

UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERNS AND DIMENSIONS OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

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Abstract

The ability of a country to successfully conduct non-violent elections is a crucial indicator of the consolidation of its democracy and a necessary condition for free and fair citizen participation. Unfortunately, democratization is rarely a smooth path. The competition and contestation characteristic of the entire electoral process can, in the extreme, result in the electoral violence that we have seen in many countries, Nigeria inclusive. This paper explores the nature and dimensions of electoral violence in Nigeria with the aim of providing useful insights on the phenomenon in order to curb democratic set-backs. The methodology involves the use of secondary data that were thematically analysed. The paper establishes that a proper understanding of electoral violence must among others, view it to include all acts or threats; physical, psychological or structural violence carried out purposively to intimidate or harm a political actor and effect a change in the electoral process. It is separated from other forms of political violence by a combination of timing and motive. In Nigeria, Electoral violence has the capacity to impinge on the electoral process and threaten democratic stability. Government and other important stakeholders must ensure a comprehensive security, institutional and necessary electoral reforms as well as diligent implementation of such policies aimed at curbing electoral violence.

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Electoral Violence, Nigeria

Introduction

Democracy is perceived as a way of managing change and conflict. Yet, in many democracies, violence has become a trade mark of the electoral process. Electoral violence does not occur in all democracies. Yet, in recent years, violence in connection to elections particularly in the so-called 'emerging democracies' have attracted attention precisely because they seem to be scandalous in a system that is supposed to be, by definition, non-violent (Reif, 2005).

The ability of a country to successfully conduct non-violent elections is a crucial indicator of the consolidation of its democracy and a necessary condition for free and fair citizen participation. Unfortunately, democratization is rarely a smooth path. The competition and contestation characteristic of the entire electoral process can, in the extreme, result in the electoral violence that we have seen rage starkly in different countries around the world. In Africa, with its high degrees of societal and cultural diversity and relatively weaker mediating institutions, electoral violence remains a crucial challenge that requires deeper investigation and collective action to address. Nigeria's history is replete with narratives of how its electoral process has been marred by massive rigging of elections, violence and the subversion of the will of the people. While electoral violence has been a constant theme in Nigeria's history since independence,

contributing to the collapse of previous attempts at entrenching democratic system of governance, the scale and intensity of election-related violence since the return to democracy in 1999 seems to dwarf what the country experience in the past.

However, a critical gap exists in the current literature regarding the prevalence and dimensions of electoral violence. In order to understand the phenomenon, it is essential to survey what scholars currently know about the nature and trends of electoral violence. Few theoretical models exist to describe this phenomenon, but existing scholarship does provide useful insight to classify and categorize the forms of and reasons that electoral violence occurs. This paper attempts to fill this gap.

In view of the foregoing, this paper interrogates the nature, patterns and dimensions of electoral violence. The paper is divided into six sections. The first section is the introduction followed by a conceptual clarification. The third section focuses on theoretical insights of electoral violence. The fourth section discusses the nature and patterns of electoral violence while the fifth section appraises the dimensions of electoral violence in Nigeria. The sixth section interrogates electoral violence and the democratic process in Nigeria. The seventh section concludes the work.

Defining Electoral Violence

The existing scholarly literature does not offer much guidance in thinking about elections and violence particularly in Africa. Only a few books and articles aim to understand electoral violence as a specific phenomenon (Fischer 2002; Laakso, 2007). Therefore, what it is and when it occurs will likely remain a source of debate as more scholars begin to focus on it. But some researchers and institution have begun to join around the notion that electoral violence is a subset of political violence distinguished by its timing, perpetrators and victims, objectives and methods (Hoglund, 2009; Fischer 2002; Sisk, 2008). These are important criteria because they help to separate electoral violence from other types of violence that may happen to occur around election time; that is, that an act of violence occurs during the election period does not make it electoral violence.

Electoral violence has been defined as an act of violence perpetrated in the course of election, before, during and after election. As a concept, electoral violence includes all acts or threats; physical, psychological or structural violence purposively to intimidate, harm, blackmail a political actor and effect a change in the electoral process (Albert, 2007). According to Olayinka (2009), electoral violence refers to disorderly conducts targeted at frustrating, eliminating and humiliating political machineries and opponents to get rid of the unwanted others. He further identified some popular modes of perpetrating political violence in Nigeria which include arson, assassination, rioting, confusion, inducement, and manipulation of votes, ballot box stuffing, threatening, blood-letting, assaults, hooliganism, vandalism and many others.

From the above, it could be discerned that electoral violence is a major tool and process through which democratic procedures are subverted. That is why electoral violence which is a sub-category of political violence becomes imperative in this study. However, some writers have chosen to use both political violence and electoral violence interchangeably (see Obadare, 1999; Sisk, 2008; Omotola, 2008 and; Olayinka, 2009). Political violence can be distinguished from electoral violence. Anifowose (1982) sees political violence as the use of threat or physical force against individuals or properties with the intention of causing injury, death or damage notably with political significance and overall consequence on the political system. This definition points to the fact that political violence is mainly undertaken in the struggle for acquisition of power. It is sometimes aimed at modifying the political behaviour of individuals and groups within a

political system for some desired results.

Electoral violence itself has been severally conceived. According to Swain (2007), electoral violence refers to a type of violent conflict behaviour that is directed against targets specifically related to the electoral process. Sisk (2008), on the other hand, sees electoral violence as a sub-type of political violence in which actors employ coercion in an instrumental way to advance their interests. At least this definition gives us an insight as to why actors engage in political violence in which case their selfish interest is paramount.

A more general definition was advanced by Fisher (2002). For him, electoral violence is 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, blackmail, destruction of property or assassination. We can, therefore, submit that electoral violence is a particular type of political violence and it occurs within the context of the overall process of democracy and democratization. We may also suggest that competitive election; from the campaign process through the casting of ballots on Election Day to the tabulation of the results, at which winners and losers are determined, is susceptible to violence.

For the purpose of our work, electoral violence shall be used here to refer to all acts of physical assault, threats or intimidation purposefully to cause injury, damage of properties or even death which are directly tied to an impending electoral contest or an announced electoral result. Electoral violence is separated from other forms of political violence by a combination of timing and motive. The time aspects relate to violence carried out during the election period. The objective of electoral violence is to influence the electoral process and in extension its outcomes.

Prevalence and Depth of Electoral Violence

It is also necessary to better understand the trends in electoral violence like the frequency or intensity at which it occurs or the pervasiveness and severity of the issue. On a global scale, a survey of 57 elections in 2001, electoral violence occurred in 24.5 percent or 14 countries. These countries included Bangladesh, Benin, Belarus, Chad, Fiji, Gambia, Philippines, Uganda, Pakistan, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Yemen, and Zambia. Of these conflicts, 14 percent were voter-motivated, and the remaining 72 percent majority was rival-motivated (Bekoe,2010).

In recent years, electoral violence has gained increasing attention due to a perceived expansion and escalation of this type of conflict in Africa. One estimate from Lindberg (2004:70) shows that electoral violence surrounding multiparty elections in Africa was very widespread; from a sample of 87 presidential and 116 parliamentary elections held between 1965 and 2001, 80 percent of these elections experienced electoral violence. Furthermore, elections reported as free and fair experienced no less violence than those that were not reported as free and fair.

However, more recent trend analyses disagree with the previous assessment. Bekoe (2010:1) argues that “most elections are not intensely violent”. Based on the metric of one person killed, electoral violence occurs in between 19 and 25 percent of African elections. In addition, electoral violence tends to recur, suggesting “underlying grievances or structural characteristics may be tied to the elections, which in turn leads to unpopular attitudes towards democracy”.

Straus and Taylor (2012) found similar results from their research. From their dataset of all Sub-Saharan elections held during 1990 to 2007, the authors find that 19 percent of all elections were classified as highly violent campaigns, 39 percent as violent harassment, and 42 percent of cases reported no instances of electoral violence. Many countries had repeat occurrences of highly violent campaigns, including Kenya, Cote d’Ivoire, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Togo, Ethiopia,

Guinea, Equitorial Guinea and Nigeria. Level of development is not a distinguisher since many of the countries on this list have significantly more wealth and development (like Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Cote d'Ivoire) than many of the poorer countries on the list (like Ethiopia, Guinea, and Togo).

Of the 124 cases of some form of electoral violence (violent harassment or more), 117 of them were pre-voting electoral violence, while 37 exhibited post-election violence, including some cases where countries had incidents of both. Finally non election years are slightly more violent with a mean log of 4.93 annual deaths versus 3.93 in election years (Straus and Taylor (2012:37). The conclusion that can be drawn from these studies is that while serious electoral violence is not nearly as frequent as critics suggest, it is frequent enough to warrant serious concern from advocates.

Theoretical Insights on Electoral Violence

Literature on electoral violence tend to focus on the phenomenon in three distinct categories of contexts (Sisk, 2008; Klopp and Zuern, 2003). Firstly, there are countries in transit which have experienced transition from authoritarian or single party rule to multi-party politics but which are considered to be partial and unconsolidated systems which may be especially prone to conflict due to uncertainties of transition that these societies experience. For example Philippines which saw an initial transition to democracy in 1986.

Secondly, there are the weak or fragile democracies where election violence persists and is mostly perpetrated by supporters of those who lose power. And thirdly, the post-war societies undergoing democratic transition and in which elections are seen as critical turning points in the implementation of a peace agreement but in which disarmament and demobilization may be incomplete due to social divisions and enmity such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Klopp and Zuern, 2003). However, this categorization should not be seen as being mutually exclusive. For example, Nigeria displays a semblance of the first and second categories.

No single theory can account for all the root causes of election violence; however, two broad ranges of theoretical insights can be identified. A first set of the theoretical insights highlight institutional incentive as the driving force behind electoral violence (Norris, 2004; Birch, 2007; and Fischer, 2002). Institutional incentives relate to the electoral system, the police and the judiciary, and the electoral administration. The electoral system determines the rules of the game and it influences both the significance of the outcome of the election and how antagonistic the campaigning may turn out (Birch, 2007). For instance, the proportional electoral systems deals better with conflict because they generally generate a more representative outcome in the election.

It has also been argued that there is less electoral misconduct in proportional system because individual candidates have more to lose in first past the post because voters vote for candidates and not parties (Norris, 2004). Although these may look like theoretically sound ideas, the broad range of electoral system calls for more research into these questions. An independent electoral administration and an effective police and judiciary can enforce the electoral laws, but a fundamental problem is that electoral administration is politicized and subject to political pressures from the incumbent party or government.

A second set of the theoretical insights/ line of thought emphasizes the political, societal and cultural incentives encouraging electoral violence (Steankan, 2005; and Waldman, 2007). These issues relate to political patronage and a culture of violence in societies where employment and educational opportunities, business contracts and welfare services are dependent on political

patronage, gaining state power becomes a key matter. Such concerns can influence the tendency of political parties and other actors to manipulate the electoral process with the use of violence (Waldman, 2007).

On the other hand, in societies where jobs, schooling and other social services are distributed fairly, regardless of who is in power, much less is at stake at election times. Therefore, writers like Sisk (2008) maintained that to understand the root causes of election related violence, analysis must focus on the stakes of competition, expectation about winning and losing in election contests and the incentives that electoral process creates. Commonly, the stake of winning and losing valued political posts in many situations and in conditions of high scarcity and underdevelopment is incredibly high. When winning a state office is the key to livelihood not just for an individual, but for their entire clan, faction or even ethnic group, the stakes involved in prevailing electoral competition are significantly high.

Many theories abound which are relevant to the understanding of the phenomenon of electoral violence. One of these is the conflict theory which sees issues like relative deprivation, economic disequilibrium, power contentions and ethnocentrism as key in understanding the root causes of violence (Oberschall, 2007; Collier, 2003). There is also the theory of institutional-functionalism which explains violence and instability by focusing on the interface between institutionalization and political participation. Huntington (1968) cited in Biegon (2009) maintained that political disorder is more likely to occur in societies marked by high levels of political participation but slow or weak processes of political institutionalization. This suggests a direct correlation between fragile or weak states and the phenomenon of violence.

A prominent perspective for the study of electoral violence is the grievance perspective. While there are internal differences in definitions, interpretations and conceptualization, most grievance theories focus on how individual and group grievances could provide incentives for violent protests. The most influential account in this perspective is the frustration-aggression theory, which states that aggression is always the result of frustration, aggressive behaviours such as violent protests result from frustration individuals feel when they are restrained from achieving valued goals (Berkwitz, 1962). Scholars have observed that individual whose basic desires are frustrated is likely to react to his condition by directing aggressive behavior at what is perceived to be responsible for thwarting those desires, or at a substitute. With regards to electoral competition, politicians who fail to clinch electoral victory or their supporters may direct violence at their opponents, electoral institutions/officials, members of the community of origin of their rivals, or any other person/group perceived to have contributed to their failure. This theory has been used by some writers like Orji and Uzodi (2012) to explain the 2011 post-election violence in Nigeria as a reflection of the grievances of the Northern part of the country over the outcome of the presidential election result which can result in their political exclusion or loss of access to state resources. However, the grievance perspective has been charged for over predicting political violence; the existence of serious grievances is not sufficient for collective violent action to erupt (Sambanis, 2004).

Another theory worthy of mentioning is the opportunity structure perspective, which links the likelihood of violence to the presence or absence of opportunity structure for violence. The opportunity structure argument contends that no matter how discontented a group of people may become, they cannot engage in violent political action unless they organize themselves and utilize some essential resources. An important component of the opportunity structure perspective is the elite manipulation thesis, which asserts that the elite often exploit individual and group grievances of the masses to incite violent mass protests. Many opportunity structure

theories explore factors that facilitate resource mobilization by aggrieved individuals or group (Tilly, 1978).

According to Orji and Uzodi (2012), the presence of willing protesters, weak state capacity, use of inflammatory rhetoric and the existence of simmering communal tensions were seen as issues that provided the opportunity for violent mobilization in the 2011 post-election violence in Nigeria. Again, it has been argued that while opportunity may be an important determinant of violence, this does not necessarily mean that actors cannot also have strong motives for violence.

Meanwhile, these theories have their own usefulness in enhancing our understanding of the phenomenon of electoral violence, yet they also have their weaknesses which still, do not curtail their utility. For instance, the theory of institutional-functionalism has been attacked for neglecting the structural dimension of violence such as the role of the state actors in instigating violence (Biegon, 2009). In Nigeria, for instance, the fierce struggle by the political elites to win election and control state apparatus and invariably exploit the situation for personal economic aggrandizement and advantage sparks-off the roots of electoral violence. And this is further predicated on moral decadence and abject poverty where the electorates have become easy prey to be bought up and instigated in all forms of electoral violence by the political elites.

The Nature and Patterns of Electoral Violence

The term electoral violence has been used generically in two strands of research. In a first approach, electoral violence is seen as a subset of activities in a larger political conflict. In particular, it has been studied as part of the trajectory of ethnic or communal violence in divided societies such as Kenya, Sri Lanka, and India where it has been noted that violence tends to cluster around election times (Hoglund, 2006). In a second approach, electoral violence is seen as the ultimate kind of electoral fraud; and electoral fraud has been defined as clandestine efforts to shape election results (Lehoucq, 2003). In another submission, Schwartz (2001) notes that electoral violence is simply violence aimed at the electoral process and is geared towards wining political competition or power through subverting the ends of the electoral and democratic process.

As with other types of violence, defining electoral violence becomes a matter of characterizing the actors, activities, timing and motives. While the type of activity or the target is the defining feature of; for instance, terrorist violence, it is particularly the timing and motive that distinguished electoral violence from the other types of violence.

The overall objectives of electoral violence are to influence the electoral process. If disaggregated further we find that there are different motives behind the violence. Some actors might object to elections of any sort and find elections an illegitimate method for the transfer of political power. Other perpetrators might not object to elections as such, but are opposed to the system under which the elections are held, and might try to prevent or postpone elections. Yet other actors behind violence might want to influence the outcome of election. Finally, if elections do not yield the expected results, groups or parties might use violence to overthrow or alter the election outcome.

Violence can occur in all phases of an electoral process. The pre-election phase can be defined as the time from when voter registration begins to Election Day. The registration of voters may take a long time if basic documentation and a popular census is lacking. Sometimes, violence occurs on polling days, but it is interesting to note that the day of the election is often remarkably peaceful (Rapoport and Weinberg, 2001). Acts of violence and intimidation may also occur in the

post-election phase as votes are counted and the results are analyzed. The post-election phase can be defined as the period leading up to the inauguration of the newly elected body.

Electoral violence in a conflict context can emerge from a variety of sources such as state actors (military and police), political parties, guerilla/rebel groups, and militia and paramilitary groups. Armed groups are the obvious perpetrators of electoral violence in situations of sustained violent political conflict. But political parties-both those who hold government positions and the oppositions-have been key organizers of electoral violence (Hoglund, 2006; Sisk, 2008). Political parties have also been known to pay thugs or make use of the youth wings to carry out the violence. Moreover, if the party system is weak and lacks legitimacy, opportunities arise for other groups to exploit election tensions (Rapoport and Weinberg, 2001).

Activities and targets of electoral violence include the harassing, assault and intimidation of candidates, election workers, and voters, rioting, destruction of property, and political assassination. Targets can be separated into four categories, electoral stakeholders (voters, candidates, election workers, media, and monitors); electoral information (registration data, vote results, ballots, campaign materials); electoral facilities (polling and counting stations); and electoral events (campaign rallies, travelling to polling station) (Fischer, 2002:9).

Electoral violence is characterized by its timing and targets. It occurs during before and after elections; clearly, electoral violence is targeted at four categories of phenomenon; electoral stakeholders (such as voters, candidates, electoral officers, media and election monitor), electoral information (such as voter registration, vote results, ballots, campaign materials), electoral facilities (such as polling and counting stations) and electoral events (such as campaign rallies, travelling to polling station, party primaries and convention (Fischer, 2002; Hoglund, 2008).

Toyoda and Higashijima (2011) observe that electoral violence is of two strands- the politician based instrumental use of violence for electioneering and local/mass conflict which spilled over into electoral conflicts. Serious elections related violence mostly occur after post-electoral period when the outcome of the results of the election is already known and the potential for violence is evident than pre-electoral period when the outcome is quite uncertain. Hence, post electoral violence is differentiated from pre-electoral violence in its magnitude of conflicts and the level of mass participation. Interestingly, there are common patterns of violence across time, varied cases and within cases. The periods when electoral violence occurs have been categorized as follow:

- (i) The long run-up to electoral events targeted at state official with an aim of threatening or eliminating adversaries;
- (ii) The campaign's final lap targeted at influencing voters and having an impact on political participation;
- (iii) The polling days, that is, actual days of voting targeted at voters, electoral officials, and workers;
- (iv) The period between voting and proclamation of election results targeted at electoral officials; and
- (v) Lastly, the post-election outcome and their aftermath targeted at the government and state officials (Sisk, 2008).

The types of violence are embedded in each of these periods. This can be represented diagrammatically, thus:

Table 4.1: Election Periods with their Common Types of Violence

Election Periods	Types of Electoral Violence
Phase I: The long run up to electoral events	Intimidation or removal of independent judges; intimidation or targeting of election officials; intimidation or harassment of journalists; incitement to violence in the media and other public places such as religious centres; police or internal intelligence services targeting of meetings of opposition figures; and increased rates of hostage taking, kidnapping, assassinations and extortion.
Phase II: The campaign's final lap	Clashes between rival groups of supporters; attacks on election rallies, candidates; bomb scares; attacks or intimidation of election officials; and attack on observers, domestic and international.
Phase III: Polling day(s)	Attacks by armed rebel groups to disrupt polling, to limit turn out, or attack security force or police stations; attack on administrators, observers; and physical attack on election materials such as destruction of ballot boxes and papers.
Phase IV: Between voting and proclamation- the period when election officials are collating results or in between a first and a second round of elections	Armed clashes among political parties; violent clashes among groups of rival supporters; vandalism and physical attack on property of opponents; and targeted attacks against specific candidates or political parties.
Phase V: Post-election outcomes and their aftermath	Attacks on rival who either won in election or were defeated; violent street protest and efforts by armed riot police to maintain order; tear gas, firing on protesters, attack by protesters on property or the police; emergence of armed resistance group against an elected government; or escalation and perpetuation of ethnic or sectarian violence.

Source: Bamishigbin, (2011).

Pre-election violence may include acts or threats against electoral stakeholders during voters' registration or electioneering campaigns. During this period, the targets of electoral violence are often incumbent state officials or emerging candidates from political parties. Often the objective of the violence in this phase is to eliminate or weaken an opponent, to affect early the shape and nature of voting process, establish a dominant position within a particular district by eliminating or threatening potential adversaries. Other types of violence seen during this period include intimidation or harassment of journalists, incitement to violence in the media or places of worship, targeting of meetings of opposition figures by police or security operatives and increased rate of hostage-taking, kidnapping and extortions. Also in the final laps of pre-election campaigns, common patterns of violence include clashes between rival group of supporters, attacks on election rallies, bomb scares, and attacks on election observers both domestic and international.

Election Days violence in Nigeria are mostly minimal. This is why state officials horridly conclude that elections were held in a violent free atmosphere. Where such voting days become violent, the common types of election violence that occurs include attacks by political thugs to disrupt the polling, to limit turnout, or to attack security forces. There are also physical attacks on election

materials such as destruction of ballot boxes as well as assaults on opposition agents or parties and harassment or intimidation by security agents.

In the aftermath of an election, electoral violence may take the form of violent protests against electoral rigging, whether real or imagined, and of the state's deploying its apparatus of force in response to the protest, thereby further fuelling the violence. In most instances, the main actors have been the state, represented by the ruling party, security agents and electoral officials, and opposition forces (Omotola, 2008). On this note, Kura (2008) avers that aside from use of resources over which the party has absolute control of, the ruling PDP in Nigeria also employs security agencies to deal with oppositions.

Similarly, Fischer (2002) identified five intervals in an election process at which electoral violence occurs. These are:

- i. The identity conflict which occurs during the voter registration exercise as a result of inability of persons to establish their officially recognized identities;
- ii. The campaign conflict which occurs as parties and candidates seek to disrupt their opponents campaign, harass voters candidate in a bid to impact on the level of participation during the electioneering process especially voting;
- iii. The ballot conflict which occurs on election day to influence participation and disrupt the process;
- iv. The result conflict which occurs as a result of disputes over election results and inability of the judiciary to dispense election related cases fairly, transparently and timely; and
- v. Lastly, the representation conflict which takes place in countries with the winner takes all system (Zero sum game politics). The losers are left out of governance and their grievance with the winner results into post election violence.

Furthermore, the type of conflict and violence that characterizes election is also a pointer to the motives, victims and perpetrators behind such violent act. These violent acts include: voters in conflict with the state, as a result of disputed elections results or process, the state in conflict with voters who challenge the electioneering process, political adversaries in conflict with each other to achieve their political ambition and lastly, an amalgamation of these three typologies of violence (Fischer, 2002).

Dimensions of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

a. Physical Dimension

Physical dimensions of violence in Nigeria include political assassinations, lootings, assaults, arson, bombing and hijacking of electoral materials at gun point. The issue of political assassination, for example, has been a major dimension to electoral violence in Nigeria. Some notable people assassinated include top party chieftains, candidates aspiring to elective offices of high stake and those already in elected/appointed offices. Notable figures here include Funsho Williams-a gubernatorial aspirant under the PDP in Lagos on July 2006, and Dr Ayo Daramola, also a PDP gubernatorial candidate in Ekiti State on August, 2006. This raises doubts of the likelihood of their being eliminated to clear the political coast for others in the race (Rafiu et al, 2009). There were also reported and verified cases of bomb explosions in the homes of aspiring candidates. For example, the home of Senator Patrick Osakwe in Delta State was bombed on 24 November 2006, as well as, those of Nduli Elemelu and Theodora Giwa-Amu both aspirant into the House of Representatives also in Delta State. These were all before the elections.

The conduct of the elections itself witnessed many more cases of physical violence-most notably the open display and use of dangerous weapons such as guns, axes and cutlasses to perpetrate electoral fraud. In the process, many innocent people were killed. In the aftermath of the 2007 elections, and especially after the announcement of results, physical violence broke out in many parts of the country but was much more pronounced in the south-west. For instance, there was violent response including the burning of houses, killing, looting and general break down of law and order in Ondo, Ekiti, Osun and Oyo States.

b. Psychological Dimension

The psychological dimension of violence relates to official and unofficial actions that create fear in the people, which may be a product of physical violence. These include threats to opposition forces by security agencies or through phone calls and text messages. At the psychological level, the situation does not seem better. The most glaring manifestation of this strand of electoral violence in Nigeria was the infamous declaration by President Obasanjo that for him and the PDP, the 2007 election was a do or die affair (Orogun, 2008). This statement seemed to bolster the resolve of the PDP to go to any length to win at all costs, to create fear in the mind of the opposition and the electorate and make them more circumspect about their roles during the elections. The resultant criminalization of politics through violence further served to heighten fear in the populace.

This tendency was replicated at lower level of state governance. In Oyo State, for example, late Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, generally seen as the strongman of Ibadan politics until his death, was said to have boasted shortly after the 2007 elections that only those that were on his side could win elections. In Kwara State, Dr Olusola Saraki, the political godfather of the state, simply declared that there was no vacancy in the government house and insisted that his son, Dr Bukola Saraki must be returned for a second term. And this created fear in most aspiring gubernatorial candidates, and caused them to withdraw/defer their aspirations (Omotola, 2008).

c. Structural Dimension

The structural dimension of electoral violence seems much more pronounced, being a product of structural imbalance, including coercion of citizens by the government to register or vote, unequal opportunities for political parties and candidates, abuse of power of incumbency, falsification of election results, as well as the politicization of security and electoral officials (Nwolise, 2007). Structurally, violence manifested in the form of systemic disequilibrium predicated upon double standards in Nigeria, all the parties were not given equal access to the state-owned media, particularly the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN).

Moreover, the anti-corruption agencies of the state, particularly the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) were being used as a political weapon by the ruling party to harass, intimidate and frustrate the opposition out of politics. A case in point here was the ordeals of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the Action Congress (AC) presidential candidate in the 2007 elections, who was hurriedly indicted for corruption without a fair hearing, which formed the basis for his purported disqualification from contesting the election. The overall ineffective governance of the elections which included the late arrival and shortage of electoral materials and officials, falsification and announcement of false results and the massive disenfranchisement of the people that were the hallmark of most elections in Nigeria in the recent times, represent other dimensions of structural violence (Omotola, 2008).

Evidently, electoral violence is more pronounced at the physical dimension which seems more severe and apparent, though conceptually electoral violence is beyond mere physical violence. Nevertheless, in most societies of Africa like Nigeria, electoral violence is perceived more from the physical dimension by extant literature on election violence in Nigeria (Albert, 2007).

Elections, Electoral Violence and Democratic Process in Nigeria

Democracy does offer some opportunities and political space for national development and conflict transformation. Free and fair electoral competition is central to the working of any democratic project. Orogun (2008) argued that competing issues and societal dimension of democracy/democratic process must emphasize the primacy of transfer of state power to succeeding administration through the processes of election that are reasonably certified to be free and fair, thus legitimizing the dynamic of regime transition. Elections constitute potent tools for the proper functioning of liberal democracy. That is why Aluaigba (2008) maintained that election offers opportunity for people to participate in the political processes by deciding through the ballot box who should represent them at the level of governance. It is through election that the legitimacy and credibility of public office holders are stamped.

Properly managed elections provide a veritable platform for conflict resolution and transformation (Odukoya, 2007). Unfortunately, in Africa and Nigeria in particular evidences suggests that elections are fast becoming the very opposite of the above. Odukoya (2007) further pointed out that while much lip-service is paid to norms of free elections, too often the reality is a travesty of democracy. Devoid of the attribute of freeness and fairness, elections become empty shells, lacking any real democratic content. Aluaigba (2008:2) maintained that credible election most relevant to the quality of democracy has been dented with terribly festering irregularities. This explains why the conduct of free and fair election has remained elusive and problematic in Nigeria since independence. He further argued that public polls held in 1959, 1964-65, 1979 and 1983 were all fraught with various levels of anomalies ranging from bribery, electoral violence, intimidation and harassment of voters, ballot box snatching and ballot stuffing, under age voting, vote buying, and so on. This misdemeanor has cost Nigeria its political stability, leading to military coups that over-threw the civilian regime. It is clear that this trend has not changed as exemplified by the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections. To some extent election cycles of 2011, 2015, 2019 and even 2023 were also marred by one some degrees of electoral violence in the country. Consequently, electoral violence has become a prominent feature in most democratization processes and with catastrophic effects on democracy or democratic consolidation. As an element of conflict, violence is in existence in one form or another in every society and every institution of societies but the persistence of electoral violence signifies a draw-back in a country's democratic journey.

Studies of election-related violence (Olaniyi, 2001) often highlight the perpetuation of patronage politics or a system in which politicians are gang-like bosses that control resources (such as access to jobs and income) and dispense public service such as housing, health care or lucrative government contracts. Indeed, Olarinmoye (2008) maintained that electoral corruption is the result not just of the avariciousness of god fathers and politicians but of the logic of electoral competition (zero sum) which demand that political parties in Nigeria resort to individuals (god fathers) to effect electoral success through activities that distort the electoral process. Thus, the stakes of election are often seen as opportunities to engage in corruption and economic rent-seeking. This, in turn, leads to highly factionalized politicians, often along religious, sectarian, or ethnic lines or along party political divides, where control of the state leads to the reinforcement of class divisions or economic opportunities along lines of social difference.

Struggle in politics is a normal phenomenon since it has to do with competition, what is abnormal is the violence that has engrossed political struggle and power relations in Nigeria. Electoral violence is motivated by political actors who see politics not only as do or die affairs, but also as an extension of birth rights of individuals or group and so real or imagined opposition is silenced, worst still, eliminated. For the purpose of political recognition and relevance, well-placed individuals and groups continue to enjoy tenacity of office at the detriment of other 'disadvantaged' groups and individuals. Politics and political relations become stressed and strained. Intolerance ensues rather than accommodation; rancour rather than harmony and conflict in place of cooperation.

Electoral violence is gradually becoming a permanent feature of democratization in Nigeria. This is because most campaign grounds are soaked with violence and killings. Arowolo and Aluko (2012) argued that electoral violence seems to be institutionalized since it emanates from the corridors of power and so politics and political activities become exclusive rights of the politicians who make politics dirty in the first place. The fact that political game in Nigeria is played at variance with set rules makes it a dirty game. They maintained that Politics in Nigeria must have been infested with greed, tribalism, intolerance, injustice and parochial instinct of political leadership.

It is only natural and expected, therefore that in a situation where political opponents are clamped down upon like in Nigeria, the political space becomes heated and tension-soaked as opponents strive to balance the terror. Indeed Arowolo and Aluko,(2010) maintained that from 1999 to 2011, election into political offices was constantly secured by those who had the monopoly of weaponry and thuggery, as violence, rather than the electorate determined who occupied what position.

Since it was only the industry of politics as practiced in Nigeria that promised or delivered to the lucky ones the scarce commodities of wealth, power and fame which are the three dividends of public office holding at all elective levels in Nigeria, political contests became fiercer than necessary in game where winners took all and losers become more desperate to such an extent that they could hire assassins, readily available among the poor not gainfully employed to do dirty jobs for the rich politicians.

The culture of violence in some societies predisposes them to electoral violence. The prevalence of violence during election season in Nigeria has been explained within the context of democratization process in the continent. The several decades of military and authoritarian colonial rule has impacted on the electioneering process in most of Africa's new democracies. The decades of military/authoritarian rule resulted in a strong military dominating virtually all spheres of the society (economy) giving them a vantage position over their civilian counterpart in the struggle for power in civilian dispensation (Adekanye, 2000). Civilian political leaders emerged with military mentality. The use of violence during election season is seen as justified as an instrument for competing against opponents in the struggle for power in the relatively new democracies in Africa. Electoral violence has increased by 50 percent in Africa from 1990 to 2006 compared to time between 1945 and 1989. According to the NELDA data set of national elections, ranging from 1945 to 2006, between 1945 and 1989 there were 352 election events, of which 66 or 18.75 percent were marred with electoral violence that involved civilian deaths immediately before, during or after the elections. Between 1990 and 2006 there were a total of 330 election events of which 93 (or 28.18 percent) involved electoral violence (Hyde and Marinov, 2012).

Osaghae (1989) identifies the form and character of the state as implicating factors toward electoral violence in Nigeria. For him, states that are totalitarian such as most African states, where the exercise of powers of the state is based on the use of force; capturing political power

translates to capturing all other things. When these states embrace democracy, the character of the state remains and is still evident. The result eventually is unhealthy rivalry and competition for power during elections.

Electoral violence in Nigeria assumes different nature ranging from fighting, hooliganism, disruption of campaign rallies, threat of violence, political thuggery, abduction and kidnapping to the most like murder, killings, assassinations, assault, battery, bombings destruction, looting and damage to property. The causes of political and election violence cut across factors such as political greed and repression, bias and partiality of the electoral commission and lack of credibility of the electoral body to such issues as poverty, illiteracy, incitement and ethnicity which makes the populace susceptible to political manipulation by politicians.

Political parties, electoral management bodies and the judiciary ideally are supposed to be tools for social mobilization, transparent electoral governance, and effective electoral justice system respectively. In most cases, especially in the emerging African democracies, the reverse is the case. Political parties are not ideologically based to effectively mobilize voters. This inadequacy gives room for other forces of mobilization such as ethnicity and religion which are usually manipulated and are prone to violence (Basedau et al, 2007). Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) in their composition are supposedly impartial, independent and transparent but their funding and composition is determined by the government and has political affiliation. This casts doubts on their independence by opposition parties. Consequently, rejection of election results by opposing parties/candidates, results in outbreak of violence because of perceived manipulation of EMBs by the incumbent.

In examining the potential determinants or conditions that fuel violence in connection to polling, Lyons (2005) identifies the context within which conflict occurs in the electioneering process. In conflict societies, elections are contested fiercely because of the perceived stakes involved. Violence thus becomes an attractive tool to garner votes in an election. Also, the competition between parties during electioneering process may invite the use of violence as a way out of accepting electoral defeat. The culture of violence and impunity which characterizes conflict societies further fuels the situation since perpetrators of electoral violence are not brought to book because the political parties are afraid of losing their support.

A country's electoral administration and electoral system are crucial to explaining the attractions of violence in some societies and among certain actors. In systems where a small percentage of the votes are determinant of the outcome for the election, for instance, in system such as first-past-the-post electoral system violence is likely to occur (Reif, 2005; Reilly and Reynolds, 2000). Also the kind of election whether it is a referendum, a local or national (presidential/parliament) election will influence the pattern of electoral competition and the likelihood to use violence. The independence of the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) whether they are run by government, under government supervision or strictly independent of government control. Lastly, the choice of electoral administration may influence the use of violence during election because of the suspicion and mistrust. Socio-economic condition of the citizens is also one of the key drivers of violence in Nigeria. Nigeria is a wealthy country with the poor of the poorest population. Most citizens live on less than \$2 per day, maternal mortality is high, and there is widespread unemployment. Hence, resource-based competition is one of the underlying reasons for electoral violence. Citizens compete for jobs, land, oil profit etc.

Bekoe (2010) implicates some underlying grievances or structural characteristics for the regularity with which electoral violence occur. These structural factors includes: grievances over land rights, jobs and ethnic marginalization are manipulated by politicians in pursuit of their political

ambition. In the same vein, Biegon (2009) observes that electoral violence is not an independent phenomenon of occurrence; rather it is a product of historically dysfunctional political relationships and structural factors. It is clearly a part of a larger problem of fragile political, economic and social systems. This in turn, further weakens an already fragile state or society.

As Adetula (2007) observes, while electoral violence may occur before or after electoral competition, at their base are protests and agitations over socio-economic issues. Invariably, the lure for these resources creates a ready supply of people to perpetrate violence in order to get those resources. The level of poverty with its attendant problems of unemployment, restlessness etc predisposes societies to violence. The logic is that democracy thrives under some level of economic development, the absence of this have dire consequences for democratization in Africa. The situation makes people easily vulnerable to the antics of dubious politicians who may want to use them for thurgery to achieve their political objectives (Omotola, 2008). Bamfo (2008) in his study identifies the sit tight syndrome of political leaders. That is, the tendency to hang on to power at all costs, no matter what it takes, even if it means using violence to manipulate elections.

On the consequences of electoral violence on the democratic process, it is worth noting that election-related violence is potentially damaging and can undermine progress towards democratization. It has been suggested that violence beyond direct effects such as hindering people from casting their votes and preventing candidates from participating in the election can have long term effects of causing disillusionment and frustration with politics (Sisk, 2008; Bratton, 2008; and Aluaigba, 2009). The absence or presence of electoral violence during an electoral process is also central to determining the legitimacy of an election (Lindberg, 2006).

One major feature of electoral violence in Nigeria is the insecurity that characterizes it, this comes in form of loss of lives and property, this in turn results in attendant implications such as increase on resources for repairing damaged infrastructures, this also leads to economic instability etc More so, electoral violence does hinder citizens from participating in political activities occurring in their countries and hampers effective political competition.

As Omotola (2008) rightly observes, electoral violence in Africa's new democracies may lead to the collapse of public order and large numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), the flow of refugees and further militarization of the society.. The foreign policy implication is also paramount to the image of the state and among the comity of nations. Most especially, as it has to do with conducting free, fair and credible elections acceptable to the international community.

electioneering process. Electoral violence does undermine democratization. Democracy is intrinsically connected to the problem of political stability; electoral violence is perceived as being causative and symptomatic. If not properly mitigated, electoral violence could result in war thereby putting the security of person, property as well as the social development of the country in jeopardy (Ugiabe, 2010).

To corroborate this position, Hoglund and Piyaathne (2008) in their study found that electoral violence does undermines peoples trust in the electoral process and consequently put off certain groups of the society such as women and youths from engaging or involving themselves in politics. Also the fear and anxiety that characterizes elections as a result of electoral violence in the past may in itself become a cause of violence and invariably jeopardizing the democratization process in the state.

Strategies towards reducing the scourge of electoral violence have been severally advanced at different points in time. These include the institutional character of the electoral body in terms of the structure, balance, composition and professionalism; is a major determinant of a successful

electioneering process that is perceived as credible (Wall et al, 2006), the absence of which may make the system vulnerable to election related violence. Likewise, building strong institutions that can conduct credible elections and ensure adequate representation.

The role of the security agencies is paramount in quelling, managing and bringing under control, severe violent situations. The security operatives should be briefed and debriefed towards early warning and conflict prevention capacities. The use of principle and techniques of non-violence can counter balance or dampen the tendency towards violence during elections; the incorporation of the local police into training sessions and briefings on conflict prevention and mitigation strategies during election is quite rewarding.

Anti-corruption measures could be used to serve as deterrence to erring political office holders who see politics as a booming industry where they could get rich quickly, security sector reforms; which will ensure a more responsive police force, economic and social development as well as good governance and electoral laws reform.

The civil society has to play vibrant role in ensuring the enthronement of democratic rule; civic education should be of high priority; the opposition parties should be encouraged to serve as a watchdog on the process; the mass media should be revitalized to play its crucial role of promoting the credibility of the electoral process through the development of workshops, radio programs and educational events to promote peace and non-violence in elections. The role to be played by international actors must not be underestimated as partners in violence prevention through support of various study and grants to research bodies conducting research on mitigating violence.

In line with the above, Schimpp and McKernan (2001) identify potential democracy and government related activities that have the capability to mitigate conflict during the election period. They identified the media as capable of preventing conflict from spreading through responsible reporting, monitoring and mitigating electorate violence through the activities of NGOs involved in gathering information useful in deterring violence related to elections,

Although these may seem empirically viable as a means of mitigating electoral violence; it is nevertheless difficult to ascertain whether these strategies were solely, responsible for the decrease in violence. Notwithstanding, the effects and impact of these interventions must be analyzed properly in order to improve strategies for reducing violence.

Conclusion

Elections are paramount to the sustenance of democracy and good governance. To attain sustainable democracy, government must be able to ensure credible and less-violent election. Democracy can only thrive in a system devoid of violence. As a concept, electoral violence includes all acts or threats; physical, psychological or structural violence purposely to intimidate, harm, blackmail a political actor and effect a change in the electoral process. Electoral violence destroys lives and properties, and violence disrupt democratic regimes, as was the case in the abrupt termination of the First and Second Republic in Nigeria. Thus, electoral violence is common in Nigeria and has the capacity to impinge on the electoral process, undermine legitimacy and threaten democratic stability. This means the clamor for democratic consolidation and deepening may continue to be a mere rhetoric in Nigeria. Institutional and electoral reforms by the government is critical to safeguarding the electoral process in Nigeria. INEC, Nigeria's electoral management body needs to be more independent with less encroachment from the government while the electoral Act of 2022 is a reform that must be properly implemented to secure the country's elections. Again, advocacy and media-related activities involving the citizens, civil

society organizations and international actors remain vital in mitigating the crisis of electoral violence before, during and even after elections in Nigeria.

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