
ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Political Violence in Nigeria and Its Implication for National Development

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Abstract: Political violence is a major impediment to Nigeria's national development. With the restoration to democratic rule in May 1999, high expectations were raised that the new democratic dispensation would resolve the risk of Nigeria's political violence, while speeding the country's economic and social transformation. It's worrying that since democratic rule returned, Nigeria has experienced a degree of unprecedented political violence that has crippled the efforts of national development. The fundamental thrust of this paper is to investigate the incidence of Nigeria's political violence and assess its national development consequences. The paper shows that political violence dissuades domestic and foreign investment in our economy, triggers government loss of revenue and resources, and results in the election of unqualified representatives to the detriment of the country's economic and social progress. This paper proposes reducing wages paid to political office holders, and politicians should strive to achieve national unity instead of growing religious and ethnic tensions. Lastly, National resources should also be equitably distributed by the government.

Keywords: Political Violence, Development, National Development, Transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Political violence has been identified as a common feature of the Nigerian political system. An analysis of the Nigerian political journey has shown that “political violence has been part and parcel of the country’s chequered history”. According to Nweke (2006, p. 41) “the emergence of political violence in Nigeria is sourced through the nature of party formation, which was ethno-regionally based. This was followed by the regionalization of Nigeria as created by Richard Constitution of 1946”. Since attainment of independence Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented political violence which is a serious impediment to National Development. Ani and Nwanaju (2011, p. 2) observed that “at independence, political conflicts took over the centre stage of nation building in Nigeria and its multiplier effect gave birth to factors that led to the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970”.

With the return of civilian government in May, 1999, hopes were high that the new democratic order would tackle the incidence of political violence in the country thereby facilitating economic and social progress. It is a sad commentary that since the return of civil rule, political violence has reached a dangerous proportion. The Nigerian state and its fledgling democracy have been beset with phenomenal violence and atrocities ranging from those that come in the form of religious crises, like sharia. Niger-Delta militancy, ethno-religious conflicts, Boko Haram insurgency, electoral violence, politically motorated assassinations all with alleged

political undertones (Omodia, 2009; Omotola, 2010).

Therefore, the basic thrust of this paper is to examine the incidence of political violence in Nigeria and determine its implication for national development. The paper also suggests appropriate strategies to address the menace of political violence in Nigeria. The paper is divided into six sections. Section one deal with introduction, section two is concerned with conceptual clarification and section three dwells on theoretical framework. Section four deals with the incidence of political violence in Nigeria. Section five focuses on implication of political violence for national development. The last section dwells on conclusion and recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Political Violence

Political violence is

“the use of threat or physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals and/or property with the intention to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction to property and whose objective, choice of target or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effects have political significance, that tend to modify the behaviour of others in the existing arrangement of power structure that has consequences for the political system” (Anikawose 1984, p.4).

According to Gurr (1970) political violence refers to all collective attacks within a political community against the political regime, its actors including competing political groups as well as incumbents or its policies. Political violence is form of violence relations and crisis of interest, goals and ambitions between individuals, groups, and political structures in the process of attaining power and keeping it (Johnmary 2012). The Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution (cited in Nweke, 2006, Pp. 40-41) observed that “political conflict emanates from power struggles, within the political class and often involves the manipulation of the people, who are inevitably less informed about the essence of the political struggle”. Therefore, political violence “takes place in the process of power struggle aimed at certain very players in the political system.”

Development

Scholars have defined development in various ways. Sapru (1997:5) defines development as a process of improving the well being of the people. It is about raising the standard of living of the people, improving their education and health and also opening out to them new and equal opportunities for richer and more varied life. According to Akanji and Akosile (2001) “it means the attainment of self governance, to others it signifies the provision of essential infrastructure that create a healthy atmosphere, proper provision of education, communication and ability to evolve an amiable business environment for its citizenry while some even sees it as achievement in technological advancement”. Naomi (1995, p.67) believes that development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of healthcare, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life. Chisman (cited in

Lawal & Abe 2001, p. 237-241) views development “as a process of societal advancement, where improvement in the well being of the people are generated through strong partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society. It is reasonable to know that development is not only economic exercise, but also involves both socio-economic and political issues and pervades all aspects of societal life.”

National Development

Evolving from the meaning of development, national development can be explained to mean totality of improvement in collective and concrete terms across socio-economic, political, technology as well as religion and is best achieved through strategies mapped out by government as contained in the nation development plans (Akindele, Ogini & Agada, 2013, p. 171).

In the opinion of Oluwatoyin (2001, p. 237) national development can be defined as “the overall development of collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or a nation. This is best achieved through development planning, which can be described as the country’s collection of strategies mapped out by government.”

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The importance of theories in political discourse cannot be overemphasized as it proffers empirically based general explanatory laws through synthesizing and integrating of empirical data for maximum clarification (Raphael, 1978, p.2). Many theories could be used to explain political violence in Nigeria, but pluralist theory is more preferable in Nigerian situation. The pluralist theory posits that conflict is inevitable in plural society (Cohen 1996). Therefore, conflict generated by competition among plural groups in democracies of the third world countries like Nigeria is a common phenomenon. Since Nigeria is a plural society, composed of various ethnic groups, there is always competition among these ethnic groups to capture political offices and control national wealth (Bassey, 2016). This is because in variegated society like Nigeria, every ethnic group is mobilizing support for its candidates during elections. This could result in election motivated political violence.

Political violence in Nigeria could also be explained by using the psychological theories especially Ted Gurr’s theory of relative deprivation (1980) and James Davies (1971) J-curve hypothesis. The centrality of the theory rest on the fact that frustration-aggression mechanism is analogous to the law of gravity; men who are frustrated have an innate disposition to do violence to its source in proportion to the intensity of their frustration, just as objects are attracted to one another in direct proportion to their relative masses (Dungan, 2004). According to the theorist, the main cause of human capacity for violence is frustration- aggression mechanism. This means that “unfulfilled expectations create relative deprivation gab between expectations and capabilities” In other words, when someone or group of people have the perception of their ability or right to something (goal), if prevented from attaining such goals, the result is frustration which will in turn generate aggressive behaviour that will snowball to violence (Ojo, 2014). Therefore, in Nigeria if an individual or group of people are prevented from achieving their expected goals like joining public office, it could lead to frustration and aggressive behaviour which may result in political violence (Ogar et el, 2016)

INCIDENCE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Political violence has been endemic feature of many developing countries like Nigeria (Ogar et al, 2018). It was a great achievement that Nigeria attained her independence with minimum violence, but is worrisome that since after independence, political violence has reached a dangerous dimension. It is imperative to note that political violence associated with election and electoral processes in Nigeria commenced with the 1959 federal elections designed by British to facilitate the transition from colonial rule to independence (Ogundiya & Baba 2005). This problem worsened in the elections held immediately after independence in 1960s. In Western Region, political violence popularly referred to as “Operation “Wete” were recorded in 1964 to 1965 following both federal and regional elections as well as rift between Awolowo and Akintola (Aver, Nnorom & Targba, 2013, p. 263). There were also political violence in parts of Northern Region especially between the supporters of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) and supporters of other parties, mainly the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and Action Group (Aver et al, 2013). Another political violence that emerged after independence was the military coup of January 1966, where a group of young Nigerian army of officers seized power and assassinated the then Prime Minister Tafawa Belawa, Amadu Bello and Ladoke Akintola Premiers of Northern and Western regions respectively. This military coup led to political violence that caused the Nigerian civil war 1966-70.

Following a protracted military rule that lasted for thirteen years, the Murtala/Obasanjo regime carried out a transition programme and returned the country to civil rule in 1979 (Alfa & Otaida 2012, p.46) The 1979 election witnessed minimal cases of violence. According to Nwolise (2007) “the election was characterized by violence at three stages pre-election, during the election and post election. In almost all the states, the results were contested or disputed.” The major contending issue was that of 2/3 of 19 states which was resolved in favour of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, NPN presidential candidate by the Supreme Court (Alfa & Otaida 2012:15).

The 1983 elections were not devoid of violence. The election was rigged in favour of ruling party, the National Party of Nigeria, (NPN). This led to violent demonstrations in some parts of the country. For example the landslide victory of the National Party of Nigeria NPN in Oyo and Ondo States considered to be stronghold of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) witnessed massive post-election violence. Several persons lost their lives and large scale destruction of property was recorded (Alemika 2011). The violent political activities in the country contributed to the overthrow of Shagari’s regime on 31st December, 1983. In what could have ushered in the third republic by Babangida designed in 1993, was however aborted by the June 12 1993 annulled presidential election which created chaotic situation in the country (Alfa & Otaida, 2012, p.46). The cancellation of the election led to massive ethno-religious conflicts in the country. Babangida stepped down in August 1993 which led to the formation of an interim government headed by Chief Shonekan. The interim government was dismissed following “the palace coup” led by General Sani Abacha. Abacha’s regime was beset with oppressive policies and assassination of his political enemies. Chief among these was the murder of Mrs Kudirat Abiola, wife of the acclaimed winner of the June 1993, presidential poll annulled by Babangida (Alfa & Otaida 2012, p.47). Later Abacha died mysteriously in the process of trying to “transform himself into a civilian President.

General Abubakar who replaced Abacha supervised 1999 elections that ushered in the Fourth Republic on May 29th 1999. There were high expectations that the nascent democracy would help to reduce the menace of political violence in the country. It is worrisome that since

the return of civil rule, Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented level of political violence which militates against economic and social transformation of the country. For example, the introduction of Sharia law in Zamfara State which spread to other Northern States led to massive killing of people from Southern Nigeria and their corpses were brought back to their respective states. There were also reprisal attacks in some places such as Okigwe, Owerri and Aba. In Kwara State, supporters of the governor and leading gubernatorial candidate were involved in violent conflict which resulted in the killing of the state party chairman in August 2002. Other prominent politicians that lost their lives due to political violence include Chief Bola Ige of AD while serving as minister under PDP's government, Chief Harry Marshal, Vice Chairman of All Nigerian People Party, South-South, Asari Dikibo, Vice Chairman of PDP, South South, Luke Shigaba, Chairman of Bassa Local Government Area, Kogi State (Osisioma, 2007). An unprecedented political violence took place in Anambra State on 10th July 2003, when the former Governor of Anambra State was kidnapped with the intention of forcing him out of power. This plot was executed by the late Assistant Inspector General of Police Mr. Raphael Ige who later claimed he acted on the basis of an "order from above" though the principal actors to such act remain unknown till today (Adeleke, 2012).

Political violence associated with election was massive in 2007. There were violent political activities in different parts of the country. According to Adele (2012, p.211):

In River-State, a police station was attacked and burnt by unknown assailants a night before the election date. In Anambra and Rivers State voters were faced with intimidation and violence. In Ekiti State, there was confrontation between PDP and Action Congress supporters and election results were blatantly falsified in many areas. Violence was equally reported in Northern State of Kastina where opposition supporters burnt down government building in protest as the announcement that PDP had swept the state's gubernatorial polls. Soldiers clash with angry voters in Nasarawa State. In Oyo State, PDP thugs beat up opposition party officials and hijacked ballot boxes.

The declaration of 2011 presidential election result in which president Goodluck Jonathan emerged as the winner led to violent demonstrations in northern parts of country. The supporters of Congress of Progressive Change (CPC) unleashed violent protests and destroyed properties worth of millions of naira. The house of the Vice President Namadi Sambo was looted and raised and palaces of prominent traditional rulers in the North were attacked (Alfa & Otaida 2012, p.48).

The activities of Boko Haram in the Fourth Republic have also a serious security threat to our country. The crisis is assuming a dangerous dimension. The Boko Haram has unleashed grievous attacks on places of worship, media houses, markets, parks, telecommunication facilities etc in many northern states. In the process, a lot of lives and properties worth millions of naira have been lost.

IMPLICATION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Since attainment of independence, Nigeria is bedeviled with political violence which has undermined the performance of all sectors of national development. It has retarded the economic and social transformation of the country. Political violence militates against domestic

and foreign investors in the economy and prevents future economic growth and development (Bassey et al, 2018). Again, some victims of political violence while taking refuge in refugees camps cannot be able to involve themselves in economic activities. Therefore, cannot contribute to development of the country. Segun (2013, p.333) observed that between 2003 and early 2005 over 3,000 people died in election related violence in the Niger Delta perpetrated by the youths, with properties worth hundreds of million destroyed. The people who lost their lives in this type of conflict can no longer contribute to political, economic and social development.

Political violence is a serious challenge to national security and causes government's loss of revenue and assets. For example, the government of Delta State in 2003 spent N200 million to maintain soldiers stationed in Warri to maintain peace (Adebanwi, 2004). It is estimated that assets worth of N59,672,000 were lost to the Jos crisis in 2001, while government compensation to victims was about N13,938,000; assets loss to the Kaduna crisis of 2001 amounted to N50,625,000 with government compensation at N32,716,000 (Segun 2013, p.333).

Another serious implication of political violence for national development is that it leads to electing those leaders that are not credible which is detrimental to economic and social progress of the country. Election of unqualified leaders into political offices in Nigeria is a launching pad to poor leadership that cannot drive home the vision of the country (Okoafor, 2015, p.8). The development challenges that we are witnessing in the contemporary Nigeria, could be attributed to poor leadership.

Political violence has disrupted educational activities and consequently school calendar is extended. This adversely influences the duration a student would spend in school, attracting more expenditure on parents, more worrisome is exposing students to social vices like drug addiction, alcohol, armed robbery, prostitution among other vices (Aver et al, 2013). Based on the above mentioned factors, we can deduce that political violence is a serious threat to national development in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this paper, attempt has been made to examine how political violence undermines national development since Nigeria attained her independence. Political violence retards domestic and foreign investments, causes government's loss of revenue and assets, results in the election of unqualified leaders and disrupts educational activities. The following recommendations would help to reduce the incidence of political violence in Nigeria and consequently accelerate economic and social growth of the country.

1. Salaries and other benefits that are due for political office holders should be reduced to ensure that they are less attractive. The benefits that are associated with political offices encourage unhealthy competition which results in political violence.
2. The politicians should strive to achieve national integration. They should avoid making statements that would arouse religious and tribal sentiments which usually leads to political violence.
3. The Nigerian politicians should see governance as a strategy of addressing the problems of the masses not necessarily accumulation of wealth.
4. The government should distribute national values equitably and ensure balance development of all regions. No section of the country would feel marginalized.
5. The convicted sponsors and executors of political violence should be prevented from occupying any public office.

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