

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Igbesi Emeke Francis¹, Obasi Chinonye Henrietta² & Akunne Philomena Eleje³

¹Department of Public Administration, School of Business Studies, Delta State Polytechnic
Ogwuashi-Uku, Delta State, Nigeria

²Department of Public Administration, School of Business Studies, Akanu Ibiam Federal
Polytechnic, Unwana, Afikpo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

³Department of Public Administration, School of Business Studies, Akanu Ibiam Federal
Polytechnic, Unwana, Afikpo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

igbesiemeke@gmail.com¹

chinonyeobasi516@yahoo.com²

philomenaokoisu@email.com³

Abstract

Nigeria's electoral system and process has been characterized by irregularities, rigging, destruction of lives and properties of opposing groups, and other demonstration of characters that ridicule cardinal objective of democracy, all in a bid to influence outcome of elections for personal gains. This paper examines electoral violence and national development in Nigeria. The paper adopted the descriptive analytical approach. This study found out that electoral violence is seen as a strategy for employment during elections and the use of weapons during elections have an aftermath effect on the national development. The researchers made some recommendations. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has to take conscious and strategic actions against electoral violence in Nigeria, appropriate security network and intelligence should be organized to monitor electoral activities of the country to mitigate incidences of violence. The Independent National Electoral Commission should conduct free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria while the political parties and their candidates should ensure strict compliance with electoral regulations of the country.

Key Words: Democracy; Election; Electoral Violence; National Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Electoral violence has been part of human history, present in the history of all humanity for ages. It is an endemic feature of most of the developing world political systems particularly in developing countries, like Nigeria, where politics has become an essential feature of the people's means of achieving economic wealth. (Obakhedo, 2011) posit that the nation's political history is replete with instances of electoral violence. To him, since Nigeria became independent on 1st October, 1960, the history of elections has been written in violence. The nation's post-independence history has been described by the Human Right Watch (2007) as being overshadowed by the depredations of a series of corrupt, abusive and unaccountable government. The above analysis therefore poses serious dangers to the national security of the country integrity and has pose serious danger, to regional security due to its spill over syndrome and due to strategic political cum; economic position of Nigeria in West Africa sub-region. In other for the right choice of the people to be made towards who will represent them in political offices, election process needs to be free and fair. Nigeria being the giant of Africa needs to live up to the standard with its democracy.

Electoral 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) 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 security.

Ani & Nwanaju (2011) observed that at independence, electoral violence 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 electoral 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. Therefore, the basic thrust of this paper is to examine the electoral violence in Nigeria and its effect on national development.

Research Objective

The main objective of this research is to examine Electoral Violence on National Development, using Nigeria as a study area.

Methodology

The research makes use of descriptive method to analyse the study of Electoral violence on National Development. Secondary data were applied in the analysis of the electoral violence on national development in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Electoral violence in Nigeria can be explained by using the psychological theories especially (Ted Gurr's, 1980) theory of relative deprivation. The centrality of the theory rests 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 gap 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 is 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. al, 2016). The Frustration Aggression theory is accredited to Dollard and colleagues. The theory was developed in 1939 when Dollard and colleagues published a monograph on aggression, which later was known as the frustration-aggression theory.

Assumptions of the Theory

- a. Aggression is always the consequence of frustration
- b. The occurrence of aggressive actions always presumes the existence of frustration and conversely, and that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression.
- c. Frustration aggression reflects the reasons for electoral violence because men who want to live beyond their social means do not accept their limitation in defeat this results into violence as the last resort in order to live beyond their social means.
- d. Frustration and aggression comes into play when a certain aspirant is power hungry and possibly realizes the indications that he/she may possibly lose to the rival, thereby adopting vehemence for their own personal gains.

The Relative Deprivation Theory is a theory that explains the subjective dissatisfaction caused by one person's relative position to the situation or position of another. The pressure of society to which people belong – encourages them to participate in political and socio-economic activities. When this is not possible, a person begins to compare his or her own position with the situation or position of another. For many people, relative deprivation means lack of resources or time to support certain lifestyles, activities and amenities that individuals or groups have become accustomed to. Poverty and social

exclusion are features associated with Relative Deprivation Theory. The term is used in social sciences to express feelings or forms of economic, social or political deprivations. Relative Deprivation Theory is often cited as the major reason for the emergence of social movements, which in the extreme leads to politics, riots, revolution and war. For the benefit of hindsight, the emergence of Relative Deprivation Theory is associated with two American Sociologists - Garry Runciman & Ted Robert Gurr (1934). Both stressed on fraternal deprivation, selfish deprivation and frustration aggression mechanism to explain the Relative Deprivation Theory. They went on to add that if an obstacle or barrier is placed on the way of people that obstructs or hinders them from achieving their demands and goals, they will be subject to relative deprivation. In this situation, they uphold that the natural response of those obstructed or hindered is to damage the source of the barrier.

In furtherance of the above, it was Ted Robert Gurr who brought into focus the linkage between political (electoral) violence and Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT) to which he did in his book – “Why Men Rebel”. In this book, Gurr succinctly explains the linkage between Relative Deprivation and political violence; and further discusses why people commit political violence and how regimes respond to violence. Gurr who is not favorably disposed towards frustration aggression as the main source of electoral violence further examines in the book whether the primary source of the human capacity for violence is frustration, which the Frustration Aggression Theory posits. He concluded that frustration does not always lead to violence, but if someone or a group is/are exposed to frustration for a long time, it often leads to anger and ultimately violence (Gurr, 1970) Though this study concurs with the views of Gurr above on the linkage between deprivation and electoral violence as a pent-up energy, yet it should be stated that very few political violence is a function of response or reaction towards damaging and clearing sources of barriers caused by prolonged deprivation. None-the-less, the theory is appropriate as a theoretical framework for analysis of limited numbers of electoral violence in Nigeria.

Empirical Review

Nwobashi, (2015) in a study “Electoral Violence in Nigeria” sees electoral violence as the use of illegitimate force of any kind prohibited by the state (law) to achieve political ends. This may be true, correct and acceptable if it has to do with an 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.

In a related study, Nkwede, & Nwobashi, (2011) defined electoral 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. It was Nigeria's pride that she achieved her independence with minimum disturbances; but, it is rather unfortunate that after independence Nigeria has been gravitating in a spiral of electoral violence. This problem deteriorated in the elections conducted immediately after independence in the 1960s. (Akubo, 2006) affirm that the roles played by political parties are vital in every nation's democratization. The cardinal and strategic roles of this essential and fundamental institution of democratization which is germane to its growth are central to the achievements and failures of democratic politics. “The study carefully looked at the relationship between political parties in the democratic consolidation of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, with heavy reliance on secondary data supported by the analytical approach. The culminations of the study are the problems that have threatened the consolidation of democracy since the beginning of the fourth republic, namely the lack of institutionalization and personalization of political parties; godfatherism; intra-party conflict within political parties and ongoing party/political abuse.” Nigeria's party system is already fragile and unstable, with no clear signs of benefit to consolidating democracy.

During the 2019, 2023 general elections evidence of vote buying was recorded in polling units across the countries; evidence of vote buying is as a result of widespread of poverty and weaponization of poverty for political gains. Any chaos is an opportunity to settle scores and exact revenge on personal foes. These adversely affect the development of the country.

Conceptual Clarification

Democracy

Lambe, (2022) opined that Democracy is defined as a system of government that gives preference to and strengthens citizens' decision-making, and thereby, promotes equal participation of local citizens in securing and building their nation for the collective good of all, while upholding the principles of justice, peace and the rule of law

Developing a working definition of the term as “the expression of the universal human quest for autonomy,” Sanford argues that democracy signified “rule by the people” from the earliest period, which upholds the belief in autonomy or self-determination for individuals and group to which they belong. Hence, he pinpoints that “democracy offers the radically different promise that freedom need not be sacrificed for order because the constitution guaranteeing both is supported not by force alone, but also by the express and regular consent of the governed” (Sesan, 2012).

Election

Election remains the essential elements of democracy due to its allowance of popular participation; more so, it is the only acceptable means of choosing representatives in a democratic system. It allows for systematic and peaceful change of leaders and representation. The concept of election is associated with several meanings. On a higher intellectual plane election is defined as 'the process of selecting the officers or representatives of an organization or group by the vote of its qualified members' (quoted in Nwolise, 2007). Such an election may be in a university seeking a vice-chancellor, a corporate organisation choosing a chairman, a political party conducting its primaries to choose its standard bearer for a presidential contest, a nation wanting to choose its president, or an international organisation selecting its secretary general.

The electoral process has been categorized into three significant groupings; these include before the election activity (polling centre delimitation, registration of voters', political party registration, the nomination of candidates, the processes of campaigns, media activities, voter education, etc.); during the election activity (management of polling stations, secret balloting, ballot boxes, and ballot papers, materials for the election, counting the votes, monitoring of elections, etc.); and after the election activity (announcing the results, after election assessment, and disputes arising from the conduct of the election (Sisk, 2008, UNDP 2009, Adoke 2011). To a great extent, the level of a society's culture of politics, participation, and governance are determinants of the type of electoral conduct and contest in that society.

Electoral Violence

Electoral 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) observed that “electoral 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, electoral violence “takes place in the process of power struggle aimed at certain very players in the political system.

Electoral 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). According to (Gurr, 1970) Electoral 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.

The term electoral violence therefore can be construed to mean any act of violence perpetrated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post-election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process, or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with the electoral processes (Ladan, 2006). Fischer, 2002 defines 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.

In terms of motivation, violence is usually intended to influence the outcome of an election. The specific type of violence employed can take a variety of forms, but it is temporally close to Election Day. The perpetrators of violence are generally actors who have a vested interest in the election outcome, such as members of the state security apparatus (police, military, etc.), militias that are loyal to particular parties, and rank-and-file party supporters. For this subject, electoral violence can be “understood as a coercive force, directed towards electoral actors or objects that occur in the context of electoral competition... [It] can occur before, during or after elections and it can target a variety of actors, including candidates, activists, poll workers, election observers, journalists and voters.

Development

In his contribution on the concept of development, (Seers, 2019) argues that the best way to find out what development means is to answer such questions as: What has been happening to society, what has been to poverty, what has been happening to infrastructures and what has been happening to inequality? If all these mentioned are on the decline from high, then it means that development has not taken place. He argues that the mere increase in per capita income does not mean that a country is developed. The word development connotes too many things following its usage by so many disciplines. But in this restricted application, development is the ability of a people within a given area to manage the local natural resources within their local environment effectively to induce positive changes that would enhance the quality of their lives and their economic well-being.

Naomi, (2015) believes that development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life). (Rodney, 2015) in his submission that development in any human society is a many sided process; he explains that at the level of the individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being while at the level of social groups, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. According to Sapru, (2012), development is a continuously changing and dynamic concept that has taking different shapes and dimension over the years. He explains that the nature of development as seen in the early 1990s differs considerably from what was obtained in the early 1950s and even in the contemporary society. Development is a process of increasing real per capita income and engineering substantial positive transformation in the various sectors of the economy. Development represents advancement, a change that yields tremendous improvement in the overall living standard of the greater number of people in a given society. Development is the harnessing of human and material resources available to the society for the benefit of all members of the society. It leads to the fulfilment of societal ideas considered relevant to the needs and aspirations of the society.

Causes of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

- i. **Poverty:** Poverty is the principal cause of political, social and economic conflict in Nigeria. Poverty in the midst of plenty; creates disaffection among the populace and leads them toward violent behaviour. It constraints the ability of the people to make independent choices and participate actively in decision making. It reduces their self-esteem and ability to extract accountability from those they elect.

- ii. **Unemployment:** Unemployment provides a fertile ground for the recruitment of the youths into an army of political thugs. As a result, these youths feed on the crumbs that fell from the tables of the politicians, who in-turn used them as thugs to perpetuate political and electoral violence.
- iii. **Godfatherism and Party Politics:** Some political parties are incapable of organizing themselves in line with democratic requirements for electoral conduct. This challenge introduces tension and hostilities into the electoral system practice as some political elites regarded as godfathers take over control of the parties and influence their decisions. These political godfathers influence the choice of party delegates who vote to select leaders of the parties as well as candidates at the party's primaries (Nkwede, Ibeogu & Nwankwo, 2014). By controlling the delegates, the godfathers decide who should become the party's leaders as well who gets the nomination to contest for elective positions
- iv. **Absence of Political Tolerance:** Political intolerance and the tendency to see election as a do or die affair also contribute to electoral violence at the detriment of democratic stability. Hardly do election losers in Nigeria accept the verdict of the ballot box. Our politicians in Nigeria should learn lesson from the developed nations where losers of election embrace and congratulate those who defeat them in elections. Personal bitterness and existing rivalry between two contenders can eventually degenerate into serious political violence in Nigeria.
- v. **Sit-Tight Syndrome:** In Nigeria, Leaders enjoy the benefits of governance and therefore are most times reluctant to leave the position. Violent activities occur in situations where it is envisaged that there is the probability of replacing the incumbent leadership of a state and where such incumbent is not ready to relinquish power. This scenario could be as a result of the dominance of one party or the attitude of intolerance of opposition.
- vi. **The Administration of Elections by Electoral Bodies:** Electoral management bodies play significant roles in ensuring the effective management of elections and ensuring credibility, fairness and success of elections. If such a body behaves in a manner that cast doubts on the otherwise fairness and credibility of an election, the ensuing reactions and discontents may result in conflict when election results are declared.
- vii. **The Nature of the Electoral and Party System:** These are key factors that can exacerbate or moderate the occurrence of violence in the process of an election since they directly affect the character and political ideology of the party. The level to which these systems are viewed as just, equitable, inclusive, and democratic may control or mitigate the likelihood of eruption of violence.

The Effects of Electoral Violence on National Development

- i. **False Democracy:** Though election alone does not make government work optimally, the amount of loyalty given to government who get power illegally affects the peoples input into the government. The distrust the people have in the government makes them lose faith in the government.
- ii. **Lives and Property Loss:** The amount of property been lost or damaged during election and the lives expounded to violence could increase if not properly checked.
- iii. **Social Interrelationship:** The violence negates peaceful coexistence and reduces the respect individuals have for each other Lives. In a society whereby lives can easily be taken, crime escalation and vices will follow suit.
- iv. **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).

- v. **Ethnic Tension and Crisis:** Election is always characterized with the employment of ethnicity, superiority, marginalization and secession discussion this therefore, could be triggered during election to cause civil war and crisis.
- vi. **Overall Escalation of Conflict:** The tension during election crisis and violence could instigate wider conflicts between or amongst various groups. The loser and the winner conflict might escalate into full grown national crisis.
- vii. **Disruption of Educational Activities:** Electoral 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).
- viii. **Overall Development of the Country is Affected:** It has been noted that various elements employed during election to cause crisis move further to carry out vices and operations on their own hereby causing havoc to the state.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, attempt has been made to examine how electoral violence undermines national development since Nigeria attained her independence. The researchers proposed following recommendations

1. The youth should be engaged through job creation. This is to distract them from violence as idle mind is the devil's workshop.
2. Godfatherism and party politics should be avoided since some of the electoral violence are traceable to that.
3. Nigerian politicians should imbibe with the culture of tolerance such will make them not to see politics as do or die affair rather to accept the outcome of the election with utmost good faith.
4. Only men of integrity be appointed as members of the electoral commission (INEC)
5. 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 electoral violence.
6. The Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and relevant agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should embark on vigorous education and value-orientation and re-orientation aimed at repositioning democratic institutions and the citizenry.
7. Government and judicial authorities should carry out prosecutions of persons implicated in electoral violence whatever their political affiliations; those prosecuted should include persons who ordered or organized the violence as well as those who carried it out.

References

- Adebanwi, V. I. (2004). Democracy and Violence: Challenges of communal Clashes in Adigun, A. Diamond, E. & Onwude, E. (eds.) *Nigeria's Struggle for Democracy and Good Governance*. Ibadan; University Press pp. 327-348.
- Akubo, O. (2006). *Ethnic Conflicts and Citizenship Crisis in the Central Region*. Lagos: Eddy Asae Nigeria Press.
- Ani, K. J. & Nwanaju (2011). Post-Conflict Inter-Group Forgiveness: Tool for Sustainable National Peace and Development in Nigeria. Paper Presented at Fourth International Conference on Research and Development held at the University of Lome, Republic of Togo from June 1-2.
- Aver, T. T. Nnorom, K. C. & Targba, A. (2013). Political Violence and its effects on Social Development in Nigeria, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3 (17), 261-266
- Dugan, M. A. (2004). Aggression Retrieved 16th March 2019, from <http://www.beyondint.ractability.org/essay/aggression>

- Gurr, T. (1980). *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Gurr, T. T. (1970). *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Johnmary, A. K. (2012). Political Violence in Nigeria and Peaceful Political Communication for Sustainable National Democracy in Wilson, D. (Ed). *The Media, Terrorism and Political Communication in Nigeria*. Uyo: BSM Resources Ltd pp. 140-148.
- IFes White Paper.<http://unpan1.un.org> Human Right Watch (2007) Election or Selection? Human Right Abuse and Threats to free and Fair Election in Nigeria. <http://www.hrn.org>
- Lambe, O. E (2022). Political Conflict and Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Implications on National Security. *IJPAS* Vol. 12. pp. 54-65
- Nkwede, J .O, Ibeogu, S, & Nwankwo, O. (2014). Political Godfatherism and Governance in a Developing Democracy: Insight from Nigeria. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(4), 137-143.
- Nkwede, J. O. & Nwobashi, H. N. (2011). Political Violence in Nigeria: Implications for a Developing Democracy. *Nigerian Journal of Business*, 5(1), 157-167.
- Nweke, E. N. (2003). Political Conflicts in Nigeria in Odo, S. I. & Onuoha, J. (Eds.) *Peace and Conflict Studies in Africa*. Enugu: Jones Communication Publishers
- Nwolise, O. B. C. (2007). Electoral Violence and Nigeria's 2007 Elections” *Journal of African Studies* 6(2).
- Obakhedo, N. (2011). Curbing Electoral Violence in Nigeria: The Imperative of Political Education. *Journal of African Research Review*, Vol. 5 (5) No. 22. Pp. 1.
- Ogar, J. N., Ogar, T. E., & Anyim, M. N. M. (2016). Selected Issues in Biomedical Ethics and its Social Implications: African Consideration. *International Journal of Research*, 5.
- Ogar, J. N., Ogar, T. E., & Bassey, S. A. (2018). Ambivalence Human Nature and Social Justice. *UCT Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 6(02), 63-67.
- Ojo, O. M. (2014). Electoral Security and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. In Ikuejube, G & Olupayimo, D. Z. (eds.) *Nigeria's Internal Security Challenges: Strategies For Sustainable Development*, Ibadan, John Archers.
- Rodney, W. (2015). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Abuja: Panaf Publishing Inc. Limited.
- Sapru, R. K, (2012). *Development Administering*, New Delphi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.
- Seer, D. (2019). The Meaning of Development, *International Development Review* 11(4).
- Segun J. (2013). Democracy and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria: Implications for National Development,. *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*, 7 (3).
- Sesan, O. (2012, Sept. 27) Voter Apathy Dangerous for Democracy. *The Punch*, p. 7.
- Sisk (2009) UNDP, Elections and Conflict Prevention. “A Guide to Analysis, Planning and Programming”.