



## POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper titled Political Violence and The Sustainability of Nigerian Democracy seeks to establish the causes of political violence in Nigerian democratic experiment and possibly suggest how to surmount the pathologies with a view to ensuring the survival of the nation's fledgling democracy. The study adopted elite theory as a theoretical framework of analysis. The study established that greed, struggle for supremacy between godfathers and godsons have often led to political violence in the country's party system. The implication of the study is that if the above factors are not assuaged, the polity will continue to elect and nominate mediocre to occupy positions of responsibilities. Similarly, the country polity will keep witnessing wanton destruction of lives and properties. The study therefore recommended that the existing sentiments and parochial cleavages such as ethnicity and religion should not be a pre-requisite when it comes to attracting the suitable qualified candidates for public and political offices.

**Keywords:** Democracy, violence, Ethnic loyalty, Meritocracy, Godfatherism, Godson, Political interest, Nigeria.

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Political violence and insurgency in Nigerian democracy have become intractable because of ethnicism, party and political interest which have become a modern day parlance in public governance and the Nigeria democracy, while godfatherism which is a famous concept in the teachings and religion of the Roman Catholic Church may have found its root in the political sphere of the Nigerian politics arising from the inability of most contestants in an election to stand on their own and contest elections (Ibeogu: 2014). In the political setting today, both concepts (ethnicism, political interest and godfatherism) though parochial, are ideologies championed on the belief that certain individuals possess considerable means to unilaterally determine who gets a party ticket to run for election, who wins in the electoral contest and who is to be appointed to occupy juicy positions in government. When these happen, it gives rise to political upheavals, violence and insurgency in our democratic system.

Arising from the above is the endless struggle to outwit oppositions. It is for this reason that Lasswell (1958) opined that one cannot get involved in politics without the What, How, and Why questions. As a result, security became paramount in the political environment. Security ensures peace of mind and the possibility to sleep relaxed. Security implies stability and continuity of existence of the human life in the society. Since society is paramount in everyday life, insecurity and violence which has become a topical issue in today's Nigeria democratic exercise implies the inability to cope with shock or misfortune, therefore, increase in violence and insecurity results in pervasive anxiety and fear and so becomes detrimental to the survival of the nation's fledgling democracy.

Against this backdrop, this study ventured into the nature, character and dimensions of political violence in Nigerian democracy with a view to finding lasting solution that would enthrone sustainable democracy in the country.

## Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the elite theory as a theoretical framework of analysis. The classical elite theory was propounded by Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941). Elite theory developed in part as a reaction to Marxism as an ideology rather than an objective analysis of social systems. According to elite theory, men can never be liberated from the subjugation of an elite structure. Elite theory argues that all societies are divided into two main groups, the ruling minority and the majority that are ruled. This situation according to theorists is inevitable. When this revolution occurs, it results to violence and insurgency.

Public policies for instance, "good governance" policies of every regime, are made by few persons in government. This goes to support the postulation by Pareto and Mosca that, two main groups exist in the society, the ruling minority and the majority that are ruled. The elite theory regards public policy "good governance" which in turn, becomes "bad governance" as the values and preferences of the governing elite. In other words, public policy "good governance" (bad governance) is the product of the elites reflecting their values and serving their ends (Ibeogu, 2015). The political and economic elites wield powers, wealth, and influence government policies in their favour. The "good governance" (bad governance) of the previous and present democratic government, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa/Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (1960-1966) Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983) Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (2010-date) was and is also characterized by the struggle for who get what, when and how of the proceeds of governance. Orchestrated by the politicization of government policies and programmes by the elites who influences the outcome, have often given rise to the renewed insecurity, insurgency and political violence in our democracy.

## Literature Review

Nwobashi (2015) in a study "Electoral Violence in Nigeria" sees political violence as the use of illegitimate force of any kind prohibited by the state (law) to achieve political end. Though this may be true, correct and acceptable if it has to do with opposing or opposition party adopting that. But the reverse is usually the case if it is adopted by the ruling party (party in power) it then could be an acceptable phenomenon. For instance, the Peoples Democratic Party (P.D.P) which is the ruling party could adopt political violence as a strategy to winning elections, and it will be termed acceptable and normal, but when the opposition party for instance, All Progressive Party (APC) adopts that it will be termed illegal since they were not in control of government machinery, and as such all manner of security agents will be deployed to cow them down.

In a related study, Gurr (1968:93) cited in Nkwede and Nwobashi (2010) defined political violence as all collective attacks within a political community against the political regimes, but the argument of the researcher is that political violence goes beyond the political community, since neighbouring communities and foreign investors feel the bite and pains of political violence in other communities.

## 2015 General Elections and Peoples Democratic Party's Crisis (Ebonyi State in Focus)

Apparently, leadership in Ebonyi State under the watchful eyes of Chief Martin Nwanchor Elechi swore to ensure equity and fairness in the governance of Ebonyi State. His insistence that power must rotate among the geo-political zones of the state (Ebonyi North, Ebonyi Central, and Ebonyi South) and Ebonyi North and Central having taken their share, he quickly pronounced the unanimous ad option of Professor Onyebuchi Chukwu as the P.D.P flag bearer for the state on 3/10/2014 without the P.D.P congress conducted. This singular statement heightened tension in Ebonyi State, especially with those jostling for the governorship position under the platform of P.D.P. Unfortunately, when the primaries were conducted, the then Deputy Governor, Engr. Dave Umahi emerged as the P.D.P flag bearer. This act led to the polarization of P.D.P in Ebonyi State as the governor was not in support of the candidature of Engr. Dave Umahi (Ibeogu, 2015).



As a result of the division in P.D.P in Ebonyi State, the loyalists of the governor, which includes the commissioners, special advisers, chairmen and members of boards and commission, local government caretaker committee chairmen and coordinators of the development areas (development centres) decided to throw their weight behind the flag bearer of the Labour Party (L.P) Architect Edward Nkwegu who was seen as a possible candidate and party which should be voted for to ensure that Engr. Dave Umahi of P.D.P, do not emerge as the possible successor of Chief Martin Elechi, come May 29<sup>th</sup> 2015.

Since then, there has been renewed incidence of violence leading to loss of lives and snatching of permanent voters card (P.V.C's) in some places or local governments in Ebonyi State. Such local government includes, Ikwo L.G.A, Izzi L.G.A etc. Lives were also lost in Ikwo L.G.A. Worrisome is the spate of lives lost in Afikpo South L.G.A during the Labour Party rally in January 2015, and number of cars and houses burnt down across Ebonyi State by P.D.P faithfuls because of the rival political party, the Labour party and the candidature of Edward Nkwegu.

There are also renewed plots and allegations by the P.D.P loyalists in the state House Assembly against the government of Chief Martin Elechi, he was accused of corruption, embezzlement of public fund, lack of due process in award of contract, all in a bid to frustrate his government because the P.D.P faithfuls were of the opinion that he is in support of Labour Party taking over power from him (Ibeogu, 2015).

These and many others have been generating concern in Ebonyi State, such that political and economic activities have been greatly affected.

### **Economic Violence, the Lost Glory to Nigeria's Growth and Political Development**

Most crises in Nigeria are poverty induced. This leads to depression and deprivation. As a result, the inability of the state to provide basic services for the people, generate new conflict or renew the old ones. Evidence abounds to suggest that oil has given rise to vertical and horizontal conflict between national, state, local and society or between dominant and subordinate geo-political zones, classes and groups across Nigeria, given the pivotal role that oil plays in the restructuring power relationships in Nigeria. Crisis of resource control and revenue sharing regularly rent the air between proponents and opponents, these have estranged the relationship not only between the super-ordinate government and subordinate government, but between the electorates and the government. This, then, hampers the possibilities of putting up institutions and structures to provide daily living for the jobless youths in the streets. In a bid to earn a living through no available opportunities, these youths take up arms to source their living, hence the spate of political kidnapping and assassination to ensure that political godfathers, and godson have their way in political positions, so that they themselves will in turn earn a living.

### **Political Violence and Assassination, the Bane of Democratic Transformation in Nigeria**

The Nigerian 2015 general elections like the previous elections have displayed politics of anxiety which has played down on dialogue, negotiation and consensus, especially with what happened in Ebonyi State (The Deputy Governor, emerging the P.D.P flag bearer) and other states in the country.

Currently, the winners of the respective primaries of their party were strategizing on how to win, control and retain power come 2015 elections. To this end, inter and intra-party conflict have become very unpleasant that politicians are deploying large resources to out-do each other. Party meetings, campaign rallies and conventions have become war threats where arms and weapons like guns, axes and cutlasses were freely displayed and used to rig elections, harass and intimidate electorates and contestants. So, the inability to redeem electioneering promises by politicians to those who constitute thugs after elections, gave rise to the spate of political assassination, kidnapping, violence and insurgency, ravaging all sectors of the nation's economy.

### **Political Thuggery, Joblessness and the Fate of Nigeria's Economy**

Massive unemployment and poverty are prevalent in Nigeria which has experienced a depressed economy since 1980s. This provides a fertile ground for the recruitment of the youths into an army of political thugs. As a result, these youths feed on the crucibles that fell from the tables of the politicians, who in-turn used them as thugs to perpetuate political and electoral violence.

### **Political Violence, Ethnic Loyalty and Local Conflict Caused by Actions of Government**

The character of Nigerian state is defined in terms of primitive and primordial cleavages. Decisions and actions taken without due considerations of the existing cleavages do generate political and electoral violence. Instances are Ife – Modeka and Warri, in which the creation of local government area and the siting of the headquarters led to the violent conflict over a long period. Such crisis ridden areas cannot have violent free elections. These local cleavages and conflicts easily provide a conducive environment for electoral violence.

### **Manifestation and Consequences of Political Violence In Nigeria's Electoral and Democratic System**

- Political intimidations and boycott of elections by political party



- Tension charged and violent campaigns and election
- Violent clashes between factions of a party and among different political groups
- Insecurity of lives and property
- Breakdown or near breakdown of law and order
- Demonstrable recklessness, arson and wanton destruction
- Violence during party primaries, campaigns, polling and collation of results
- The use of, or mobilization of ethnic, religion, regional or other primordial sentiments
- Threats of attacks against individuals, political opponents by those who possess incumbent power
- Destruction of party offices, campaign bill boards and posters of opponents
- Disallowing political parties in opposition by political party in government from the use of public arenas like stadia, parks etc
- Abuse and manipulation of security agents by the incumbent government or more powerful political rivalries to disallow or to disperse the rallies and campaigns of opponents under the guise of not securing approval or likelihood of breach of public peace
- Psychological violence by inducing, manipulating and directing the security operatives to harass through arrests, detention and arraignment in courts on the basis of false accusation with a view to demoralizing or demobilizing the opponents
- Intimidations and harassment of opponents and voters in areas of low support through deployment of political thugs or highly armed security agents by incumbent government under the guise of preventing the breakdown of law and orders.

**Table 1: Selected cases of Electoral Violence In Nigeria (1990-2006)**

S/N	Conflict	Causes	Manifestation	Consequences
1	Inter-party squabble Ebonyi State, August 24 2001	Alleged interference in Ebonyi State affairs by the Senate President	Protest by women and Youths, open violence	Loss of lives Insecurity of opponents
2	Inter party conflict August 13, 2002	Preventing the pasting of a candidates posters	Gruesome murder	Loss of lives, Increase tensions
3	Political mob action, Adamawa State, March 13, 2003	Inter-party rivalry	Attack on ANPP Presidential campaign train	Destruction of property, Intimidation and Insecurity of opponents
4	Election time violence, Awka Anambra, July 10, 2003	Intra party squabble between PDP leaders godfathers/godson squabble Alleged electoral malpractice	Abduction of state governor	Restiveness Development of militia and political thugs. Removal of governors security aides

Source: Newswatch, April 28, 2003; Daily Sun March 24, 2004; Daily Trust March 7, 2003

**Table 2: Selected cases of Electoral Violence in Nigeria 2011 General Election**

S/N	Zone	State	Nature of Conflict	Causes	Manifestation	Consequences
1	South West	Ekiti	Inter party clash	Protest between PDP and ACN	Violent protest	Killing of two PDP members
2	South South	Cross River	Inter party conflict	Between PDP and opposition	Violent clash	Many people were injured and many cars destroyed
3	south East	Ebonyi	Inter party conflict	Thanks giving church service by ANPP senatorial candidate	Violent attacks	Five motorcycle were destroyed
4	North central	Benue	Inter party conflict	Between PDP and ACN	Attacks on the convoy of the Deputy governor and ACN senatorial candidate	Press secretary and his driver were shot. The candidate was wounded
5	North West	Kaduna	Inter party conflict	Protest against Dr. Good luck Jonathan's electoral victory	Violent attacks	Several people died, property worth billions of naira destroyed. Churches and mosque
6	North East	Gombe	Inter party conflict	Post presidential poll violence	Violent protest	17 people lost their lives. 400 people were injured etc.

Source: Adele (2012)

**FIGURE 1: VICTIMS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN EBONYI STATE DURING THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS.**



Source: Amandianeze (2015)

## Conclusions

Any polity, society, environment or economy threatened with crime, insecurity, insurgency, kidnapping and violence is usually accompanied with tensions and anxiety. The elimination of these threats and enemies of man should be the number one programme of the government in Nigeria. This will create opportunity for human development and habitable environment for the citizens. Apart from the role of governments, all hands should be on deck to eliminate the monster, insecurity, insurgency, criminal acts (rape, burglary, theft) kidnapping and violence, and most importantly all should be committed to the growth, development, and transformation of our father land by being honest and eschewing politics of acrimony in Nigerian politics.

## Recommendations

- The government should provide social infrastructures like roads, schools, hospitals and skill acquisition centres for those who do not have opportunity for formal education;
- Economic empowerment- This is most significant to ameliorate the sense of what seems to induce crime;
- Campaign promises should be kept and maintained, especially with the provision of job opportunities for the teeming unemployed youths and graduates;



- The government should increase the size of Nigeria's security agencies, empower and motivate them very well and strengthen neighborhood watch and local vigilante to stem the tide of insecurity in our country;
- There is the imperative of getting political parties to be positively engaged in the political process so as to promote dialogue, tolerance and peaceful Inter-party relations;
- There is the need to generally dignify but demystify public office and make the contestants and general public to realize that winning an elected office is a call to public office;
- There is the need to ensure institutional integrity of the election body and personal integrity of the election administrators at all level;
- There is the need to ensure proper and adequate training of all personnel involved with election matters both permanent and adhoc staff;
- Campaign rallies should be issue based and not making derogatory statements about persons or contestants;
- Policies and programmes of the government meant to address the problems of the people should not be politicized;
- Less emphasis should be placed on money for those seeking political office, rather emphasis should be placed on the credibility of the candidates seeking political office;
- The existing sentiments and parochial cleavages such as ethnicity and religion should not be a pre-requisite when it comes to attracting the suitable qualified candidates for public/political office.

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