

**THE PATHOLOGY OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE
IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

In Nigeria, hardly has any election taken place without violence, hence making Nigeria's election a tale of violent political struggle, a keen to what Karl Marx describe as "the bitter political struggle between the bourgeois ruling class and the proletariat working class for control of limited resources". With above in mind these articles will x-ray the pathology of electoral violence in Nigeria by capturing the antecedent of violence in Nigeria, causative factors, effect and solution. This work adopts the qualitative methodology by extrapolating information through various secondary sources, this paper concludes that the most valuable asset to control election violence is the credibility of the Election Commission and the electoral process, which leads to increased legitimacy of the government and, provides less chances of political turmoil.

Key words: Violence, Political violence, Election

Introduction

Historically election has religious background as the origin. It could be traced from old and ancient Greek and Roman States, where "elections were used in ancient Athens, in Rome, and in the selection of popes and Holy Roman emperors, as the same went with the selection/election of Caliphate in the ancient Islamic history after the death of the prophet of Islam Muhammad. The origins of elections in the contemporary world lie in the gradual emergence of representative government in Europe and North America beginning in the 17th century" (Adamu, 2009:17).

Election is an irreducible feature of democratic governance. Its main goal is peaceful resolution of societal differences, while building citizen trust in the capacity of collective decisions and institutions to govern. But, violence undercuts the entire investment. Making the voting process fatally flawed and the outcome suspect; as such, trust is therefore diminished or lost. Electoral violence is one of the greatest obstacles to democratic consolidation. It does not only affect the credibility of the electoral system, but also destroys the democratic system and the rule of la

The risk of violence is present in nearly every election around the world, even in established democracies. According to the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP), violence has been observed in elections in Germany and Spain and other Asian countries such as “India, Pakistan, Philippines, and Malaysia leading to loss of human life, property, injuries and chaos. In the Philippines, for instance 75 people were killed prior to the May 2007 elections, while 80 others were wounded all in election violence”(Atuobi et al., 2008). In African countries like “Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Chad, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Zambia have all been affected by electoral violence. The incidence of election violence in Africa is so high that even an election considered being free, fair and transparent the outcome may not have been free of violence (Cyllah, 2010:5).

The forgoing analyses bring us into the extreme nature of the Nigerian situation. According to Bello, (2015) citing an analysis of the Nigeria Watch database for the period between June 2006 and May 2014 revealed 915 fatal incidents related to elections. The research did not include terrorist attacks by Islamic or militant groups with religious, social, or economic undertones, making a total of 3,934 deaths recorded from these 915 incidents, with the highest prevalence in Plateau State and the lowest in Jigawa State.

Spatial analysis of the Nigeria Watch database by Bello...shows that the bloodiest geopolitical zone is the Middle Belt, with 1,463 deaths. The region is characterized by pre-existing ethno-religious tensions, just as in the North- West (911 deaths). The North-East (319 “political deaths”) is affected mainly by the Boko Haram insurgency, which is not covered by this study. So-called godfatherism affects more the South-West (386 deaths) and the South-South (644). The South-East also witnesses political thuggery but records the lowest occurrence of deaths from electoral violence (152).

The major revelation from research manifestly reveals that most electoral violence in northern Nigeria was found to have an ethno-religious background, whereas the southern part of the country is more affected by the high prevalence of criminal gangs. To this end these paper will chronicle the history of electoral violence in Nigeria, cause and effect of electoral violence in Nigeria; finally, solutions to electoral violence.

History of Political Violence in Nigeria

The history of political violence in Nigeria, according to scholarly consensus dates back to the colonial era (Alanamu, 2005 cited in Ikyase and Egeberi, 2015:35). Apart from the latter, the post colonial era especially the 1960s saw creation of regionally biased political parties, with their individual ethnic loyalty. For instance 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. In the above regard, the first major national election by the political parties degenerated into conflict, as report 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 different in 1983, for instance, post-election violence followed the declared landslide victory of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in Oyo and Ondo states, which were the stronghold of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN).

Also during, the planned transition from military rule to democracy, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida witnessed demonstrations and bombings when supporters of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) called on the Government to step down in favour of the winner of the 12 June 1993 election, late Chief MKO Abiola. With the return to a civilian regime in 1999, Nigerians went to the polls again, though this time with relatively low violence before and after the vote. Yet the elections were blighted by widespread fraud. Likewise in 2003, the election was characterized by violence, corruption, and the falsification of results, according to the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of 170 NGOs in Nigeria. Similarly, in 2007, foreign and national monitors observed violence, corruption, fraud, and manipulation (Bello, 2015).

The 2011 round, on the other hand, was reported to have been well-run relative to past elections. Nonetheless, “violence claimed 800 lives over three days in Northern Nigeria and displaced 65,000

people, making the elections the most violent in Nigeria's history" (Bekoe 2011). Political violence has thus been inherent in almost all the elections held since independence in 1960

Conceptual Clarification

The definitions of violence are subjective and emotive, depending on the typology and the angle writers chose to look at it from. It could be domestic violence, criminal violence, routine interpersonal violence, cultural violence, structural violence etc.

The word 'violence' is derived from the Latin word *violentia*, meaning 'vehemence', a passionate and uncontrolled force" (Vittorio Bufacchi; 2005). "Violence is an interpersonal acts of force usually involving the infliction of physical injury", (Coady; 1986). From the above definition it suggests that the concept of violence cannot be understood independently from the concept of force. In the words of John Dewey, "violence is force gone wrong, or force that is destructive and harmful"

Violence is defined as "the cause of the difference between the potential and actual, between what could have been and what is" (Galtung; 1965:169). Here violence is seen as the difference between what is considered as actual and the potential or the ideal and the realities. Thus in a country where citizens are not able to have access to their basic needs like food, shelter, clothes in the midst abundance then there is violence. It means that when the actual and the reality are avoidable then there is a manifestation of violence in a society. "Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realization" (Galtung; 1965:168) Again, the emphasis is on the deprivation and the incapacitation of people to attain their fullest potential. There are two types of violence; physical violence and the psychological violence. Physical violence exists when parties or standby and development projects are affected directly or indirectly by killing, maiming by guns, bombs among others constitute casualties used in assessing the magnitudes of the violent. Under this type of "violence, human beings are hurt somatically to the point of killing. Psychological violence occurs when parties or standby or development projects are not affected in any form directly" (Galtung; 1965:168).

David Riches introduced the triangle of violence consisting of performer, victim, and witness. Each of these three categories of persons involved is likely to have their own view of the legitimacy issue. "A performer may see his or her action as legitimate, or at least justified; the victim is less likely to do so; and the witnesses will evaluate the actions variably according to their relationships with either the performer or the victim (or both) and their own social standards, moral code, or personal interests" Ibid. The performer or the perpetrator would see his or her action as a legitimate and must be carried out, the victim also think that he or she is legitimate. However, the third person in the Riches triangle could equally interpret the actions between the performance the victim in his or her line judgments. Hence, violence is a subjective and complex theory.

Election

Attempts to define elections have equally been extended to the level of several domestic legislations. Elections are combination of acts and procedures aiming at choosing or selecting among various candidates, members of parliament and the head of the state by the electorate.

Elections also can be described as avenues for elite contestation, helping to co-opt and divide oppositions. In the face of heightened opposition and wide spread unrest, ruling elite often re opened legislature or expand them with the promises of democracy to come. According to Webb (2009) an election is a formal group decision making process by a population who choose an individual to hold public office. Also Merriam Webster dictionary used several synonyms to qualify the term election, which include; choice, option, alternatives, preference, selection, election which means the act or opportunity of choosing freely that is specifically granted or guaranteed. Choice, suggest the opportunity or privilege of choosing freely. Option the option of paying now or later, which implies a need to

choose or reject another possibility. Preference, suggest choice guided by ones judgment or predilections. Selection implies a range of choice. Election, implies an end or a purpose which requires exercise of judgment

Election is the formal process of selecting a person for public or of accepting or rejecting a political position. Also “as a method for the selection of persons to fill certain offices through choices made by an electorate; those (citizens who are qualified to vote under the rules and procedures of the electoral system” Elections are organized channel of popular expression (Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017; Roberts and Edwards as cited in Omotola, 2010).

The concept of election is associated with several meanings. In political parlance election, is defined as a “formal expression of preferences by the governed, which are then aggregated and transformed into a collective decision about who will govern, who should stay in office, who should be thrown out, and who should replace those who have been thrown out” (Ojo 2008: 6).

Reinforcing the above, Awopeju (2011) clarifies that, election is a procedure that allows members of a given society to choose representatives who will hold positions such as leaders of local, state and national government. According to Dye (2001) in (Kalu & Gberevbie, 2015) election is an important mechanism for the employment of administrative governance in democratic social order, a major involvement in a democracy; and the way of giving approval to a regime.

Rose (1978) and Dye (2001) aptly defined election thus: Election is a major instrument for the recruitment of political leadership in democratic societies; the key to participation in a democracy; and the way of giving consent to government (Dye, 2001); and allowing the governed to choose and pass judgment on office holders who theoretically represent the governed (Rose, 1978 cited in Obakhedo 2011).

Causes of Electoral Violence

Suffice it to say that, the causes of violence in Nigeria's electoral system is multifarious, going by it rich history, as Nigeria can hardly pass through any electoral phase without one form of violence or the other, and as a result, it cause has been subject to rigorous intellectual exercise by scholars, stakeholders, and policy experts. For instance Alim (2018) is of the views that, the use of illegal money function as a tool for electoral violence. Especially the role money-bags play in the intimidation of INEC ad hoc staff with tempting offers. Also thuggery, military intimidation and harassment of voters have also been adduced to be another precursor to violence.

Including, hate speech and fake news which are capable of inciting violence.

Ujumadu, (2018) cited the inability of the card readers to function properly during election sparked up distrust and dissatisfaction, including the overnight change of many ad hoc staff at the instance of influential politicians and their supporters, as well as the use of security operatives to cause disaffection at the polling units.

Sesan and Imran, (2018) pointed out that political intolerance and Inability to tolerate one another can be a cause of postelection violence. This according to them is seen in a situation whereby hardly do election losers accept the verdict of the ballot box. For instance, in all three times from 2003 to 2011, the main opposition candidate went to the electoral tribunal to contest the verdict of every election he lost, he never accepted any of the lost elections as free and fair. No wonder Jega (2011) blamed the post-election violence on what he termed as “Crisis of Expectation”. When the choice of the people or kinsman does not win an election it then means the outcome of the election is not credible. This has led to post-election violence in Nigeria. For example, after the presidential of 2011 election while the appeals panel began its work, the then opposition candidate withheld his endorsement of the election. His key supporters insisted on taking the results to the tribunal and he wanted to respect the process. However, according to an account in Daily Trust (2011) the main opposition candidate vowed not to congratulate the then winner until his demands were met... This eventually led to violence in the northern part of the

country mostly in 2011. Electoral intolerance has multiplier effects on the national development of the nation (Sesan and Imran, 2018).

According to the special twenty two (22) man presidential panel on post election violence headed by Sheikh Ahmed Lemu (2014), other causes of post election violence include; The existing widespread desire for change, as a result of frustration and disappointment of many members of the general public, regarding, the inability of successive past regimes to solve infrastructural problems in the country, like power, including the deplorable state of Federal Government roads throughout the nation. They also cited the issue of bribery and corruption which have virtually been legitimized.

Similarly, the panel added that “general insecurity of life and property in people's houses and on the high ways and kidnapping are fuel to the fire of public frustration and disappointment. It further reported that “the next major cause of violence and disturbances is the manner in which political office holders have lucratised their respective positions at the expense of the whole nation. The panel discovered that the remunerations and allowances of the members of the legislature, in particular, are considered by stakeholders who addressed us or wrote to us about the issue to be outrageous. It has turned politics in Nigeria to a do-or-die affair for which many politicians of all parties are seriously establishing private armies to execute. In that respect, easy access to drugs, serious general poverty at the grassroots level and youth unemployment, in particular, are providing many foot soldiers ready for recruitment at a cheap rate.

The panel in the report argued that “generally speaking, the basic cause of the violence in nearly all the communities concerned is political. Ethno-religious sentiments were brought into the issue through negative campaigns and rumour-mongering by unscrupulous individuals to achieve their ulterior motives”.

It noted that “the zoning controversy, which started basically as an internal political affair of the ruling party, ultimately changed the nature of the presidential election into ethno-religious contest in the country particularly in the northern states”.

The panel was quick to add that “the most important major cause was the failure on the part of the previous successive regimes since the military handover of power in 1999 to implement the recommendations of various committees, commissions and panels that had taken place. That failure facilitated the wide spread sense of impunity in the culprits and perpetrators of crimes and violence in the Nigerian society”. (See<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/06/stakeholders-list-causes-of-election-violence/>).

Effects of Electoral Violence

Electoral violence has led to certain undesirable implication in our body polity, for instance 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 (Ikyase and Egberi, 2015). 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 (Ikyase and Egberi, 2015).

Also Sesan and Imran, (2018) cited Political instability, according to their thesis, political instability stem from Nigeria believes in winner-takes-all and lack of the spirit of sportsmanship. When you lose be humble enough to prepare for the next election. The emergence of violence makes the opponent to capitalize on the unhealthy environment to challenge the election. Election challenge also slows down the pace of development and this makes political office holders to engage in primitive accumulation of

wealth and does not allow them to concentrate on governance and development suffers. Electoral violence is both causative and symptomatic of political instability in Nigeria. It is symptomatic as it reflects an inchoate political system. It is also causative because it feeds the political crises that manifest regularly.

Political instability also follows the level of violence which ensured the ultimate collapse of the first Republic and the subsequent intervention of the military in politics in 1966 which 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 (Ikya and Egberi, 2015).

Political apathy as a result re occurrence of electoral fraud which signifies rigging of the pool, most voters are not sufficiently motivated to exercise their franchise because people believe that their vote may not count. The apathy is also worsened by economic situation whereby thugs are recruited to disrupt and harm the electorate because they have been bribed or induced with drugs. Therefore, poverty is a reflective of the apathy (Sesan and Imran, 2018).

Violence generally leads to displacement of people, which can also be termed as forced migration as people tend to run away from their ancestral abode in search of safety and this has become a major problem confronting African countries. People can be displaced internally while others can become refugees especially for those who run across borders to another country for the purpose of security. Alubo (2011) asserts that 'the refugee problems that accompany these disturbances also have implications for attainment of target and access to social development such as education, reduction in maternal mortality and childhood deaths as well as other aspects of productive health'. Again, this has led to increase in humanitarian emergencies. According to the Human Rights Watch (2011:1), the 2011 post-election violence forced more than 65,000 people to flee their homes, camping in various locations in Kaduna, Bauchi, Gombe, and Kano, Niger, Sokoto, Anambra and Plateau states among others.

Women and children are usually the worst hit during violent conflicts, as a result of their vulnerability. In most cases women can be victims of rape, and sometimes when their husbands are killed, the women then begin to suffer in order to cater for the welfare of the family. According to Aver et al., (2013) cited in Sesan and Imran, (2018), the mass rape of the female population in the areas engulfed by violence fuels the spread of HIV/AIDS which is already a high prevalence and regarded as a social problem in Nigeria. In addition, the continued eruptions of political violence have implications for national peace and security, and thereby threaten the dissolution of the country Nigeria. This leads to psychological trauma on the part of women and children in the society. A large number of people suffered bodily harm inflicted with dangerous weapons such as machetes, cutlasses, and arrows. In one incident, a police officer was bathed in hot oil (See Sesan and Imran, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Given the notoriety and prominence of election violence in Nigeria and the relentless struggle for political power in a democratic environment, the theory of Dollard et al., (1939) cited in Gberville and Kalu (2015) (Frustration Aggression) is adopted based on its suitability for these research. The frustration-aggression theory has as its major thesis that "aggression is always the consequence of frustration." This theory primarily focuses on aggression, as Dollard theorized that "the occurrence of aggressive actions always presumes the existence of frustration and contra wise, and that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression" (Dollard et al., 1939). Frustration aggression according to the argument of Gberville and Kalu (2015) citing Tamuno (1991) reflects the reasons for electoral violence because men who want to live beyond their social means do not accept their limitation in defeat this results into violence as the last resort in order to live beyond their social means. Frustration aggression theory addresses the pre-election and postelection violence. In cases of pre-election violence, frustration and aggression comes into play when a certain aspirant is power hungry and possibly realizes

the indications that he/she may possibly lose to the rival, thereby adopting vehemence for their own personal gains. In post-election violence, persons who feel cheated on election outcomes, isolated or disadvantaged by the injustice of the electoral practice are likely out of frustration, transfer aggression on other individuals through violent acts. The relevance of the frustration aggression theory to this current study shows that political actors resort to violence as a means to achieving their aims and exercising power, out of feelings of frustration that leads to aggression, especially when the results of the election would not favor them. This theory helps in understanding the psychological behavior of persons in the use of violence to achieve selfish interest. Electoral candidates adopt violence when they fail in their bid to win elections, thereby employing thugs to execute their selfish intentions (Ladan-Baki, 2016 in Gberevie and Kalu (2015). Therefore, the frustration aggression theory provides an explanation for electoral violence that has been occurring in Nigeria. The theory stipulates that events surrounding electoral violence in Nigeria are as a result of fear of defeat exhibited by electoral candidates, which triggers frustration and then transfer of aggression, through the employment of human mercenaries in perpetrating violence in pre, during and after elections. Therefore, to achieve peace, fairness and transparency of elections in Nigeria, the theory specifies the need for enlightenment on the importance of citizens coming out to vote in their masses in support of a free and fair election, making their votes count and as well provisions for well-equipped security personnel that would safe guard life and properties of voters during elections (Gberevie and Kalu 2015).

Way Forward

Electorate should muster the courage to say 'Enough is enough' of bribing politicians by shunning them, as they only come around to bribe the people once the elections draw near. Also Political parties' institution of internal party structure should ensure that only those validly nominated stand for elections.

Again, civil society groups should spearhead the eradication of corruption by speaking out without fear or favour and a programme has to be drawn on how to fight the canker worm in the polity. Premium towards security of lives and properties must be top priority of the government to give people a discernible sense of security.

Government should ensure the speedy Prosecution of previous actors of electoral violence so that families of those who lost their lives and affected communities will feel the sense of justice". Also political education based on scholarly and expert consensus is also a key panacea towards the eradication of political violence in Nigeria since education has been identified as the launch-pad of a nation-state's development agenda, thus political education constitutes a herculean task for the several agents of education in Nigeria; namely: the family; peer groups; schools (primary, secondary, and tertiary); religious institutions; civil society organizations and the fourth estate of the realm (the mass media). For schools as agent of socialization and social change, the need to abhor all forms of violence must be incorporated into our school curriculum. The political education that the pupils and students would receive will both in the short and long term deepen our political culture and socialization processes. Therefore, Nigerians should know the dynamic nature of our politics, and the emerging trends that shape the political culture and determine the direction of political socialization, and in relation to electoral violence, should learn, imbibe and internalize the political sociology of electoral behavior education. This would help the nation to either make or mar its emerging democratic order.

Conclusions

Finally, and conclusively, the most valuable asset to control election violence is the credibility of the Election Commission and the electoral process, which leads to increased legitimacy of the government and, provides less chances of political turmoil. According to Kriger (2011), "If the electoral process is not managed according international standard best practice of the conduct of election by a trusted institution, the risks associated with organising elections increase drastically. Unfortunately, history has shown discredited election commissions are incapable of managing a competitive electoral

environment, and often find themselves at the core of controversy". That is why we urge INEC at this very crucial period to try as much as possible to dissociate itself from any event that will cast some shadow of doubt as to its integrity and competence in the conduct of election and listen to stake holder complain. For instance Evidence from many countries of the world shows that true credibility works as an antidote to electoral violence. Achieving this objective is neither easy nor cheap, but it is the most effective tool to prevent electoral violence from materialising in the first place. These three areas which could be incorporated in guidelines against electoral violence include:

1. Training programmes: polling station staff training has to be more interactive (role play activities, scenario-building) in order to increase staff capacity to handle Election Day complaints effectively before they escalate to violence
2. Dialogue among electoral stakeholders (political parties, human rights organizations, security forces etc.) to create an agreement on the rules of the game, but also the build-up the commitment and relationships (exchange of information, regular meetings, and contingency planning). Dialogue efforts are essential not only centrally but also on lower levels, ensuring that district/village level conflicts are resolved and that all actors respect the codes of conduct
3. Efficient and credible complaints processes: unresolved complaints are one of the main triggers for electoral violence (especially as they relate for instance to party registration), so the mechanisms to deal with them have to be efficient.

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