junta of General Abdusalami Abubakar, after a short transition programme, handed over to General Olusegun Obasanjo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) who defeated Chief Olu Falae of Alliance for Democracy (AD)/All Peoples Party (APP) in the presidential election. Although there were pockets of violence across the states in the general elections both national and international observers regarded the election as being relatively peaceful. For example, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and Carter centre reported that "the transition from military to civilian rule was generally conducted without violence but observed some electoral irregularities and outright fraud (Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart, 2010: 3). The 2013 election was

to witness violence and malpractice on a higher scale than the 1999 general elections. The 2003 elections according to reports were characterized by “low intensity armed struggle” by thugs hired by the political class especially in the Niger Delta (Human Right Watch, 2004; Ibeanu, 2007). The issues of intra-party and inter party conflicts also degenerated into violence especially in the ruling PDP in the election cycle.

The violence in the following general election in 2007 was worse than the previous elections in the Fourth Republic. Indeed, it was the election cycle of do or die politics declared by the then President, Olusegun Obasanjo. The period also witnessed more daring rigging tactics, ballot snatching, used of security operatives to alter results and intimidation and harassment of opponents as well as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials. Consequently, the 2007 was declared as a cycle of “civil strife, heightened social and political tension as well as sporadic use of violence, but in which armed conflict was not formally declared (Olajuyigbe, 2010). The 2007 election because of the violence also led to judicial review of some of the declared results in the elections. The 2011 election witnessed the worst violence in the Fourth Republic as over 800 persons were killed in the violence that trailed the presidential election. The violence could be traced to the internal politics of the ruling PDP and the regional, ethnic and religious dimensions of the electioneering cycle. The violence created fears and anxiety and put the unity of the country to question.

### **Background To the 2015 General Elections and the Abuja Peace Accord**

The violence that followed the 2011 presidential election in the country led to the death of over 800 persons and massive loss of property worth billions of naira. The violence coupled with the Boko Haram insurgency created tensions and insecurity in the country. The divisive campaigns that preceded the 2011 election as regards the office of the president further polarized the country along ethnic, religion and regional lines (Albert 2012; Ugbudian 2015). The violence indicators that culminated in the 2011 post-election violence reached unprecedented height following the nomination of presidential candidates by 14 political parties. President Goodluck Jonathan of PDP and General Muhammadu Buhari were the leading candidates in the election and also heightened violence orchestrated by their supporters using hate messages along religious, regional, cultural, ethnic and personal lines. The hate messages that created fear,

tension and insecurity in the political space made Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, a former Minister of External Affairs and elder statesman to write an open letter to the leading candidates requesting for a truce and stoppage of the hate campaigns (Alabi, 2015). The request was initially rejected by the presidency. However, on January 14 2015, the Office of the National Security Adviser and the Special Adviser to the president on Inter-Party Affairs through a generous financial grant and support of donor agencies including United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), European Union (EU) and others organized a workshop on the 2015 general elections (Ezea, 2015; Ojo,2015). The workshop with the theme: “2015 General Elections Sensitization Workshop on Non-Violence” had most of the political parties’ chairmen and presidential candidates invited and in attendance. The workshop was an attempt to deescalate the raging conflict that was looming in the political space through reorientation of the political actors- political parties’ leadership, candidates and other stakeholders. It is instructive that the electioneering campaigns were taking violent dimensions that further promoted tensions and insecurity in parts of the country. The 14 presidential candidates and their chairmen as well as Chief Emeka Anyaoku signed the below declaration while Mr. Kofi Anna observed the proceedings.

We, the undersigned presidential candidates of the underlisted political parties contesting the general election of 2015, desirous of taking proactive measures to prevent electoral violence before, during and after the elections, anxious about the maintenance of a peaceful environment for the 2015 general election, reaffirming our commitment to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, desirous of promoting the unity and corporate existence of Nigeria as an indivisible entity, determined to avoid any conduct or behaviour that will endanger the political stability and national security of Nigeria, determined to place national interest above personal and partisan concern, reaffirming our commitment to fully abide by all rules and regulations as laid down in the legal framework for elections in Nigeria hereby submit ourselves and our parties to the following:

1. To run issue based campaigns at national states and local government levels. In this, we pledge to refrain from campaigns that will involve religious sentiment, ethnic or tribal profiling, both by ourselves and all agents acting in our name.

2. To refrain from making or causing to make in our names or that of our parties any public statement, pronouncement, declaration or speeches that have the capacity to incite any form of violence before, during and after the elections.
3. To forcefully and publicly speak out against provocative utterances and oppose all act of electoral violence whether perpetuated by our supporters and, or opponents.
4. To commit ourselves and political parties to the monitoring of the adherence of this accord if necessary, by a national peace committee made up of respected statesmen and women, traditional and religious leaders.
5. All the institutions of government including INEC and security agencies must act and be seen to act with impartiality (Ezea, 2015; Ojo, 2015).

The Accord had provisions for sensitizing the public, and establishment of platform for monitoring and interfacing with the stakeholders to ensure adherence to the terms of the accord. The sensitization provision deals with engaging the stakeholders in ensuring that the 2015 elections were free, fair and credible. The accord according to Ben Obi, the Special Adviser to the President on Inter party Affairs, comprises public sensitization, peace-building, youth education, and community-wide awareness campaigns involving the political, religious and traditional institutions (Punch, 2015; Champion 2015). Thus the process will involves seminars, workshops and seminars as well as town hall meetings on a regular basis with the aim of inculcating on Nigerians the habit of making peace.

The accord also made provision for the existence of a platform for the implementation, monitoring of the accord and for mediation on issues that may arise among the signatories. Consequently, the National Peace Committee (NPC) was inaugurated to midwife the peace accord. The NPC headed by Nigerian former head of state, General Abdusalami Abubakar had other eminent Nigerians including Commodore Ebite Ukiwe, former Chief of General Staff in the Babangida military junta, served as Vice Chairman. And other members were Bishop Matthew Kuka;, Alhaji Aliko Dangote; Justice Rose Ukeje rtd; John Cardinal Onayiekan; Sultan Abubakar, Sultan of Sokoto; Alhaji Muhammad Musdafa, Lamido Adamawa; Most Rev. Nicholas Okoh, Primate of Anglican Church; and Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, President, Christian Association of Nigeria; Dame Priscilla Kuye, former President of Nigerian Bar Association;

Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs; Professor Ibrahim Gambari; Mr. Sam Pemu-Amuka, Publisher of Vanguard Newspapers; Professor Ameze Guobadia; and Professor Zainab Alkali(Aziken, 2015; Champion 2015).

The NPC on 26 March 2015 persuaded the two leading candidates, Muhammadu Buhari of APC and Goodluck Jonathan of PDP to renew the 14 January 2015 accord. The renewed accord pledge says:

You may recall that on 14th January 2015, both of us, along with nine other party leaders signed what has now come to be known as the Abuja Accord. The substance of that Accord was our commitment to free, fair and credible elections in our dear country.

In the Accord, we agreed to, among other things, run an issue-based campaign and pledged that our electoral campaigns will not involve any religious incitement, ethnic or tribal profiling, both by ourselves and all agents acting in our names.

Now that the campaigns have come to an end, we meet today to renew our pledge for peaceful elections. We therefore call on all fellow citizens of our dear country, and our supporters, to refrain from violence or any acts that may in any way jeopardize our collective vision of a free, fair and credible election.

In addition, we call on INEC and all security agencies to ensure strict adherence to their constitutional roles. We also pledge to respect the outcome of free, fair and credible elections.

Today, we again renew our commitment to a united, democratic and prosperous Nigeria. We want all Nigerians to stand together at this critical phase of our nation's history.

Long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria. God bless you all” (Alli and Akowe,2015; Ojo 2015)

### **Impact of the Peace Accord in the 2015 General Elections**

A significant impact of the peace accord in the 2015 general election was the mediator role of members of the NPC. The members of the NPC acted as a mediator in ensuring that the terms of

the accord were strictly observed by the candidates and political parties. The NPC began series of dialogue and interfacing with relevant agencies and stakeholders as well as candidates in the election. In this regard, the NPC met with Professor Attahiru Jega, Chairman of INEC and its officials, head of security agencies, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Air Marshal, Alex Badeh, and Inspector General of Police (IGP), Suleiman Abba to ascertain their state of preparedness and impress on them the need for free and fair elections. The NPC was also involved in reassuring the candidates and Nigerians on the conduct of the 2015 elections following the rescheduling of the election to 28 March and 11 April 2015, respectively by INEC, based on security report of the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The NPC informed Nigerians and the political class that despite the postponement of the election, the credibility, freeness and fairness of the conduct of the election will not be compromised thereby helping to douse tension, fear and threat of violence and even actual violence that pervaded the election cycle.

Also, the NPC engaged in another round of shuttle diplomacy immediately the voting ended and counting began with President Goodluck Jonathan and General Muhammadu Buhari on the observance of the terms of the peace accord. According to General Abubakar, “We have come as one to see Mr. President as the Commander- in-Chief of the country and to tell him what we have discussed with all the stakeholders and the role he as the Commander-In-Chief has to play and also what we expect him as a contestant in this race”. “We have briefed him and he has given us his assurance of conducting free, fair and violence-free elections. And this is what this committee is all about.” The committee continued its works even on Election Day and the conclusion of voting by meeting with both leading candidates on the need to abide by the terms of the accord. The committee also observed: “We are here to ensure peace is maintained at this moment. We thank Nigerians and all international community who came to support us during the elections. “The elections have been very peaceful despite the hitches here and there. At the end of the elections, at the counting, there are a lot of upheavals that have happened but thankfully they have been contained (Punch.2015)

This shuttle diplomacy eventually paid off when the candidate of the PDP and president of the country, Goodluck Jonathan eventually conceded defeat even when the results of Borno state were yet to be formally declared. This by any standard can be described as the demonstration of statesmanship. In the words of General Abubakar:

We were at the middle of a meeting with the international observers to try to see how we can still water the tension down, when gladly I called Gen. Buhari that we are going to see him, he told me that Mr. President had called him at about 5:15pm and congratulated him and conceded defeat. He continued: “In the history of Nigeria, I think this is the first time a contestant has called his rival to congratulate him and through this point, President Jonathan maintained a point that his ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian. “He has proved that he is a man of his word because during our interaction on this peace committee he has always maintained that he is going to accept the result of the elections whichever way it is done. “And he has proved this (Atojoko, 2015; Punch, 2015; Ayomide; 2015).

Another impact of the peace accord of 14 January 2015 was seen in the wave of peace accords in several states across the country in the following weeks. It is instructive that the states were not isolated from the hate campaigns that were prevalent between the two major power political parties and candidates at the national level. Indeed, it was even more intense and violent prone at the states level. Given the fact that most of the foot soldiers of the political parties are based at the various states and coupled with the internal dynamics within the states which are often different from the national, it became imperative that for the accord at the centre to fully succeed there was the need for the states to be carried along. Therefore, in the spirit of promoting peaceful election and without the involvement of the peacemakers at Abuja, the bandwagon of the peace accord caught most of the states of the federation. In this regard, several states including Lagos, Ogun, Imo, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Oyo, Niger and so on signed Peace Accords to promote peace and avert violence before, during and after election in their respective states. For instance, in Lagos, peace accord was signed in February 2015 between Mr. Jimi Agbaje of the PDP and Mr. Akinwunmi Ambode of APC at the Lagos official residence of the US Consular General, Jeffery Hawkins (Alabi, 2015). The signing of the treaty was also witnessed by the Resident INEC officer, religious and security leaders, stakeholders in the state as well as the U.S. ambassador to Nigeria, James F. Entwistle. Similar peace accord in other states were largely initiator and witnessed by the INEC officials, head of security apparatus and religious and eminent personalities with the candidates pledging to promote and support peace and restrain their supporters in the election cycle.

These pledges by the gubernatorial candidates in the states could be described as playing critical role to some extent in reducing tensions and the rate of violence in the election cycle, especially in the election-day and post-election periods. Although the typical Nigerian politicians are noted for doing everything possible to ‘win’ elections, the attention, both the media and civil society placed on the states especially the most violence prone and strategic such as Lagos, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Kaduna, Kano and so on played significant role in dousing the tension and violence in most of the states except Rivers, Akwa Ibom and few others. In addition to the foregoing, was the historic congratulation messages issued by the losers of the elections to the winners in most of the states which could be traced to the peace accords they signed. In Nigeria political space, it is rare for losers in an election to concede defeat and congratulate the winners. The 2015 gubernatorial election were unusual as most of the states witnessed candidates conceding defeats to their opponents which helped to avert violence, hence, promote peace. For instance, in Adamawa, Nuhu Ribadu, the PDP candidate in the gubernatorial election issued a message congratulating his APC opponent, Senator Jibrilla Bindow, who won the election. Also, in Lagos, Jimi Agbaje of the PDP also congratulated the winner, Mr. Akinwunmi Ambode of the APC. Similar scenarios played out in Kaduna, Niger, Katsina, Sokoto, Nasarawa, Benue, and many other states.

## **Conclusion**

The prediction before the election painted a scenario of doom that warranted the peace accord. The elections through the sacrifice and commitments of NPC, stakeholders, and the candidates were largely peaceful. The indicators of the Early Warning of several governmental and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) both national and international showed there will be threat and actual violence in the election cycle that could affect the unity of the country, coupled with the menace posed by the Boko Haram insurgency group in the north eastern part of the country. The CLEEN Foundation forecast for the 2015 general election revealed that over 15 Nigerian states were prone to electoral violence. Similarly, the International Crisis Group observed that “the country is heading toward a very volatile and vicious electoral contest” ([www.nigeriaelection.org](http://www.nigeriaelection.org)). Coupled with the report, the history of election in the country which have been characterized by violence and loss of lives and properties made violence in the 2015

election almost inevitable . In addition, the tone of the electioneering campaign did not help matters as it was drifting towards violence following the use of hate messages.

The signing of the Abuja Peace Accord created a window of opportunity for transforming and deescalating the threat of violence. Although there were deficits in the accord because of lack of sanction on erring parties, coupled with the fact that INEC, judicial and security chiefs were not parties to the agreement, the accord still helped to a very large extent in making the parties to the accord comply with the laid down rules(Iredia, 2015). The monitoring of the implementation of the terms of the accord by the NPC through its shuttle diplomacy with the major candidates, General Muhammadu of APC and President Jonathan of PDP no doubt brought some measures of sanity thereby promoting peace in the election cycle.

The relative peaceful conduct and outcome of the elections that culminated in the losers congratulating the winners which are historic in the country's political space is one of the major fruits of the accord. The conceding of defeat and congratulating of winners by losers in election in Nigeria prior to 2015, is unusual and could be said to be largely novel. It is instructive to say that most of the election in the country since 1960 were largely marred by malpractices. But the lack of sportsmanship among the Nigerian political class is well noted by scholars and observers. Therefore, the burden that the accord placed on the political parties and candidates because of the national and international backing that accord received, coupled with the relative credibility, free and fairness of the election despite some hitches and pockets of violence in few states could be one of the key grounds for the wave of conceding of defeat by the candidates. This new politic in the country was led by President Goodluck Jonathan who conceded while the result of Bornu state were still being expected. This step by President Jonathan helped to reduce palpable fear and tension that was raging in the country hence, promoting peace in the post-election cycle. Given the conflict transformation efforts of President Jonathan, the mirror effects manifested in several states of the federation which witnessed defeated candidates conceding to the winners that further promoted peace in parts of the country.

In a nutshell apart from the violence in few states including Rivers and Akwa Ibom, there was no organised or intense violence in the election cycle in the country. The election was relatively credible, free, fair and peaceful. The violent transformative role of the peace accord though

under reported, cannot be overemphasized. The accord made political parties, their supporters and candidates to be conscious of the consequences of engaging in violent behaviour. Therefore, the peace accord played a critical and important role in ensuring and promoting peace in the 2015 election cycle in the country through obtaining the commitment of the major candidates.

### **Suggestions**

There is no doubt that the peace accord played a huge role in promoting peace and averting violence in the Nigerian 2015 general election. This was manifested in the sportsmanship attitude of President Jonathan who lost the presidential election and most of the gubernatorial candidates who also lost and conceded defeat. This has drawn national and international commendations on the actors and stakeholders that made it possible.

Despite these global commendations and the huge role the accord played in transforming violence in the election cycle there are obvious deficits in the peace accord. The paper thus suggests that the scope and efficiency of the accord should be broadened. In this regard, INEC, security heads especially the IGP, media representatives and judicial head should not be made observers in the accord, rather these officials should be made signatories in the accord. These stakeholders are very crucial in the conduct of free, fair and credible election and promotion of peace in electoral contest. Thus making them signatories in the accord would also place a burden and commitment on them to perform their duties judiciously and impartially in the interest of the country. For instance, the media are channels for preventing the spread of hate messages while the behaviour of INEC officials and the security operatives could determine the outcome of the election process and the consequences.

Added to the above, is the application of sanctions on erring parties. The non-application of sanctions on erring parties in the peace accord made it to be largely a moral issue. In the other words, adherence to the accord is at the discretion and commitment of the signatories based on moral ground. The paper thus argues that sanctions based on level of infringement on the terms of the accord should be meted out to violators. The NPC should be made a permanent institution in the electoral process with legal backing and further charged with the responsibilities of determining violators and recommending sanctions.

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