

Political Violence and its Effects on Social Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper was undertaken to ascertain the effects of political violence on social development in Nigeria. The conflict theoretical perspective was adopted for the study in order to determine the problem at hand. It was discovered that political violence has brought a lot of conflicts in Nigeria among ethnic groups, nations, religions and tribes. The paper recommended that politicians should conduct their campaign on the basis of issues rather than attack on political opponents or mobilisation of religious, ethnic and regional sentiments. The campaigns should focus on the implementation of the critical national economic, political, social, cultural, educational and health services. Political parties should evolve as mechanism of democratic governance rather than servicing as an organised criminal enterprise used for seeking, gaining and retaining power in order to rob public treasury.

Keywords: Political, Violence, Effects, Social and Development

Introduction

Nigeria in the recent decades has been in the news for very ugly reason of the unprecedented political violence which has occurred in different parts of the country but with specific dominance in the northern parts of Nigeria. The latest of such violent scenarios was the Tuesday May 7, 2013 mass murder of nearly one hundred security operatives in Nasarawa state, North Central Nigeria, by a suspected armed local secret sect known in local parlance as “*Ombatse*” (meaning we have arrived) cult group (Onwubiko 2013). Politicians recruited, trained and empowered local secret sect to harass, intimidate and victimize perceived political opponents and opposing views against their political ambition. This culture of violence has not only been imbibed and sustained as part of the country's political behaviour since independence it has been one of the potent causes of the low participation of Nigerians in politics and other social activities. Adeyemi and Adeyemi (2003) express concern over the situation of politics in Nigeria, when they observed that during the ward congress of the PDP, an intra-party affair, many politicians went to the congress venue armed with assault rifles and acid containers for possible use on opponents. These politicians employed local secret sect to compel innocent people to vote against their wishes. The party agents at the polling booths are openly threatened to compromise, and INEC officials were forced to do what they would not have done ordinarily.

Political violence negates peaceful coexistence, law and order. In addition to security concerns, it militates against the consolidation of democracy and social coexistence. This in turn impacts on the social and economic well being of the nation and creates imbalances in social relations (Howell, 2004). Political violence brings complex set of events such as poverty, ethnic or religious grievances which affect the social relationship of the people in the society. Marx, (1968) posits that violence, particularly political violence, represents a disturbance movement to the political equilibrium and peaceful co-existence of the system.

Alubo (2011) asserts that the refugee problems that accompany these disturbances also have implications for attainment of target in, and access to social development such as education, reduction in maternal mortality and childhood deaths as well as other aspects of productive health. Indeed, the mass rape of the female population in the areas engulfed by violence fuels the spread of HIV/AIDS which is already a high prevalence and regarded as a social problem in Nigeria. Furthermore, the continued eruptions of political violence have implications for national peace and security, and thereby threaten the dissolution of the country Nigeria. It was reported in December 2001, that, over eighty major political violence have been recorded in various parts of the country in twelve years of civilian rule (Alubo, 2006).

Political violence impact negatively in many forms of development such as the inability for people to interact with one another creates unhealthy child growth. More so, during political violence a lot of people abandon their ethnic, cultural values, religion or traditions to pledge allegiance to new, artificial and unproven states. This unfortunate, states have plunged people into deeper crisis, poor interaction resulting to fierce elimination of people. The phenomenon is used extreme, repressive measures that have threatened the rule of law, personal freedoms and human rights. Political violence is a determinant of armed conflict, complex interplay of ideology, quest for power by competing groups, specific in the country and international conditions. The economic determinants of conflict, in turn, are often related to poverty, inequality and social exclusion. It is in the light of the prevailing situation that this paper seeks to periscope on the effects of political violence on social development in Nigeria. To achieve the goal the paper is sub divided into the following themes: the introduction, which is ongoing, conceptual terrain, theoretical frame work, belief history of political violence in Nigeria, political violence and social development in Nigeria, recommendations and conclusion.

Definition of Terms

Conceptualizing Political Violence

Violence is defined as "the illegitimate and unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will or desires of other people in the society"(Wolf, 1969). According to Gurr (1970), political violence refers to all collective attacks within a political community against the political regime, its actors including competing political groups as well as incumbents or its policies. From the foregoing, one can observe that there is a correlative relationship between the two concepts. As a matter of fact, they are complementary. The end-product of political violence is thuggery. Violence is the means through which thugs achieve their aims.

Conceptualizing Social Development

Social development refers to the process by which people interact with others around them. As they develop and perceive their own individuality within their community, they also gain skills to communicate with other people and process their actions. Social development most often refers to how people develop friendships and other relationships, as well as how they handle conflict and friends.

Social Development denotes people, community and the factors that influence quality of life. Social development attempts to explain qualitative changes in the structure and framework of society that help the society to better realize its aims and objectives. Development can be broadly defined in a manner applicable to all societies' at all historical periods as an upward ascending movement featuring greater levels of energy, efficiency, quality, productivity, complexity, comprehension, creativity, mastery, enjoyment and accomplishment. Development is a process of social change, not merely a set of policies and programmes instituted for some specific results.

Theoretical Overview

Conflict/Marxist theoretical perspective shares the same assumptions concerning the nature of the society and political violence. Marxist situates every social action within the ambit of economic base and lays much emphasis on historical and dialectical materialism as a methodological device. Conflict theory on the other hand emphasizes conflict as the hallmark of the society (Yecho, 2005). The theory is based upon the view that the fundamental causes of political violence are the social and economic forces that operates within society.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists are of the view that there are groups in the society that have different interests. In this regard they believe that social arrangement will tend to benefit some groups at the expense of others.

Because of existence of the different interests, the potentials and the likelihood of conflict is always present. According to this theory, some groups come to dominate others and to win for themselves a disproportionate share of the society's political power, which includes wealth and privileges in the society at the expense of the less powerful ones. They also incriminate the activities of the less powerful while they protect that of the powerful persons such situations according to this theory creates violence. The theory is of the view that, the masses are not bound to society by their shared values, but by coercion at the hands of those in power. This perspective emphasizes social control, not consensus and conformity. Groups and individuals advance their own interests, struggling over control of societal resources. Those with the most resources exercise power over others with inequality and power struggles resulting. There is great attention paid to class, race, and gender in this perspective because they are seen as the grounds of the most pertinent and enduring struggles in society which often lead to political violence (Anderson and Taylor, 2009).

According to the theory, the nature of politicking in Nigeria abridges the basic right of citizens as the various institutions of society such as the legal and political system are instruments of ruling class domination and serve to further its interests. However the activities of citizens aimed at maintaining the resistance leads to increased escalation of political violence in Nigeria. Consequently upon this ugly menace politicians in Nigeria used to create many social problems to the society especially when the masses attempt to fight back for instance the elections held in 2003 was preceded by widespread intra-party and inter-party violence that continued on the polling days (Human Rights Watch 2004). This further indicated that both Nigeria's federal and state elections in 2003 and local government elections in 2004 were marred by serious incidents of violence, which left scores dead and many others injured ... In April and May 2003, at least one hundred people were killed and many more injured... Majority of the people were serious abuses and perpetrated by members or supporters of the ruling party, the people's Democratic Party (PDP). In a number of locations, elections simply did not take place as groups of armed thugs linked to political parties and candidates intimidated and threatened voters in order to falsify results (Alemika 2011).

The reality of politics in modern Nigerian society is that even the police take side with the most powerful group instead of being neutral in carrying out their role of crime prevention and control. Consequent upon this, they aid and abet well placed individual in the society who commit political violence and go unpunished while punishing others who commit the same crime but are less powerful members of the society, thereby increasing the problem of political violence in the society. From the above background it has clearly been demonstrated that even the police do not give adequate attention to prevention and control of political violence as the core of their duty, rather they are organized to manage and conspiring with the most powerful group in the society who perpetrate political violence thereby leading to social disintegration of Nigerians. Based on the foregoing major assumptions of the theory, the perspective has been adopted as the theoretical guide on the study of the effects of political violence on social development in Nigeria.

Brief History of Political Violence in Nigeria

Political violence has been part of human history, present in the history of all humanity for ages. It is an endemic feature of most of the developing world political systems. Particularly in developing countries, like Nigeria, where politics has become an essential feature of the people means of achieving economic wealth (Tamuno, 1972). It was Nigeria's pride that she achieved her independence with minimum disturbances; but, it is rather unfortunate that after independence Nigeria has been gravitating in a spiral of political violence. This problem deteriorated in the elections conducted immediately after independence in the 1960s. In the Western Region, political violence, popularly referred to as "operation wet e", were recorded from 1964 to 1965 following both federal and regional elections as well as rift between Awolowo and Akintola. There were also political violence in parts of Northern Region, especially between supporters of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and supporters of other parties, mainly the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and Action Group. Furthermore the national election conducted in 1983 witnessed massive post-election violence following the declared landslide victory of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in Oyo and Ondo states considered to be stronghold of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). Several persons lost their lives and large scale destruction of property was recorded (Alemika 2011). This trend of violent activities which begins since 1960s lead to current democratic experiment which started in May 1999, with tremendous degrees of power struggle and violence killings. Available statistics show that over 10,000 lives were lost to violent clashes between 1999 to June 2002 (Adeleke, 2012).

More so, the Nigerian Red Cross, was involved in the resettlement of over 250,000 individuals and 32,000 families as a result of various acts of political violence in the country in 2001 alone (Olukorede, 2002).

For instance the first case of political violence, in Nigeria came after independence during the military coup of January 5, 1966, where a group of Nigerian young Army officers-Majors and Captains-seized power, assassinating the then Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa and Premiers Ahmadu Bello and Ladoke Akintola, of the Northern and Western Regions, respectively (Diamond, 1995). This military coup brought about political violence which led to Nigerian Civil War 1966-1970. When Nigeria successful return to democratic rule on the 29th of May 2009, the first significant civilian coup occurred in Nigeria on 10th July, 2003, when the former Governor of Anambra State Chris Ngige, was abducted in a grand plot to unseat him. This plot was executed by the late Assistant Inspector General of Police, Mr. Raphael Ige, who later claimed he acted on an “order from the above” though the principal actors to such act remain unknown till today (Adeleke, 2012). Political activities in Nigeria, since the inception of the current democratic exercise in 1999 till the present-day, have witnessed tremendous degrees of power struggle and political violence whereby the number of politically motivated murders is said to be equal to the number of people killed during the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 to 1970 (Olawale, 2003). The trend of political violence in 2003 and 2007 partly explain the post-election political violence in April 2011. Over twenty prominent Nigerians were killed as a result of political violence in what is called “Trial of Blood”. The killings also involved religious, ethnics and communal conflicts, which may come in the name of religion, ethnic or communal and his continued till date.

The Effects of Political Violence on Social Development in Nigeria

The Nigerian political scene is bedeviled by violence. This can be attributed to the culture of political activity during the pre-independence period and the early stage of political independence in 1960. Exploring the origins of political violence entails the analysis of the different domains and levels within which violence emerges. Moser and Clark (2001a) asserted that it is in the public domain where political violence, intertwined with economic and social violence, takes place. Political violence geared towards winning political competition or power through violence, subverting the ends of the electoral and democratic process. Its tool of trade is the intimidation and disempowerment of political opponents. Political violence takes place not just at election time, but in periods leading to elections, during the elections themselves, and in the period immediately following elections such as during the counting of ballots.

According to Dudley (1973), the possession of political power leads directly to economic power. Those who hold positions in the power struggle determine the location and distribution of scarce resources. Therefore, politics in Nigeria is the struggle for more money and this means that to get into politics, there is always a price to pay. Since politics entails spending huge sums of money, one will have to be involved in some competition which may precipitate political violence. Echoing in the same vain Adeyemo, (2000) maintained that political violence develops as a feature of struggle for power. He further opined that, the employment of violence in the struggle for power has some negative implications for the realization of the collective well-being of individuals and society as a whole. In Nigeria, political violence has become highly disruptive to social life, thereby causing divisions in families and communities as well as causing antagonisms among and within social groups. Nigerians have witnessed several cases of political violence in the form of assassinations, bomb-blasts, intimidations, murders, and destruction of properties in time past and now on the increase. The effect of this menace in Nigeria is tending in some respects towards social disaggregation into its constituent ethnic and sub ethnic groups divisions. Killing, harming and intimidating persons trying to vote during elections in order to destroy ballot boxes in areas where the perpetrators lack supporters or in order to snatch ballot boxes so as to stuff them with ballot papers illegally obtained and thumb-printed creates a social division in Nigeria.

The current surge of political violence is a very disturbing trend towards social progress and prosperity. In fact, the political violence is creating difficult living standards for Nigerians. For instance many people cannot live in the northern part of the country (Nigeria) where violence has become volatile. Political violence, conflict and terrorism destroy human lives, physical assets and reduce people’s social relationships. This trend has created a divisible life among the people as a result of the hitherto mutual trust that Nigerians used to experience in the past between Muslims and Christians, Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Tiv, Fulani among the ethnic groups. Sum to here melted array Nigeria is now at the precipice of fashioning along religious and ethnic affiliations.

Social activities such as inter marriages, worship, and sports among others are often disrupted as a result of political violence, invariably denying Nigerians access to social interaction and relationships. Fundamental human rights like freedom of movement have been grossly violated because of the restriction of movement or curfew limiting most Nigerians to a time framed movement under a forced confinement that is not good for social life.

This condition hampers' social activities and limits bilateral and diplomatic relationship among Nigerians. Political violence as creates movement of people leading to mass movement of people from northern to southern part of the country Nigeria. This leads to loss of human lives and destruction of assets and property. Human life which is considered valuable and sacred is often hunted, maimed and killed like wide animals as a result of politics. Fear of violence has been imbibed in the hearts of Nigerians, especially during electioneering times. Most Nigerians fear of the unknown of has part of their life because of the reoccurring of the past tension, the state of insecurity and social instability among the citizens. Consequently victims and non victims of the crisis appear to be in a relative state of panic in Nigeria. It has contributed significantly to the ethnic, religious, communal conflicts that Nigeria is witnessing today. For instance in places like Plateau, Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi, Yobe, Borno States among others people are targeted clearly on the basis of their religion or ethnicity. A Christian man who found himself among the Muslim dominated area would be killed or vice versa. This has seriously affected the social relationship in this area that children are socialized to be relating along religious lines. Any chaos is an opportunity to settle scores and exact revenge on personal foes. These adversely affect the human security and social development of the country (Vilela 2009). Political violence helps in propagating the ongoing cycle of violence in the country. The acts impact negatively on the children living in such societies as they grow up to take the same root. Bandura and Walters (1963) maintained that such children would likely end up being violent in nature. They further explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, an environmental influences.

Educational activities often bring to a halt and consequently school calendar is extended. This adversely influences the duration a students would spend in school, attracting more expenditure on the parents, more worrisome is exposing students to social vices like drugs addiction, alcohol, armed robbery, prostitution among other vices. Nigerian society has now been characterized by conflicts, incessant case of armed robbery, terrorism, sea piracy, assassinations, kidnapping/hostage taking, homicide, rape, and gang violence (including cultism) that are increasingly becoming rife and promoting a climate of fear, impurity and insecurity in the country as a result of political violence. The political unrest has worsen the internal security situations in Nigeria due to this reason business activities are often closed for a long time leading to government lost of revenue. People no longer engage in social activities that will prolong their lives for instance wherever there is a display of this political dominance there will always be a curfew. Aver (2012) asserted that political violence has led to the emergence of criminal group like Boko Haram who has, been terrorizing religious organizations living in some parts of the northern Nigeria resulting in the death of innocent citizens. For example on the June 17, 2012 over seventy people were killed and thirty other wounded in coordinated attacks on shalom church Trikayiya, Christ the King Catholic Church, Sabon Geri Zaria and ECWA DCCC also in Zaria all in Kaduna State. This political violence has led to division of the country into factions which contributed greatly to the underdevelopment of social relationship.

Therefore, the significance effects of the political violence it has affected social and economic activities. Apparent affects the pace and direction of societal peace. In Nigeria violence have promoted a sense of global integration and induced the spread of a universal culture the state system and the experienced growth of particularism and localized violence, accompanied by the empowerment of groups seeking socio-political fragmentation like Boko Haram, Ombatse Cults, among others. For instance the Vanguard (13, July 2013) reported that the chaos in the rivers state assembly the police simply watched while the law was being broken with impunity by the law makers. The paper reported further that people are living witnesses to the horrors the nation went through as a result of the activities of political thugs and cults groups who later became militants and went into the creeks to disrupt the peace, economics and social well being of the country Nigeria.

Recommendations

Political violence is an ill wind of social phenomenon, which blows no one any good. In its aftermaths both its perpetrators and victims are losers. Also, that violence is not native to man but rather a consequence of his fallen nature, his frequent transgressions against the grains of his nature.

Therefore politicians should conduct their campaign on the basis of issues rather than attack on political opponents or mobilisation of religious, ethnic and regional sentiments. The campaign should focus on the implementation of the critical national economic, political, social cultural, educational and health services. Political parties should evolve as mechanism of democratic governance rather than servicing as an organised criminal enterprise used for seeking, gaining and retaining power in order to rob public treasury. The antidote to political violence in any society is justice. Nigerians should allow justice to rule.

The culture of impunity that encourages political violence should be discouraged by scrupulous enforcement of laws prohibiting political violence and illegal arms trade, possession and use. The National Orientation Agency, which is the foremost agency of government for enlightenment, orientation, political education and mobilisation, should be made more active in political times, civic and voter education more important. The civil society organisations should intensify their efforts in the area of civic education so that the citizens can understand the essence of politics, the values of democratic governance and practices, and to eschew ethnic and religious sentiments in political participation. There is need to stop overzealous ambition, lust for power, selfishness, voluptuousness, pride, anger and revenge in Nigerian politics. We should learn to have a passion of leadership no matter what will be our political need. Dialogue should be allowed to prevail over the language of violence.

Conclusion

Political violence manifest in acrimony, assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and killing consequently these affect the existing social relationship in the society. This paper has significantly discussed the effects of political violence in Nigeria using the conflict theoretical perspective. The political violence is an ill wind of social phenomenon, which blows no one any good. In its aftermaths both its perpetrators and victims are losers. Also, that violence is not native to man but rather a consequence of his fallen nature, his actions against the grains of his nature. The steps taking here are aimed at reducing or eradicating political violence such that social relationship will grow. There is no substitute to political violence without bitterness.

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