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Political Conflict and Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Implications on National Security

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Abstract

The Electoral contest in many developing democracies in Africa including, Nigeria, are faced with the challenges of conducting free, fair, credible and violence-free elections. Political violence has become a stain on our democracy. The paper therefore assessed the impact of electoral violence on national security in Nigeria. The paper adopted the descriptive analytical approach. The data collected were classified, analyzed and organized chronologically in a manner that ensured effective interrogation and presentation of the interests driving the debate on the subject matter to ensure adequate comprehension. The frustration aggression theory was used to explain the cause of electoral violence in Nigeria. The study found out that Political violence is now a stain in our democracy that is now seen as a political structure and strategy for employment during election and the use of weapons during election have an after effect on the national security. Consequently, some policy recommendations were made. The political umpire has to take conscious and strategic actions against political violence, due to the fact that action and inaction of the government plays a major role in either stopping or continuing the menace. Appropriate security network and intelligence should be organized to monitor electoral activities to mitigate incidences of violence. The Independent National Electoral Commission should conduct transparent and credible elections while the political parties and candidates should ensure strict compliance with electoral regulations.

Keywords: Political Conflict; National Security; Democracy; Electoral Violence.

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Introduction

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. In an indirect democracy, elections help in institutionalizing the process of succession. It creates a constitutional framework for handling inter-elite rivalries and providing a modicum for popular backing for the new ruler (Hughes & May, 1988). Election also helps in deepening the process of political participation in government thereby giving room for universal suffrage, in this sense, eligible adults have the right to vote and be voted for. This invariably gives them opportunity to participate in decision making process as well as governance of their affairs.

National security is devoid of universally acceptable definition but has been described as the concern of government about the stability and safety of a state. It encompasses the sum of what a nation does in order to safeguard itself as a sovereign entity. That is the physical protection of a nation's subjects, landscape, independence and even issues such as food security and national image (Okoroafor, et al, 2012). Indeed, elections have helped spark ethnic, religious, political, and communal violence since the pre-colonial era, when British colonial authorities introduced limited voting. In Nigeria, elections are to a large extent considered as a "do or die" affair and a must win. In the words of Etannibi Alemika, "politicians turn electioneering and elections into warfare in which violence, ethnic, religious, and other forms of primordial sentiments and prejudices are employed (Rosenau, Mushen, & McQuaid 2015). Electoral violence has been a feature of Nigeria's politics since the return to democratic rule on 29th May, 1999. Therefore, Elections in Nigeria's fourth republic were marred by irregularities such as ballot box stuffing, ballot snatching, and falsification of results and abuse of electoral act among others. In third world countries, especially in Africa, elections are often riddled with tension, conflicts, crises and fraud such that it is difficult to use them as a barometer of the people's choice (Agbaje and Adejumobi 2006).

Thus, Nigeria's electoral system and process has been that 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

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elections for personal gains. Obakhedo (2011) posit that the nation's political history is replete with instances of electoral violence. To him, since Nigeria became independent on October 1, 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 pose 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. This implies that public faith in the integrity of election system is a cornerstone of democratic government (Alvarez and Hall, 2008).

Research Objective

The main objective of this research is to assess the impact of electoral violence on the National security of the country.

Methodology

The research makes use of descriptive method to analyse the study of Electoral violence on national security. The study will adopt a comparative study in other to gain a deeper and clear understanding on the effect of political conflict. An analysis of the major concept was thematically analysed along with a analysis of the effect of electoral violence on national security. Secondary data were applied in the analysis of the effect of electoral violence on national security.

Theoretical framework

Ted Gurr's theory of relative deprivation (1980) expounds on political violence. The centrality of the theory rest 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

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human capacity for violence is frustration- aggression mechanism. This means that "unfulfilled expectations create relative deprivation gab 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 el, 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

- Aggression is always the consequence of frustration
- The occurrence of aggressive actions always presumes the existence of frustration and contra wise, and that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression.
- 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.
- 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

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Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Election

The concept of election in representative democracy as practiced in most modern states which is the freedom to choose people into political offices is one of the unique factors that make representative democracy one of the most acceptable systems of government in the world. 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. Akzin (1960, pp 706-8) informs us that elections have technical and social significance. In the technical sense, they are the process through which an office or a post is assigned to a person by an act of volition that requires the simultaneous expression of many people's opinions. In the social sense an election is the process by which a person is linked to an office through the due participation of the people who will bear the weight of his or her authority. It is this social aspect of elections that generates the idea of governing a society with the consent of the governed, and this boils down to democracy and distinguishes election from appointment (Akzin 1960, pp 706-8).

Political Violence

There are scholars who perceive violence in terms of the use of force against persons and objects. For example, Corsini (1999) defines violence as the manifestation of hostility and rage through physical force directed against persons or property. Degenaar's view is that violence is 'the intentional application of extreme force against another person in such a way that it is destructive of objects and physically injurious to animals and persons' (2004). There are also scholars who perceive violence as the illegitimate use of force.

Electoral violence therefore is a form of anomic participation in the political process (Elaigwu, 2006). In furtherance of this position, Ilufoye, Ogundiya& Baba (2005) see electoral violence is

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a limited aspect of political violence that is associated with the process of elections. They reason that forms of political violence occur before, during and after elections. 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 (cited in 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.

The Impact of Violence and Insecurity on Electoral Participation

The relevance of an election in democratic settings cannot be overemphasized. Election contributes significantly to the democratic system of governance conducted through the auspices of representative government. A periodic election ensures continuity in governance by helping to resolve the challenge of leadership succession in a democratic setup. The instrumentality of elections thus helps the citizenry to choose their representative in government as well as hold them to account for their stewardship. Citizens' participation in the process of election instills a sense of self- esteem, political worth and usefulness to the political system. The right to participate in an election and the power to refrain from doing so can be an expression of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the political system or process of election. Four conditions required for the conduct of free and fair elections were identified by Mackenzie (1964) to include an autonomous judiciary; an honest, nonpartisan and competent electoral management body; an established political party system and the acceptance of the guiding electoral principles by the general political community. The electoral system is the institutionalized provision that ensures that the conduct of elections meets the stipulated legal requirements for electoral activities. These include the registration of voters and the administration of the entire process of elections (Roberts, 1971). A country's electoral system performs these significant functions for ensuring the shaping and sustenance of the behaviour of the citizenry in the political system (Okolo,

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2002). 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 (Sisk2008, 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. However, whatever feat that is attained would be dependent on how effective and efficient the electoral system is. Though regularly conducted elections have increased the hope of achieving credibility, stability and democratic consolidation, the trend of violent activities related to elections is a worrisome threat to these expectations (Lindberg 2008; Campbell, 2010). Scholars the world over have initiated studies to determine the nexus between violence and democratic engagement by appraising the influence of violence on individual attitudes. Bergman (2006) averred that the rise of violent activities poses a serious threat to the institutions of democracy worldwide.

Acording to (Nwolise 2007), electoral violence epitomizes any planned action that encompasses physical, psychological, and structural threats directed at either to intimidate, harm, blackmail or pressure a candidate for political office. This action could be before the election, during the election or after. This action is directed at influencing and subverting the otherwise fairness of the electoral process (Nwolise 2007). 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 (Birch &Muchlinski

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forthcoming, in Taylor 2018, p. 8). Electoral violence has also been seen as any action that overtly threatens the physical and psychological structure of the human being resulting in any form of damage or harm directed at political events, electoral materials, and electoral actors including, the destruction of property (IFES, 2011). From the foregoing, violence associated with electoral activities can be construed as acts directed overtly or covertly, directly or indirectly to actors in the electoral process aimed at undermining election processes. The objective of agents of electoral violence is to influence the processes of elections unduly and to gain an advantage over other political rivals or opponents.

Causes of political violence

i. Absence of a tolerant political culture: "The winner takes it all" modus operandi of Nigeria cum "do or die" political affairs bread intolerance and ready to go out to get it no matter the means. In such milieu, the deliberate intention and consequences of acts of violence are premeditated in various ways- to either manipulate the whole process of the election or to use manipulative means like coercion to induce voters to vote against their will.

ii. 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.

iii. Sit-tight syndrome: In Africa and specifically 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.

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iv. 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. v. 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.

The implications of political conflict and electoral violence on national security

There abounds various implications of political conflicts and they include;

i. **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.

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. In the 2015 election 100 lives were officially lost and in the 2019 election 150 lives were being pronounced lost. (Datawrapper 2022)

iii. **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.

iv. **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.

v. **Social interrelationship:** the violence negates peaceful coexistence and reduce the respect individuals have for each other Lives. In a society whereby lives can easily be taken, crime escalation and vices will follow suit.

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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.

Conclusion

In this paper, attempt has been made to examine how political violence undermines national development since Nigeria attained her independence. Political violence has several consequences not only on national security but on economic and social relations.

Recommendations

The research proposed the following recommendations would help to reduce the incidence of political violence in Nigeria

1. De-monetization of political offices. The benefits that are associated with political offices encourage unhealthy competition which results in political violence.
2. Cognitive orientation of national integration should be inculcated by Politicians. The concept of do or die must be addressed by the electoral umpire.
3. The Nigerian politicians should see governance as a strategy of addressing the problems of the masses not necessarily accumulation of wealth.
4. The government should distribute national values equitably and ensure balance development of all regions. No section of the country would feel marginalized.
5. The trial and conviction of sponsors and executors of political violence should be made public and prevented from occupying any public office.

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