

DEMOCRACY ELECTION VIOLENCE CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian fourth republic has been marred with varying forms of electoral violence and since inception has been a reoccurring phenomenon. This research is focused on the causes of electoral violence in Nigeria especially the fourth republic, reason why it persists and how these menace can be curbed from the Nigerian electoral system.

Keywords: Democracy, election, violence, conflict, republic

1 INTRODUCTION

Democracy in Nigeria has had a chequered history. From the 'Wild-Wild West' experience of the first republic through prolonged autocratic military regimes and the truncated second and third republics to the present democratic dispensation, democracy has suffered debilitating experiences in the country. The perennial travail of democracy is predicated on a number of factors, including ineffective structures and institutions, the foreboding presence of the military, corruption, money politics and godfatherism (Said & Kehinde, 2007: 95).

Democracy which has multiple of variant of definitions and meanings is believed to have a worldwide acceptance as the best form of government. And if one may argue, the concept has been either imposed or largely accepted as the

best form of governance. However, this system of government is characterized by certain shortcomings which are either external or internal i.e. domestic causes and or foreign influences. In the case of Nigeria, the concept of democracy has become difficult to define and this is because, the very factor which qualifies a democracy (free and fair election) has been difficult to achieve in Nigeria.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Violence

The word "violence" defies any precise, commonly, accepted definition. The concept often serves as a catch all for every variety of protest, militancy, coercion, destruction, or muscles flexing which a given observer happens to fear or condemn. (Anifowose 2006:1).

Gatlung (2004:2) identifies three types of violence, as physical, psychological and structural. He states that physical violence involves a situation of physical assault whether mild or hard. To him psychological violence is the kind that places a person in a state of perpetual fear of what could happen to him as a result of his participation in an activity of being a member of a community.

Violence manifests itself in various forms according to the society by which it is perpetuated. For instance, in Nigeria the most common forms through which it manifests is ethnic, domestic, religious, political or electoral patterns (Ugboaja:6). This paper focuses on electoral violence.

2.2 Electoral Violence

Electoral violence can be defined as any random or organized act of threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence an electoral process (IFES 2002:3).

Ugboaja (2007:5) sees electoral violence as one form of organized act or threat which is physical, psychological and structural aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing

political opponents before, during and after election geared towards influencing the electoral process to one's selfish desire.

According to Ekiran (2006:284) violence of any type whether political or otherwise has more negative than positive results on the society. To him, in the first instance, it does not project a good image of the country outside its borders. It implies that the country is still politically immature and democracy is still a mirage.

2.3 Causes of Electoral Violence

Electoral violence does not just happen, there are some underpinning antecedents from observations and research electoral violence is rooted in the following among others;

i. Natural Tendency:

Research and experience show that some individuals are naturally prone to violent behaviour due to their upbringing. Researchers of human behaviour assert that people who have been exposed to violence will more likely than those who have not been exposed to violence to employ violent strategies to manage conflict either on the micro or macro level. Ugoh(2004:)

ii. Cultural Trait:

Some cultures are said to be prone to and committed to the use of violence to maintain or achieve a desired goal. Most children in such a culture have at one time or another been slapped by either or both parents at least in a minor way. Such action meets the approval of the society and it is not even thought of as violence against the child since it is by the parents (Anderson and Sabatelli, 1999:45).

iii. Political Intolerance:

Most political parties in power are intolerant of opposition. They put all necessary and all possible machinery to frustrate opposing parties or even to eliminate them. Ugoh (2004:164) maintains that this is the order of the day in many African countries. To him, the result is one party system. Here in Nigeria, the opposition parties are only vocal without any effectiveness.

iv. Unpopular Politicians:

Violence is also caused by unpopular politicians who usually employed political violence through paid thugs to

turn the table in their favour. These are individuals who cannot win election but want to win by all means. Furthermore, election results are changed in favor of a particular political party at the detriment of other parties.

Types of Democracy

The broadest differentiation that scholars make between democracies is based on the nature of representative government, these are two categories;

Direct and indirect Democracy

Direct Democracy

Places all powers in the hands of individuals. When political decision must be made, all members of the polity gather together and individual cast a vote. In theory this sound like the ideal form of government. There are no intermediaries. Each person is treated as an equal and each person is given a chance to directly affect the policy making process.

Representative Democracy

As political communities change and evolve, so does the understanding of how democracy should be implemented. Representative democracy establishes on intermediary political actor between the individual and the policy output of the state. Through electoral process one person or groups of people are elected and assigned with the task of making decision on behalf of a group of citizens that they represents.

2.4 Electoral Systems in Nigeria

According to Kurfi (2009:95-97) though democracy has generally been accepted the world over as the best form of government, like all good things, it has its own conditions, rules and procedures. To him democracy can strive and flourish only under certain conditions, one of which is general elections in which the people are given the opportunity to freely choose their own leaders through secret ballot. He added that this vital exercise is usually carried out from time to time through the process of adult suffrage.

After this analysis of the desirability of elections, Kurfi came down to Nigeria and lamented the various vices which marred Nigeria's electoral process. In his opinion, electoral malpractice are many and varied in many

countries including some of the very advanced democracies, however the case of Nigeria is said to be peculiar because of the fact that things seem to be getting worse rather than better as the nation moves ahead.

3 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

A total of three hundred (300) questionnaire was administered 30 were for politicians and 270 were shared among electorates as they comprise the chunk of 52 questionnaire were invalid or not return at the course of research owing to many factors as the case may be.

3.1 Sections Analysis on Opinion

Table 1: Age respondent bracket

S/N	Age Colum	Number	Frequency	Percentage%
1	18 - 27	30	30	12.19
2	28 - 37	72	72	29.0
3	38 - 47	82	82	33.1
4	48 - above	64	64	25.8
	Total	248	248	100%

The break down in table four above shows that the age bracket 18 - 27 has representation of 30 (12.1), age bracket 28 - 37 has 72(29.0) representatives, age bracket 38-47 has 82(33.1) and 48 and above has 64(25.8). the highest respondent is age bracket 38 - 47(33.3) and the least 18 age bracket (18-27) with 30(2.1) representatives.

Table 2: Status of Respondents

S/N	Status Colum	Number	Frequency	Percentage%
1	Politicians	30	30	12.1
2	Electorates	218	218	87.9
	Total	248	248	100%

The above table shows that 30(12.1) are politicians and 218(87.9) are electorates. Shows electorated are the majority.

Table 3: Respondents opinion of causes of electoral violence

S/N	Opinion Colum	Number	Frequency
1	Violence is caused by malpractice	41	41
2	Perpetrators go unpunished	31	31
3	Violence mostly affects electorates	44	44
4	Unwillingness to accept defeat	31	31
5	All of the above	101	101
	Total	248	248

From table above 41(16.5) of our respondent suggest that electoral violence is caused by electoral malpractices in Nigeria, 31(12.5) believe that perpetrators of elections violence go unpunished or rather Scott free, 44(17.7) percent of our respondent also opined that in most cases the electorates suffer more of the consequences of electoral violence's, 31(12.5) of the respondents also agree to the fact that some politicians are unwilling to accept defeat and finally most of the respondents 101(40.7) agree to the fact that all the above listed factors compound or form the factors that cause electoral violence in Nigeria.

After the above analysis the respondent were asked to comment on the Nigerian elections from what they have observed so far from 1999-2011 elections 28(11.3%) regard elections a free and fair, 118(47.6) describe the elections as sham and a share manufacture of numbers by party in power, 68(27.4) believe the elections were not totally free and fair in some states of the federations, 50(20.2) of the respondents refused or rather did not comment on this aspect.

In the same vein the people were asked if they think free and fair elections will strengthen the Nigerian democracy 213(85.9) agree that free and fair election with develop Nigeria's democracy, while 35(14.1) disagree, reason were free and fair election is a continues process that mustn't be distorted.

3.2 Overview of Finding

Having administered the questionnaire among electorates and a few politicians, drawn from various parts of the country it has been discovered that the Nigerian democracy is facing serious threat due to election related violence these no doubt in its reoccurring stages and if not put in check, the Nigerian democracy will be distorted like history has it.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Democracy in Nigeria since independence is practised with regard to subjective factors and primordial loyalty to one's place of birth, social connection and group affinity. Consequently, voting pattern has been ethnic-based. Democratization is always directed towards consolidation of ethnicism. Campaigns are not issue-based and election victory is a function of level of intimidation, thuggery and rigging. Sub national consideration has displaced national interest and mediocrity took preference over merit and competence in the election of national leaders.

The unfolding events in Nigeria evidently point to a departure from the guides of democratic ethos and ethics. Politics in Nigeria has been described as sectional politics where denial of rights takes priority in the distribution of and access to national resources. The segregated politics of the governments at all levels create primordial ethnic loyalties where groups jostle for the "national cake" in a way that could inhibit the continuity of the Nigerian State.

4.1 Conclusion

Attempt has been made to establish a relationship between democracy and violent conflicts with a particular focus on the Nigeria fourth republic. Some factors have given impetus to violent conflicts in Nigeria were highlighted, the paper recommends that;

- Benefits accruable to political offices be reduced to make them less attractive. This is because privileges associated with political offices engender violent competition for them.
- Political elite should be re-orientated towards emphasizing things that unite them rather than things that separate them.
- Political corruption that has made Nigeria a rich nation with poor people should be addressed seriously and capital punishment meted out to corrupt public officers to serve as deterrent to others.
- There is need for societal re-orientation towards holding public office holders

accountable. Nigerian education should be tailored towards meeting the immediate needs of our society. Education system should go beyond paper qualification. There is need to align our education system towards the needs of the society.

- Politicians should take the issue of building and integrating the disparate groups in the country very seriously.
- Government should come up with an acceptable formula for sharing federally collected revenue as this has been a vexed issue among the various groups in the country.
- There is need to build the culture of peace among the citizenry as this will tone down the culture of violence people have already imbibed especially under military rule

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