
Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Democratic Experience: A Survey of South-South Geo-Political Zone

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ABSTRACT: *Incontestably, election constitutes the central process of instituting a government in any democratic system through the competitive vote of the electorate. This competition can either be peaceful as obtainable in most developed democracies, or it could be violent, as prevalent in most African States, including Nigeria. Since the return of civilian rule in 1999, the electoral process in Nigeria has been replete with violence as groups engage in the struggle to capture state power. This paper explored the prevalence of electoral violence in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019 with evidences from the South-South geo-political zone. Observably, the juiciness of political offices has raised the premium of politics such that competition for political power becomes ruthless and normless in Nigerian, thus making electoral contests akin to warfare in which lives and property are lost and destroyed. The paper ascribed the recurring and high level of political violence in the country to over-zealousness and desperation of political gladiators to win elections or remain in office at all cost. From the investigative and analytical outcome, the paper recommended, inter alia, a reduction in the financial attractiveness of political offices, handing down of stiffer penalties to perpetrators of electoral violence by the government so as to deter others from demonstrating such acts in the future as well as effectively educating the citizens on the dangers of electoral violence and its effects on democratic stability in the country.*

KEYWORDS: Democracy, electoral violence, political gladiator, political power, South-South.

INTRODUCTION

Elections are held in nearly all countries in the contemporary world with the aim of allowing for peaceful transfer of political power. Yet, elections held outside of consolidated democracies are often accompanied by substantial violence. In the Nigerian context, political violence, especially electoral violence has become ingrained in the political system such that every election is greeted with anxiety. Obviously, studies by scholars such as Albert (2007), Olajuyigbe (2010), Adesote and Abimbola (2014), Ikpe (2015), Egobueze and Ojirika (2017), Joab-Peterside (2018), Akpan and Onya (2019), Obiam (2021) among others have shown that over the years, electoral violence has been a recurring decimal in Nigeria and, disappointingly too, the various strategies adopted to curb the menace have not yielded much success. It is therefore necessary to explicate this problem for effective understanding and for proffering of an enduring solution.

If election is a process designed to produce governments for democratic societies, then it can function best under conditions of cooperation, compromise, understanding, orderliness, constitutionality and legality. It is only under these conditions that citizens' preferences could be

maximized. Violence brings about intimidation of voters and contestants, in which case the outcome of such an election will not reflect the preferences of the people. If democracy is, therefore, the rule of the people, then electoral violence violates these conditions. Political violence in election always goes hand in hand with electoral malpractices, which is the reason it is destructive of democracy.

Electoral competitions in Nigeria often result to violent conflicts in which lives and property are lost and destroyed. Political violence manifests in various forms such as maiming, acid bathe, arson, bearings and other such violent acts. Indeed, political killings or assassinations are very serious forms of political violence. In Nigeria, politics is often conceived in zero-sum terms which makes it a 'do-or-die affair' and prosecuted with all amount of seriousness and deadliness, using every available strategies, including murder.

Democracy is a system of rule in which every qualified citizen has the right to participate in the ruling process, either directly or indirectly through representatives elected by them. Election, as the process through which individuals and parties interested in holding political power contest for the people's votes, constitutes the central process of instituting a government in any democratic system. This competition can either be peaceful and orderly, as it is the case in most of the developed democracies, or it could be deadly violent, as is the case with democratic elections in most African States, including Nigeria.

However, it is worth pointing out that political violence is not limited to the electoral arena. Political violence could arise out of disagreement with government policies, or if a group feels unjustly treated in the distribution of amenities, like the situation in the Niger Delta. Whichever form and dimension it takes, political violence is insalubrious to political stability in general and democratic stability in particular. This paper will focus more on political violence in the electoral arena with the survey of Nigeria's South-South geo-political zone.

Understanding Violence and Electoral Violence

The concept of violence has been examined by scholars in diverse perspectives. For instance, Etannibi (2011) opined that violence involves direct physical hurt or harm to someone's bodily integrity (violation as in torture, rape, mutilation, beating) and ultimately live itself (killing). It can be a result of an aggressive attitude (or impulse) or instrumental behaviour meant to injure or destroy human beings to achieve a variety of ends, such as enforcing (or avoiding) dominance. Moreover, violence has to do with aggressive actions from person/persons or party/parties which are imposed onto another and could, therefore, be caused by someone intending to change a government or situation.

Violence, in the words of Bamgbose (2012) is an act of aggression that leads to inflicting injury on persons, destruction of properties and causing pandemonium within a given social gathering, community or society. This implies 'destructive aggression' which entails the use of physical force to injure persons or property. Put differently, violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation.

On the other hand, electoral violence is a component of political violence, which is broader in perspective, and encompasses or relates to violence that is political. Put differently, political violence could arise out of a myriad of factors, but political violence that arises specifically from the conduct of elections and the objective of which is to influence the outcome of elections can be described as electoral violence. As observed by Ochoche (1997), any attempt at any stage of the electoral process to corrupt, influence or determine the outcome of an election beyond what it would have been objectively, does damage to the election and amount to electoral violence. According to Ujo (2007), it is perpetrated in the course of political activities including pre, during and post-election periods, and may include thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process, or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes.

For Albert (2007), electoral violence has to do with all forms of organized acts or threats - physical, psychological, and structural - aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process. International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) (2011) defined electoral violence as any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at any person or property involved in the election process, or at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period.

Electoral violence, as an aspect of political violence, is specifically referred to physical violence and coercive intimidation directly tied to impeding electoral contest or to an announced electoral result. It is, therefore, an isolated harm perpetrated by and/or through the mobilisation of private security outfits, ethnic militias, thugs, community vigilante groups and privatisation of security with serious implications for electoral democracy (Ikpe, 2015). In effect, for violence to be political there must be the intent to affect the political process, just like any other type of political participation.

The foregoing conceptualizations of electoral violence typically capture the deeper nature and stages of electoral violence in Nigeria especially since the birth of the Fourth Republic in 1999. The principal mode of manifestation of electoral violence in Nigeria is thuggery which denotes the use or threat of use of physical violence to intimidate political opponents and voters during election periods. Thuggery comprises several bestial and criminal activities such as beatings, maiming, arson, kidnappings and murders. Indeed, thuggery captures the entire essence of electoral violence.

Categories and Stages of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Electoral violence can be categorised according to their time of occurrence. Consequently, Ikpe (2008) classified electoral violence into four categories, viz:

(i) Pre-election Violence: This violence occurs before election which various aspirants declare their interest to run for certain offices. Aspirants will begin to eliminate or threaten each other so as to reduce the number of real rivals in the field. This pre-election violence is usually perpetrated by members of the same political parties and their supporters before and during the primaries.

(ii) **Election Violence:** This is the type of violence that occurs between the conclusion of primaries and the conduct of the main election. The parties' flag bearers are known and they are all engaged in the mobilization of support through vigorous campaign activities. The target of violence at this time is usually the active members of the rival parties. That is, members or rival parties and candidates in the respective constituencies attack each other. This reaches the climax on the voting day where the attacks are extended to non-partisan supporters (voters) of the different parties. Usually, violence at this stage is initiated to scare opponents' supporters. For instance, in one of the transition elections under the Babangida regime in which the Open Ballot System (OBS) was used, a candidate took a short gun and went to the opponent's supporters (Ikpe, 2000). Violence will also emanate from attempts by party thugs to rig election, intimidate electoral officers, stuff the ballot boxes with fake ballots, or try to escape with the ballot boxes. It is at this stage that the state could be officially and non-officially involved in electoral violence through the use of security officers to intimidate opponents of the ruling party. In the First Republic, during the 1983 election in the former Cross River State, there was a case where a naval boat intercepted a boatful of ballot boxes being taken from Calabar to the mainland part of the State (now Akwa Ibom State) by some top National Party of Nigeria (NPN) members. The NPN officials and the electoral materials were handed over to the Police who, rather than prosecute them, provided official escort for the journey. In the Fourth Republic, there have been many reports of similar situations during elections all over the country, especially from 2003 elections as security personnel detailed to maintain order at election venues often turns partisans.

(iii) **Post-election Violence:** This occurs after the announcement of an election result and the parties not favoured by the result attack the opponents. When a popular candidate with the large number of votes wins election, there is no need to be violent; the whole constituency will rejoice for they have successfully elected the candidate they wanted. If the minority starts a problem, it will only be a storm in a tea-cup. But when an unpopular candidate is announced, contrary to the will of the majority, there is that tendency for widespread violence. For instance, when in 1983 in Ondo State, NPN flag bearer, Akin Omoboriowo, supported by the federal might, was declared winner of the gubernatorial election contrary to the wishes of the Ondo electorate, large-scale violence and wanton destruction greeted the announcement. Omoboriowo had to flee to Lagos for safety. When he returned to Ondo State after some weeks he was massively guarded by security forces. This is how he lived until the court reversed his victory (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985).

Similarly, the announcement of the April 2011 Presidential election results by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in which the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Goodluck Jonathan was declared the winner led to post-electoral violence, especially in some parts of Northern Nigeria, such as Bauchi, Yobe, Maiduguri, Kaduna among others (Abimbola and Adesote (2012). In Bauchi, for instance, 10 Youth Corp members, a Divisional Crime Office (DOC) and a policewoman lost their lives. Over 4,500 people were displaced. Four INEC offices were equally vandalized in Bauchi, Dambam, Misau and Jama Local Government Areas while 500 laptops used for the voter registration exercise were looted by the irate youth (Sabiu, 2011).

(iv) **Godfather-godson Violence:** This form of violence is peculiar to Nigeria's Fourth Republic. When godfathers sponsor their godsons for political offices, they enter into contracts which will enable the godfathers to control aspects of the government. After elections are won and

government instituted, the godsons often find the godfathers overbearing and so breach the contract to exert their control as the offices demand. The godfathers will move against their godsons and conflict, some of which result to violence, will ensue. The Fourth Republic has witnessed these ugly trends from inception soon after the governors were sworn-in on 29 May, 1999. Prominent cases include Senator Jim Nwobodo vs Governor Chimaroke Nnamani (Enugu State); Senator Ali Sherif vs Governor Mala Kachalah (Borno State); Dr Olusola Saraki vs Governor Mohammed Lawal (Kwara State); Lamidi Adedibu vs Governor Rasheed Ladoja (Oyo State); Alhaji Abubakar Rimi vs Governor Rabi'u Kwankwaso (Kano State), and the ideal model, Emeka Offor vs Governor Chinwoke Mbadinuju and Chris Uba vs Chris Ngige (Anambra State). Both Offor and Uba had unleashed wanton violence and destruction in Anambra State such that, at some point, the state was ungovernable.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical base of this paper is tied to the pluralist theory as popularized by Cohen (1996). The theory posits that conflict is inevitable in a pluralist political society where various groups struggle for political power. A plural society is one in which there is existence of segmented sociological groups which can establish effective cultural and political cohesion within the society, on the basis of that group identity. Sometimes these cohesions are artificially created by the exigency of the political conditions (Nnoli, 1989); sometimes they are direct and primordial (Geertz, 1996). Competition between plural groups takes place largely in the political arena, but the dimension of conflict generated by this competition becomes even more complex in democracies, particularly new ones, where such diversities are the bases for political parties formation, identification and competition (Bell, 1996).

In Nigeria specifically and Africa in general, the leaders of the victorious groups in the competition use state power and other benefits that go with it to patronize its members, which further aggravates acrimonious relationships between the groups (Barongo, 1987). This was the situation in the First and Second Republics. Although parties in the Fourth Republic have reduced their degree of ethnic identification, political elites still claim the right to positions/offices on the basis of ethnic, sectional or geo-political identities, and ethnicity still plays a dominant role in mobilizing electoral support for candidates. Under such conditions, conflicts during elections are inevitable.

According to Abah and Nwoku (2015), the juiciness of political offices raises the premium of politics such that competition for political power becomes ruthless and normless. Furthermore, due to the inability of the state to mediate in political conflicts as a result of excessive factionalization of the ruling class, political competitions have turned to something akin to warfare. As rightly stated by Diamond (1982, p. 66), the Nigerian state is:

The primary locus of national wealth, the chief routes of access to the resources of opportunities of class formation ... those who aspire to positions of the dominant class must aspire to political power and the basis of class formation in political power results in an extra-ordinary premium for political power.

The explanatory value of the pluralist theory is obvious as it presents a more holistic picture of electoral violence in Nigeria. The reason is that, in the struggle to capture state power, political

elites exploit the pluralist characteristics of Nigerian society and their consequences in the polity, particularly ethnicity and religion. These are used to mobilize political support for the different elite factions (Barongo, 1987; Ikpe, 2000). In this case, the pluralistic nature of Nigerian society as a source of conflict, secondarily, depends on elite manipulations to gain political power for personal aggrandizement. The premium for political power is raised to a level whereby any imaginable strategy for its capture, no matter how fraudulent and bestial, is considered appropriate by the contesting factions. A situation in which the ruling party is determined to entrench itself in power to the detriment of the opposition that also vigorously seeks power to enhance its economic and social status will inevitably result in an irrational and tempestuous struggle for power that will be difficult to mediate.

In essence, before electoral violence erupts, something must have been done by one or both parties in the polity to ignite it; one party must perceive the other to be manipulating the electoral process to achieve some advantages. The attempt by the other party to counter these advantages, or stop the manipulative process, will lead to a clash which will be unavoidably violent. This manipulation of the electoral process by parties is branded as 'rigging.' Electoral violence is usually caused by an attempt to rig an election, or an attempt to counter rigging, or protest against rigging, which is viewed as a fraudulent manipulation of the electoral process to give an advantage to a party in the outcome of the election.

Electoral Violence in Nigeria: A Historical Overview

The history of Nigeria is replete with violence during elections. In the First Republic, electioneering was so brazenly violent and full of malpractices such that when the preferences of the people did not reflect the electoral outcome, large scale violence that shook the foundations of the nation ensued. There was electoral violence in all the regions where the ruling parties and their supporters unleashed violence on their opponents. However, it was in the Western Region, particularly during the 1965 regional election that the fast straw broke the camel's back. The violence unleashed by the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) (Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and -NNDP alliance) was massive. Nevertheless, it was resisted by the opposition alliance, the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) (Action Group and -NCNC alliance). It led to so much destruction of property and loss of lives that the region became virtually ungovernable as law and order broke down totally (Post and Vickers, 1973). Because the crisis originated from injustice perpetuated by the central government, it has no moral scruples to interfere equitably. Rather, it had chosen to be indifferent while lives and property were lost massively on daily basis in the western region. This crisis spilled into other regions, and it was the immediate cause of the first military coup in Nigeria in January 1966 (Anifowose, 1982).

The military rule that started in 1966 passed through several coups, counter coups and attempted coups and finally terminated in 1979, with the birth of the Second Republic. The election that ushered in the new democratic government led by the NPN was marginally violent. But the one conducted by the civilian regime in 1983 was full of rigging, violence and manipulations. In this election, the state unleashed a wave of violence on innocent citizens who dared to express different opinions from the State's. The NPN relied solely on state violence and manipulations to win that election. Of course, attempting to win where they lacked the popularity like in Anambra, Oyo and Ondo States generated large scale violence. Obviously, the bastardization of that election and large scale political violence that followed it led to the military take-over of 1983. Thus, for the second

time political violence emanating from electoral malpractices was principally responsible for the scuttling of another democratic experiment in Nigeria (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985; Joseph, 1991; Ita, 2018).

The Third Republic was still-born as the military was unwilling to hand over power after initiating an expensive, dilatory, fitful and protracted transition programme. Finally, Abacha's inglorious reign priced the military out of the political market and his successor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, had no option but to bring the permanent transition train to a halt in 1999. Since the rebirth of Nigeria's democracy in 1999, violence of varying levels has been an unfortunate staple of Nigerian elections, some of which are chronicled hereunder:

1999: As usual with elections conducted by the departing military regimes, rigging and violence were minimal in the 1999 elections. The election, which marked the transition from military to civilian rule, was generally conducted without violence, though there reported cases of 'electoral irregularities' and 'outright fraud'. The result of the 1999 election would have, like in 1983, justified a coup. Although this result did not truncate democratic rule in Nigeria, it, nevertheless, weakened democratic consolidation because many people lost faith in election, and the elites who are the carriers of democratic creed became overly divided. Some political leaders would have gladly welcomed a military coup (The Carter Center and NDIIA, 1999).

2003: Violence during the 2003 election cycle was more blatant and widespread. Intra-party clashes, political assassinations, and community unrest in already volatile areas such as Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta, characterized these elections. The ball was set rolling in Osun State with the murder of Bola Ige, the Attorney General of the Federation on 23 December, 2001. The major suspect was Iyiola Omisore, the deputy governor of the state and later a senator. The motive for the murder was that Bola Ige refused to endorse Omisore for Osun State governorship position. This was followed by the murder the chairman of Anambra State branch of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Barnabas Igwe and his wife, Abigail on September 1, 2002. The prime suspect in this murder was the state governor, Chinwoke Mbadinuju. This cycle also marked the unchecked proliferation of another worrisome development: the hiring and arming of militias to serve narrow political ends. This ugly situation made the Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2004) to brand the 2003 election as 'a low intensity armed struggle'. Politicians and party bosses found a ready supply of unemployed men, frequently youths, willing to perpetrate violence in exchange for pay and firepower. As a result, these young men comprised a significant percentage of the lives lost leading up to the 2003 polls (Asuni, 2009).

2007: As the nation geared up for another election in 2007, violence had already started vibrantly on a large scale. Indeed, many analysts expected the level of violence to escalate as election approached. People were generally apprehensive of the political terrain; expecting an unsafe politicking period. In fact, people started preparing for this election since 2003; preparations by way of identifying their possible opponents and eliminating them early enough, thus intensifying election related violence between 2003 and 2006.

As the primaries were getting nearer, the tempos of violence and murder also increased. On July 27, 2006, Funsho Williams, the PDP gubernatorial candidate in 2003 election and the most favoured aspirant for Lagos State governorship election in 2007, was murdered. The obvious

suspects were the 15 other PDP gubernatorial aspirants in the State. In Ekiti State, Dr. Ayo Daramola, the most popular PDP gubernatorial aspirant who was set to challenge the incumbent governor, Ayo Fasoye, in 2007 was brutally murdered in August 2006, and the accusing fingers pointed in the direction of the governor. In Osun State, large scale violence erupted between the supporters of the governor, Ola Oyinola, Senator Iyiola Omisore and Rauf Aregbeshola, Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure in Lagos State who wrecked violence and destruction on the state. In light of the violence unleashed during the 2007 and other past elections, Action-Aid Nigeria in its 2010 Report classified Nigerian electoral violence squarely within the category of protracted social conflict, 'characterized by civil strife, heightened social and political tension, and the sporadic use of violence, but in which armed conflict is not formally declared' (Olajuyigbe, 2010).

2011: Prior to the 2011 elections, politically motivated violence became rampant in several states. In October 2010, Nigerian security officials intercepted thirteen shipping containers of smuggled weaponry at the Lagos port in what many analysts considered an ominous portent for 2011 election season (Purefoy, 2010). In Bauchi State, several attacks involving Bauchi politicians or their affiliates abounded. Reportedly, a security aide to the Bauchi State governor was shot in an attempted attack on the governor (Ibileke, 2010a). A famous Niger Delta militant, Saboma George, accused of rigging past elections, was killed in Rivers State, while the supporters of two gubernatorial candidates clashed in Kano, leading to one reported death and numerous injuries (Ekeinde, 2010; Jaafar, 2010). In Anambra and other Eastern States, high-level political kidnappings were reported.

2015: The 2015 elections recorded violence on a low level, though, as Ladan-Baki (2016) noted, there were numerous reports of policemen terrorizing and shooting the electorate and in some cases escorting thugs to snatch sensitive electoral materials. As observed by Akpoyibo (2004), at the polls in Rivers State, men of the Nigeria Police escorted thugs to cause mayhem and snatch the INEC result sheets from polling units. Similarly during the elections in Ekiti State, men and officers of the Nigerian Army worked in connivance with PDP thugs to manipulate the elections and attack the electorate in that state. There were also reports of PDP thugs shooting sporadically in the air in the presence of soldiers. To back up this point, a leaked audio tape described how the Commander of the 32 Artillery Brigade, General Momoh, connived with PDP members to rig the elections in favour of the ruling party.

2019: During the 2019 general elections, the politically related violence reported in many States was in contrast to the relatively peaceful 2015 elections that brought Muhammadu Buhari into his first term in office. Hence, the 2019 general elections that brought him back into office for a second term were marred by political violence, some of it by soldiers and police officers. The election period witnessed persistent attacks by factions of Boko Haram insurgent group in the North-East; increased communal violence between nomadic herdsman and farmers spreading Southward from North-Central States; and a dramatic uptick in banditry, kidnapping, and killings in the North-Western States of Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara with ineffective responses from security forces to threats to people's lives and security (HRW, 2019).

Thus, within the six-month period between the commencement of electoral campaigns and voting, 626 persons reportedly lost their lives in election-related violence (Nigerian Civil Society

Situation Room, 2019). According to the report, the North-Western region had the highest number of recorded deaths at 172, while North-East followed with 146 fatalities; the South-South and North-Central regions recorded 120 and 111 fatalities respectively. According to Salihu and Yakubu (2021) and Obiam (2021), voters and election officials took to their heels for their lives while the policemen either fled or stood idly by as perpetrators snatched election materials, disrupted voting and harassed voters. In some places, the police shot live rounds of ammunition and used teargas to disperse those who protested voting disruptions.

A Survey of Electoral Violence in Nigeria's South-South Geo-Political Zone

The Nigeria's South-South geo-political zone comprises of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, Delta and Rivers States. Since the emergence of the fourth democratic dispensation in May 1999, the spate of political/electoral related violence in the zone has been enormous. To begin with, **Akwa Ibom State** has been known as one of the most peaceful states in Nigeria's Niger Delta and South-South region since 1999, though, with minimal records of politically motivated violence and killings, prominently, the assassination of Chief Paul Inyang, a PDP State chairmanship aspirant on 20 June, 2010. The storyline changed as the 2011 elections intensified with several incidents of targeted as well as general violence. Purported assassination attempts against political aspirants were reported while a popular journalist was killed for voicing anti-government sentiments. Moreover, one Akaninyene Ukanah, a major PDP politician and one stalwart of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) were reportedly murdered by assassins although no specific motives were reported.

More disheartening, political campaigns in the state took a destructive dimension on 22 March, 2011 when both Ikot Ekpene and Uyo townships were turned into theatres of political war by political parties occasioned by the vicious pre-election face-off that broke out between loyalists of the ACN and PDP. The ACN had its gubernatorial campaign rally at Ikot Ekpene while the PDP had its own in Mkpato Enin and Abak Local Government Areas. The news of attack on ACN campaign team by PDP supporters in Ikot Ekpene sparked off a counter-attack by ACN loyalists on PDP team who were returning to the state capital with unprecedented losses (Nyong, 2011; Adesote and Abimbola, 2014).

According to official Police gazetted report, two supporters of the Peoples Democratic Party, Etop Nicholas Idiong, a trader and Daniel Udo Akpan, a commercial motorcyclist were brutally murdered in Ikot Ekpene while several people sustained various degrees of injuries. Also, Nsemo Ita Ekong, a bus driver with Akwa Ibom Transport Company was recovered shot dead in his vehicle along Abak Road even as several persons were injured in Uyo. Property worth billions of Naira were also destroyed which among others included: 200 brand new Peugeot 307 cars, 500 brand new Keke-tricycles set ablaze; the Goodluck/Sambo Presidential Campaign office situated along Abak Road which was burnt down by the rampaging mob; Fortune International High School owned by Senator Aloysius Etok which was razed down with school children in session and over 20 Toyota Hiace buses belonging to the PDP and Godswill 2011 Campaign Organization, nine Hilux jeeps belonging to the State Government which were either completely destroyed or vandalized (AKSG, 2012; Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017). The incident heightened ethnic tension among the three main ethnic groups - Ibibio, Annang and Oron during the 2011 elections, mostly along party lines.

As preparations for the 2015 elections gained momentum, pre-elections killings and maiming of aspirants and their supporters by unknown gunmen raised its ugly head. Specifically, in Uyo and Ikot Ekpene there was a significant amount of violent incidents, mainly between PDP and APC supporters, including political thuggery and targeted killings. In 2014, Engr. Ukanah was slain at his residence; Mrs Helen Esuene was attacked on October 5, 2014 while on a campaign tour by political thugs for venturing to campaign in the governor's town. She later defected to the Labour Party. Obong Okon Uwah, a former deputy speaker of the State House of Assembly, and an aspirant for the opposition's All Progressives Congress was killed on 18 March, 2015 by political thugs allegedly led by chairman of Ukanafun Local Government Area, Mr Effiom Abai, among other politically motivated killings (Dode and Edet, 2015; Effiong, 2015). Generally, the 2015 elections in the state were marred by violence leading to a barrage of accusations and counter accusations by the All Progressives Congress claiming that the People's Democratic Party used its hoodlums, security agencies and its thugs to truncate the elections in their favour (Ladan-Baki, 2016).

Bayelsa: Electoral politics in Bayelsa State between 1998 and 2019 have been characterized with violent conflicts, political thuggery, assassinations, and arson. This has been so because, as Azeez (2005) noted, politicians in the state are not opened to dialogue, negotiation and consensus. Hence, political contests and recurring political violence in the state could be attributed to over-zealousness and desperation of political gladiators to win elections or remain in office at all cost (Ifeyanichukwu, 2017). In 2012, there were reported incidents of politically motivated violence and killings in the state. For instance, fight broke out at a political rally in February 2012, resulting in at least one death. Same year, there were two bombings suspected to be linked to political tensions around the gubernatorial elections.

In early 2014, unidentified gunmen killed the former chairman of Peremabiri Community Development Committee (CDC) in his Akenpai residence. His attackers reportedly took nothing from the victim's home, suggesting motives other than robbery. Multiple incidents of cults related violence were reported, some of which were targeted at politicians or candidates. Likewise, in 2015, the Secretary of Bayelsa State Independent Electoral Commission (BYSIEC) was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen.

During the Bayelsa State governorship election held on Saturday, 5 December 2015, few hours before the commencement of accreditation of voters, thugs believed to be loyal to the PDP were said to have invaded the residence of the former Minister of State for Agriculture and the Director General of the Sylva/Igiri campaign organization, Sen. Heineken Lokpobiri at Ekeremor town in Ekeremor Local Government Area in the early hours of the day. In the ensuing encounter, the thugs were said to have overpowered the security men deployed to Ekeremor and made their way into the minister's compound causing mayhem with Senator Lokpobiri and others trapped inside the house. One person was reported dead in the shootout between the military and the thugs (Razemba, 2016). On the same Election Day, a policeman and four others were killed by thugs suspected to be working for the All Progressives Congress. The policeman was killed in Famgbe, a suburb of Yenagoa, the state capital. According to sources, the hoodlums, who were led by a renowned political thug in the area, machete the deceased officer to death for his alleged refusal to allow alteration of results in the area (Emma and Ibeogu, 2017).

In places like Okpoama, Eweama, Town Brass and Oporoma, headquarters of Southern Ijaw, thugs shot sporadically into the air, forcing voters to run helter skater. The then state governor, Sierake Dickson, recounted that after his accreditation at ward 2 in Toru Orua, his home town, security operatives refused to heed the alarm earlier raised over plot by the APC to attack his party supporters. He stressed that they had warned the security agents before the election that the APC was not prepared for election but war.

As the attack and counter-attack lasted, both the PDP and the APC traded in words over the violence that characterized the election in the state. While the PDP claimed that a member of the House of assembly Hon. Ingo Iwowari, was attacked and stripped of her belongings, including money; the APC accused the PDP of unleashing violence on its supporters with many of them injured (Olorungbemi, 2014). In Nembe Bassambiri, PDP further claimed that an ex-militant leader, Eris Paul, led the attack in Oporoma. Four persons were said to have been killed during the shootout which prevented the distribution of election materials to polling units in the local governments of the state (Emma and Ibeogu, 2017).

Cross River State: Electoral violence in Cross River State has been on the low side. However, the state saw an increase in electoral related violence with two notable peaks in the first half of 2012 and first half of 2013. Overall, 47 violent incidents were reported that led to the deaths of over 170 people, particularly around the capital city of Calabar and in Yakurr, Ogoja and Abi Local Government Areas. During the 2011 elections, at Ugep there was violence and some people were injured and cars destroyed while guns were used freely. The violence led to arrest of one of the aspirants to the Federal House of Representatives, Mr Patrick Okomiso and the then incumbent member, Chief Bassey Ewa (Aliu, 2011).

As the 2019 elections approached, there were reported cases of politically motivated killings in Etung Local Government Area, which has over the years been known as one of the flashpoints for electoral violence in Cross River State. Residents of Bendeghe community were violently attacked by suspected political thugs, alleged to be members of APC faction in the area. Three people who were members of the PDP, including the party's ward chairman lost their lives with other people sustaining gunshot injuries. In a reaction, the State Publicity Secretary of the APC, Mr Bassey Ita, denied the allegation that supporters of the party were responsible for the killings. According to him, the accusations were merely a political statement to score a cheap political point by the PDP ahead of the elections (Odey, 2019).

During the governorship election, election in Abi Local Government Area was cancelled in 23 polling units, following violence and snatching of electoral materials. Some of the affected polling units are in Imabana, Ekureku, Itigidi, Ediba, Ebom and Igoligoli. Similarly, in Odukpani and Yakurr Local Government Areas, election was cancelled in 11 and 16 polling units respectively owing to eruptions of electoral related violence (Wodu, 2019).

Delta State: In early February 2003, there was a serious clash between the Urhobo and Itsekiri in Warri town during the PDP senatorial primaries over the issue of electoral wards. In a statement, the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC) on March 3 demanded among other things that INEC should disregard the fraudulent voters registration exercise earlier conducted in Warri South West Council until INEC and Delta State Independent Electoral Commission (DSIEC) are

able to conduct a fair and just delineation of electoral wards. In a situation where there was absolutely no confidence that the polls themselves would be free and fair, those who felt frustrated by the existing systems for dividing up power (and thus wealth) then turned to violence (Adebayo, 2003).

In 2011, the governor dissolved the local government councils in the state and replaced them with caretaker committees. After two years, local government elections were held on October 25, 2014, with the PDP winning most seats while elections in two local governments were declared inconclusive due to eruption of violence. Again, the re-scheduled Delta North Senatorial district primary was marred by sporadic gunshots at the Cenotaph venue, Asaba. The State chairman of the party, Chief Peter Onyeluka Nwaoboshi escaped being lynched by some angry delegates during the senatorial rerun. The crisis was more fuelled when Nwaoboshi upbraided the panel members for presenting a fake list of delegates. The delegates thus lost patience and hell was let loose (Sobechi, 2011).

By the same token, the Delta State 2011 legislative election into Patani constituency involving Mr Raymos Guanah (former Commissioner for Lands, Survey and Urban Development) of the Fresh Party and Basil Ganagana of the Peoples Democratic Party was marred by violence. The violence caused the death of Sixtus Ganagana, a brother to Basil Ganagana. Also the transitional chairman of the Patani Local Government council, Mr Paul Atie was shot by unknown gunmen. In March 2014, an ACN vice chairman was abducted and reportedly killed despite the ransom having been paid. In Ethiopie Local Government Area, in November, 2014, there was a clash between supporters of the Labor Party and Peoples Democratic Party in which scores of people were reported dead and properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed (Aiwerie, 2014; Adeosun, Ismail and Zengeni, 2017).

In 2019, Channels Television on 24 February, 2019 gathered that gunmen stormed a polling unit along Old Eku Road, Amukpe, near Sapele, when voting was still on-going and rained bullets at the voters leaving two persons dead on the spot while several others were severely injured.

Edo State: The state was not spared of election related violence. In August 2010, a political contender was gunned down after declaring his intention to contest for a seat in the House of Representatives (Ibileke, 2010b). In April 2013, factions of the PDP and the ACN clashed during the local government elections. In July 2013, the Deputy National Chairman of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) was attacked at his home. Loud drums of violence were beaten in the state since the split between Adams Oshiomhole, former National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress and his handpicked successor as governor of the state, Godwin Obaseki. Obaseki, who later defected to and became the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party in the state, was elected on the platform of the APC in 2016, defeating then candidate of the PDP, Osagie, Ize-Iyamu in a controversial governorship election. Both Obaseki and Ize-Iyamu were again the leading contestants in the 2020 governorship election, but this time, reversing their political parties. The campaigns of the two main parties, the PDP and APC were full of violent rhetoric - the APC accusing the now PDP government in the State of tearing down their campaign posters and the PDP accusing the APC of stockpiling weapons of violence ahead of the elections.

In July 2020, a clash ensued between supporters of the APC and the PDP, following the visit of governor Obaseki and leaders of his party, PDP, to the Palace of the Oba of Benin. The incident

left several persons injured and vehicles destroyed. The exchange of threats of violence and inciting statements by political parties and their supporters prompted the Independent National Electoral Commission to address the issue in an emergency meeting of its Electoral Management Board on Thursday, 6 August, 2020. The commission stated its resolve to enforce relevant rules and regulations in the elections in Edo State, and sanction offenders. The conduct of political actors in the State constituted a recipe for election violence.

Rivers State: Of all the States in the South-South geo-political zone, Rivers have had the most violent gubernatorial elections. In the opinion of Adeosun, Ismail and Zengeni (2017), the State suffers a bloody political struggle between the All Progressives Congress and Peoples Democratic Party over supremacy and control of the state. In fact, by 2007, electoral violence had become such a credible risk that merely declaring oneself a candidate was enough to put one's life at risk (Salihu and Yakubu, 2021).

In the build-up to the 2015 general elections, Rivers State experienced elevated levels of election-related tension and violence. Within the period, the natives of Rumuigbo and Rumuipirikon in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area were attacked by thugs hired by both parties (APC and PDP) resulting in massive destruction of properties of supporters of the two parties (Joab-Peterside, 2015). Again, on 11 January, 2015 the APC secretariat in the Okrika Local Government Area was attacked; on 25 January, 2015 gangsters razed the venue of the APC meeting damaging vehicles, attacked people and put the rally to a halt. In a reaction, in March 2015, the APC alerted the public with claim of losing nine of its members in two separate attacks along the D-Line hub and the Eastern Bypass in the Marine Base region of Port Harcourt. It added that supporters of the party in the Okrika Council Area also suffered incessant assaults even as the party has been victim of three bomb attacks. Recounting their losses, the then Rivers State governor, Rotimi Amaechi, alleged that 30 members of his party were killed in the build-up to the 2015 presidential election while Nyesom Wike claimed that 45 members of his party lost their lives (Anonymous, 2015; Abuh, 2015).

During the 2015 Governorship and House of Assembly election in the state, there were incidents of killings, attacks on INEC officials, hijacking of election materials and arsons. For instance, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Registration Area Centre (RAC) in the Buguma Local Government Area and the house of the State's Commissioner of Women Affairs, Mrs Joeba West were burnt and in Asari Toru LGA, seven vehicles conveying electoral materials were reportedly burnt. Heavy gunshots were reported in Ozuoba and Rumuolumeni in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of the state. Soldiers were deployed to Buguma in Asari Toru Local Government Area where two persons were reportedly killed by political thugs. In Ozuaha community in the Ikwerre Local Government Area, thugs barricaded the road leading to the town and in the process opened fire on a team of security personnel who were escorting INEC ad hoc staffs to polling units (Joab-Peterside, 2018). This triggered fear in the people because peace and stability in the state were under threat of politically motivated violence and other forms of criminality.

Before the Rivers State re-run elections on 10 December, 2016, there were documented incidents of disturbances with political undertone in the state committed by cultists and militants against the law abiding people of Omoku, where a chieftain of the All Progressives Congress, Franklin Obi,

his wife and son were killed. Similarly, Isaac Ikechukwu Chinedu, a PDP chapter chairman in Obite and Chinedu Saidey, Ward 9 PDP Assistant Secretary from Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area were gruesomely murdered. The security operatives were also brutalised by these groups. For instance, on 20 November, 2016, soldiers of 34 Brigade were ambushed and one of the soldier was killed. On 21 November, 2016, four men of Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps were killed and their weapons carted away. On the day of the re-run elections (10 December, 2016), DSP Alkali Mohammed of Mobile Police Unit 48 was beheaded along with his orderly and their weapons and patrol vehicle taken away (Joab-Peterside, 2018).

During the 2019 elections, as Human Rights Watch (2019) found out, after a soldier was killed in the town of Abonnema, on Election Day, the soldiers shot at residents, killing an unknown number of people. They also carried out sweeping arrests and arbitrarily detained several people. The soldiers were on a rampage, shooting at anyone around.

Obviously, the spate of electoral violence in the South-South zone of Nigeria shows that politics of tolerance and accommodation, bargaining and compromise are yet to be enthroned in the Fourth Republic. The aftermath of the elections of 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 continue to pose major threats to political development of the region. Indeed, electoral violence, from experience, has not really shown any sign of positive implication for Nigeria's democracy.

CONCLUSION

From the preceding analysis, it is established that electoral violence, which encompasses coercive acts against humans, property and infrastructure, is perpetuated by political actors to purposefully influence the process and outcome of elections. If not properly managed, this can generate significant casualties and form part of an escalatory process toward an arm strife. In the Nigerian context, the reason for high level of electoral violence is the fact that politics and holding political offices are the surest investments that bring quick returns. Anybody that wants to make it in Nigeria must either hold a political office or be in the corridor of power somehow. This is the reason people approach winning election with a do-or-die-affair mentality.

The ease with which states officers convert public resources to private wealth, with no political or legal consequences, help to sustain this dangerous political mentality. Covert and overt societal encouragement of corruption by political office-holders should be discontinued with. Such encouragements come in the forms of individuals, organizations and communities calling for large donations and seducing them with chieftaincy titles, and so on. It is when society sees corruption as bad and stigmatizes its perpetrators that politicians can check themselves and be checked by others. But as long as the society does not care how politicians and people, generally in the society, make their money and as long as politics remains the surest and the fastest means to make money, people will fight, kill, maim, and do whatever is in their power to win elections and occupy political offices. It is therefore no misnomer to aver that the long term solution to the problem of political violence, particularly during election, lies in the restructuring of the Nigerian political economy to reduce the economic value of political power.

Recommendations

Flowing from the preceding analysis, the following measures are recommended towards managing electoral violence in the Nigerian polity:

- (i) The financial attractiveness of elective offices should be reduced. The rewards for most of the offices are not commensurate with the job the officers do in Nigeria. It is possible to be a multi-millionaire in a single term of membership in the State Legislature, not to talk of the Federal House and Senate. Other political offices are also very lucrative; this is the root-cause of intensive and normless competitions which result into violence.
- (ii) The electoral body must truly be independent and strengthened especially in the area of fiscal autonomy and independence from political actors. This will enhance effective enforcement of electoral laws and sanction any candidate or political party that may engage in any form political violence before, during and after elections.
- (iii) The government needs to hand down stiffer penalties to perpetrators of electoral violence so as to deter others from demonstrating such acts in the future. This should include the candidates who are seen as accessories to the crime who sponsor the youth to cause mayhem.
- (iv) A special court should be established in Nigeria to prosecute electoral offenders, as that will help to curb recurrent violence during electioneering. The need for this special court is informed by the lacklustre nature of the regular court which creates room for lawyers to hold onto frivolities to delay delivery of justice. The special court should be smart and fast in its operation so that within two to three months, election related matters are dispensed with.
- (v) Nigerians should be adequately oriented to eschew the mind-set of winning election as a 'do-or-die-affair' and to always seek redress in the court of law instead of taking laws into their hands as such situation is capable of throwing the country into flames.
- (vi) Government should direct attention to formulating and implementing sound economic policies and programmes with a view to reducing the high level of poverty and unemployment among the youth in the South-South geo-political zone and the country at large. This will assist in meaningfully engaging the youths, thereby distracting them from engaging in violent activities during electoral process.

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