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Electoral Violence and 2015 General Elections in Nigeria

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Electoral Violence and 2015 General Elections in Nigeria

I S. Ladan-Baki

Abstract- The Nigerian state is not alien to electoral violence which can be traced as far back as the pre independence elections. Contestants in Nigeria can go to any length to rig and win elections even if it means to break the states monopoly of violence to deploy terror to win elections. At the just concluded 2015 general elections in Nigeria, the South South part of Nigeria witnessed different levels of mayhem and the destruction of lives and property. On the other hand the Northern and South Western states witnessed minimal electoral violence unlike previous years where violence was more in the North. To this end it is the aim of this paper to highlight how electoral violence was reduced during the 2015 general elections. This paper adopted the use of secondary data in the analysis of the research. However this paper concluded that the electorates in the Northern part of Nigeria and the South West aligned to the All Progressives Congress political party (APC) the opposition party which eased tensions but in the South South violence broke out as a result of an attempt by the opposition party to unseat the ruling party Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). This paper recommends that continuous voter education should be increased in order to educate people on the ills of electoral violence. Also stiffer penalties should be handed down on the agents and accessories of electoral violence so as to deter others from deploying violence in future elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: violence, nigeria, elections, electorate, opposition.

I. Introduction

All over the world, the most acceptable means of changing of a government is through democratic elections. Even before the introduction of democracy in Africa, Africa had its own democracy already in existence in its pre-colonial systems of government having separation of powers and checks and balances (Molomo, 2006: 23). As OJo (2008) opines, the holistic idea of a democratic self-government is not compatible with electoral hostilities thus a free and fair election is a *condicosine qua non* for a political system to be termed democratic, but not every election fulfills these criteria. Elections all over the word is seen as a peaceful means of electing representatives into government so as to push the demands of the people to the highest level of policy making. This is done periodically in democratic regimes by conducting free and fair elections and the electorate are allowed to exercise their franchise by voting a candidate or a party whom the electorate see to be the best choice among other options. The candidates usually declare their interests after being a member of a political party then contest in the primary elections which leads to the secondary elections. However as simple as this may be the Nigerian case is unique because violence is not only demonstrated at the secondary elections but it begins at the point at which a candidate indicates his interests of contesting a particular position. Thugs and sometimes law enforcement agencies are used by the people in high places to unleash terror on party members and sometimes it can lead to the kidnapping of the family members of a particular candidate. Candidates in Nigeria break the Nigerian states monopoly of violence by deploying a high caliber of terror on members of other political parties especially a political party perceived to be a threat to the success or victory of the others at the polls. This paper will attempt to discuss the dynamics of electoral violence at the 2015 general elections. The paper consists of six parts. The introduction, evolution of electoral violence, theoretical framework, actors of political violence in Nigeria, conclusions and recommendations.

II. Evolution of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Electoral violence was not introduced in Nigeria during the just concluded 2015 general elections, the phenomena can be traced as far back as 1922 when the Clifford constitution was introduced. The constitution came with the idea of electoral principle which gave room for voting in Lagos and Calabar and also paving way for politicking in the Nigerian polity. Nwolise (2007) posits that, from the 1959 general elections that ushered in the independence of 1960, the state began to experience a high level of electoral violence varying from all spheres which include physical, structural and psychological violence. According to Ugoh (2004), most of the political parties at that time lacked the ideological base and thus party membership, affiliations and formations were all based on ethnic or regional sentiments. Electoral violence during the 1959 elections was on a low scale and this was as a result of the presence of the colonial masters who were as at that time present to monitor the electoral events.

In 1964, another round of general elections was first conducted by the elite of the Nigerian state after the independence. Before the elections, the contested results of the national census and intense political

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campaign by the political parties had increased the tempo of the political stake and this affected the outcome of the elections which was severely marred by unethical practices. There was a high level of violence such as maiming, kidnapping, arson and murder. The electoral violence reached a climax by 1965-1966 during the Western Regional Elections which emanated from the tense electoral battle between the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) for the control of the government of the Western Region. There was a very high level of rigging and physical violence associated with that election and this was what made the Eastern part of the state to boycott the elections. On the 11th of October, 1965, the Western House of Assembly ended in chaos, extreme violence and disorder due to widespread and high level of rigging (Olaoye, cited by Omotosho, 2007:158). To Malu (2006) it was recorded that about a thousand lives were lost during that period and some are still missing. However this period is seen by Ochoche (1977) as the worst electoral crisis the Nigerian state has ever witnessed in its history. However the military led by Nzeogwu, had been keenly studying the events as they unfold and on the night of January 15th 1966 the First Republic collapsed in a bloody military coup and this was what ushered in military dictatorship in Nigeria (Nwolise, 2007; Ojo and Azeez, 2002).

In the Second Republic, one would think that electoral violence would have ended with the taking over of governance by the military but this time around, it was not also devoid of malpractices which ranged from victimization, intimidation by security agents, manipulation of results, bribing electoral officers and the use of thugs (Ugoh, 2004: 172). Similarly Olaoye (2004), postulated in the Second Republic, the norm of election rigging was even worse. According to Olaoye (2004), the level of rigging was beyond people's expectations and unimaginable proportions during the voting, vote counting and declaration of results. In the 1983 general elections, it was a similar rigging pattern under the electoral superintendent of the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) which was to serve as the umpire in the electoral processes actually connived with the Northern Party of Nigeria (NPN) which was the ruling party to rig and manipulate elections. However both Ugoh (2004) and Olaoye (2007) concur that the rigging pattern was beyond reasonable doubt heightened and maximized during this period to clinch victory by all means necessary even if it means to deploy violence. Numerous times accusing fingers had been pointed at FEDECO and have also been accused of electoral irregularities as opined by Ofonagoro (1981):

> *The FEDECO staff were variously accused of aiding and abetting the preparation of electoral fraud.*

Kurfi (1983: 222-223) submitted that FEDECO had been compromised and were working hand in hand with NPN with the aim of clinching victory at whatever cost. However, both Kurfi and Ofonagoro concur that FEDECO was breeched, biased and compromised and were out in ensuring smooth victory in favor of NPN.As demonstrated by Nwolise (2007) the elections had three stages of violence associated with it, pre-election violence, during the election and post-election. There was hardly any state where results were not contested and most of the time this led to violent protests and eventually riots. At the upper level, there was a battle was between Shehu Shagari and Chief Obafemi Awolowo. However Chief Obafemi Awolowo, contested the results announced by FEDECO at the electoral tribunal by challenging the return of Alhaji Shehu Shagari as president elect and after a long battle at the courts. The Supreme Court rested the case in favor of Alhaji Shehu Shagari's NPN on the 26th September 1979 (International IDEA, 2000: 343).

In 1993, under the superintendent of the military leader General Babangida, another election were being organized and it was eventually conducted and majority of observers both local and foreign recognized the elections as the most transparent of all times. The election was eventually annulled and a transitional government was set up and Babangida handed over power to Chief Ernest Shonekan. Eventually General Abacha took over power from him which he eventually died and General Abdulsalami Abubakar took over power and eventually gave the mantle of leadership to Obasanjo on the 29th of May 1999 who was released from prison and contested under the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Electoral violence was slim as that time because people were anxiously in need for change.

The 1999 elections one would see as a new era of elections free of rigging, but in reality, it was actually a continuation of previous electoral frauds in Nigeria. Elections were monitored by over 15,000 electoral observers from the US-based Carter Center concluded that the elections were marred by high level fraud and it was impossible to give an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election (NDI, 1999:12).

The 2003 elections bear the same resemblance with the previous elections. It had been tagged by the HRW (2004) as an "abject failure." The elections were more pervasively and openly than the flawed 1999 elections. Elections for Nigeria's 774 local government councils were held in 2003 and followed much the same pattern of violence, intimidation and fraud that characterized the 2003 general elections. Nigeria's Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) observed those polls and concluded that "It is doubtful whether […the] elections can only be considered to be reflective of the will of the people" (quoted in HWR, 2004: 11, n.16). In the history of the Nigerian electoral process, April 2007 elections were the worst elections Nigeria had had. Elected officials, alongside with the government

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agencies charged with ensuring the credibility of polls, reduced the elections to a violent and fraud-riddled farce. Despite the strategies designed to ensure credible polls, by consensus of all the monitors, on general elections both local and international, those elections fell, in the words of the European Union monitors 'far short of basic regulation and international standards for democratic elections' (The Guardian, April 30, 2007).

In the 2007 the same pattern followed suit as there was mass rigging, violence, arson, voters intimidation and complete anarchy predominantly in the northern part of the country where the two dominant candidates Umaru Musa Yar 'Adua of Peoples Democratic Party(PDP) and General Muhammadu Buhari of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) hail from. Surprisingly both the former and the later are indigenes of Katsina State but rom different local government areas. When the results were finally announced the candidate of the PDP was returned president elect but he later admitted that the process which brought him into power was fraudulent in nature (Nigeria Village Square, 2007). Yar 'Adua later died and this led to the taking over of power by his vice president Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. As at the time of death of Yar 'Adua, he had spent only two years of his tenure and then after Goodluck completed the four year term, he contested for president and won the 2011 presidential elections under the platform of PDP. The 2011 elections was described as a do or die affair. Violence erupted in the northern states of Nigeria such as Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Bauchi etc. there was a high degree of rigging in the north because to win the presidential polls in Nigeria the 19 northern state and the states of the south west must be captured. This led to the imposition of dusk to dawn curfew in most northern states.

At the just concluded 2015 general elections, violence was recorded though it was mostly exhibited at the South South geopolitical zone of Nigeria in states like Rivers and Akwa Ibom. The ruling party the PDP and its agents were accused of deploying all means necessary including barbaric methods to clinch victory at the polls. In Akwa Ibom state prior to the elections, candidates were even murdered by unknown gun men and in some cases maimed. There has been a barrage of accusations and counter accusations by the All Progressives Congress claiming that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) used its hoodlums, security agencies and its thugs to truncate the elections in their favor. The opposition parties in the state claimed that there was no election held in that state and that the PDP rigged the elections (Vanguard News, April 2015). The state chairman of the APC Mr. Attai petitioned the then Independent National Electoral Chairman (INEC) Professor Attahiru Jega on the level of irregularities in the state which include connivance with INEC officials and police to rig elections, missing result sheets etc. Attai said:

> *"In areas where polling materials were received hordes of deadly armed thugs escorted by men in Nigeria Police Uniform stormed the polling units and made away with the election materials midway into accreditation. For instance in Ndiya 3 Unit 004 in Nsit Ubium which happens to be the polling unit of our governorship candidate, election materials were supplied but thugs invaded the place and took away all the election materials. Given the widespread failure of the INEC to supply election materials to most parts of the state, the rampant snatching of ballot boxes and the bloodletting by PDP thugs that characterized the conduct of the elections, we as a party hereby call for an outright cancellation of the elections. Their outcomes cannot be allowed to stand because they can never reflect the wishes of Akwa Ibom people."*(Vanguard News, April 2015).

From the above, it is clear that there was no election in Akwa Ibom state because there was chaos everywhere and people scampered for safety. Similarly a PDP member Obong Victor Attah agreed that there was widespread electoral violence with cases of ballot box snatching, Smart Card Reader (SCR) snatching among others. Attah concurs:

> *"I got to my unit a little before 10 am that fateful day with my PVC in my hand and I looked round and the whole place was empty. Except for the people who came out to vote I did not see any INEC staff. The story I got is not a matter of hijacking on the way to this unit but at the distribution center that people came with guns and machetes and shot in the air and carted away all of the materials and I said including even your card readers? And the answer was yes. "And this issue of shooting and attacking people and carting away materials including card readers, what does anybody want to do with card readers? They want to use it to accredit who? We used to understand that they take away ballot papers and thumb printing and so on but now you did not even allow accreditation to take place. "So my appeal which I have made to everybody that is prepared to listen is to accept the fact that truly there were no elections whatsoever in this state. I am not talking about my unit. I am talking about cancelling the election in Akwa Ibom and conducting a fresh one as soon as INEC finds it possible so that all eyes will be beamed on Akwa Ibom, and people will now be forced to do proper elections. It is now I am beginning to understand why Akwa Ibom was regarded as battle ground. But I didn't come to fight. I came to do an election"* (Vanguard News, April 2015).

However many scholars attributed the violence to the PDP in trying to retain power since the presidential candidate Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was from the South South political zone of Nigeria so they had to make sure they won by all necessary means in that state. When the results were eventually announced the PDP won with a landslide victory over the APC in the state. Soon after the polls, the Election Petitions Tribunals were opened and so far there has been overwhelming revelations

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exposing how the PDP printed fake result sheets and snatched and filled in their party's favor result sheet Forms EC 8A, EC 8A (I), and EC 8A (II) for Presidential, Senatorial and the House of Representatives elections. Also Forms EC 8A and EC 8A (I) for Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections, respectively (Sahara Reporters, 2015).

Again at the tribunals in Rivers state, INEC was asked to produce all the electoral materials used in the state for presidential, governorship and legislative election. But on producing the materials, it was discovered that they have been badly mutilated with liquid suspected to be water. However upon examination by a UK forensic expert hired by the APC, he noticed that the finger prints on most of the ballot papers were not from human beings (Vanguard News, August 2015). Similarly the tribunal asked INEC to produce the statistic of the accredited votes and voters in Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Delta states respectively. But when the data came to bare, it was recorded that in Rivers and Delta states, the total number of votes announced by the returning officers of the presidential, governorship and legislative elections did not tally with the number of accredited voters as captured by the SCR of INEC (Sun News, August 2015). In Delta state, the PDP candidate was returned governor elect but at the tribunal, INEC data showed the total number of votes casted during the elections supersedes the total number of accredited voters for the governorship elections. What this means is that ballots were being casted by jumping the accreditation stage as highlighted by the INEC electoral guidelines which is captured in Section 7 (a) and Section 8 (b) of the 2015 guidelines of the INEC electoral guidelines for the general elections.

Section 7 (a) reads as thus:

> *"No person shall be allowed to vote at any polling unit/voting point other than the one to which he/she is allotted and his/her name appears on the register of voters, and he/she presents his/her permanent voter's card, and has been verified by the Card Reader, or as otherwise determined by the Commission".*

Section 8 (b) reads as thus:

> "*The accreditation process shall comprise of verification of voters using the Card Reader; Checking of the Register of voters; and inking of the cuticle of the specified finger"* (INEC Guidelines, 2015).

However this has clearly shown how violence and irregularities surrounded the general elections in the South South all in an effort to retain the power of the PDP in that particular geopolitical zone. But on the other hand the people needed the desired change because of the 15 years of zero dividends of democracy under the stewardship of the PDP. But in the Northern part of the state. States like Kano, Kaduna, and Bauchi are usually the flashpoints of electoral violence. Scholars have recorded that violence usually erupts when the results are announced and riots break out as a result of the manipulation of results to favor the ruling party PDP to retain power like was seen in Zaria and Kaduna North Kaduna State where the government had to deploy the army to put the rioters under control (Sun News, 2011). This time around APC got its overwhelming support even from states who supported the PDP in the past such as Plateau and Benue states who voted enemas for the APC. Both in the Northern and Southern states like Lagos minimal violence was recorded and even the international observers applauded the northern zones to do better to shun electoral violence. But in reality for the past 15 years, the polls never went the way of the electorate which always resulted to riots to make their position known. This was evident when the chief electoral umpire of the state professor Jega returned Buhari of the APC as the president elect and this was met with jubilation from all over the nation and violence was not recorded when the result was released. From my own perspective in Nigeria, whenever elections in Nigeria turn violent it is as a result of the results not favoring majority of the electorate. The electorate know who they want as their representative but from out of the bloom, a new winner emerges which is never the reflection of the electorate. And this is why the people came together to form a coalition to defeat the PDP at the just concluded 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

III. Theoretical Framework

A theory is a set of statements or postulations used to explain a phenomena (McNabb, 2006.)Every study must have a theory to explain the research, therefore this study adopted the Frustration Aggression theory. This theory was propounded by John Dollard who postulated that violence occurs when the desire of people to achieve a particular objective is blocked which leads to frustration and finally leads aggression and to excessive demonstration of violence. However, Dollard recognizes the fact that frustration is triggered as a result of events or chain of events and then people eventually result to violent rage to show their frustration. Therefore in relation to electoral violence in Nigeria, Dollard explains that the political actors result to even violence to achieve their aims and when the results of the elections do not favor them violence erupts thus Dollard asserts:

> *It refers to circumstances in which a person experiences a strong initial provocation that precludes retaliation and then is exposed to a second triggering provocation. Dollard viewed such triggering events as serving an especially important role in augmenting displaced aggression (Miller et.al, 2003).*

However, the electorate and the candidates demonstrate violence when they fail in their bid to win elections or their candidates fail to win the elections therefore they hire thugs and sometimes use security personnel to unleash mayhem like was recorded in Akwa Ibom and Rivers state at the 2015 general

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elections (Sahara Reporters, 2015). There was a proliferation of small arms and other dangerous weapons like machetes which were used as a tool in some cases to deter or scare people and in most cases used to inflict wounds on the electorate or opposite party members and sometimes even lead to death. The frustration aggression theory provides an explanation for electoral violence that has been occurring in Nigeria. Party actors hire thugs to show their anger by destroying lives and property especially in the Northern part of the country.

The just concluded 2015 elections recorded violence on a low level and this has shown that when the choice of Nigerians is reflected in the polls and the will of the people is recognized, then violence is likely not to occur but when the results of the elections are rigged or there is a delay in announcement of results then tensions become high and violence erupts. This happened when the returning officers of presidential elections were announcing the results at the International Conference Center Abuja, it was noticed that the returning officers of the South-South zone were either reading the results from a piece of paper or discrepancies were noticed and were asked to make corrections. However with the recoding of low-level of violence at the just concluded elections this paper is of the opinion that the 2019 elections will record a lower level of violence because the electorate and now more informed and the new government in place has a zero tolerance for corruption and it is believed that the backbone of the APC led government is transparency and does not tolerate violence and will ensure that the 2019 elections will be transparent and violent free even if the APC is not returned into power.

IV. Actors of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

> *The opposition party in Katsina state are cock-roaches, hence when you see a cockroach you should kill it because cockroaches live in the sewers. Any opposition party member who harms you, you must retaliate because we the PDP in this state will no longer tolerate the actions of the opposition party.*

- Barrister Ibrahim Shehu Shema the Former Governor of Katsina state

(Premium Times, 2014)

The blame of demonstrating electoral violence in Nigeria is not lopsided, but the blame is distributed among different actors of the menace. Therefore according to Akpoyibo (2011) there are four groups of actors of electoral violence.

- The security agencies
- The religious groups
- The political groups
- The criminal groups

Akpoyibo went further to highlight the fact that, the security agencies especially the Nigeria Police have become compromised and corrupt that their loyalty is to the politicians and not the common Nigerian. To buttress further, previous elections and even the just concluded 2015 elections had numerous reports of police men terrorizing and shooting the electorate and in some cases they accompanied thugs to snatch sensitive electoral materials. At the polls in Rivers state, eye witnesses who spoke to Vanguard News narrated their ordeals on how men of the Nigeria police escorted thugs to cause mayhem and snatch the INEC result sheets from polling units (Vanguard News, 2015). Similarly during the elections in Ekiti state, men and officers of the Nigerian Army worked in connivance with PDP thugs to manipulate the elections and attack the electorate in that state. Eye witnesses told reporters how PDP thugs shot sporadically in the air in the presence of soldiers. To back up this point, a leaked audio tape described how the Commander of the 32 Artillery Brigade General Momoh connived with PDP members to rig the elections in favor of the ruling party.

The religious groups are those who use religious indoctrination in places of worship to brainwash their followers to use violence to make their voices and opinions to be heard. Of course in both Islam and Christianity which are the two dominant religions in Nigeria, the use of violence to achieve aims is prohibited. Therefore this contravenes the teachings of both religious books. The political groups are the members and supporters of political parties. These people attack rival political party members and supporters in order to send a clear signal or warning to stay clear or in other cases to show the might and strength of the political party. Often a times there have been clashes between the ruling and opposition party members. Again utterances made by political figures spark off electoral associated violence. At political meetings, rallies and congregations, political actors make derogatory comments on other parties which when heard by the other political parties spark off violence.

The criminal groups are the ones who take advantage of the situation. They are opportunists and behave like the lappet faced vulture who waits for the slightest opportunity to take advantage of the situation. They rob banks, shops and business and in other cases rape women as a result of the breakdown of law and order.

V. Conclusion

Electoral violence does not just destroy the people but it also destroys the nation as a whole. The state becomes backward and affects even the economy. Investors have deserted the northern part of the country and have fled to neighboring states to set up

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their businesses. A smooth transition to another government is essential because it adds to the democratic value of the state. Nigeria has been through a roller coaster of electoral violence right from the pre independence period and countless liters of human blood has been shed and can never be replaced. The 2015 general elections which recorded minimal violence gives the state a hope that sooner than expected electoral violence will be eradicated from the fabric of the Nigerian society. The electorate in the Northern part of Nigeria formed an alliance to oust the ruling party PDP through the ballot which met little resistance but in the South-South, hell broke loose and the ruling party PDP resisted and violence was high in that region.

VI. Recommendations

a) INEC and the civil society organizations should continue to educate voters on the ills and dangers of electoral violence. This campaign should start about two years to the general elections so as to sell the ideas of peaceful elections to the electorate before the day of election.

b) The government needs to hand down stiffer penalties to electoral violence offenders so as to deter others from demonstrating such acts in the future. This should include the candidates who are seen as accessories to the crime who sponsor the youth to cause mayhem.

c) The law enforcement agencies need to limit their actions to the legal framework of their organizations and not to be partisan and should remain unbiased in the discharge of their duties.

d) Government needs to properly motivate the law enforcement agencies well enough so that they cannot be bought or compromised by desperate politicians who use them as a tool or puppets to rig elections.

e) INEC should improve on the SCR so that its integrity will not be compromised and also begin to make moves to adopt the electronic voting system for the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

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