

Political Violence And Electoral Process In Nigeria: A Study of The First And Second Republics

Animashaun, Bashir Olalekan

Department Of History And International Studies

Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Animashaun,

Abstract: Since the introduction of elections as a mechanism in the governance process of Nigeria by the British colonial administration in the early years of the 20th century, there has been the association of the electoral process with political violence. This has been most manifest during the post- colonial era. This paper attempts to interrogate the nature and causative factors of electoral violence in Nigeria during the first and second republics in Nigeria. It further examines post- election violence in Nigeria in the first and second republics and contends that the inadequacy of electoral governance mechanism is a fundamental push factor that predisposes the political process in Nigeria to violence. This paper therefore contends that a special and central focus needs to be given to the management of elections before and after the casting of ballots and the declaration of results. It argues that while adequate legislation and implementation of same will help curtail pre- election violence, a credible election result derived from a transparent and fair electoral process will minimize the incidence of political violence. It is this that can guarantee a stable and sustainable democratic culture in Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigeria, Violence, Electoral governance.

Date of Submission: 16-09-2018

Date of acceptance: 01-10-2018

I. INTRODUCTION

Violence emanating from election has since the pre- independence era, become a recurring feature in Nigerian politics and has equally assumed a dangerous threat to the corporate existence of the country. While it is true that there was no major crises in the 1952 elections, there were however cases of subtle intimidation of the electorates especially in the Northern region by the emirs. In the case of the 1964 and 1983 elections, those who made up their minds to cling on to power at all costs did so at the expense of several lives and properties that were lost as a result of violence emanating from electoral discrepancies. This aspect of political violence which accompanies the electoral process though dates back to the pre-independence era, it was however first recorded in the general elections of 1964 and has been manifesting in different forms and degrees up to the 1979 and 1983 general elections. Ideally, operating a democratic system requires a process in which government is changed periodically and conventionally, through the mechanism of ballot boxes or elections. However, in most cases, as it often occurs in Nigeria, the aftermath of such exercises has been chaotic and volatile. It is therefore imperative to examine the issue of political violence in electoral process, within the context of Nigeria's political culture in order to understand the factors that determines the stability of the political system. The thrust of this paper is to appraise the outbreak of political violence that has characterized general elections in Nigeria's political history, with a particular focus on the first and second republics, and to examine the factors responsible for the spate of political violence in Nigeria with a view to proffering possible steps towards peaceful and process-led elections in the future.

For analytical convenience, the paper is divided into four parts. The first is the introduction the second part provides a conceptual clarification for the discourse. The third aspect deals with the historical perspective to political violence and elections in Nigeria's first and second republic, as a template for a general appraisal of the issue of political violence in Nigeria. While the fourth part forms the conclusion of the essay.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE, ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND ELECTORAL GOVERNANCE: A CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Violence is indeed circumscribed in social interaction, and as such is inevitable in human affairs. Its manifestation is reflective of the essence of the Hobbesian nature of man as it has equally being regarded as incidental to the basic character of social structures and processes.¹ In order to have a clear understanding of political violence and electoral violence it would be pertinent to begin by conceptualizing violence. Violence

refers to the unlawful use or threat of force and it takes different forms and patterns such as psychological, ethical and political with the latter involving forceful seizure of power or the illegitimate use of political power.² Violence also refers to the exercise of physical force to inflict injury or cause damage to a person's property.³ Inherent in the above definitions of violence are two basic things; the use of force and the abuse of another person's fundamental rights,

In conceptualizing political violence a range of theoretical explanations are offered and prominent among these theories are the liberal and Marxist theories of political violence. While the latter emphasized the role of the state in the use of open force in favor of the ruling classes; the former depict political violence as actual or potential threat to the state.⁴ The liberal theory also explains political violence as the excessive use of force on civilians in an attempt to ensure order.⁵ It is important to note that the above theories are explained within the ideological of Marxism and liberal democracy.⁶

Electoral violence is often used interchangeably with political violence. It is however noteworthy to point out that political violence is much more comprehensive than electoral violence which occurs in different kinds of political systems that may not necessarily be democratic. Thus, there is a distinguishing factor between political violence and electoral violence. According to Anifowoshe;

*Political violence is defined as the use of threat or physical act carried out by 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 is tend to modify the behavior of others in the existing arrangement of power structure that has some consequences for the political system.*⁷

In essence, political violence is carried out in the struggle for the acquisition of political power, while in some cases political violence is geared towards political consolidation. In either case, political violence is aimed at modifying the political behavior of individuals and group within a political system for some desired results.⁸

Electoral violence on the other hand, is a narrow aspects of political violence that is associated with the process of elections. This form of political violence occurs before, during or after elections. Electoral violence represents one of the greatest challenges of most democratizing societies. There are different manifestation of electoral violence and these includes arson, murder, abduction, assault, violent seizure and destructions of electoral materials.⁹ Interestingly these acts are perpetuated by individuals and groups with the intention of influencing the outcome of elections or deter elected officials from consolidating their positions after elections. According to Ogundiya;

*Electoral violence also includes all sorts of riots, demonstrations, party clashes, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery and kidnapping amongst others, spontaneous or not, which occur before, during and after elections. It could be regarded as election motivated crisis employed to alter, change or influence by force or coercion the electoral behavior of voters or voting patterns or possibly reverse electoral decisions in favor of particular individual, groups or political party.*¹⁰

The above definition, no doubt, aims at influencing the voting behavior of the electorate and changing electoral results in favor of an individual, groups or political party with the use of force, which often results to violence, fatal injuries, death and destructions of property. Electoral violence is a form of violence that is associated mainly with the process of elections in a given society precisely a democratic setup or in the process of democratic transition.¹¹

Electoral violence in Nigeria is a classic elite affair arising from the inordinate struggle for places in the structure of power that have often degenerated into open violence among ethno-communal groups or individuals who are deceived into believing that their interest are about to be jeopardized.¹² It is thus, imperative to note that political violence as the mold of electoral violence is associated with elections in the process of democratic transition or consolidation because of the often undesirable effects of political violence, elections are constructed with certain institutional and constitutional elements with the purpose of providing procedural certainty and to ensure order and balanced structure in an electoral outcome.

Electoral governance on the other hand refers to a process that starts with the enactment of legislation and continues with the administrative enforcement and judicial response and concludes when the process returns to the beginning, either through judicial interpretations or recommendations by a legislative body.¹³ In the view of Schedler and Mozaffar, electoral governance involves three levels, which include rule making that is, the design of institutions that defines the basic frame work of democratic elections. Rule application that is, once rules are made there is the great need for the rules to be implemented. Rule adjudication, this becomes necessary because disputes would naturally emerge regarding the conduct of elections especially the electoral officials and whether contestants have remained within the rules governing their conduct or not.¹⁴ Electoral governance could also mean the application of a dominant regime, defined by the citizens as stakeholders in the democratic process to the conduct of elections. This is the civic sphere that is the realm of stakeholders in the electoral process.¹⁵

In formulating and sustaining electoral governance in Nigeria, it can be readily mentioned that such elements as the level society, political parties, the state electoral bodies or umpires, the judiciary and the constitutional framework are all necessary ingredients. How these are formed over time in the conduct of election in Nigeria, has been a major point to consider in reflecting on recurring political violence that attend electoral outcomes in the country.

Political Violence in Nigeria: A Historical Overview

Political violence in Nigeria is as old as the nation itself. Beginning from the first republic or even before the nation gained independence, the aftermath of elections have always created uncertainty, fear and panic. What is remarkable about political violence in the first republic is that it was a vestige of the politics of colonialism. The colonial system which conceived of the amalgamation of 1914 was not sufficiently crystallized to produce a nation out of the artifice. This was not so clear until the 1954 general elections when the peoples of the Northern and Southern regions had reasons to relate politically. And when the people began to relate, the political terrain was already in a squall state, thereby setting the stage for Britain to take side rather than been in appellate position in the event of rivalry and competition between the two. It is important to note that, political violence associated with election and electoral process in Nigeria started with the 1959 federal elections designed by the British to facilitate the transition from colonial rule to independence. This position dotted the entire debate and struggle for independence. Independence of course was attained in 1960 and the political rivalry between the North and South did not simmer even when the attainment of independence was thought to have ended the old rivalries and political altercations.

It is significant to note that immediately after independence the political experience in Nigeria was particularly turbulent and this was as a result of several factors that include the precarious tripartite structure with strong regionalism; disparity in sizes and population of the three regions; three major regionally-based and tribally sustained political parties; cut throat competition amongst politicians most of whom had limited ideas about the art of politics and the constitution.¹⁶ Furthermore, most state activities that had the least political undertone or bearing were frustrated. The 1963 population census for instance ended up in crisis as it appeared more as a political exercise than a demographic study. This was because most of the regional leaders unduly falsified and inflated the population figures in preparation for the general elections which formed one of the basis of the electoral sharp practices that took place subsequently. Furthermore there were some ideological problems in some political parties as was with the case with the Action Group in 1962 when its *Democratic Socialism* created crisis in the Western Region thereby leading to the ruin of the regional legislature.¹⁷ The intra-regional cases in Western Nigeria later snowballed into a major political violence especially in the Western Region House of Assembly.

By 1964, political competition had become very severe and tense. Electoral deceit was so unbridled during this period that elections became meaningless and the results were stalemated. In most cases election results were suspicious due to lack of public confidence in the neutrality of the electoral body that is, the *Federal Electoral Commission* and its leadership as well as the ineffective and compromised policing system. The boycott of the 1964 General Election by the United Progressive Grand Alliance *U.P.G.A.* is a classic example of the lack of confidence in the electoral body and its leadership by some parties.¹⁸ It is important to point out that the aftermath of the 1964 federal elections dim into relative insignificance when compared to those that followed during the Western Region elections in 1965. The 1965 rescheduled regional elections in the Western Region turned the region into a "theater of war" between the coalition of NNDC and the NPC as well as the AG-UPGA. There were political disaffection and other electoral problems during and after the elections. The implication of the Western Region elections was that the outcome was not accepted as a true reflection of the choice of the electorate thus translating into a legitimacy crisis and led to the outbreak of protest and resistance by the electorate. The political acrimony and crisis generated by the post-election in the Western Region gave birth to arson, looting, massive destruction of lives and properties as well as a total breakdown of law and order. A state of emergency was declared in the Western region by the central government when the situation got out of control.¹⁹ The above not only affected the legitimacy of the newly constituted civilian government, it also paved the way for Military involvement in Nigerian politics. The immersion of the Military in Nigerian politics no doubt, led to the demise of the first Republic as well as democratic governance in Nigeria for thirteen years.

The Military after a prolonged rule resolved to return to democratic rule in 1979²⁰. It is important to note that party formation in the second republic was a mere resurrection of the parties that took part in the political process during the first republic. And just like in the first republic there was still the traces of the North-South dichotomy coupled with the Military governments preference for a particular party and candidate thus, setting the stage for a repeat of some of the political ills of the first republic and the outbreak of political violence along the lines of ethnic differences in the second republic.

Substantive Analysis of Political Violence in Nigeria

From the above historical survey of Nigerian political process, it is obvious that the root causes of political violence can be classified into systemic framework and political behavioral pattern of participants in the political scene. Each of these classifications has almost equal and significant effect on the direction of events before, during and after a political process. It should also be noted that these two classifications can also find a confluence where they both act together to produce fundamental chaos in a polity.

The Systemic Framework

This speaks directly to institutions and political agents that play active roles in a political system. For ease of reference, their positions must of course, be of operational significance. In Nigeria, the analysis of institutional culpability in political violence begins with the constitution of an electoral body saddled with the operational responsibility to see to the conduct of elections. As it is done in Nigeria, an electoral umpire is always appointed by the head of government. This head of government is often not impartial in his choice of who heads an electoral institution. In plain text, he would be interested in the character of his successor to the extent that he directs the electoral process. He may have plethora of reasons to justify his interest in his successor. This justification could be chequered, either for the right or wrong reasons. Most successful leaders would like to be succeeded by people they feel will continue their performing legacy, but such choice often may not be the choice of the people, hence the resort to colliding with electoral institutions to tamper with the results of elections. On the other hand, an out-going leader who is propelled by the quest to cover his atrocious past, is keen about who succeeds him. In this case he also would need to employ the services of the electoral institution as a tool to cover his tracts. The important point here is that the system does not guarantee the independence of the electoral body. The consequence of this is that the electorates are left only with the option to protest against the winners of elections forced on them. That was the situation in Oyo, Benue and Old Bendel states of Nigeria in the second republic.

The institutions saddle with maintenance of law and order can also serve as funnel for electoral violence. This becomes essential, as the above point, because these institutions are not independent of the executive arm of government which appoints them. In Nigeria, the Inspector General of Police *I.G.P* is appointed by the president who in turn also expects the *I.G.P* to supervise a political process. In a clear case of contingent dependency theory, the IG would often do the bidding of the presidency as was the case with Mr. Sunday Adewusi who in the discharge of his duties and responsibility, did the bidding of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (President then). The basis of political violence should be located in the scarcity of appellate institutions where the people can turn to seek redress. More, the Judicial Institutions also contribute to political violence in view of its often transcendental principle of justice. This was the situation when the Attorney General of the federation gave a re-interpretation of algebra which assumed $\frac{2}{3}$ of the 19 states in the federation to mean 12 states of 19 states. This event and the battery of the judiciary largely encouraged the military to take over of December, 1983.

Behavioral Pattern of Participants

Political power is so highly valued. It is important to capture control of the Nigeria state, this political leverage provides for the ruling class, an economic base. The politician use control of state power to amass wealth in an attempt to consolidate his material base to the extent that political power is now the established way to wealth. Those who win state power can have all the wealth they want even without working, while those who lose the struggle for state power cannot have security in the wealth they have made even by hard work thereby creating a lacuna between the rich and the poor. And the only way to become rich overnight is through the control of state power. Thus, the capture of state power inevitably becomes a matter of life and death. The enormity of power at the disposal of the regional premiers in the first republic for instance led to the leadership rivalry in the Western region between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief S.L.A. Akintola. The outcome of the rivalry eventually led to the outbreak of violence in the Western region.

Structurally, politics in Nigeria is designed to make people rich. Whether by way of salary or emolument, allowances and votes, from the councilors to the president, no one can be impoverished after traversing the land of blessing and pleasure. This is one reason why our politics is so intense, anarchic and violent. It is thus, a do or die situation. Nigeria's political history illustrates this, no sooner did Nigeria become independent that the high premium on power began to threaten it with disintegration. Our very first election was marked by lawless and violent campaigns and expectedly ended in serious crisis. Sooner ethnicity crept into this, what could not be done civilly, was done militarily and by 1966 the country was already on the precipice of collapse.

II. CONCLUSION

It is clear from the above that the Nigerian state has a long history of political violence which features most prominently after the conduct of elections that are brought with irregularities, manipulations, and the culpability of civil society, state institutions and economic groups. Elections it must be noted are procedural and process-led activities, which, when conducted in fair, transparent and systematic manners have the potential of resolving existing conflicts as well as providing a frame-work for all-inclusive political participation. This is why the efficiency and sufficiency of electoral governance are desirable, in order to bring about an election that is capable of reflecting the aspirations of the majority of the citizens. If the rule making, rule application and rule adjudication processes that characterize electoral governance are, well dispensed, the likelihood of elections being marred by violent outcomes, would be minimized, if not eliminated.

More importantly, institutional and constitution deficiency are the major hindrance to effective electoral governance that is capable of militating against post-electoral violence in Nigeria albeit most other third world countries. Therefore in order to put in place a viable and stable political system, attention should be paid to ensuring a proper electoral governance mechanism that would make the norms of electoral process rise above individual, group, sectarian and other interests. It is through this, that the possibility of engendering violent free elections in the future can be guaranteed.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1]. Anifowose, Remi, (1984) *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba experience*, London: Nok Publishers International, p. 1.
- [2]. Albert, I.O. (1994), "Urban Violence in Contemporary Africa: Some Theoretical Explorations" in I.O Albert, J. Adisa, T. Agbola and G. Herault (eds) *Urban Management and Urban Violence in Africa*, Ibadan: IFRA, pp9-20
- [3]. Afolabi. A.A (2003) "Electoral Violence and the Democratization Project: The Nigerian Experience," In Olasupo B.A. *Electoral Violence in Nigeria; Issues and Perspectives*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) p.79
- [4]. Arikpo, O (1967). *Development of Modern Nigeria*, Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books.
- [5]. Bola Ige, (1994), *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria, 1940-1979*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Plc. Pp407-410.
- [6]. Colen, D.L (1983): "Elections and Election Studies in Africa," in Yolimu Barango (ed) *Political Science Africa: A Critical Review*, UK: Zed
- [7]. Domenach, J.M. (1978), "The Ubiquity of Violence" in *International Social Science Journal*, 30(4) : pp.717-726
- [8]. Egwu, Samuel (2003): "Electoral Violence and Democratization Project. The Nigerian Experience," In Olasupo B.A (ed) *Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Issues and Perspectives*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) p. 88
- [9]. Frederick Peddler, (1979), *Main Currents of West African History 1940-1978* London: The Macmillan Press. Pp220-223
- [10]. Halloran. J.O (1978) "Mass Communication: Symptom or Cause of Violence" *International Science Journal*, 30(4): pp816-863
- [11]. Human Rights Watch Violence@hrw.org
- [12]. Joseph, R. (1991), *Democracy and Presidential politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books
- [13]. Kuna, M.J. (2001): *Violence and State formation: The case for Northern Nigeria*; Unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to the Department of Political Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto. P 169
- [14]. Kunle Amuwo, (1992) Historical Roots of the Nigerian Civil War: An Explanation" in Siyan Oyewso (ed), 1992, *Perspectives on the Nigerian Civil War*. Lagos: OAP pp1-18
- [15]. Mahmud, A.Y. (2008) Electoral Reforms in Nigeria retrieved from <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/reforms-in-nigeria.html>. Accessed 12/03/2018
- [16]. Mozaffar, S. and Schedler, A. (2002) "The Comparative Study of Electoral governance" in *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1.
- [17]. Nwabueze, B.O. (1994) *Nigeria '93', The Political Crisis and Solutions*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books
- [18]. Nyemutu, F.O and Emeka E.O. (2007), Electoral Violence and Role of the Police in Nigeria. *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria. Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA)* pp 398-400
- [19]. Ogundiya, S.I. and Baba, T.K. (2007) Electoral Violence and the Prospects of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria in *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria. Journal of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA)*, pp369-371
- [20]. Ogundiya, I.S., (2003) "Election Violence and the Democratization Project: The Nigerian Experience in B.A. Oladipupo (ed) *Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Issues and Perspectives*, FES

- [21]. Ojibo, O (1980) *Nigeria Returns to Civilian Rule*, Lagos: Tokin. P.18
- [22]. Oyediran, Oyeleye, (1989),” The 1983 Elections” in P.P.Ekeh, P.D.Cole and G.O.Olusanya (eds) *Nigeria Since Independence: The First Twenty Five Years, Vol. V. Politics and Constitutions*, Ibadan: Heinemann. Pp.165-182.
- [23]. Tamuno, T.N. (1991) *Peace and Violence in Nigeria*. The Panel on Nigeria since Independence History Project, Ibadan: University of Ibadan. p.3
- [24]. Waziri, M. (2002)“*A Discussion on why is the Electoral System Vulnerable to Abuse*”, Paper presented at Retreat on Electoral Process and Violence, 7th -10th February 2002, Abuja.

IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Animashaun,,,” Political Violence And Electoral Process In Nigeria: A Study of The First And Second Republics.” IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 23 no. 09, 2018, pp. 71-76.