



Causes and Effects of Post Election Violence in Nigeria

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Abstract

Elections are generally accepted in all climes of the world as the hallmark of democracy. Free, fair and credible elections in any democratic society are platforms for legitimate governments with the capacity to initiate and implement clearly articulated development programs, peace, and good governance in the society. This paper examines the causes and effects of post-election violence in Nigeria. Historical method was used for the research. It was discovered that most elections in Nigeria are characterized by violence either before, during or after elections. Electoral violence in Nigeria is as a result of misconceptions by politicians that politics is an avenue for the acquisition of extraordinary wealth, ineffective law enforcement agents, weak legal framework, poverty and campaign of calumny. Electoral Violence in Nigeria is one of the reasons for insecurity, death of some innocent citizens and lack of development. Nigerian government should strive to bring electoral violence to the barest minimum so that peace and development can be achieved in our Country.

Keywords: Election, Violence, Democracy, Development & Nigeria

1. Introduction

Election is generally accepted in all climes of the world as the hallmark of democracy. Political scientists and development theorists link free, fair and credible elections to democratic governance, peace and development. They argue that free, fair and credible elections provide the basis for the emergence of democratic governance, accountable and legitimate governments with the capacity to initiate and implement clearly articulated developmental programs. Again, they claim that free, fair and credible elections empower the electorate to hold the government accountable and to demand strong credentials and feasible developmental agenda from prospective government officials. In other words, free, fair and credible elections bestow on governments the legitimate authority to, on one hand, initiate and implement policies; while on the other hand, they empower the citizens to hold government accountable for their actions and/or inactions. Credible elections are, therefore, *sine qua non* for democratic governance, political stability and national development¹

Nigeria's electoral politics from independence has been tumultuous. The politicians, in Nigeria, have over the years "become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power; more reckless and greedier in their use and abuse of power; and more intolerant of opposition, criticism and efforts at replacing them". Violence has continued to mar the conduct of almost all general elections, making free and fair elections a necessity. Thus, electoral violence has proved to be Nigeria's harbinger of national instability as unabated festering (growing) irregularities that manifest at different stages of election, subject almost all Nigeria's election below the minimum democracy standard.²

¹ O. Nkwachukwu, & U. Nkiru, *Post Election Violence in Nigeria: Experiences with the 2011 Elections*, Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2012.

² V.O. Olayiwola, "Turbulent Election History: An Appraisal of Precipitating Factors in Nigeria", *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*. Vol. 5, No. 5.2 pp 1-18.



However, since the advent of democratization in Africa in the 1990's, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on holding regular elections. As a result, since 1999, elections have become more regular in Nigeria. Between 1999 and 2011, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducted four consecutive general elections. This period has been marked by an extra-ordinary progress towards the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, considering that the country is able to conduct four consecutive general elections for the first time in its political history.³

Although elections are now more regular in Nigeria, the quality of these elections is a matter of grave concern to both the actors and observers. The 2003 and 2007 elections were particularly marked by dissatisfaction by candidates, voters and observers. Dissatisfaction with the 2007 general elections reflected in the barrage of litigations brought before the election tribunals and courts as well as the number of election results that were nullified.⁴

Unlike the 2007 elections, the April 2011 general elections in Nigeria were adjudged by observers and analysts as the most credible election in the series of elections organized since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. The success of the 2011 elections can be attributed to the remedial measures taken by both the government and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the aftermath of the 2007 general elections to restore the credibility of the electoral process.

The widely acclaimed success of the 2011 elections was dented by post-election violence that broke out following the announcement of the results of the presidential elections. The 2011 post-election violence is seen by many as the bloodiest incident of electoral violence in Nigeria's history. In fourteen Northern States, including Adamawa, Kano, Kaduna, and Bauchi States, where the post-election violence was most prevalent, violent protesters killed several people, including an unspecified number of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members; torched, looted or destroyed businesses, churches and private houses. In the aftermath of the violence, thousands of people were displaced from their homes and places of business.⁵

Post-election violence is not a new phenomenon in the country. However, most incidences often tend to be localized, short-lived and restricted to polling centers and communities. But the incidences of large-scale post-election violence of 1963-65; 1983 and 2011 in Western Region, Oyo and Ondo States and in several Northern States respectively recorded large scale loss of lives and destruction of property with serious implications for national development

2. Definition of Terms

Central to this discourse are the following clarified concepts:

2.1 Electoral violence

This paper sees electoral violence as “any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced ‘protection’, blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination’. The target of electoral violence can be people, places, data, or things. In an attempt to influence the electoral process,

³ S. Oyovbaire, *Governance and Politics in Nigeria: The IBB and OBJ Years*, (Ibadan: Spectrum, 2008), 56.

⁴ INEC, *The Official Report on the 2007 General Elections*, (Abuja: Independent National Electoral Commission, 2007).

⁵ D. Bekoe, *Nigeria's 2011 Elections: Best Run, but Most Violent*, (Washington, DC: USA Institute of Peace, 2011), <http://www.usip.org/files/resources/PB%20103.pdf>.



perpetrators of electoral violence may attempt to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll and determine the winners of competitive races for political office (UNDP, 2009).⁶

Three key elements in the above definition of electoral violence are worthy to note.

The first is that like any other form of violence, electoral violence manifests in physical forms (kidnapping, killing, and destruction of property) and non-physical forms (threats, intimidation and blackmail).

Secondly, the main goal of electoral violence is to influence the electoral process, either by changing the outcome of elections or by disrupting the electoral process.

Thirdly, electoral violence can occur at different periods in the election cycle; that is, before, during, or after election.⁷

2.2 Post-electoral Violence

Post-election violence is a specific form of electoral violence. The post-election phase usually starts from the collation and announcement of election results to litigation and settlement of election disputes. Violence at this phase is usually triggered by issues emanating from the pre-election and election phases. Post-election violence manifests in several ways including attacks on rival candidates, party officials and supporters; as well as violent street. They could also include shooting, killings, arson, wanton destruction of property, usually perpetrated by officials and/or supporters of different political parties (Adoke, 2011). Therefore, what distinguishes post-election violence from other forms of electoral violence is the fact that it occurs just after polling, usually during or after collation and announcement of election results⁸.

3. Election Violence in Nigeria

Elections have been a source of violent political, ethnic, religious and communal conflicts in Nigeria since the late 1940s when limited elections were introduced. This problem deteriorated in the elections conducted immediately after independence in the 1960s.⁹ All the eight general elections conducted in Nigeria since independence in 1960 (including 1964, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections) have been marred by various degrees of violence.¹⁰ The announcement of the results of the Western Region elections in 1965 was followed by violence and breakdown of law and order in the region. It was the Western Region crisis that gave rise to the infamous ‘*Operation Wetie*’ - an atrocious practice of dousing political opponents in petrol and setting them ablaze.¹¹ In 1983, allegations of rigging by the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led to bloody post-election crisis in Ondo State.

In 1993, the results of the presidential elections won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola was annulled by then military ruler, Ibrahim Babangida, leading to the ‘June 12’ crisis that took the lives of many Nigerians.

⁶ Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance 2011. *Elections, Violence and Conflict Prevention*. Report of workshop on organized by UNDP, European Commission, and International IDEA, Barcelona, 20-24 June.

⁷ O. Nkwachukwu, & U. Nkiru, *Post Election Violence in Nigeria: Experiences with the 2011 Elections*, Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2012

⁸ M. Adoke, ‘Stemming Electoral Violence in Nigeria: A Focus on the Adequacy of the Law and its Enforcement’, *Vanguard* [Lagos], 8 September 2011.

⁹ Alemika, E.E (2011). “Post-Election Violence in Nigeria: Emerging Trend and Lessons, *CLEEN Foundation*, July.

¹⁰ The Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research 2002. *Election Violence in Nigeria: The Terrible Experience 1952-2002*. Kaduna: Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research.

¹¹ R. Anifowose, *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba Experience*, (Enugu Nigeria and New York: NOK Publishers, 1982), 34.



Nigeria's Fourth Republic has not been devoid of electoral violence. Between 1999 and 2011, thousands of people have died in election related violence.¹²

There is substantial similarity between the post-election violence recorded in 1983 and the post-election violence recorded after the presidential election on April 16, 2011 in which hundreds of people were reported killed and property worth billions of naira were destroyed or looted. The main difference between the 1983 and 2011 election violence was the ethnic and religious dimensions that were introduced at the latter stages of the 2011 post-presidential election riots. Notwithstanding, this difference, they both reflected an anger primarily targeted at people considered as collaborators with the ruling national party to undermine local interests. Both cases also demonstrated the helplessness of the police in containing serious political violence due to lack and non-utilization of relevant intelligence and other forms of institutional weaknesses.¹³

The elections conducted in 1999, 2003 and especially 2007 were characterized by widespread malpractices such as violence, corruption and falsification of results. After the 2007 election, there was widespread disenchantment with the electoral process. The elections held in 2003 and 2007 were preceded by widespread intra-party and inter-party violence that continued on the polling days. The foregoing pattern and trend of violence in 2003 and 2007 partly explain the post-election violence in April 2011.¹⁴

3.1 Causes of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Orderly transfer of power from one government to another in accordance with democratic norms has been problematic in the Nigerian polity. Indeed, electoral violence has become a clog in the wheel of democratic progress as violence always manifest at all the three stages of election process; pre-election, during the election and post-election period. However, myriads of factors are responsible for turbulent transfer of political power from one regime to another¹⁵.

1. Electoral violence in the country is primarily due to the perception of politics and political office holder as investment and as an avenue for the acquisition of extraordinary wealth through corruption, which is otherwise not possible through any form of legitimate vocation and enterprise. As a result of this perception and reality, Nigerian politicians turn electioneering and elections into warfare in which violence and ethnic, religious and other forms of primordial sentiments and prejudices are employed. It is against this background that former President Olusegun Obasanjo counselled his party members to see the 2007 election as a do or die affair.¹⁶
2. Politics generally in Nigeria has been conducted with a certain amount of bitterness. It appears that a person belonging to a party becomes an enemy of another who belongs to a rival political party. Political parties are equivalent ... to, warring camps- elections are conducted with party thugs protecting the campaigners and this state of affairs has been described to have assume a pitch that no method would

¹² ICG, *Lessons from Nigeria's 2011 Elections*, (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2011).

¹³ Alemika, E.E (2011). "Post-Election Violence in Nigeria: Emerging Trend and Lessons, *CLEEN Foundation*, July.

¹⁴ Bidemi Badmus, *Post Electoral Violence and National Development in Nigeria*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316924133_Post_Electoral_Violence_and_National_Development_in_Nigeria, 2014, accessed on March 3rd, 2021.

¹⁵ Bidemi Badmus, *Post Electoral Violence and National Development in Nigeria*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316924133_Post_Electoral_Violence_and_National_Development_in_Nigeria, 2014, accessed on March 3rd, 2021.

¹⁶ Alemika, E.E (2011). "Post-Election Violence in Nigeria: Emerging Trend and Lessons, *CLEEN Foundation*, July.



be spared, however, vindictive or extreme by any rival political party as against another in order to score over one or another.¹⁷

From the foregoing, the attractiveness of public office engenders investment mentality. 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. Therefore, no amount is too much to use in instigating electoral violence, even expending the lives of opponents and valueless youths.

3. The nature of the Nigerian state and regimes contribute to endemic violence in the electoral process. The state is in effect privatized. It remains an enormous force but no longer a public force, no longer a reassuring presence guaranteeing the rule of law but a formidable threat to all except the few who control it, actually encouraging lawlessness and with little capacity to mediate conflicts in society. In the circumstance where the state is privatized, those in power will use violence and state repressive apparatuses to retain power. The people excluded from governance (especially in a society where politics is a license to oppress other citizens and to rob the public treasury with impunity) will resort to violence in their quest for office.
4. Ineffective law enforcement is another core contributory factor that encourages turbulent elections. Non enforcement of laws and non-adherence to same in the electoral process promotes violence during elections; due to lack of political will by the political class (Aluigba, 2008). Political actors, players, party supporters and political thugs violate the law that governs the rule of politicking with impunity due to inability of the government and other law enforcement bodies to compel obedience. It worthy to note that when the administrators of the political process are unwilling to enforce the rules, a lot of opportunities are created for violence and if the law does not prevail, it is tantamount to the absence of rules governing the conduct of elections.¹⁸
5. The weak legal framework in Nigeria forms the fulcrum upon which the culture of violence is built and sustained resulting in violence, arson and assassination. As Aiyede observed, when the rule of law is weak, the judicial system becomes ineffective and there are ineffective penalties that make the probability of punishment of offenders' low, thus creating a fragile and corrupt system.¹⁹
6. Poverty pervasiveness is another factor that hastens the occurrence of electoral violence in Nigeria. The scourge of poverty in Nigeria is an incontrovertible fact which results in hunger, ignorance, malnutrition, diseases, unemployment as well as general level of human hopelessness. The massive poverty that engulfs the body polity is a great asset to the politicians. The alarming rate of unemployment gives youth away as willing tools for the perpetration of violence with little financial inducement. In the words of Danjibo and Oladeji, the high spate of deprivation and human hopelessness of the Nigerian youths force them to take the readily available "job opportunity" –implementers of electoral violence.²⁰ The endemic poverty easily plays the gullible youths into the hands of unscrupulous politicians, who manipulate them by dangling irresistible baits for the youths to undertake

¹⁷ Anifowose, R. (1982) *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba Experience* Enugu – Nigeria and New York: NOK Publishers

¹⁸ Olayiwola, V.O. 2014. Turbulent Election History: An Appraisal of Precipitating Factors in Nigeria. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*. Vol. 5, No. 5.2 pp 1-18

¹⁹ Aiyede, E. R. 2007. Electoral Laws and the 2007 General Elections in Nigeria' *Journal of African elections* special issue; Nigeria's 2007 General Elections. volume 6, Number 2. October.

²⁰ N. D. Danjibo, and A. Oladeji, "Vote Buying in Nigeria: An Assessment of the 2007 Elections in Nigeria", *Journal of Africa Election*, Special Issue: Nigeria's 2007 General Elections. Volume 6, Number 2, October, 2007.



electoral violence. More often than not political violence is paid for, used as a tool by prominent Nigerians to bolster their political and financial positions.

7. Rigging is also a predisposing factor that easily makes the entire process violent. Experiences of the past conduct of elections reveals that subverting the electoral process through massive organized fraud do engender violent upheaval, before, during and after elections. The use of political thugs by politician to maneuver electoral process in perceived unflavored area does cause violence if resisted by the opposition or the citizenry. Also, when an unpopular candidate is declared the winner of election, violence always greeted such announcement.
8. The media indulgence in campaign of calumny, mudslinging and defamation or slanderous attack on other political actors cannot but be mentioned as a causative instrument for electoral violence. The media spread of sensational political and motivated opinions engender violence by succumbing to the influence of selfish politicians to use their outfit as propaganda launch pad.

All the factors discussed above, though not exhaustive, are causal factors triggering election related violence in Nigeria.

3.2 Effects of Post-Electoral Violence on Nigeria

In a democratic system where elections are devoid of crisis, long term disputes or political violence, are amicably resolved. Such system enhances the prospect for political stability, peace, development and continuity in governance. But where elections are characterized by violence, thuggery, intimidation, rigging, ballot box snatching and stuffing and other forms of electoral malpractices, they bring to question the very essence of democracy and compromise the prospects for national development.²¹

One of the principal functions of the modern state is that of protecting the territorial integrity of the state, lives and property of its citizenry and upliftment of the human condition. In fact, the promotion of human security has become the central focus of the new development paradigm because building of arms and ammunitions do not bring peace, security and political stability. Eradicating poverty, hunger, diseases and maintenance of peace through sustainable development programmes, hold the key to an enduring national security. Thus, a country that invests heavily on human security, which is integral to national development, may not have to spend much money and efforts in fighting crimes like: kidnapping, human trafficking, bombing, student unrest, political assassination, etc.²²

The Nigerian experience with general elections has shown that the political elite have not fully come to terms with the significance of elections for democratic sustenance and national development. More often than not, the elite have failed to play by the rules of competitive electoral politics which prioritizes politics of tolerance, conflict and consensus, bargaining and compromise. They see elections as warfare, characterized by gangsterism and political disorder. Political parties which organize for elections are also, like armband of men and women going to war, where there must be victors and the vanquished.

Elections have therefore become warfare, where it is a sin to lose. This dominant pattern of elections and electioneering threatens to tear the nation apart and put its tenuous peace at great risks. And these have been our experience with post-electoral violence in Nigeria. Taking cognizance of the foregoing, the implications of post-electoral violence on national development are examined as follows:

²¹ Ighodalo, A. 2012. Election Crisis, Liberal Democracy and National Security in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *European Scientific Journal*. Vol. 8, No.26, pp 1-16.

²² Ighodalo, A. 2012. Election Crisis, Liberal Democracy and National Security in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *European Scientific Journal*. Vol. 8, No.26, pp 1-16.



1. Electoral violence breeds insecurity as it is often characterized by loss of lives and properties as was the case during the November 2008 political violence in Jos, Nigeria. Over 500 people were killed, thousands displaced and properties worth billions of naira were burnt, looted or destroyed. This same instance applies to post-electoral violence. There is equally the recent harvest of deaths, due to post-presidential election violence leading to many victims from the three days rioting in twelve Northern States. The election-related violence in the northern part of the country “following the April 16 presidential election left more than 800 people dead, Human Rights Watch said”.²³
2. The post-election deaths followed the widespread protest by the supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammed Buhari from the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) over the re-election of President Goodluck Jonathan of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). The political protest which started peacefully, soon degenerated into what has been variously described as sectarian killings, violent riots as well as political terrorism. This incidence of post-presidential election violence was witnessed in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara States. “Relief officials estimate that more than 65,000 people have been displaced. ‘The April elections were heralded as among the fairest in Nigerian history, but they also were among the bloodiest’, said Corinne Dufka, Senior West African Researcher at Human Rights Watch”.²⁴
3. In the face of post-election violence, both the police and the military showed lack of capacity to effectively control it, showing that despite earlier experiences of electoral violence they were not prepared. In some places they were implicated in the excessive use of force and other serious abuses while responding to the rioting and sectarian violence. Human Rights Watch documented eight cases of alleged unlawful killing of unarmed residents by the police and soldiers in the cities of Zaria and Kaduna, and received credible reports of more than a dozen other. These are critical signs of national failure that hampers people’s peaceful existence in the state²⁵.
4. In addition to the insecurity, there are attendant costs like increased security votes and the resources spent on repairs of damaged infrastructure. These resources could have been better spent on human and social development and such trends adversely affect the social and economic wellbeing of the country.
5. It is axiomatic that development cannot occur in the absence of peace and security. The economy suffers in an atmosphere of insecurity and political instability.
6. Insecurity in the country has not only discouraged transnational corporations to invest, but has equally caused the established ones to divest by way of folding up their businesses. This is because investors are scared due to lack of security for their investment. Direct foreign investment is thus often lost in such circumstances which have contributed to the state of underdevelopment in Nigeria.
7. Electoral violence militates against the consolidation of democracy. This in turn impact on the social and economic well-being of the nation and creates imbalances or instances of *structural*

²³ S. Awofadeji, “Post-Election Violence Claimed 800 Lives”, *Thisday*, May 17, 2011, 3.

²⁴ S. Awofadeji, “Post-Election Violence Claimed 800 Lives”, *Thisday*, May 17, 2011, 3.

²⁵ Human Right Watch (2011) Nigeria: Post-Election Violence Killed 800.

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/16/nigeria-post-election-violence-killed-800>



8. Post-electoral violence has helped propagate the ongoing cycle of violence in the country. Acts of violence impact negatively on the children living in such societies. In line with the social learning theory, such children would likely end up being violent (Bandura and Walters 1963 in Ugiagbe, 2010). The ongoing violence by youths in the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria (which has witnessed considerable political violence) supports this.
9. Acts of electoral violence are likely to result in hostile goals like “*the desire for revenge*” in political opponents which could lead to conflict escalation. This perhaps explains why almost all political parties in Nigeria are involved in electoral violence.²⁶
10. The absence of political efficacy and stability, economic efficiency and pervasive social development owing to the disruptions of post-electoral violence since independence till present, lays the continued elusive search for genuine national development in Nigeria.

4. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that electoral violence happens before, during and after electioneering period in Nigeria. Many lives and property worth millions of naira have been lost. Electoral violence is caused in Nigeria by the political class, the electorate and the agencies of government that are saddled with the responsibility of conducting elections. The bane of electoral violence in Nigeria are insecurity, lack of development and death of innocent citizens. Electoral violence has made Nigeria far from reaching greater heights of national development. The political class, the electorate and the agencies of government conducting elections in Nigeria are to shun violence, to adhere strictly to the provisions of the electoral law as stipulated in the electoral act. People who lose elections should accept defeat without exhibiting acts of violence. People should be educated to seek redress in the court rather than take laws into their hands.

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²⁶ Ugiagbe, T.B. 2010. Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Implications for Security, Peace and Development. UN University for Peace: Peace and Conflict Monitor.



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