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## **POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE NEGATION OF DEMOCRATIC STABILITY IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR THE FOURTH REPUBLIC**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper asserts that political violence has been a major road-block to democratic stability in Nigeria. It argues that the excitement and euphoria that greeted the country's return to democracy on May 29, 1999 has drastically waned and cynicism and fear have become the other of the day. The methodology adopted is that of secondary data and insights were drawn extensively from the conflict theorists. The paper concludes with a ray of hope by suggesting antidotes to political violence and prescriptions for attainment of democratic stability by Nigeria

**Key Words:** *Political Violence, Democracy, Democratic Stability, Democratic Consolidation, Nigeria.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

When Nigeria successfully put in place a democratically elected government in 1999, after a tortuous and convoluted transition programme, the citizenry was in euphoria and the attention of the international community was fascinated by this feat. The democratic attainment also attracted the attention of scholars (Adejumobi, 2007; Alumona, 2007, Anifowose and Babawale, 2003, Suberu, 2002). Paradoxically, the Nigerian state and its fledgling democracy has been beset with phenomenal violence and atrocities ranging from those that come in the form of religious crises, like Sharia, Niger-Delta militancy, ethno-religious conflicts, the Boko Haram insurgency, electoral violence, politically motivated assassinations – all with alleged political undertones. (Omodia, 2009, Omotola, 2010). An objective review of the Nigerian political journey would reveal that political violence has been part and parcel of the country's chequered history. (Adekanye, 1989). What is however, new is the metamorphoses of the violence in shapes, magnitude and consequences. No country can develop in an atmosphere of rancour and acrimony. Nigeria would have been one of the leading economies of the world but its movement has been anti-clockwise due largely to the fact that monumental resources are channeled into security votes, conflict resolution and reconstruction as a result of perennial political violence. Since political power is the major source of wealth in Nigeria, the contest for political office is always a 'do or die' affair (Ake, (1981) Tenuche, 2011). There is need to fundamentally redress the hydra-headed cankerworm of pervasive political violence which negate and retard development in Nigeria and safeguard the survival, growth and sustenance of the country's nascent and embattled democratic set up.

### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

**Democratic Stability:** According to Osaghae (1997) "the premise of democratic stability is that what sustains government and ensure stability is voluntary support or consent of the

citizens rather than reliance on coercion” To that extent therefore, there is a correlation between democratic stability and legitimacy. Democratic Stability implies that government is a product of the will of the people and derives its legitimacy from the people’s consent. This therefore, ensures that the people willingly support the government given that the government is not arbitrarily foisted on them. In a reciprocal manner, the government carried out programmes that are in line with the interest of the people. In a democratically stable society democracy is said to be more or less consolidated. To that end, the revert to authoritarianism becomes remote because democracy is seen as the “only game in town. (Linz, and Gunther, 1995); Alfa, 2011)

**Political Violence:** This refers to the use of threat or physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals and/or property with the intention to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction to property and whose objective, choice of target or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effects have political significance, that is tend to modify the behavior of others in the existing arrangement of power structure that has some consequences for the political system”. (Anifowose, 1984:4). Political violence therefore takes place in the process of power struggle aimed at certain very players in the political system.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The embracing of democracy globally tends credence to the phenomenon whereby free and fair election and political stability become major indices to measure democratic successes (Dauda, 2010; Alfa, 2011). An event is inherent either if it will always happen or if the potentiality for it always exists and actuality can only be obstructed (Eckstein, 1980). An inherent view of conflict then suggests that it is a normal and natural factor in society. For example, goal incompatibility is almost inevitable in any complex highly differentiated society. According to Wright (1951), there are in individuals and groups inconsistencies in the sentiment, purpose, claims, politics or option of social entities, for example, radical difference in political ideology, religion or institution. When the parties initiate actions based on their respective orientations, the inconsistencies as may lead to social tension and such social tension in terms of magnitude may determine the probability of conflict. If the conflict as a problem of resolving the inconsistencies do not succeed and if tension is high enough and regulatory arrangements are ineffective, conflict is likely to escalate to a level of open violence among the contending parties (Dauda, 2010). The Nigerian state is confronted by a plethora of inconsistencies and tension of various proportions arising from incompatibility of individuals and group interests in political succession and sharing of the perquisites of office. The tension in political succession and sharing of the perquisites of office. The tension sometimes snowballs to political violence among political parties which can as well lead to serious threat to democratic survival and consolidation.

### **NATURE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE PAST REPUBLICS**

The first republic was not devoid of conflicts that dovetailed into political assassinations and violence. Prior to the 1966 coup, there was the 1964 General elections which was alleged to

be fraught with gross irregularities. The expression of discontentment to the election resulted in civil uprising and political brouhaha, killings and reprisal attacks. It is imperative to note that political violence associated with election and electoral processes in Nigeria commenced with the 1959 federal elections designed by British to facilitate the transition from colonial rule to independence (Ogundiya, and Baba, 2005). The stalemate exacerbated with the 1964 General Elections which was resulted in mind antagonistic positions by the two major alliances of practical groups, i.e. Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) and United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) indicating that irrespective of the outcome of the elections crisis was inevitable as neither of the parties would not concede defeat. (Godowoli, 2003).

Capturing the 1964 general elections, Dudley (1982:268) aptly asserts:

“The electoral officers were terrorized into absconding from their offices once they receive the nominations papers of governing party candidates, leaving the opposition candidates with no opportunity of registering their nomination papers. So, flagrantly was electoral procedure, abused that at close of nomination some 88 out of total of 174 NPC candidates in the North had their candidature.

Therefore, as envisaged by many people including the proclaimed winner of the 1964 general elections, the results was not only rejected, but the opposition especially in the Western region resorted to violence to contest what they perceived as the reverse of their mandate by the ruling NPC. The situation gave birth to arson, looting, killings, massive destruction of properties and total breakdown of law and order beyond the control of the central government. Consequent upon this, a state of emergency was imposed and the then Prime Minister declared the Western region as wild-wild West. The intensity of the electoral violence recorded after the 1964 general elections affected the legitimacy of the newly constituted civilian authority and subsequent military intervention in Nigeria’s politics on January 15, 1966.

The political tension and crisis associated with the 1964 elections among other factors eventually pave way to military, intervention in 1966. The situation was so horrifying and the army was persistently being used to quell them. The following are some of the articulate exposition of the crises are expoused by Adekanye (1989).

- The Western Crises, Round 1 of 1962, when units of the armed police force were used by the NPC – controlled federal government in support of Chief Akintola’s faction of the Action Group Party, that later became the Nigerian National Democratic Party or NNDP, and against the dominant one still under Chief Awolowo;
- Census crisis, Rounds I & II of 1962/1963 and 1963/1964, when the army was on the alert in the wake of an inter-tribal, inter-regional war of reprisals waged verbally and bitterly engendered by the census controversies.
- Struggles for control of the newly created Mind-West (October 1963 and January 1964): the region which came to be viewed as the ‘cockpit of Nigerian’ where the leader of the now emasculated West, contested for supremacy;

- University of Lagos crisis of March 1965, that developed into a fierce inter-ethnic struggle in which the elites of southern Nigeria's two most socially mobilized groups, the Ibo and Yoruba, found themselves lined up in defence of their two individual representatives competing for the job of vice-chancellor of that institution.
- The Tiv riots: The first outbreak came a little before Nigeria's independence in 1960 but increased in scale and intensity after 1964; directed against the Hausa/Fulani domination of the Middle West sub-region, these riots were met by the ruling NPC government sending in maximum security forces to suppress the latter;
- Western Nigerian crisis Round II, in which the blatant rigging of the regional election of October 1965 in favour of the Akintola NNDP regime provoked an instantaneous revolt against the whole NPC controlled federal government believed to come masterminded the event".

Following a protracted military rule that lasted for thirteen years, the Murtala/Obasanjo regime carried out a transition programme and returned the country to civil rule in 1979. The 1979 general elections recorded minimal chaos except that some cases of violence were reported in some cases as a result of the fact that some parts of the country were aggrieved at the outcome of the election. The major contending issue was that of 2/3 of 19 states which was resolved in favour of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, NPN presidential candidate, by the Supreme Court. In contradiction to the scenario in 1979, the 1983 election were manipulated through the incumbency influence of the Shagari regime. This resulted in case of violence in parts of the country and gave the military a fertile ground to overthrow the civilian government on 31 December, 1983. In what would have ushered in the third republic by the Babangida designed in 1993 was however aborted by the June 12, 1993 annulled presidential election which created chaotic situation in the country.

As the post-election imbroglio deepened, Nigeria was increasingly beset with the ugly specter of ethno-regional violence and national disintegration (Diamond et al, 1997). As Africa Watch described the situation in a statement in August, 1993: The tragedy of the present crises is that Nigerian citizens, who in the election seemed to have overcome a legacy of ethnic conflict by crossing ethnic and regional barriers to vote for Abiola, have been forced once again to narrow their sights and put their ethnic identities first, rather than their citizenship as Nigerians.... In the past few weeks, tens of thousands of Nigerians have fled the cities for their home villages, fearing the outbreak of widespread ethnic violence. Southern race has ignited and anti-Hausa sentiments are increasingly given voice. In the North, Hausa who supported Abiola have been stung by the recent anti-Hausa backlash and are withdrawing back into their ethnic and regional identities".

It is worthy of mentioning that the Babangida regime could not survive the political logjam occasioned by the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential elections and on August 27, 1993, Babangida's manipulative expertise which earned him the name "Maradona" became impotent and he was forced to put in place the "Interim National Government (ING). The

ING suffered a legion of contradiction and on November 17, 1993 it was eventually swept off by General Sani Abacha junta in what has been described by scholars as "a palace coup".

Abacha's self-succession bid made him to tailor his transition programme in such a way as would have ensured his transmutation from a military leader to a civilian president. Consequently, his reign was characterized by oppression of real and imaginary enemies who were perceived as thorns in the flesh of that ambition. There were sporadic cases of blast and assassination of political enemies. Chief among these was the murder of Mrs. Kudirat Abiola, wife of the acclaimed winner of the 12 June 1993, presidential poll annulled by Babangida. Abacha's mysterious demise on June 8 1998, was the last stroke that broke the back of his self-succession bid and the climax of his regime.

### **POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC**

The nascent democratic experiment in Nigeria, after years of military rule, came to reality on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1999, thus, setting the pace for the Fourth Republic. As a result of the tortuous clamour for democratic governance which was stifled by Babangida and Abacha's regimes' protracted transition programmes, the ability of Abdulsalami Abubakar to put in place a brief transition time-table and actualized his promises filled the political air with excitement and euphoria. However, the issue of Sharia declared by the Zamfara State Governor, Alhaji Ahmed Sani brought about series of problems and reactions in Nigeria. For the most part, people were killed both in the North and South. People were embarrassed, unlawfully arrested and those who violated the Sharia law had their hands amputated. The act of declaration of Sharia itself is against the constitutional provision as provided for in Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution. Section 38 subsection 1-3 upholds the practice of various religions in the country and not state religion as misquoted by the Governor in an interview with Thisday Newspaper of April 4, 2000. His attitude towards the opponents of Sharia is undemocratic.

As the Sharia crises spread in the Northern States with monumental casualties, especially with people of Eastern and Southern Nigeria extraction killed and their corpses returned in large numbers to their states, reprisal attacks started in many areas such as Okigwe and Aba. As Omodia (2009) asserts, "in Nigeria, just like most of the countries in Africa, elections especially its freeness and fairness constitute the central factor in ensuring democratic survival. This is because the lack of free and fair elections often tends to threaten the democratic process as a result of legitimacy question". This factor no doubt has characterized the democratic experiment of the Nigerian Fourth Republic in that there have been persistent crises of legitimacy in governance arising from poor electoral system". This legitimacy crisis often degenerates into political wrangling of disturbing frequencies and concomitant vices of thuggery, assassination and abduction of real and/or imaginary enemies. For example, in Kwara State, supporters of the governor and the leading gubernatorial candidate were in conflict, leading to the killing of a State Party Chairman in August, 2002 and the bombing of a newspaper office in November 2002. Some of the violence took place during the primaries of political parties in 2002 (Africa action, 2003). The

inability of political parties, to enforce or play politics according to the rules of the game both within the party and in the art of governance have turned politics to warfare (Ake, 1981). This has led to a legion of politically motivated killings across political parties. Some prominent ones include the assassination of Chief Bola Ige of the AD while serving as a Minister under PDP's government, Chief Harry Marshal, Vice Chairman of All Nigerian People Party, South-South; Ahmed Pategi, Kwara State PDP Chairman, Asari Dikibo, Vice Chairman of PDP, South-South, Luke Shigaba, Chairman of Bassa Local Government Area, Kogi State Electoral Commission (Osisioma 2007; Ogundiya and Baba,., 2005, Omotola, 2010). The announcement of the results of 2011 presidential election sparked up violent demonstrations in some Northern states of the country. Following the declaration of President Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of the election, people believed to be supporters of opposition Congress for Progress Change (CPC), burst into violent uprising unleashing terror destroying properties worth millions of naria. The house of the vice president, Namadi Sambo was looted and raised and palaces of prominent traditional rulers in the North were attacked. A number of members of National Youth Service Corps were killed in mayhem in Bauchi, Gombe among others. (EU, EOM, 2011).

The most dreaded insurgency of the fourth Republic has come to be that of the Boko Haram (Dearn, 2011). As Dearn (2011) noted, "Boko Haram was a little understood, dangerous but parochial Islamic sect believed to be in decline after a purge by Nigeria security forces in 2009. Now, with 2 years drawing to a close, it is clear that Boko Haram remains little understood and has evolved into Nigerian's most serious security threat, one which shows no sign of abating inspite of the repeated government line that it is solving the problem". The Boko Haram has carried out horrendous attacks on various targets including the Police Headquarters, the UN building. It has also carried out horrifying attacks targeted at places of worship in northern states of Borno, Kano, Plateau, Gombe, Kaduna, Taraba, Sokoto and the FCT (Saidu, Alabi, and Suka, 2012). Lately, the Boko Haram has spread its targets to include media houses and telecommunication facilities for allegedly being sympathetic with the government.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

From the foregoing discussions, it is apparent that the Nigerian state is beset by the cankerworm of political violence which to all intents and purpose retards democratic consolidation. It has brought disenchantment and disillusionment in the entire polity and the democratic project. As a matter of fact, the realities that spelt doom for the past republics are still endemic and prevalent in Nigeria. Poverty, unemployment, hunger, corruption, politically motivated killings, abductions, religious bigotry to mention a few are still conspicuous in Nigeria's political firmament after five decades of existence as an independent political entity. The paper however makes the following recommendations to obliterate or at least reduce political violence to the barest minimum. The first and foremost is that a pragmatic and proactive effort must be made by those in positions of authority to reduce poverty. With this, people would not be pawns in the hands of politicians in orchestrating political violence. Youth employment should be vigorously embarked upon and objectively

implemented without prejudice to give the vast majority of Nigerian youths the opportunity to be gainfully engaged in productive ventures. Political parties should be made to play politics according to the rules of the game. There should be internally democratic and refrain from politics of desperation which oscillate the polity and swing it to the precipice of violence.

Politicians should not use ethnicity and religion to galvanize support and polarize the populace through politics of religious deception and ethnic chauvinism which have stirred up sentiments and sparked communal violence perennially in Nigeria. The use of the police during elections should be appropriate. In other words, the police should be politically neutral and their number should be adequate to be able to quell likely violence. They should not use excessive force and those suspected of violence and misconduct should be arrested while those who aid and abet electoral violence should be punished. Since elections have been characterized by volatile contestations and tension, attempts should be made to forestall cases of stolen mandate and abuse of incumbency. Trained officials should not be replaced by party faithfuls. The Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and relevant agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should embark on vigorous education and value-orientation and re-orientation aimed at repositioning democratic institutions and the citizenry.

Government and judicial authorities should carry out prosecutions of persons implicated in political violence whatever their political affiliations, those prosecuted should include persons who ordered or organized the violence as well as those who carried it out. Establishment of Electoral Crime Commission to deal with Electoral offences, and deal with cases like EFCC successes (Omodia, 2009). In the absence of legislation dealing specifically with political violence, offenders should be tried under existing criminal laws including conspiracy. Fundamentally too, the federal and state governments should publicly condemn discrimination on the basis of 'indigene' or 'non-indigene' status and accord all Nigerians full citizenship status and make them eligible to enjoy all political and ultimately dissuade inclinations for political violence. (Africa Policy 2003, Dauda, 2010 and Alfa, 2011).

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