

ISSN: 2315-7844

Website: www.arabianjbm.com/RPAM_index.php

Publisher: Department of Public Administration Nnamdi Azikiwe
University, Awka, Nigeria and Zainab Arabian Research Society
for Multidisciplinary Issues Dubai, UAE

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRATIC STABILITY IN NIGERIA: REFLECTING ON THE PAST AND CHATting THE WAY RORWARD

IKYASE, Tersoo Johnkennedy & EGBERI, Anthony Ejue
Department Of Political Science, Federal University, Wukari
Taraba State Nigeria
kennykyas@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the political violence and democratic stability in Nigeria. The paper is written against the backdrop that, periodic elections are fundamental to the principles of democracy. Thus, political violence has been a major road-block to democratic stability in Nigeria. The paper argues that the Nigerian democratic project has been under perpetual threat since 1999 when the country returned to democratic governance. However, the excitement and euphoria that greeted the country's return to democracy in 1999 has drastically waned creating fear in the polity. The methodology adopted focuses on the secondary data and insights were drawn extensively from the conflict theorists. The paper revealed that the realization of democratic objective or stability depends solely on free, fair and credible elections. The paper therefore recommends among others, that politicians should not use ethnicity and religion to galvanize support and polarize the populace through politics of religious deception and ethnic chauvinism which have stirred up sentiments and sparked communal violence perennially in Nigeria. Fundamentally too, the federal and state governments should publicly condemn discrimination on the basis of 'indigene' or 'non-indigene' status and accord all Nigerians full citizenship status and make them eligible to enjoy all political and ultimately dissuade inclinations for political violence.

Keywords: Political Violence, Democratic Stability, Nigeria, Election.

Introduction

It is apposite to state that political violence is the hallmarks of weakly institutionalize politics. The starkest manifestation of such violence is armed conflict in the form of civil war. Though elections which are supposed to be a significant pillar in the democratic process of a country with the twin principles of political participation and accountability is precisely in the greatest and most notable violations of the occurrence of this principles. Everyone wants to win, and

nobody wants to lose. It is obvious that for any political critic to say anything considered 'negative' about any political office holder, he should be ready to bear the risk of being molested.

According to Adekanye in (Alfa & Otaida, 2012), an objective review of the Nigerian political journey would reveal that political violence has been part and parcel of the country's history. What is however new are the metamorphoses of the violence; which is now in shapes, magnitude and consequences? No country can develop in an atmosphere of rancor and acrimony. Nigeria would have been one of the leading economics of the world but its movement has been anti-clockwise due largely to the fact that monumental resources are channeled into security votes, conflict resolution and reconstruction as a result of perennial political violence: since political power is the major source of wealth in Nigeria, the contest for political office is always a 'do or die' affair (Ake, 1981 & Tenuche, 2011 in Alfa & Otaida, 2012)

It is against this backdrop that this paper examines political violence and democratic stability in Nigeria. For ease of analysis, the paper is collapsed into several sections in such a way that we first undertook the introduction, section two examine the conceptual and theoretical epistemology, section three expound the historical evolution of political violence in Nigeria, section four considered the causes of political violence, section five examine the effects of political violence on democratic stability, while section six envelop the paper with conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Epistemology

Democratic Stability: The premise of democratic stability is that what sustains government and ensure stability is voluntary supported or is with the consent of the citizens rather than reliance on coercion. To that extent therefore, there is a correlation between democratic stability and legitimacy (Osaghae, 1997). Democratic stability implies that government is a product of the will of the people and derives its legitimacy from the people's consent. This therefore, ensures that the people willingly support the government given that the government is not arbitrarily foisted on them. In a reciprocal manner, the government carried out programmes that are in line with the interest of the people. In a democratically stable society, democracy is said to be more or less consolidated. To this end the reverse to authoritarianism becomes remote because democracy is seen as the "only game in town. (Linz, & Gunther, 1995; Alfa, 2011)

Violence: Violence could be an instrument employed by non-governmental organizations, individuals and groups to press forward their demands. However, violence when it is endemic and persistent or unmanageable may become an impediment to political stability and economic progress. In our conceptualization, electoral violence is synonymously used as political violence, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping etc. spontaneous or not, which occur before, during and after every election (Ilufeye, 2006)

Political Violence: According to Anifowose (1982) is the use of or threat of physical act carried out by individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or groups and property, with the intent to cause injury or death to persons, damage or destruction to property, and whose objective, choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstance, implementation, and effects have political significances, that tends to modify or change the behavior of others in the existing arrangement for the political system

Political violence could take two dimensions that are pre-electoral violence and post-electoral violence (Tamuno, 1991). The pre-electoral violence may occur where electoral laws or provisions are seen to favor a particular candidate at the expense of the other. It could also occur when a particular candidate is over-ambitious and perhaps sees the signals that he may likely lose the election to the opponent. Post-electoral violence on the other hand, may be spontaneous. It may be engineered by individuals who feel cheated, alienated or deprived by the unfairness of the electoral process. This deprivation may be real or perceived. In Nigeria, the purpose of such violence apart from seeking redress through illegal means is also to destroy it, if we cannot have it (Afolabi 2007).

Theoretical Epistemology

The Nigeria political woes could be analyzed from variety of theoretical stand point. This is because multitudes of symptoms are responsible for electoral fiasco in Nigeria. Thus, in this paper we adopted conflict theory. At the development stages of this theory, some of the proponents, Karl Marx, Gluckman and Max Weber anchored their arguments on the fact that conflict situation is created when a person or group of persons attempts or succeeds in carrying out its or their will by overcoming the resistance of other groups or person and their interests in situation of scarcity of resources.

Conflict theory seeks to scientifically explain the general contours of conflict in society: how conflict starts and varies, and the effects it brings. The central concerns of conflict theory are the unequal distribution of scarce resources and power. Conflict theorists generally see power as the central feature of society, rather than thinking of society as held together by collective agreement concerning a cohesive set of cultural standards. Where power is located and who uses it (and who doesn't) are thus fundamental to conflict theory.

Semel, (2010) cited in Wilson, (2011) also posit that conflict theorists view society as an arena or "social battlefield" where different individuals and groups contest one another in order to obtain scarce and valued resources, most of which have economic implications which, in turn, have implications for access to influence in our society and the so-called "levers of power." The general assumption is that in our economic system, wealth is power, and that we also have a stratified social system (i.e., social classes) that is differentiated primarily by the ability of its members to generate wealth.

Aliegba, (2004) thus corroborate this view when he stated that Conflict is an aspect of social interaction that usually arises from the pursuit of divergent interest, goals and aspirations by individuals and groups in defined social and physical environments

In Nigeria, source of conflict is power; politicians are competing to enter into a system, they act in their self interest, not for the welfare of the people. It arises from the divergent of interest, goals, and aspirations by individuals or groups in defined social and physical environment such as contestable access to political positions.

It is on this note that the Nigeria state is confronted by a plethora of inconsistencies and tension of various proportions arising from incompatibility of individuals and groups interests in political succession and sharing of the perquisites of office. There is tension for political succession and sharing of the perquisites of office, the tension sometimes snowballs to political violence.

Obasanjo was quoted to have said: we fight and sometimes shed blood to achieve and attain political power because for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for too long been the gateway to economic kingdom (Obasanjo, 2002 in Segun, 2013). Similarly, Omoweh and

Okanya (2005) in Segun (2013) noted that, political competition for the control of the state and its political power is now a bloody warfare as the state holds the key to wealth.

Conflict theory is vital in this research paper because, it will enhance scientific understanding and stands as an operational tool to further assess the role of political violence and its effect on democratic stability of Nigeria.

Historical Background to Electoral Violence in Nigeria

In the words of Alanamu (2005), the history of violence in Nigeria politics dates back to colonial era. From the 1950s, elections in Nigeria approximated a war wage to determine “who get what, when and how” (Oyediran 1997). All weapons were available for those combatants to use which include religion, ethnic sentiments, outright bribery, the power of incumbency, corruption, the abuse of electoral processes etc. Indeed, evidence before us proves that electoral behavior in Nigeria has never been guided by ideology, party programmes or the merit of those standing to be elected, but by a political calculus based on ethnic geopolitics, the means to assume power by all costs, either singly or by a small power bloc around a big power bloc for the purpose of fighting the war so as to win, rule and rule and then share the anticipated booty.

In the 1960s too, there were no parties that were not regionally bias: The Northern people’s Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG) and National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) were based in the North, West and East respectively. After independence, the first major national election by the political parties degenerated into conflict (Ogundiya, 1999). More importantly, the crisis within the AG which spread to other areas of the Western region and the whole country, affected in no small way the election (1964) in its conception, execution and outcome (Oyediran, 1997). For example, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) brought the NPC and the Akintola-led Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and other minor political parties together under one umbrella.

Alibi, (2004) observes that, the electoral officers were terrorized into absconding from their offices once they receive the nomination papers of governing party candidates with no opportunity of registering their nomination papers. So flagrantly was the electoral procedure abused that at the close of nominations some 88 out of the total of 174 NPC Candidates in the North had their candidature unopposed. In the West, about 30 percent of the NNPC were supposed to have been unopposed. The situation in the East was not much different.

Our analysis shows that, the electoral fraud of 1964 brought about the crisis that eventually led to the coup of 15th January, 1966. The situation in 1979 and 1983 was not cordial (Agubamah 2008).

The five registered political parties were; National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), Nigerians People’s Party (NPP), Great Nigerians Peoples Party (GNPP) and Advance Party which was later registered in 1983 (Ademolekan,1985). The federal election of 1979 contested by these political parties gave the impression that politicians may after all have learnt some lessons from the demise of the first Republic. However, it is important to state that the annulment of that election by Ibrahim Babangida, the then Military Head of State, recorded serious opposition to his regime. This was a bad signal for democracy in the country (Ali, 2006).

The 1998/99 general elections lacked bitterness, boycotts, thuggery and other malpractices usually associated with electoral process in the country (Nnadozie, 2007). However, electoral

violence was also a major issue of concern throughout the 2007 election process. While some states enjoyed nearer (EU Report 2007 in Alfa & Otaida, 2012).

The announcement of the results of 2011 presidential election sparked up violent demonstrations in some Northern states of the country. Following the declaration of President Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of the election, people believed to be supporters of opposition Congress for Progress Change (CPC), burst into violent uprising unleashing terror, destroying properties worth millions of naira. The house of the Vice President, Namadi Sambo was looted and raised and palaces of prominent traditional rulers in the North were attacked. A number of members of National Youth Service Corps were killed in mayhem in Bauchi, Gombe among others. (EU, Report, 2011 in Alfa & Otaida, 2012)). The most dreaded insurgency of the fourth Republic has come to be that of the Boko Haram (Dearn, 2011 in Alfa & Otaida, 2012). Dearn (2011) in Alfa & Otaida (2012) further noted, "Boko Haram was a little understood as, dangerous but parochial Islamic sect believed to be in decline after a purge by Nigeria security forces in 2009. Now, with 2 years drawing to a close, it is clear that Boko Haram remains little understood and has evolved into Nigerian's most serious security threat, one which shows no sign of abating in spite of the repeated government line that it is solving the problem". Boko Haram has carried out horrendous attacks on various targets including the Police Headquarters, the UN building, etc. It has also carried out horrifying attacks targeted at places of worship in northern states of Borno, Kano, Plateau, Gombe, Kaduna, Taraba, Sokoto and the FCT (Saidu, & Suka, 2012 in Alfa & Otaida, 2012). Lately, the Boko Haram has spread its targets to include media houses and telecommunication facilities for allegedly being sympathetic with the government.

On the whole, our contention so far is that electoral violence is an unpalatable phenomenon for democratic stability in Nigeria.

Causes of Political Violence in Nigeria

We may not be able to exhaustively enumerate all the causes of political violence as they are somehow complex. They include; the mass poverty of the people caused by the socio-economic crisis of under-development. Averages Nigerian can easily be bought over with a few Nairas' which can lead him to perform any odd task.

Election rigging equally contributes to electoral violence in our country. Experience has shown that rigging has been a single most important cause that pervades free and fair election and this has been responsible for grave consequences for democratic stability in Nigeria. More so, electoral maladministration is also one of the causes of electoral violence in Nigeria. The insincerity of the electoral officers seem to over shadow the inadequate control mechanisms and poor logistics which all enhance manipulations through electoral fraud.

Political intolerance and the tendency to see election as a do or die affair also contribute to electoral violence at the detriment of democratic stability. In Nigeria, but only of recent as demonstrated by His Excellency, Ebele Goodluck Azikiwe Jonathan, hardly do election losers accept (even in those elections that are seen as transparent) the verdict of the ballot box. Our politicians should learn lesson from the developed nations where losers of election embrace and congratulate those who defeat them in elections. Personal bitterness and existing rivalry between two contenders can eventually degenerate into serious political violence in Nigeria.

Effects of Electoral Violence on Democratic Stability in Nigeria

Electoral violence has caused a lot of harm to the democratic stability in Nigeria. An uncontrolled electoral violence has the potentials of truncating democratic stability in a country.

More so, given the nature of our politics, electoral violence is a luxury can ill afford. A consequence to this is sabotaging the will of the electorate at the elections. It may lead to a situation where leaders that emerge, are elected by the minority because the majority that has fears for their lives will not go near the electoral process. (Amaka, 2005). More so, large scale electoral violence has adverse effect on democratic stability because it negates the essential purpose of elections as a popular basis for government, for instance; a government which by electoral violence sustains itself in power against the wishes of the majority of the electorate lacks the legitimacy or the moral authority that popular mandate bestows (Ezeani, 2005).

The Nigerian Politics for example has always been characterized by violent conflicts even in the colonial period where state repression was a certainty. The women's riots of 1929, the Egbo uprising of 1931, the general strike of 1945, the Enugu Colliery Strike of 1949 and the Kano Riots of 1953 are cases of violent in Colonial Nigeria (Anifowose, 1982). In the early years of independence the prospects of violence reared its head in the Western Region and the Middle Belt. The violence that ensued ultimately led to the collapse of the first Republic (Anifowose, 1982). The intervention of the military in politics in 1966 also generated more violence in the scale that was unprecedented. Not only were political assassinations the order of the day but the pogrom against easterners in the North and the civil war in which over 2 million Nigerians lost their lives showed the depression of the political elite for power and the extent they could go to maintain it.

Electoral violence has created room for the emergence of incompetent persons who occupy vital electoral positions made possible by some political demagogues. The fact that such people are mediocre, they cannot deliver the dividends as expected by the masses.

It also important to note that due to political violence, some of the best brains in political and economic management are not in governance as a result of victimization, while others are even brutally eliminated as was the case of Chief Bola Ige.

The Nexus between Political Violence and Democratic Stability

There seems to be a growing academic discourse on Political violence and democratic stability. It is argued in many quotas that democracy is a panacea to Political violence; in fact, it is one of the measures the United Nations (UN) often advocate in their intervention efforts in war torn countries (Paris, 2004 cited in Segun, 2013). However, Keane (2010) in Segun (2013) argued that democracy rather than been a solution to violence, is a major driver of Political violence because elections which are cardinal features of democratization often generate violence in democratic countries. For example, Rapoport and Weingberg (2001), Høglund (2006) cited in Segun (2013) contended that competitive election facilitates peaceful transfer of power and makes it possible to assign accountability to those who govern, to others, democracy comes at a price because violence attend most election. Rapoport and Weinberg (2001) in Segun (2013) further stated that the situation immediately after elections is often very sensitive as the acceptance or otherwise of the outcome of elections by contenders can produce outbreaks of violence. Elaigwu (2005) in Segun (2013) identified 17 major violent conflicts in Nigeria from May 1985 to May 1st 1999. However, from May 31, 1999 to June 2005 he identified at least 121 cases of conflicts in Nigeria.

Democracy midwives peace, however, democracy alone cannot bring about peace as evidenced in some countries undergoing democratization such as Nigeria. The intense nature of competition for political power has made violence to be associated with democracy. Nigerian politicians,

over the years, have become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power and more intolerant of opposition, criticism and efforts at replacing them (Alemika, 2011 in Segun, 2013). Obasanjo for example asserted that: we fight and sometimes shed blood to achieve and attain political power because for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for too long been the gateway to economic kingdom (Obasanjo, 2002 in Segun, 2013). Similarly, Omoweh and Okanya (2005) in Segun (2013) noted that, political competition for the control of the state and its political power is now a bloody warfare as the state holds the key to wealth. The above scenario explains why election which is the means of political power acquisition in democratic governance has been violent ridden. Abbass (2008) in Segun (2013) corroborate this views when he stated that election period in Nigeria is best described as warfare. According to Human Right Watch (2011) in Segun (2013) at least 100 people died in federal and state election in 2003; not less than 300 people were killed in violence linked to the 2007 elections and well over 800 people were victims of electoral violence in 2011 presidential elections alone in the North with more than 65,000 people displaced.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the discussions demonstrated in the work, it is apparent that the Nigeria state is beset by the cankerworm of political violence which to all intents and purposes retards democratic consolidation. It has brought disenchantment and disillusionment in the entire polity and the democratic project. As a matter of fact, the realities that spelt doom for the past republics are still endemic and prevalent in Nigeria. Poverty, unemployment, hunger, corruption, politically motivated killings, abductions, religious bigotry to mention a few are still conspicuous in Nigeria's political firmament. The paper however makes the following recommendations to obliterate or at least reduce political violence to the beeriest minimum.

The first and foremost, is that a pragmatic and proactive effort must be made by those in positions of authority to reduce poverty. With this, people would not be pawns in the hands of politicians in orchestrating political violence. Youth employment should be vigorously embarked upon and objectively implemented without prejudice to give the vast majority of Nigerian youths the opportunity to be gainfully engaged in productive ventures.

Political parties should be made to play politics according to the rules of the game. There should be internally democratic and refrain from politics of desperation which oscillate the polity and swing it to the precipice of violence.

Politicians should not use ethnicity and religion to galvanize support and polarize the populace through politics of religious deception and ethnic chauvinism which have stirred up sentiments and sparked communal violence perennially in Nigeria.

The use of the police during elections should be appropriate. In other words, the police should be politically neutral and their number should be adequate to be able to quell likely violence. They should not use excessive force and those suspected of violence and misconduct should be arrested while those who aid and abet electoral violence should be punished.

Since elections have been characterized by volatile contestations and tension, attempts should be made to forestall cases of stolen mandate and abuse of incumbency. Trained officials should not be replaced by party faithful. The Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and relevant agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should embark on vigorous education and value-orientation and re-orientation aimed at repositioning democratic institutions and the citizenry.

Government and judicial authorities should carry out prosecutions of persons implicated in political violence whatever their political affiliations; those prosecuted should include persons who ordered or organized the violence as well as those who carried it out.

Establishment of Electoral Crime Commission to deal with Electoral offences, and deal with cases like EFCC successes (Omodia, 2009). In the absence of legislation dealing specifically with political violence, offenders should be tried under existing criminal laws including conspiracy.

Fundamentally too, the federal and state governments should publicly condemn discrimination on the basis of 'indigene' or 'non-indigene' status and accord all Nigerians full citizenship status and make them eligible to enjoy all political and ultimately dissuade inclinations for political violence. (Alfa, 2011).

To crown it all, we suggest that the recommendations contained in the Uwais Electoral Reform Report are necessary and sufficient enough to improve the quality of our elections and therefore should be implemented having gone through historical, analytical, causes and impact of electoral violence in Nigeria, we have argued in this paper that electoral violence has posed a serious danger to the democratic stability in the country. To ensure a formidable and enviable democratic stability, we must eschew any real or imagined ingredients of electoral violence.

References

- Adekanye, J. B. (1989). Politics in a Military Context. In Ekeh, P. P. et al (eds.), *Nigeria since Independence; The first 25 years*. Vol. V, 186-205. Heinemann.
- Africa Action (2003, April). Nigeria: Political Violence and Elections. *African Policy E-Journal*, 3: Africa Watch 4 (5)
- Afolabi, O. (2007). *Electoral Violence and the consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria*, Nok Publisher, London.
- Agubamah, E. (2008). Electoral Violence and Democratic Stability in Nigeria. A paper presented at the 27th annual NPSA conference at Benue State University, Makurdi.
- Alfa, P. I. (2011). Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Nigerians (2007-2011). *Journal of Policy and Development Studies*, Vol.5 (5), 49-160.
- Alfa, P. I. and Otaida, E. (2012). Political Violence and Negation of Democratic Stability in Nigeria; the Implication for Nigerian Fourth Republic, *Journal of Physical Science and Innovation*, Vol. 4, 43-51. Available in www.cenresinpub.org
- Alanamo, A. (2005). Issues in Political Violence. Hamson Printing Communication. Ilorin.
- Alibi, O. (2004). *Political Violence and Nigeria Democracy*, Ife: University Press
- Ali, D. (2006). *How to Curb Electoral Violence*. Lagos: Green Press
- Alubo, O. (2006). *Ethnic Conflicts and Citizenship Crisis in the Central Region*. Lagos: Eddy Asae Nigeria Press
- Amaka, B. (2005). *Electoral Violence: The bare if Democracy*. Enugu: Ikenga Press
- Anifowose, A. (1982). *Violence and politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yourba Experience*. London: Nok Publishers
- Egwu, S. (2003). Electoral Violence and Democratization Project: The Nigerian Experience, in B. A. Olasunpo (eds) *Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Issues and Prospective*. Fredrick Ebert Stiftung (FES).
- Ezeani, E. O. (2005). *Fundamentals of Public Administration*. Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Ilufoye, F. (2006). *Electoral Violence in Nigeria. Political History*. Lagos: Spectrum

- Iwekwe, C. (1965). *Violence in Nigeria Politics*. Ibadan: Uiversity Press
- Jembe, A. (2009). *Political Parties and Pressure Groups in Nigeria. Tortoise Nigeria*, Gboko: Printing and Publishing
- Linz, J. S. and Gunther, R. (1995). Democratic Transition and Consolidation in Southern Europe, with Reflections on; Latin America and Eastern Europe, in the Politics of Democratic Consolidation; Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective (ed) Gunther, R. .Puhce H. and Diamond M.D John Hopk.
- Nnadozie, U. (2007). History of elections in Nigeria. In Attahiru Jega and Oke, I (Eds.) Elections and the future of democracy in Nigeria. Nigeria: Nigerian Political Association.
- Ogundiya, P. (1999). *Elections and Democracy in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Publishers
- Omodia, S. M. (2009). Elections and Democratic Survival in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 3(3).
- Osaghae, E. E. (1997). A Moral Politics and Democratic Instability in Africa: A Theoretical Exploration. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 4 (1), 62 – 78.
- Osioma, B. C. N. (2007). Electoral Violence and Nigerians 2007 Elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 6(2), 155-179.
- Oyediran, O. (1997). *Electoral Violence and Party Politics in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Oduduwa Press
- Remi, F. (1984). The Impact of Electoral Violence. IUP, Ibadan electoral Reforms Recommendations of the Electoral Reform Committee.
- Segun, J. (2013). Democracy and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria: Implications for National Development. *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia* Vol. 7 (3), 324-339. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v7i3.23>
- Tamuno, T. N. (1991). *Peace and Violence in Nigeria. Ibadan: the panel on Nigeria since independence History project*. Ibadan: University of Press.
- Wilson, R. (2011). The Relationship between School and Society: Part II - Conflict Theory. *Colleagues: Vol. 6: 1(7)*. Available at <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/colleagues/vol6/iss1/7>