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Political Violence in North Central Nigeria: Reflections and the Way Forward

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Abstract

The problem of political violence in Nigeria has its root from colonial era and coupled with the military incursion into politics in 1966, it has continued unabated resulting in loss of precious lives and property. This paper attempts to X-ray political violence in North Central Nigeria using retrospective analysis and advances potent ways to ameliorate the menace in the Nigeria's body polity. The paper is explorative and theoretical in nature. Meanwhile, political intolerance, politics of ethnic and religious competition, unemployment and poverty, weak laws and poor adjudication are the fulcrums leading to political violence. The findings clearly revealed an alarming loss in lives and properties, with Plateau State being the highest victim in the zone. It also indicated that there would be no meaningful political and socio-economic progress in the country amidst political violence. Thus, it recommended the urgent review of our legislation to ensure a free and fair election and violators be properly and promptly punished by the judiciary in accordance with the law. Again, public offices must be made unattractive to reduce the 'do or die' contest syndrome as well as total reorientation against ethnic and religious politics with a genuine fight against poverty and unemployment.

Keywords: Democracy, Electoral Act, Politics, Thugs, Violence

INTRODUCTION

The post-colonial state in Nigeria as indeed with most less developed countries (LDC'S) in Africa, Asia and Latin America is fraught with political disequilibrium (Adetumbo,1991), specifically the political laboratory in Nigeria is a theatre of violence, conflict and war for primitive accumulation through the power process, amongst the dominant forces with the inevitable consequences of political violence identifiable within the spate of the various recently experienced assassination galore.

The devastating effect of colonial and military rule on the third world nations is noticeable in all their undertakings, as dependency scholars have extensively analyzed. It is through this historical circumstances and configuration of social interest and classes, that the Nigerian political class, emerged, which accounts largely for

their political behavior. The logic is that being a creature of western imperialism, the natural tendency for them is to make the country safe for their selfish interests.

In other words, there is a very high probability that they will exploit and marginalize the led. Nonetheless, the Nigerian political environment in the post-colonial era has the rare opportunity to guarantee political stability, produce dedicated political elites and in turn, safeguard the nation's hard earned democracy. This is because the old images and structures were maintained. For example, the nature of leadership and their respective socio-economic and political policies remain unchanged. According to Ogunsawo (1990), Nigerian political elites are a hydra-headed, incoherent group who is a decisive factor in the exacerbating political violence in Nigeria. It is in the light of this relationship that the nature of political violence can be explained.

THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this research is to review the nature of political violence in Nigeria and its consequences. The specific objectives are to:-

1. Identify and examine the various political crises experienced in Nigeria from independence to 2015.
2. Evaluate the major causes of political violence in Nigeria.
3. Assess the impact of the violence to the political development of the country, particularly, the North Central.
4. Identify the possible ways of ameliorating the political crisis and improving political development in the country.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Political violence:

Political violence according to Agba (2011) is the use of thugs, private armies, and physical force to threaten or harm political opponents or rig election. As UNESCO (2005) observed, it could result in or has high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, deprivation or mal-development.

Feirabend, Raslind and Tobert (1972) have contended that political violence is usually the consequence of social discontent. In this light one possible cause of violence could be aggression arising from frustration. A theory popularized by Gurr (1970), political violence could also break out as a result of malfunctioning within a social structure (the systematic hypothesis) or fallout of clashes among dominant groups in a society.

Political violence according to Anifowose cited in (Ikyase and Egberi 2015) is the use of threat of physical act carried out by individual or individuals within a political system against another individuals 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 significance that tends to modify or change the behavior of others in the existing arrangement for the political system.

LITERATURE REVIEW: POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Politics can be seen as an activity associated with the governing of a country or an area. It is mostly tied to practice of democracy controlled by political parties. Those involved are called politicians. Partisan politics entails the conduct of election within the constitutionally stipulated periods. In pre-election period, politicians aspire from time to time to occupy their desired elective/political offices at various levels. Political killings are prevalent in every political system across the globe, but the degree marks the difference. America has the most developed democracy in the world, yet it had its fair share of suspected politically motivated killings. On the list in this regard were John F.Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther king. In India, Indra and Raji'v Ghandis were killed. There were also Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Patrick Lumumba of Congo, Acquinno of

Philippine, Olymipo of Togo to mention but a few. A thorough examination of the Nigeria political history has indicated the nature and manner of political violence in Nigeria. For example, in 1903 the colonial government had to assassinate the then Sultan Tambari. In Benin and Okpobo, the Monarchs were sent into exile after resisting colonialism. And the most recent one is the removal of Sultan Dasuki on April 20, 1996 by the then military government of Sani Abacha.

Between 1951 and 1960 the burgeoning national politicians equally perfected the strategy of colonial government in pursuing traditional rulers out of governance, and soon turn on themselves after the independence. The debut of the military in government and administration of Nigeria was the bloodiest one that set the tone for political violence in Nigeria.

During the first republic, the first Politician whose death raised suspicion of political undertone in its cheered political history was Chief Adegoke Adelasu, opposition leader, from western Nigeria in 1958. The popular Ibadan politician had died in a motor accident in circumstance that raised so many questions. It was followed by the death of Olusegun Awolowo in a suspected ghastly motor accident on the way to Lagos to defend his father, late chief Obafemi Awolowo who was facing a treasonable felony in an unprecedented political violence tagged operation wefie, which erupted following the alleged rigging of the 1964/1965 general elections in the region termed wildwildwest. The political violence spread to other regions and claimed the lives of Sir Ahmadu Bello, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Chief S.L. Akintola and Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh among others.

In the second republic the controversies that surrounded the 1983 gubernatorial polls in the old Ondo and Oyo states sparked off civil unrest, arson and assassination of some politicians, their supporters and even sympathizers, and with brashness.

Hired killings of key national figures popularly referred to as state organized murders believed to have serious political implications became pronounced during Babangida and Abacha regimes such as the death of Dele Giwa, Pa Alfred Rewane, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, Major-General Shehu Yar-adua, Architect Layi Balogun etc.

There were also series of assassination attempts such as the attempts to kill NADECO leader Pa Abraham Adesanya, Mr. Alex Ibru. Moreover, another suspected political violence/murder was the death of MKO Abiola in prison in 1998.

Since election and post-election period of 1999 to 2008, there was hardly any state in Nigeria that has not witnessed political violence. These periods are fraught by what Agbaje (2004) described as allegation of rigging, incidence of violence and litigation over election outcomes in an increasing charged atmosphere.

Statistical data on political violence within this period are frightening, on November 7, 2002 in sokoto, Umaru Dan Maliki new breed politician was attacked and beaten to the point of death, he was suspected to be attacked on the premise of decamping from ANPP to PDP. Between March 10 and 11, 2003, Lagos recorded political clash between PDP and AD in which several people were feared dead. The convoy of Gani Fawehinmi, presidential candidate of National Conscience Party (NCP), was attacked on March 14, 2003 where his driver was seriously injured. Bola Ige (a federal Justice Minister and Attorney General were shot dead at his residence in Ibadan, Oyo state, on December 23, 2007. It was suspected to be a political killing (The Punch, April 25, 2008).

Moreover, between November 1, 2006, and March 10, 2007, the Nigerian press and other sources reported several assassinations attempts of Nigerian politicians, party officials, and other people linked to various electoral campaigns. Human Rights Watch (2006) estimated that a minimum of three hundred Nigerians was killed in violence linked to the 2007 general election. The most unfortunate death is the killing of two PDP Gubernatorial Aspirants; Funsho Williams in Lagos and Ayo Daramola in Ekiti states were murdered in July and August 2006, respectively.

The implication of political violence to Nigeria resulted in the current political desperation that characterized political contests and activities. This ultimately resulted in what Akindele (2002) describe as bad governance characterized by the following:

- i. Failure to make clear separation between what is public and what is private hence, a tendency to divert public resources for private gain.
- ii. Priority that is inconsistent with development, thus, resulting in a misallocation of resources
- iii. Excessive narrow based or non-transparency decision making (World bank, 1992 as cited in Akindele, 2002)

The case of sitting Governor prevented from getting to his office just because he decamped from his party is another example of political violence; House of Assemble members are prevented from sitting in their chambers, the most embarrassing is the attempt made by police to forcibly prevent a serving house of representative speaker from entering the premises of the National Assembly in 2014, the burning of Goodluck Jonathan campaign buses in Jos, Bauchi and so on are all clear manifestation of political violence in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The research is purely explorative and theoretical. Secondary instruments such as textbooks, journals, magazines newspapers and official documents and reports were used as sources of data. The main focal area of the study is North Central geo-political zone of Nigeria, from 1999 to 2015.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section present in relevant themes the findings of the work as it relates to the causes and impacts of political violence in the North Central States of Nigeria, which is in line with the research objectives.

CAUSES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

1. Political Intolerance: This has to do with the character of 'do or die affair' as the political elites see election as a must win. When they lose through the verdict of the ballot box, it becomes difficult to accept defeat. Personal bitterness and existing rivalry between top contenders eventually result into political violence. The culture of political tolerance can hardly be seen in Nigerian politicians as winning at all costs becomes their mind set. An example is in Kogi State 2007 general elections where the idea of Ebira agenda was launched, meaning that an Ebira man must be the Governor of the state. Ohiare an (Ebira man) contested under the platform of Action Congress for the governorship of kogi state in 2007 but lost to Ibrahim Idris (a PDP candidate of Igala extraction). The Ebira found this too hard to swallow they felt robbed of opportunity to occupy the highest position in the state. This made them to vent their anger on Ebira, who were supporters of PDP in Ebiraland because they see them as betrayers of Ebira's collective interest leading to political turmoil in 2007 in Ebiraland (Nelson and Saliu, 2011, cited in Joshua 2013).
2. Politics of ethnic and religious competition: Politicians in Nigeria have always used ethnic and religious sentiments as a tool for campaign and in the process a lot of hatred is created within the contenders. Though this factor manifests in every facet of our life whether socially or economically but its political appeal is so much that it creates a lot of tensions which result to political violence. It degenerates to crises within people of different ethnic and religious groups. As Jega (2002) argued, contest for political power among the elites in their bid to capture the state is often characterized by cut throat competition, resulting in the mobilization of sentiments and negative messages and manipulations of ethno-religious and communal identities for their selfish interest end with attendant violence. According to the Nigeria Watch, third report, that covered the period 2006-2011, Plateau state, North Central, was the most dangerous state because of ethnic conflicts (Perouse, cited in Bello, 2015). The study further noted that electoral violence is thus linked to pre-existing ethno-religious conflicts. Plateau state has the highest number of deaths from political clashes and this is commensurate with ethno-religious tensions that fuel political violence. Nigeria Watch database further revealed that the Plateau state has the highest

number of deaths for a single political incident related to elections with 540 fatalities. The report for the number of fatalities from electoral violence per state and zone which covered (June 2006-May 2014) indicates the north-central zone recording the highest number. Under this period, states like Benue 109, Kogi 107, Kwara 53, Niger 86, FCT 59, Nasarawa 258 and Plateau 850 (Bello 2015). Plateau state recorded 850 fatalities within the period 2006-2014 because of the ethno-religious conflicts which created the fertile ground for all forms of political violence.

3. Lack of internal democratic structures and processes within individual political parties: Most political parties have been found wanting in respect to this, what is common is the imposition of candidates on party members by those who are called leaders or financiers of the party. This is as a result of weak democratic institutions and culture where internal democracy is neglected. When there is no level playing ground within political parties it creates room for aggrieved political contestants to orchestrate violence by sponsoring thugs and hooligans who end up causing instability during elections. The report of 2006-2014 indicates that for 2013 casualties, the majority can be accounted for by factional clashes between CPC rival groups which ignited ethnic tension between Gwandara and Eggon communities in Nasarawa state which resulted in 197 deaths during the turmoil (Cohen 2015). In another report on conflicts in Igalamela-odulu local government of Kogi State, it shows that between 2006 and 2014 there were at least 28 violent incidents which resulted to 48 fatalities, 10 of the fatalities were political conflicts (Titus 2015).
4. Poverty and unemployment: Widespread poverty and unemployment leave young people vulnerable to informal employment by politicians who engage them as thugs to maim and kill or snatch ballot boxes or intimidates their opponents on the day of election with arms. Pervasive poverty and unemployment have been the driving force pushing young people into thuggery for stipends earned as allowances to cause political violence.
5. Electoral body perceived bias and partiality: when there is an obvious willingness by the body in charge of conducting elections i.e. Independent Electoral Commission to favour a particular candidate or political party, it leads to loss of confidence as the aggrieved result to political violence as self-help solution. The partiality of the electoral body aggravates political violence especially post-election violence.
6. Weak laws and poor adjudication: the Electoral Act which guides the electoral process is in most cases weak and has lacunas which politicians exploit. For instance, the use of Smart Card Reader (SCR) for accreditation of voters is still a controversial issue within the Act given room for some politicians to insist that all votes cast must be counted even if not accredited by the SCR. The issue of monitoring campaign spending and its enforcement and penalty is another contentious problem. In addition to this, the judiciary which supposed to be the last arbiter lost its confidence in the face of the citizens. Situation where courts of similar jurisdiction passing contradictory judgments on a similar case are rampant. The Zamfara State All Progressive Congress (APC) crisis on fielding candidates for the 2019 general election, where two High Courts seating in Abuja and Gusau passed contradictory judgments, is a clear example. These can invariably breed political violence.

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE TO POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTH CENTRAL

The impact of political violence on the political development of North Central Nigeria is huge and enormous; some of them include the followings;

1. Political violence impacts on democratic culture, thereby creating disorder and political instability. Political violence distorts democratization in Nigeria through the truncating of the democratic process either before or after the election. Violence itself has not produced anything good, what it does in totality is distortion of peace. Political instability is the outcome of political violence which is unhealthy to democracy, it does generate an atmosphere of social insecurity through inter group conflicts that are capable of destabilizing the society.
2. Political violence negates the purpose of democracy which is enhanced through popular participations, where citizens exercise their will through periodic election. The electorates or voters are discouraged

from exercising their rights to vote for candidates of their choice and it is the reason Nigerian elections continue to witness low turnout because of the fear of violence. Low turnout of voters negates democracy tenets of popular participation, which gives desperate politicians the opportunity to rig elections massively. Its implication is the imposition of wrong candidates on the system.

3. Political violence discourages women from participating in democratic process either from party's primaries or general elections. Where the process is marred with heavy violence and thuggery activities of killings, maiming and other vices scare women away. This excludes women from participating because of the unhealthy pre and post-election processes.
4. Another impact of political violence is that it discourages credible and visionary political actors from participating in the democratic process. The activities of politicians who make it a do or die affair or a must win by all means have thrown descent politicians away from participating, it ends up leaving a wrong impression that politics and political processes are dirty. This impression leaves the field of politics for thugs, charlatans, hooligans to occupy the space.
5. Political violence leads to the killing of some citizens either involved directly or indirectly in electoral contest. For example, the killing of Action Congress of Democrats gubernatorial candidates in plateau state Jesse Arakwu in 2006 among so many others. Political violence has given rise to murders and political assassinations that are unhealthy for Nigeria's political development.
6. It leads to the destruction of public and private properties such as cars, office buildings and other government properties. Mostly, when there is political disagreement or post-election crises thugs engage in destruction of government properties. This is a serious obstacle to Nigeria political development. In 2011, report indicated that property worth hundreds of millions were destroyed in some areas of Plateau, Kaduna and Kano States, amongst others.

CONCLUSION

Political violence has been part and parcel of Nigeria history but it has metamorphosed in different magnitudes, shapes and consequences. Political violence has always been pre-electoral and post electoral. The North Central part of Nigeria has had its own share of political violence which has been fuelled by ethno-religious conflicts, especially in Plateau state; while other North Central states like Benue and Nasarawa have their own aggravated by farmers-herders conflicts as it has created fertile ground for political violence. Political violence in Nigeria especially in the North Central states have it root causes from the do or die attitude of politicians, ethno-religious manipulations by the political elites, political parties failure to conduct free and fair primary elections among its contestants, the level of poverty and unemployment among others. It has negatively affected Nigeria political development, causing political instability and has led to death of so many souls and destruction of properties.

RECOMMENDATIONS/WAY FORWARD

1. Seeking political office should not be a do or die affair; politicians should be able to accept the outcome of every political contestation. There is a need for political elites and actors to have political settlement machinery in resolving pre and post electoral issues in order not to degenerate into violence. Political offices should be made unattractive by reducing the overbearing privileges attached to the offices and ensure strict compliance to the rule of 'the game.' The Electoral Act should be properly strengthened and all ambiguities therein should be resolved. Perhaps, electronic voting with adequate cyber security protection will help the process.
2. There should be a re-orientation in order to change the narrative of using sentiment such as religion and ethnicity for politics. Choice of candidates should not be on the basis of religious and ethnic sentiments but merit. Government should set up genuine and reliable mechanisms for resolving existing disputes such as ethno-religious and farmers-herders crises and sanctioning perpetrators.
3. There should be deliberate attempt to tackle poverty and unemployment in the zone to discourage young people from taking up thuggery as alternative means of survival. Agriculture and entrepreneurship should be boosted, while soft loans should be given to youths who engage in the business. This will go a long way to discourage young people from been political gangsters and thugs.

4. There is need to build strong democratic culture that will allow smooth operations of democratic principles. Political parties should build strong internal democratic mechanisms and processes that will give a level playing ground for all party members. Internal democratic mechanisms should be able to resolve intra-party disputes to stop it from degenerating to political violence.
5. The body responsible for conducting election should be impartial in the discharge of its constitution mandate of conducting a free and fair election. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) must act above board to build confidence in the citizens during and after the electoral process.
6. The judiciary being the last hope of the common man should equally be up and doing. Pre and post electoral cases should be treated with dispatch, fairness and in accordance to the extant rules and regulation. This shall develop the confidence of not just the politicians but the entire citizens in the judiciary who will hence prefer to follow the civilized legal procedure in case of any misunderstanding other than taking arms.

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