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Political Violence and Democratization in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

Violence or threat of violence is a universal phenomenon. Individuals and groups have used violence in one form or the other in the past and present and will do so in the future, while others have used it as a tactics of political action. Political violence is seen as a dimension of both national and international politics, and in this Nigeria is not an exception. Events overtime have shown that political violence is gradually becoming a recurring feature of our polity as kidnapping, ethnic politics, religious crisis, militancy, terrorism, electoral crisis and other negative vices are increasing at an alarming rate while our democratization process is increasingly moving at a snail'space, constituting a threat to our political stability. The paper adopts secondary source of literature evidence to explain political violence. The objective of the study is to explain the effects of such violence on our democracy in the fourth republic. It adopts the relative deprivation theory and revolution of rising expectation theory in its analysis. Findings revealed that the scourge of political violence is endemic and if not adequately checked and tackled will become a menace that will likely consume our democracy in particular and the nation as a whole. Thus, the paper suggests that government should deal decisively with perpetrators to serve as a deterrent to would-be offenders if our hard fought democracy is to survive and thrive.

Keywords: Democracy, Violence, Political, Election, Thuggery

Introduction

Normally, democratization process is not an end in itself, but a means to an end that is aimed at democratic consolidation and good governance where every adult citizen is given an opportunity to take part in the process of governance of their nation. In addition, democratization does not operate in a vacuum, as it is a process that involves a lasting democracy, geared towards democratic consolidation. Naturally, it is a process that is characterized by competition, struggle, agitation and conflict; hence it is expected to subsist within a well laid down legal framework to guide its operation (Arowolo & Lawal, 2006).

According to Anifowose (1982), political violence is an endemic feature of most of the world's political systems and it is particularly true of most developing countries, including Nigeria, where political violence has today become an essential characteristic of our democracy, especially since after independence. Nigeria has stumbled from one crisis to the other and this has led to the near disintegration due to bitterness of party politics, ethnic and regional competition. What makes it more worrisome now is the increasing frequency of its occurrence as a means to secure political objectives by contenders for political power. Thus, there is the need for a national political behavior where every Nigerian who desires a political office must comply and conform to a national minimum political culture to serve as the ground rules of politics. As expected, a democratic political culture is based on reconciliation and compromise and not violence as it is obvious that any culture that is practised over time becomes a way of life. Therefore, we can correctly assert that the culture of political violence that has today become a permanent feature of Nigeria's democracy came on board towards the tail-end of the colonial rule that paved way for the nation's independence. The fourth republic (1999-date) has not been any different, as cases of political violence have been rampant in virtually all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Enojo cited in Egwemi, 2013). The political violence that gripped the Nigerian state since the

country's return to democracy in 1999 has posed a great challenge to its survival. Similarly, successive governments in Nigeria have used political violence in a systematic and more brutal manner to advance their political goals (Efebah & Okolo, 2016), and this has continued to hunt Nigeria's nationhood. It is estimated that over 5000 Nigerians have lost their lives; hundreds and thousands have been displaced, while properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed. Indeed, the political climate of the country has been very hostile, frustratingly uncertain and unstable. Thus general lawlessness and the devastating influence of god-fatherism have continued to pose serious dangers to our nascent democracy and the survival of the country in general (Enojo 2013 cited in Egwemi, 2013). It is against this background that the study is examining the effect of political violence on Nigeria's democratization in the fourth republic.

It is quite obvious that struggle in politics is also a normal phenomenon and has come to stay, since it has to do with 'who gets what, when and how'; but what is abnormal is the violence that has engrossed political struggle in Nigeria. Political violence is cultivated and motivated by political actors who see political power as the extension of their birth right, and every opposition as an enemy that must be dislodged, uprooted or in the extreme be eliminated or decimated thus resulting in a do or die politics of intolerance, rancor and violence.

Presently, political violence seems to have been institutionalized and legalized as it emanates mostly from the corridors of power as political activities have become the exclusive preserve of the 'dirty' politicians who make politics dirty in the first instance. In Nigeria, many view politics as a dirty game because it is played in a very murky water as against what obtains outside her shores. Thus according to Couch et al. (1992), politics must have been infested with greed, tribalism, intolerance, injustice and parochial instinct of political leadership to have summer saulted to its lowest ebb on the continent. For the purpose of understanding, this paper is divided into five parts. Part one is the introduction, part two is the conceptual clarification, part three is the theoretical framework, part four is the effect of political violence on democratization process in Nigeria, and part five concludes the study and makes recommendations.

Conceptual Clarification

The word violence defies any precise, commonly accepted definition. The concept mostly serves as a catch-all for every variety of protest, militancy, coercion, destruction, or muscle flexing which a given observer happens to fear or condemn at any given time. According to Anifowose (1982), political violence can be defined

> as the use or threat of physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals, and or property, with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and or damage or destruction to property; and whose objectives, choice of targets 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 (Anifowose, 1982,p.4).

This definition therefore suggests that for violence to be political, there must be the intent of affecting the political process (even though it may not be immediately obvious if a given action has a political component or not).

According to Moses and Clark (2006), political violence is seen as the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious to obtain or maintain political power. In the same vein, Alanamu (2005) moved further to categorize violence into two viz, direct and indirect. Direct violence refers to deliberate violence resulting in a direct attack on a person's physical or psychological integrity, and this includes all forms of homicide (genocide, war crime, massacre, murder, and

terrorism) as well as all types of coercive or brutal actions involving physical or psychological suffering (kidnapping, torture, rape, incarceration and maltreatment).Indirect violence on the other hand is a category intended to cover harmful, sometimes even deadly situations or actions, which though due to human intervention do not necessarily involve a direct relationship between victims and the institution. He further noted that this type of violence could be by omission and that where any of these forms of violence is used purely for political ends it can be described as political violence. In addition, political violence can be defined as a considerable or destructive use of force against persons or things, use of force prohibited by law, directed to achieve change in the policies, personnel or system of government, and hence also directed to changes in the existence of individuals in the society (Honderish, 1989).

Holistically, political violence occurs within the purview of the struggle or competition for state power, resources, appointment or patronage as well as human emancipation or liberation and it often takes the form of intra or inter-state hostilities as well as in form of group or individual clashes. The targets are usually political figures or instruments of the state institutions whether in power or in the corridor or those jostling to be in the corridor of power.

Democracy on the other hand has been a more difficult concept to define precisely, as it evokes different meanings to different people. The presence of no universally accepted meaning can be seen as a confirmation of the existence of varied perspectives as much as there are scholars. Ranney (1975) sees democracy as a form of government organized in accordance with the principles of popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation, and majority rule.

According to Harvey and Harvey (1989), democracy involves the settling of affairs based on known rules of government, tolerance towards minority views, regular elections and freedom of speech; and above all, observance of rule of law. Karl Marx also gave an insight on democracy in his writing, His view of ideal democracy refers to that society where the constitution, law and state are determined by the people without coercion, restriction and marginalization (cited in Victor, 2006). For Anifowose and Enemuo (2005), democracy denotes a set of ideals, institutions and processes of governance that allows the broad mass of the people to choose their leaders and that guarantees them a broad range of civic rights. However, the most popular of the definition is that given by Abraham Lincoln which states that democracy is government of the people, by the people and for the people. However, the idea of democracy, irrespective of the type, has universal values and elements as it locates power in the people who choose their leaders, thus implying that it is a government that is elected, responsive and accountable at the same time (Egwu, 2000). It has also been rightly observed that democracy is a difficult form of government to create and sustain as it goes beyond just governance as it is a way of life. Therefore, there is the need for democrats everywhere to continue and remain in the struggle to maintain the work of democratization which in Nigeria is lacking or is gradually being eroded by the actions of the political actors.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored in the 'revolution of rising expectation theory'. The revolution of rising expectation theory was popularized in the 1950s in the discussions of the foreign aid policies of the United States. It was used to describe the hope of the poorest countries for a better future in the wake of the post-war colonization. According to encyclopedia.com, the rising expectations embodied the twentieth century's 'real' revolution as it represented for the vast majority of the world population a break from centuries of stagnation, fatalism, and exploitation. The theory was used to successfully mobilize national liberation movements against British, French and Dutch rulers to create newly independent countries whose nationalist leaders fueled their follower's aspirations during their struggles with promises of

improved education, healthcare and industrial development. The theory was employed by Davies in 1969 when he used his J –curve to explain the relationships among rising expectation, their level of satisfaction, and revolutionary upheaval. He stated that revolution is likely when after a long period of rising expectation accompanied by a parallel increase in their satisfaction, a downturn occurs; that when a perception of need satisfaction decreases but expectation continues to rise, a widening gap is created between expectation and reality; that the gap eventually becomes intolerable and sets the stage for rebellion against a social system that fails to fulfil its promise. Therefore, at the heart of this reasoning is that the frustration of unfulfilled expectation leads to aggressive behavior which manifests in political rebellion. Thus, the revolution of rising expectations locates the genesis of violence in the feeling of dissatisfaction arising out of comparison between what one currently enjoys and what one expects, what one thinks one ought to have or what one regards as ideal. In other words, the distance between current status and aspirations, which is the hope and not despair, is what instigates violent political behavior.

Based on the aforementioned, it can rightly be explained that political violence in Nigeria can be situated in the revolution of rising frustration generated by rising expectation as the consequences on the part of the frustrated individual or group that has resulted in aggressive behavior. After the long years of military rule, and the return to civilian rule of the fourth republic, Nigerians had high hopes for positive changes in their life generally and the inability to meet their rising expectations by the various governments in the fourth republic is responsible for the rising wave of political violence in the country. Confirming this Ake (2001) asserted that social indicators showed that Africans and indeed Nigerians were worse off today than they were over two decades ago as our problems are embedded in our politics and that we will need a democratic revolution to overcome our situation.

Political Violence of the Fourth Republic

Political violence is a phenomenon of politics that has been known for a relatively long time in world history. It is a veritable consequence of political conflict that characterized most political systems including Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Political conflicts which often results in violence including assassinations is an endemic feature of most developing nations of which Nigeria is one (Enojo cited in Egwemi, 2013). Generally, it can be broadly categorized into three: political violence that occurred during the colonial rule, those that occurred under the military regimes and finally those that occurred under the civilian governments. Among the three, the last appears to be more violent and crisis ridden when compared to the first and the second. With Nigeria's return to democratic rule in May 1999, many had thought that political violence would be a lesser issue. Unfortunately, as time progresses, so also the spate of violence is rising leading to an unprecedented increase in crime wave, religious riots, inter and intra- ethnic clashes, communal crisis, kidnapping, banditry and militancy, etc.

A cursory look into the fourth republic (1999-present day), shows series of political violence across the country. According to Arowolo and Lawal, (2006), the potency and tempo of violence drastically increased due to the proliferation of small arms and ammunition that were introduced and its usage sustained by thugs and assassins who help to secure election victory for their masters in Nigeria. Generally, political violence occurs within the purview of struggle and competition for state power, resources, appointment or patronage. The desperation for political actors to acquire position and resources from government or to outdo one another leads to intense competition that results in cases of violence. In other words, political competition becomes a warfare that gives way for violence to reign supreme. Thus power is sought by all means and maintained by all means as politicians willingly exploit ethnic, religious divisions to gain political advantage. By so doing, they stoke community tension and sometimes

target their rivals and their supporters. Political violence-related deaths in the fourth Republic alone poses a serious threat to the democratic process in particular and the survival of the nation in general. According to Human Rights Watch, thousands of people have been killed as a result of violence in Nigeria, and more thousands have been displaced. The worst violence took place in three days where 800 people were killed after three days in 2011 with 700 of the number occurring in Kaduna State alone (www.hrw.org/report). However the perpetrators of violence and their sponsors have continued to enjoy complete impunity for their actions, while little or no concrete action is taken against those who use violence to further their political ambitions.

Effects of Political Violence on Democratization Process

Every society has its own challenges, and Nigeria as a country is not an exception. Literature evidence shows that Nigerian politicians are responsible for promoting, arming and funding political violence across the length and breadth of the country. For the average Nigerian politicians, the culture of keeping thugs have become their second nature. However, no politician in the country has admitted to supporting or organizing political violence. Those thugs are hired and paid handsomely, armed with sophisticated weapons purchased by the politicians and are majorly recruited from retired military and police officers, unemployed youths and ex-convicts (Enojo cited in Egwemi, 2013) to unleash mayhem in the society.

The major effects of political violence on democratization are:

1. The continued existence of outdated/ inefficient rules: Nigeria has had issues with its rules and laws right from inception. Firstly, the set of rules put to use in the country emanated from the colonial experiment designed for their own regulation and satisfaction. Secondly, the post-colonial period had it rules majorly emanating from the military brass to suit their centralized command structure, and the present post-military period had witnessed rules coming majorly from the elite class as against the majority of the citizenry. Thus one can correctly assert that since the rules were not the outcome of negotiations from different ethnic nationalities, the implementation will be selectively applied thereby leaving room for some politicians to manipulate their way especially those who are in the ruling party. In addition, rules and laws are majorly strictly applied on the less privileged since it is elite-centric, as the wealthy elites and political class always have their way around the rules. In such situation, the aggrieved will try to undermine the government of the day by making things difficult which in most instances will invariably lead to protest, revolt and finally violence in the polity.
2. Man-made poverty: Poverty can be said to be one of the major effects of political violence in Nigeria. The rate of poverty in Nigeria has been rising so steadily even in the face of oil prosperity and endowment that it is becoming frightening and dangerous for the growth and sustenance of democracy. Presently, Nigeria is the global headquarters of poverty and with such very poor economic environment, it is almost impossible for democratic values to thrive in the polity. The level of poverty in the country has led to a corresponding increase in ignorance as people are very willing to forgo or not even stand up for their rights when they are infringed upon. This goes a long way to explain the zeal with which Nigerians sell their votes or their permanent voter's card for as low as five hundred naira before or on an election day. Nigeria, a country so blessed with both human and natural resources, has no business being poor, but the politicians have induced the masses with extreme poverty to render them vulnerable to their antics of manipulation. Furthermore, a nation with pervasive poverty and high number of unemployed able-bodied young men who are ready to be hired by desperate politicians to intimidate their

political opponents or unleash havoc whenever they so desire to cause tension or perpetrate violence in the society is bound not to have smooth democratization.

3. Weak political institutions: This is a major fall out of the effect of political violence on the Nigerian political landscape. Held cited in Anifowose and Enemuo (2005) advocates for the existence of strong institutions as key elements of liberal democracy to ensure that the process and rules are followed to the letter. Unfortunately, Nigeria is bedeviled by weak institutions that impact negatively on the democratic processes as the country parades an array of 'strong men' who over the years have succeeded in weakening the institutions further by their actions since the return to civilian rule. For instance, the Independent National Electoral commission (INEC) that is responsible for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections had also been implicated in the perpetration and abetting of electoral frauds (Akubo & Yakubu, 2014). In the same vein, the judicial system that should adjudicate on election-related matters has performed rather poorly, as cases take unnecessarily long duration and sometimes appear compromised.
4. Institutionalization of culture of violence in the country: The endemic nature and spate of political violence in Nigeria has helped to popularize the culture of violence in our society by creating a favourable environment for violence and criminals to flourish (Peterside, 2018). This was corroborated by Okoko (2019) when he posited that since 1999, no election in Nigeria has been devoid of high rate of violence either before, during or after elections thus making a key aspect of the democratic process of the country to be tainted by anomalies. Most violence were perpetrated using small arms and ammunition by political thugs and party supporters to maim or kill political opponents as instructed by their masters. Political violence indicates an unbridled flagrancy in the smuggling and use of small arms and ammunition by political thugs. Thus, the level of political violence is posing a serious threat to the national quest for democratic consolidation and stable democratic process in Nigeria thereby undermining good governance.
5. Hinders free competition: One major appeal of democracy is its emphasis on popular participation. In a similar vein, representative democracy which is practised in Nigeria has election as a central part of it which involves free, fair, open and competitive process. However, the prevalence of political violence hinders competition among political contestants/competitors. Normally, those who do not sanction the use of violence in their pursuit of political endeavours tend to stay away from politics whenever there is a spike in political violence or the political landscape is characterized by violence. This therefore leaves the political space wide for desperate, scheming, dirty politicians to hold sway thereby elevating mediocrity in the polity, and sowing the seeds of rancour and discord. In addition, the increasing spate of political violence in the country has given room for the election of people of questionable character, mediocres, and irresponsible and unqualified political leaders into political positions that, under normal circumstances, they would never have emerged as leaders to dominate the political landscape.
6. Disenfranchisement of qualified voters: The prevalent nature of political violence in the country has resulted in massive disenfranchisement of qualified Nigerian voters who though registered are systematically deprived of exercising their franchise due to the spate of violence associated with elections in the country. For instance, the fear of being attacked by hoodlums or in a worst scenario being maimed or killed during election has led to disenfranchisement of voters who resolve to stay away from the polling units. This leaves the coast wide open for desperate, unscrupulous politicians who engage in violent politics.

7. Destruction of the nation's youths: Political violence leads to the destruction of the nation's youths that are recruited into thuggery and who eventually end up as drug addicts, armed robbers or hardened criminals. According to Efebeh and Okolo (2016), during the 2007 general elections there existed abundant evidence that Nigerian youths participated actively in the bloodletting that characterized the elections and jolted people's confidence in the democratic processes. The youths are being destroyed in so many ways: they are killed in one violent act or the other; their future is negatively affected as instead of being engaged in productive adult lives, they are engaged in destructive violent activities that could end up destroying them. Since political violence erodes credibility and confidence in our democratic process, the Nigerian youths can be said to be working against the democratic process that will benefit all and sundry in the country.
8. Political corruption: Political violence in the country has led to the increased culture of political corruption. With the involvement of youths in election rigging, ballot box snatching, brazen falsification of election results, vote buying, ("tradermoni" inclusive), arson, assassinations and political violence. It has added to the existing culture of political corruption that has eroded confidence and cast doubt on the legitimacy of our democratic process.
9. Distortion of economic activities and wastage of nation's resources: Political violence has led to major distortion of economic activities in the country as whenever there is disruption in the polity, all economic activities suffer as people are forced to retreat and close shops and markets. It also has a negative effect of discouraging investors from investing in the country. In addition, as a result of violence in the polity, it encourages mis-allocation of resources to the security sector which has become a recurring decimal as funds meant for developmental purposes are diverted to beef up the security sector (Peterside, 2018). Similarly, political violence increases wastage of the nation's resources as resources that are normally meant for developmental projects are diverted and spent on combating the fallouts of political violence, such as repairing damages caused by hoodlums. Worst still, the economic community is put on the edge as many are scared away due to high level of insecurity. It has also been observed that political violence drains government resources and diverts attention from other critical development issues and frequently provokes undemocratic responses from both the state and citizens.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is no doubt that the demand for democracy in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular has been very strong (Ake, 2001), in the real sense but the democratization process has always been shallow. This paper re-affirms that the country's democratization process is characterized by violence due to the near absence of enforcement mechanism and the total absence of political will to punish offenders hence both the political actors and enforcement officers are guilty of aiding and abetting political violence. Literature evidence and observations thus far have shown crystal clear that political violence is inimical to growth, progress and development of any society. It has never been a solution to any form of societal problem but rather has remained a source of pains, misery and evil. Therefore, Nigeria's acceptance and practice of liberal democracy on the one hand and the spike in political violence on the other hand is a major contradiction in the Nigerian democratic process as political violence is dysfunctional to democratic politics.

The paper recommends the following measures to curb political violence in our society:

- Government should address the major causes of social inequality in the country by creating opportunities for citizens to realize their potential within the country. They should

ensure equitable distribution of resources so as to reduce the yawning gap between the rich and the poor in the country as it will prevent greedy godfathers from mobilising the youth for political violence.

- In addition, government should create employable opportunities since widespread unemployment has made young people vulnerable and at the mercy of informal unemployment of politicians who engage them as thugs thereby promoting the wave of political violence across the country.
- Government should put laws in place to deal decisively with perpetrators of violence in our society. This will serve as deterrent to would-be offenders. It has also been observed that the punishments for political violence are often too weak to deter would-be offenders. It is therefore recommended that sponsors of political violence and their agents should face heavy fines or long jail terms on convictions, as this will make them have a rethink of their action.
- In relation to the above, the judiciary should be strengthened and made to be alive to its responsibility. They should be bold enough to give verdicts on any one found guilty regardless of how highly placed the person is, and to pass judgment in favour of those who truly won elections, since those who feel robbed tend to resort to violence when they think the verdicts were compromised.
- In the same vain, political parties are to instill internal discipline mechanism to check erring and disgruntled members who preach and promote violence in their communities. In addition, opposition parties/politicians should not be seen as enemies to be decimated; rather, they should be accorded recognition.
- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should live up to its name of being an independent and impartial umpire, by being transparent and credible, and avoid any body language that will make it seem that it is amenable by those in power or at the corridor of power.
- The police should be well equipped and trained to withstand the new revolutionized wave of political violence so that they can be proactive at all times.
- Finally, all hands must be on deck by both the state and the citizens to have and encourage a democratic process driven by the rule of law so as to build and sustain a lasting democracy in Nigeria.

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