

**POLITICAL PARTIES AND ELECTION VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA,
2007-2019: A HISTORICAL EVALUATION**

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DOI: 10.13140/ RG.2.2.23433.67684

Abstract

Political parties are one of the major pillars of democracy. This is because it helps in the peaceful transition from one political dispensation to another. Political parties are expected to serve as an agent of change, peace and national unity as its members are drawn from across the nation irrespective of tribe, ethnic background or religious affiliation. But in the recent times political parties have been found to be involved in escalating political cum electoral violence in Nigeria. The youth wing of some political parties now serve as an agent of pre, during and post-election violence. Party thugs are so glaring that it is easy to identify which party that parades the most active and dreaded thugs in the political system. Why do political parties involve in election violence and what are the implication to democratic stability in Nigeria? Methodologically, this paper adopts the historical analysis approach while data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The paper finds out that political parties involve in election violence in order to win election and perpetuate their party in government. The paper concludes that to minimize the rate of political parties involvement in election violence, there is need for electoral reforms that will inculcate new provisions as a way to checkmate electoral violence and prosecute political parties who perpetrate or sponsor of electoral violence.

Keywords: Political parties, Election, Electoral violence, Democracy, Politics.

Introduction

This paper examines the role of political parties in electoral violence in Nigeria. First, the paper looks as the definitions of these concepts in order to give insight on the subject matter. A political is an organized group of people (men and women) who has similar ideologies and who come together for the purpose of contesting and winning election for the purpose of controlling the machinery of government. Therefore, a political party is as an organized group of individual seeking to seize the power of government in order to enjoy the benefits to be derived from such control. This definition in essence implies that political parties are organized for

the purpose of benefiting from such organization by the organizers especially in the corridor of power.

Electoral violence on the other hand is a form of organized acts or threats which may be physical, psychological and structural aimed at intimidating, harming or blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after election with a view to determining, delaying or otherwise influencing an electoral process, (Nwolise, 2007). Electoral violence in Africa's electoral processes has become increasingly alarming. Virtually every political process in Africa such as party conventions, party primaries and party nominations are usually fraught with violence. Party stalwarts/chieftains in a bid to install their puppets and ensures the control of government usually encourage violence in order to achieve their aims. Thus electoral violence continued to be aided and abated by political parties in order to ensure that their party continues in power.

To Ojo (2014) electoral violence is any act of violence perpetrated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post-election periods, and may include any of the following; thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings and or voting at polling stations as well as use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with the electoral process. From the above assertions, it is clear that electoral violence is aimed at thwarting the normal electoral process by the actors.

Whenever the electoral process is marred by violence, the choice of the electorates are always in jeopardy. The choice of the electorates may not have the political and economic will power to withstand the negative onslaught of the party stalwarts who has what it takes to install whomever they wish because of their status in the party at the detriment of the powerless choice of the electorates. Evidence from existing studies shows that electoral violence is a recurring issue and has become an integral aspect of the electoral processes in Nigeria and other emerging democracies especially in the casting of votes.

Political parties have continued to encourage electoral violence in the political system by ensuring that its members do everything possible to retain their position in office which invariably means retention of their party in power. The ruling party by hook or crook ensures they continue in power while the oppositions fought tooth and nail to ensure the dethronement of the ruling party. To achieve its aim, both parties enlarges and consolidates their tentacles to ensure they reach their destination which is to win election and control government power. Further

evidences reveal that both ruling parties and opposition parties use violence to achieve their aims, (Mehler, 2007). The opposition parties also employ violence to express their grievances over the outcome of the electoral process whenever they lose. In fact, it has become natural in Africa, hence Nigeria, that after elections, those who lose, always complain that the election was marred with fraud, while the winning party describes same election as the most free, fair and credible election in the country and vice versa. The ruling party usually take arbitrary and suppressive measures against the oppositions due to the fear of losing political power to opponents (Laakso, 2007). Election related violence typically includes clashes between political party supporters, incidents that take place at campaign events, and attacks on existing or aspiring politicians.

The implication of the above is that competitive elections are prone to conflict and violence due to the interest of the stakeholders in the competition. This makes them to do everything possible to ensure that they retain the office for the fear of been maltreated when the opposition wins. Thus, political parties employ the services of thugs, who happens to be the youths of their parties to unleash mayhem on their opponents in order to dismantle them from power and assume leadership roles while those in the ruling party uses every strategy at their disposal such as the electoral umpire, the judiciary, security agents and other relevant agencies that matter in the electoral process to intimidate the opponents to victory and back it up when the result is being contested in the law court.

This paper is an expose on the role of political parties in electoral violence in Nigeria. The paper finds out that political parties, at one time or the other have orchestrated electoral violence in order to ensure that political powers does not elude their party for fear of being maltreated by those whom they lost to. The paper concludes that a law should be made that any party involved in electoral violence either by its members or candidates must be made to lose the position automatically to the opponent. This will help to sanitize the system and rid it of electoral violence.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Concept of Political Parties

A political party basically, is a group of people. These people come together to contest elections in order to hold power in the government. It is a way to mobilize voters to support common sets of interests, concerns,

and goals. The primary roles of a political party is to fix the political agenda and policies and control the government. So, each party tries to persuade people by claiming their policies are better than those of other parties. Many scholars have amply defined political parties from their own perspective and understanding of the importance of political parties in the society.

Nwankwo (1990) defines political party as an organized group of individual seeking to seize the power of government in order to enjoy the benefits to be derived from such control. This definition in essence implies that political parties are organized for the purpose of benefiting from such organization by the organizers especially in the corridor of power. To Ward (1962), political party is a group with common views on certain political means. He insists that the day-to-day concern of politics is fundamentally with means and not ends.

For his part, Orji (1997) sees political parties as those organizations under whose ambit, people aspire to, and acquire political power in a system. From the above definitions, it could be said that a political party is a forum or platform under which political actors take decision on how to control the machinery of government to their advantage. This implies that political parties serve the interest of their members whose interest determines the success and otherwise of the forum.

From the above we can identify some of the characteristics of political parties as follows:

- There must be a group of people sharing the view on means to achieve an end
- The aim of political parties is to promote the national interest of a political system
- Political parties have ideologies they tend to implement when they come to power
- They have cohesive leadership
- Political parties have persuasive rather than cohesive means in coming to power.

Political parties represents aggregate of social forces and classes and bear the imprints, and characteristics of the individual and groups they represent and signify. Parties therefore originates as an act of free will among people and group sharing the same vision. This is because people who make up political parties are volunteers who chose to be in that

particular party amongst other parties in existence. To this end a political parties are means via which the people can speak to the government and have a say in the governance of any country. Thus, Political parties must be an agent of peace, change and an aperture through which the political system is kept alive.

The Concept of Election

The term election is associated with several meanings. Ojo (2008) sees election, 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.” In concurring, Awopeju (2011) observes 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. To Dye (2001) 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.

Election is a set of activities leading to the selection of one or more persons out of many to serve in positions of authority in a society (Nwachukwu & Uzodi, 2012) cited in Onuoha (2017). For Dibia, election is the act of electing candidates to represent the people of a given country in the parliament, the executive and other arms of government (Dibia, 2018). Sadly though, the conduct of vote-casting is usually not as easy as it may initially look, with several experts and researchers classifying them as turning points for violent acts. Thus (Ikyase & Egberi, 2015) opines that elections have become the apogee for violence and uncertainty in many states in Nigeria.

The Concept of Violence

In his earlier study, Johan Galtung conceptualized violence in terms of influence (to mean harm). He explains the relations between the influencer, the influenced and a mode of influencing; categorized in terms of a subject, an object and action. He accepted though within the limited assumption, that the end state of violence is its somatic incapacitation or deprivation of health of the individual by means of killing which is an extreme form of violence in the hands of actors who intend it to be the consequence of their action (Galtung, 1969). He sees violence as “present when human beings are being influenced (harm) so that their actual

somatic (body) and mental realizations are below their potential realization”.

On the account of this, he went further beyond the limited assumption to theoretically, conceptualize and empirically clarify that violence is “defined as the cause of the difference between the potential and actual, between what could have been and what is. To him Violence is that which impedes the decrease of the distance. Thus, if a person died from tuberculosis in the eighteenth century it would be hard to conceive of this as violence since it might have been quite unavoidable, but if he dies from it today, despite all the medical resources in the world, then violence is present according to our definition” (Galtung, 1969).

In other words violence occurs in a situation where the possibility of averting impediment to its escalation are apparent but those responsible to do so are not willing to take deliberate responsibility. This can be termed, “shunning the process of conflict resolution mechanism”. Shunning process in conflict resolution is the deliberate refusal to resolve a conflict in spite of the available instruments at one’s disposal. This has to do with attitudinal disorientation and institutional breakdown in spite of a level playing field.

The Concept of Electoral Violence

The concept of electoral violence is comprised two different concepts in one, which include electoral and violence. Here, the two concepts are defined. The word electoral in the view of Bamgbose (2011) is the process involved in the conduct of elections either at the public or private level. He further stated that electoral process at the public level is the process of planning and conducting elections to choose representatives of the people in public offices of governance such as the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government at state and national levels. Electoral process at the private level includes all the processes involved in the successful conduct of elections into other types of groups other than those of government such as associations and clubs. Thus, he concluded that electoral violence depicts acts of aggression, thuggery and other similar acts that are displayed in the course of the electoral process.

Ladan-Baki (2016) states that electoral violence during general elections include the snatching of ballot boxes to rig and manipulate election results, causing pandemonium in polling stations to hinder voters from voting, beating up of electoral officers and sometimes killing same in the process when weapons such as guns and cutlasses are used during the

elections. Balogun (2003) sees electoral violence as any form of violence that arise at any stage (pre, during and post-election) from differences in opinions, feelings and engagements of electoral processes.

Igbuzor (2007) defines electoral violence as: 'any act of violence perpetrated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post-election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, 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'. Electoral violence is one major problem that has affected Nigeria's democratic sustainability and achievement of good governance. Absence of proper democratic institutions militates against the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria.

History of Election Violence by Political Parties in Nigeria

History of elections in Nigeria from the period of political independence from the British colonial masters, till date is embedded on violence. The British colonial administration left behind several destabilizing policies that affected not only the nature of governance but some strange political relationships between and among the ethnic groups. As such, the ethnic groups relate with each other on grounds of suspicion and conspiracy. Therefore, virtually all elections that were conducted in Nigeria were definitively violent, often making the state ungovernable. The only periods that could be regarded as violence free were elections conducted under the tutelage of the military in 1979 and 1999. This was because the military would not tolerate any act of violence neither could the politicians allow it, in order to avoid a situation where the military might renege in returning power to civilians. The military may cling to power on grounds that the politicians were yet to demonstrate political maturity to rule. Thus, electoral violence is historical to the instrumentality of the political class.

The collapse of the Nigerian first republic in 1966 was precipitated by electoral violence of 1964 and 1965, (Falola, 2003) in Western Nigeria but reinforced by coincidental and reactive crisis taking place in the North, in particular the Tiv crisis of 1963 and 1964; as well as the controversial 1963 census. According to Anifowose (1982) the official figure of the death in the 1965 election was about 153 people, out of which police killed 64 in direct confrontation, while the unofficial figure was speculated up to a total of 2,000 deaths.

The second republican era that started from 1979 to 1983 when another coup took place was another era of serious political violence especially with the 1983 election which gave Alhaji Shehu Shagari what the ruling party, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) referred to as “landslide victory” but General Danjuma termed it “gunslide victory”, depicts the level of how violence was used to win the election. In Ondo state the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) declared Chief Akin Omoboriowo of NPN as the elected Governor. However, a counter announcement was made over the state radio by the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) pronouncing Adekunle Ajasin as the true winner. Sokoto (2011) states that the later allegedly went round Akure, the state capital in an open van “calling on his supporters to come out and defend their votes”.

Press conferences and radio broadcast by Chief Bola Ige in Oyo and Sam Mbakwe of in Imo state threatened that “if NPN went ahead to rig that election as planned the wives of those who helped them will become widows and their children orphans”. Indeed both Oyo and Ondo states experienced monumental violence that eventually led to the collapse of the second republic.

The weight of rigging in the 1983 election was so devastating that there were not only calls for its cancellation but the moves towards confederation (Osaghae, 2005). Meanwhile there began a second phase of military interregnum in 1983 which lasted till May 1999. During this period Nigeria experienced some military coups and counter coups. However, efforts were made to organize elections to return the country to civil rule.

The most feasible one was the 1993 elections which were fundamental to the quest of Nigerians for liberal democracy. The military leadership under General Ibrahim Babangida however annulled the elections adjudged the most free and credible election in Nigerian political history. The election was conducted peacefully but the reasons for the annulment which Nigerians are yet to be told, precipitated the post-election violence (Yoroms, 1994).

Again, in 1993 Nigerians began to move back to their home state of origin for fear of impending war as they did in 1967 during the civil war. There were also the 1964 and 1965 elections that led to the western regional crisis. Giving the impending doom, Babaginda decided to hand over power to an interim government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, Abiola’s kinsman from Abeokuta, Ogun state.

This arrangement however did not avert the doom as the Interim Government was declared illegal. The outcome of which General Sani Abacha exploited and upturned the Interim regime and took over power in military styled coup. In the process, Nigeria experienced for the first time serial bombings, killings and threats to life and property. Nevertheless, General Sani Abacha began a series of transition programmes that would have led to his transmutation to a civilian president but was interrupted by death in 1998. At the time General Abdulsalami took over power after the death of General Sani Abacha, it was not possible for the military to hang on to political power in spite of options given to him including extension of tenure to cushion the turbulent environment before election. Therefore Abubakar began a quick-fixed transition programme which led to the election of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo that opened up Nigeria's Third Republic on the 29th May 1999.

Unlike the 1979, the 1999 elections were conducted presumably in a peacefully atmosphere as it was done under military supervision. However subsequent elections conducted by Obasanjo in 2003 and 2007 were fraught with serious irregularities and violence. It could be recalled that immediately the military left the political stage, Nigeria began to experience several ethnic and religious conflicts earlier suppressed and bottled up by the military. According to the records of Human Rights Watch between 1999 and 2011 more than 157,000 people died in communal conflicts, political and sectarian violence since the return to civil rules in 1999 (Human Rights Watch, 1999, 2011).

Political Parties as Catalyst for Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Political parties can sow the seed of political violence in many ways. Sometimes they enact certain laws or use state power to monopolise the political space. The process of choosing flag bearers in different political parties makes it inevitable for violence to occur. Political parties most of the times impose candidates on the party members as against the party constitution which stipulates the use of primary election to select the party's flag bearer. When this is done, those who are not in the camp of the chosen will do everything possible to frustrate the candidacy of the chosen flag bearer thereby creating room for electoral violence.

During the period of the 1999 election, it was clear that the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo was in prison prior to the election. He was not among the people who formed the People's Democratic Party, neither were the party formed on his behalf while he

was in prison. In 1998, the PDP in its first presidential primary election held in Jos, Plateau State, North Central of Nigeria nominated him, who had just been released from detention as political prisoner as the presidential candidate in the elections of February 1999. In this regard those who formed the party were ostensibly not happy because his candidacy was imposed on them. Such situation could breed electoral violence among the party members.

The PDP was the ruling party from 1999 to 2015. It obviously used all methods possible to perpetuate itself in power. According to Albin-Lackey (2007) during the general elections in April and May 2003, Human Rights Watch stated that “at least one hundred people were killed and many more injured. Majority of serious abuses were perpetrated by members or supporters of the ruling party, the PDP”. The Nigeria Watch database confirmed that the PDP was the main party involved in political and electoral violence in 2007, as its followers were to be found in 73% of the total number of fatal incidents reported. Between 2006 and 2014, the PDP was to be found in 474 electoral violence incidents out of a total of 915 extracted from the database, representing almost 52% of incidents (Shamsudeen, 2015).

The youth wing of all political parties are ‘combat-ready’ thugs who are ready at any time to unleash mayhem on the opposition parties, should they try to do anything that will jeopardize the interest of their political parties. Thus we hear that PDP and APC, or APGA or any others party’s youths/thugs clashes with one another during political rally. The truth is that the party leaders have instructed their members/youths/thugs to resist by whatever means any activity of the opposition that will place their party at disadvantage in the election. Thus they boys were acting on the order of their pay masters. For instance, on November 2019, the Guardian Newspaper reported that some members of the People’s Democratic Party were attacked on Wednesday allegedly by members of the All Progressives Congress at King Koko Square in Nembe, Bayelsa State. The attack was said to be in retaliation of an alleged attack by PDP members on APC members on their way to their party rally at Igbogene town in Yenagoa LGA in the State (Guardian Newspaper, November. 2019). This is a clear attestation that violence begets violence, thus political parties indulge in electoral violence in order to retain power in government.

Again, opposition parties in Nigeria have been at the forefront of electoral violence as they are prone to resort to intimidation, in order to

compensate for their lack of base support. They always claim the election was never free, fair and credible. They are also quick at contesting election results in the court, hoping to use whatever means at their disposal to get the result reversed in their favour or be out rightly cancelled. They mobilize their members to protest against election results which are not in their favour. The protests always results in violence as thugs usually hijack the opportunity to loot properties of both government and individuals. For instance the election protest in Kano on May 2007 left more than 100 people dead, (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The youths cannot organize such a protest without the prior knowledge of their party and the party cannot deny being responsible for any unlawful acts committed by her youth wing.

Recall that in April and May 2011, scores were killed as a result of the statement credited to the main presidential election opponent, Muhammadu Buhari, if he loses the election. According to him, if what happened in 2011 should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood (Premiumtimesng.com). This type of statement is not healthy for democracy as election is a game of win and lose. Human Rights Watch reported that approximately about 800 people were feared killed after that election, and the protests was heavily masterminded by the main opposition party on the allegation or claim that the election results were rigged.

Political parties promotes political violence directly or indirectly by sponsoring violence directed at supporters of opposing parties. For instance, there are indications that, in order to ensure that general Muhammadu Buhari was declared the president of Nigeria in 2011, the CPC, and the northern elements along tribal lines, unleashed violence on the people, leaving about 800 people dead. (Human Rights Watch, 2011). This was in a bid for the CPC to ensure victory for their party and candidate and control the government of Nigeria. Similarly in Anambra state, during the governorship election in 2007, the PDP candidate Chief Andy Uba recruited thugs who happened to be cult members and they were responsible for rigging that election in his favour with total number of vote cast more than the total number of registered voters in the state during the election (Sahara Reporters, 2007).

The formation and existence of political parties based on ethnicity remain strong in Nigeria. During the first republic, most of the parties was formed on ethnic basis and some parties were bold to take tribal names such as the Northern Elements Progressive Union, Northern People

Congress, Middle Belts Democratic Front, United middle Belt Congress, Lagos United Front and the Niger Delta Congress (NDC) (Anyaele, 2003, Okereke, 1997) while some are formed and led by tribal leaders with followers usually from the same tribe as the leader. Thus, the action group was formed and led by Awolowo and S.L Akintola with members from the west, and NCNC which has a more national outlook was formed and led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an easterner and based in the east (Onwudufor and Ughaerumba, 2017). From the above, it means that a tribe or ethnic group that is larger than all others and has ethnic or tribal party will control the government if supported by its tribesmen.

On the other hand, if the tribal party lost election and decides to use violence to reclaim its mandate, it means the entire tribe or ethnic group will unleash its mayhem on other tribes thus committing post electoral violence. Coalitions and alliances were also used by political parties to ensure victory in elections. Unfortunately, coalitions were not helpful in bringing an end to ethnic politics which the emergence of political parties with tribal support had created. Thus, Ekemam, Ogonor and Udeaba (2013) argues that one of the major features of political parties that emerged as precursor's to independence was their ethnic colouration. Even the alliance/coalition of tribal parties were viewed with suspicion. For instance, it was because of ethnic/tribal sentiments that the action group and the NCNC could not combine to control the central government (Onwudufor and Ughaerumba, 2017). This sentiments cost them their opportunity and gave it to the NPC to perpetuate its domination of the country.

The tribal and regional nature of political parties and politics in Nigeria, robbed her politicians of true national consciousness. Thus they see themselves first as Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, then secondly as northerners, westerners and easterners and finally as Nigerians. This made the political parties and their politicians to pay more allegiance to their tribesmen and ensure that their tribesman is in the helm of affair. It is because of this sentiments that the northerners has continue to clamour to be in power whether person in charge is qualified or not. Their main concern is that a northerner is in charge, and this has led to political violence within the party, between oppositions and finally between tribes as each tribe seeks to produce the leader of the party, governor or president.

Incidences of Election Violence in Perpetrated by Political Parties

Elections in Nigeria since independence is replete with violence. The violence could be pre, during and or post-election violence. Some of this violence are perpetrated by political parties directly through their agents, youth wings, hired thugs or by aspirants who want to win the election by other means (Kanu & Obiefuna 2019). As a result of this unbridled quest for power, political parties do not care about the reputation or the ideology of their party but that they may control power and control it more abundantly. This explains the reason why several incidences of political cum election violence are triggered by political parties. During the 2007 governorship election in Rivers state, one opposition party agent in Ikwerre local government was dragged from the car of two journalists who was interviewing him and beaten unconscious after alleging that the PDP was rigging the tabulation of results in his area (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Police and state government officials standing nearby did not intervene probably because it is none of their business or they were acting on the orders of their pay masters. Those who beat up the young man were probably PDP thugs who were in a mission to ensure the victory of the PDP by all means.

The 2019 gubernatorial election in Rivers state was a good example of what former President Obasanjo called a do or die affair (Suberu, 2007, Alemika, 2011). **The 9th March poll was a frontal conflict** between incumbent Governor **Nyesom Wike** of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and his former friend, **Rotimi Amaechi**, who is Wike's successor and Federal Minister of Transport in the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). Shortly before the election, **a Supreme Court ruling** barred the APC from fielding candidate in Rivers gubernatorial election. But former Governor Amaechi of APC took it upon himself that it is better that an insignificant party wins the election rather than the PDP. Thus he aligned his controlled APC with a virtually unknown candidate of the African Action Congress (AAC) Biokpomabo Awara. This backing of Amaechi brought a lot of negative results with it. **Soldiers took over the streets in Rivers** and there were acts of vote buying, ballot-box snatching and voter intimidation that resulted to the death of five people. A lieutenant, soldier was killed at Abonnema, headquarters of Akuku Toru Local Government Area, while a chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and former Chairman of Andoni Local Government Council, Chief Mowan Etete, was killed alongside his elder brother and cousin in Asarama (Thisdaylive, 2019) while one Ignatius was shot dead at Ajakaja in Andoni by suspected thugs.

Also, an unconfirmed number of persons believed to be members of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) were killed following the eruption of violence before the commencement of accreditation and voting in Asari-Toru, Akuku-Toru and Degema Local Government Areas of the state. This is a clear indication that the violence was the making of political parties. The obvious is that the APC chieftain and his relatives were killed by the PDP thugs while the PDP members were killed by APC thugs.

Thus, election violence became the order of the day in an election between members of the same state whose major aim would have been to ensure peace and development for every member of the state irrespective the political affiliation. Party sponsored violence abound in almost all the states in Nigeria in the form of rigging, ballot box snatching, harassment, intimidation and assassinations. It is as if violence is a legal weapon by politicians to win election in this part of the world.

Again, assassination of political opponents is rife in Nigeria politics with either party members assassinating their co-contestants or opposition parties assassinating their major contenders in a bid to give smooth landing for them in the absence of such strong contenders. For instance in Ekiti state, during the 2006 gubernatorial election, political opponent like Dr. Ayo Daramola (PDP gubernatorial candidate) was assassinated on 14 August 2006 while Chief Funso Williams (PDP gubernatorial candidate in Lagos State) was assassinated on July, 2006. Thus, high-profile candidates began to apply for police protection. There was also bombing of the home of Senator Patrick Osakwe in Delta State on 24 November 2006 and another bombing of the houses of two Delta state House of Representative aspirants, Ndudi Elumelu and Theodora Giwa-Amu (Vanguard 7 April 2007).

Why Political Parties Orchestrate Election Violence

Politics, political parties and election seem to mean something different to Nigeria politicians. It is viewed as the fastest and easiest way of becoming wealthy as far as Nigeria is concerned. From independence in 1960 till date, Nigeria politicians have construed election, politics and political parties as all that matters in life as it guarantees money, power and security. What is more, politics makes you command respect in the Nigerian contest. That is why their slogan is always, till death do us part from politics. They see politics and election as a do or die affair and that if one is left behind in any political space, he is gone politically and will never rise again, hence the continued struggle to remain relevant in politics until death come knocking.

Since the notion of every politician in Nigeria is that winner takes it all, it behoves them to be the winner that will eventually take it all. Every politician wants to be a leader while none wants to be led. Thus every opportunity of leadership that comes on any ones way, it is hoped will never slip from him until death. This explains the reasons why politicians and political parties indulge in violence in order to maintain stausquo to the detriment of the led. The notion of democracy is that power belongs to the people. In Nigeria power belongs to politicians and once elected, they are above the law, the electorate and the state. They bend the constitution at will and frustrate any genuine effort to make the state work.

The first republic political parties initiated political cum election violence in a bid to control the state. Anyaele (2003) opines that in readiness for the 1964 election, all the political parties in the country polarized into two gigantic alliances. This alliances was to ensure that they win the election and control the state. Thus the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) and what was left of the already battered Action Group (AG) and the Northern Progressive Front (NPF), made up the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) joined together an formed the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and led by Dr. M.I Okpara while the Northern People's Congress NPC, NNDP, the Mid-Western Democratic Front (MDF), the Niger Delta Congress (NDC) and the Dynamic Party (DP) formed the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and led by Sir Ahmadu Bello. This quest to control the government made them to, during the electioneering campaign employ all sorts of crude and obnoxious methods as campaign strategies. There was also cases of irregular nomination of candidates for the election and other vices such as intimidation, thurgery and kidnapping in the northern and western regions.

Supporting the above assertions in the case of Nigeria politicians, Professor Billy Dudley observed that in Nigeria, the shortest cut to affluence and influence is through politics. Politics means money and money means politics ... to be a member of the Government party means open avenue to Government patronage, contract deals and the like". The implications of this are as follows: prebendal politics, in which political office is sought primarily for the aggrandizement of self, family members, associates and cronies, tend to become a preoccupation of the vast majority of the politicians and electorates; patron-client relationship becomes entrenched in the polity and economy; the logic and desire to belong to government party undermine the sustainability of viable

opposition in the political system; instrumental use of violence by both ruling and opposition parties as instrument of retaining or capturing power at elections independently or in contempt of electoral choices of the citizens at the poll (Dudley, 1961 cited in Bidemi, 2014)

Furthermore, Billy (1965), opines that once the politicians recognize or know “the profitability of having power, the party (and the individual members) naturally uses the same governmental machinery to stay in power. The leadership becomes a self-recruiting oligarchy and no self-recruiting oligarchy has been known to tolerate opposition to itself”. In the circumstance, violence becomes instrument for seeking, gaining and retaining political power. The implication of the above is that political parties and politicians as well as political investors and other major financiers of the political process for individuals seeking political office expend huge sum of money on the electoral process with expected return. Thus, no amount is too much to use in instigating electoral violence, including terminating the lives of opponents and valueless youths, provided their investment will generate profit for them and ultimately bring them closer to the corridor of power and to help secure their investments.

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. One of the consequences of this, is truncating the good 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). This is why some leaders/political parties have refused to implement any meaningful development in certain states, geopolitical zones, constituencies and wards because they felt that those areas did not give them any significant support during election.

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 violence 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 (Anyaele, 2003).

Electoral violence has created room for the emergence of incompetent persons who occupy vital political positions made possible by some political opportunists. The fact that such people are mediocre, they cannot deliver the dividends as expected by the masses. It is 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 were brutally eliminated as was the case of Chief Bola Ige or rigged out as in the case of chief MKO Abiola.

Conclusion

Political parties in Nigeria are still very far from practicing the very norms of political parties the world over as a means through which one government transits to another peacefully. Nigeria political parties has no ideological base and cannot boast of given the citizens robust and effective representation. This is why they move from one political party to another only to ensure they retain power and occupy political space. Political parties here are only a platform or gate way for dubious politicians to cling to power and exploit the people. There is no single party or politician whose has the interest of the country and the masses at heart, and that is why their only interest is to win election and control both the political and economic structure of the country.

It is as a result of the foregoing that election violence has become a legal weapon for them as a means of achieving their political mandates to the detriment of the masses. The politicians and their political parties recruit thugs, empower their youth wing to cause mayhem and destabilize the system if the election or the process is not in their favour. That is why some political fellows and opponents are kidnapped, maimed and killed before, during and after elections in order for them to become relevant in politics. Those politicians we support and wish to die for has their kits and kins based in abroad, with good education, job and security while they neglect our education system, health system, security and other social infrastructures that helps the ordinary citizen to survive.

If the politicians has the interest of the masses at heart, why is Nigeria still having epileptic power supply, bad road, poor education facilities, bad or

no health facilities and the likes, rather their interest is only to cling to power perpetually. The thugs, cult members and others they use to perpetrate violence has none of their children among them. Instead they provide their children with security or better still send them abroad during electioneering period for their safety while they adopt the helpless poor youths and entice them with peanuts only to expose them to danger and cut short their youthful glory.

It is so painful to see political parties with both learned, intelligent and technocrats wallowing in abject senselessness with no clear cut objective of what they want to achieve for those they represent. Lawyers, medical doctors, academics and technocrats once they venture into politics, transforms into political imbeciles and expunge their sense of reasoning and begin to act like 'one of them' with the caveat that if you can't beat them you join them. Why not make a difference with all the experiences and bring the needed change which the citizens yearn for. Election violence increases by the day in every election as if violence is the only method available for political parties and politicians to win election in Nigeria.

We therefore, suggest that to minimize the rate of political parties involvement in election violence, there is need for electoral reforms that will inculcate new provisions as a way to checkmate electoral violence and prosecute political parties, their agents and politicians or candidates who perpetrate or sponsor electoral violence. If this is done we believe that political parties will call their politicians and agents to order to follow due process and avoid violence since any violence traced to any political party will cause them dearly.

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