

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL APATHY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the nexus between electoral violence and political apathy in Nigeria. Electoral violence is one of the factors that precipitate the contemporary political apathy that threaten democratic consolidation because; democracy cannot thrive without popular majority participation in electioneering process. It looks at some conceptual clarification after reviewing some literature on electoral violence. After a critical look at some of the various causes of electoral violence in the country, the writer discovers that a high level of uncontrollable electoral violence will lead to unmitigated level of political apathy. It is against this background that it recommends amid others: the strengthening of Electoral Act, 2000; political campaign should be based on issues and not on individual personality, condemnation of money politics, intra-party democracy and the creation of a level play-ground for all political contestants etc; that will prevent electoral violence and a panacea to mitigate the level of political apathy.

KEYWORDS: Governance, Democracy, Apathy, Violence, Voter

INTRODUCTION

Elections and votes are sacrosanct and indispensable for democracy and good governance to thrive in any political system; be it presidential or parliamentary system of government. However, elections and votes (electioneering) activities in Nigeria have always been characterized by pessimism, uncertainty and fear for the safety of people's lives and property due to electoral violence (Ihonvbere, 1994). It is a threat to the nation's quest for stable and consolidated democracy. Since the attainment of political independence, the incidence of electoral violence has often threatened the fabrics uniting the various ethnic groups as one single entity; known as Nigeria. The undesirable violence and loss of innocent lives after the 2011 Presidential election, made many doubtful of the ability of Nigerians to control the electioneering event in 2015 (Falana, 2015). Some pessimists doubted the existence of Nigeria as one country between the years of 2014 and 2015 (Adeleye, 2013).

Violence in Nigerian politics does not just happen spontaneously, but begins from political or electoral conflicts; which end up as political or electoral violence when not properly managed. The populace no longer has confidence in official election results whenever being announced by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) or states electoral commission as a result of the physical and psychological aspects of the violence that must have occurred before, during and after the election. In Nigeria, electoral violence is more entrenched because our political system is supportive of zero-sum game politics; where only the winner takes it all. This is why Otoghile, (2009) described electoral violence as the radioactive by-product of some structural and attitudinal dislocations in the society which affect the level of political participation of the citizenry.

Nigerian politicians usually rhapsodize their political campaign speeches with rhetoric of party slogans and speeches. Thus, most of the electorates and populace are often carried away without any recourse to political rationality; but often, other political opponents may see this rhetoric of party slogans and speeches as threat to their winning election. Hence, some populace that are politically naïve and myopic are often used by the political class as thugs

and assassins (political patsy) to perpetuate electoral violence. It is most worrisome that security agencies are always indifferent whenever violence takes place at different campaign ground, political rallies and polling centres during electioneering. Essentially, the availability of money has enormous influence on the conduct and nature of general elections in all democracies; whether consolidated or transitional (Eme and Okeke, 2011: 87). Money is legally needed by the state and political actors to legally finance political activities from time to time. It is legitimately needed by political parties and political actors to actualize their political ambitions. However, in Nigeria, politicians finance elections illegally and wrongly to influence the outcome of election results.

Violence has become part of the political culture in Nigeria such that all elections are virtually violent ridden (Olarinmoye, 2008). Violence has been prevalent in the nation's general election to the extent that before the 2015 General election, "a Non-Violence Accord" was signed in Abuja by the presidential candidates of the political parties that took part in the election. Mr. Kofi Anan and Chief Emeka Anyaoku, former Secretary General of the United Nations and Commonwealth respectively, jointly presided over the signing of the Non-Violence Accord (Falana, 2015). It is sad that political leaders dissociate themselves whenever an act of violence in electioneering takes place and condemning the perpetrators that they will surely be brought to justice. At the end of the day surprisingly, the perpetrators of the violence go unpunished; and in extreme case, the politicians go behind to engage the services of lawyers to defend the perpetrators. The people who then are at the receiving end are the ordinary people, whose hope in the democratic system as a medium of optimizing good governance is subverted.

Conceptual Framework

Governance

Governance basically refers to the activity, process or quality of governing (Nnamdi, 2009). It helps us to evaluate the activities and effectiveness of a particular government, rather than the machineries of the government being put in place to make a state move forward. This is

why every contemporary political system is concerned with good governance as a measure of evaluating a good or responsible government. Jega (2007:142) defined good governance in terms of transparency and accountability of public officials, responsible conduct, as well as their responsiveness to demands, needs and aspiration of the governed. Good governance therefore, is a positive and invaluable outcome of a good democratic system.

According to Obadan (1998), good governance consists of five fundamentals:

- accountability of Government (Political leaders and bureaucrats) for public funds and resources;
- transparency in government procedures, processes, investment decisions, contracts and appointments;
- predictability in government behavior;
- openness in government transactions and a reliable flow of the information necessary for development to take place;
- observance of the rule of law must be adhered to by government and its citizens.

Good governance refers to the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development (World Bank, 1992). Hence, good governance is used to evaluate the socio-economic and political policies of government policies in terms of its impact on the societal values

Electoral Violence

Violence is a behaviour that is intended to hurt or kill somebody (Hornby, 2005). It could either be crimes, acts or threat of violence against any person; be it physical or emotional that hurts feelings. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual against oneself, another person or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood or resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation (WHO,2002). It is any act that causes or may cause any person physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, verbal or economic harm; whether, this occurs in private or public life, in peacetime or in conflict situations (Ladan,

2012). Electoral violence therefore, means any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities: including pre, during and post-election periods in any of the following forms:

- When dangerous weapons are used to scare voters leading to political apathy.
- Manipulation of electoral machinery; regulations and results.
- When dangerous weapons are used to cause bodily harm to any persons involved in electoral process.
- Arson and destruction of property.
- The use of thugs to disrupt political meetings; political campaign or political rallies.
- Any civil action against political opponents.

Fisher (2002) defines electoral violence (conflict) as any random or organized act that seek to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced protection, blackmail, destruction of property or assassination. Essentially, electoral violence has often been a stumbling block in the nation's (Nigeria) unity and progress.

The Concept of Political Apathy

Apathy is the feeling of not being interested in or enthusiastic about something or thing in general (Hornby, 2005). Politically, political apathy is the indifference on the part of any citizen of any country with regards to his/her attitude towards political activities (Harder, 2008). This could be generated through indifference feelings towards voting, political rally/campaign, electoral activities or any other political activities in a country.

Electoral Violence and Political Apathy Nexus in Nigeria

Electoral violence has in most often times polarized the electioneering process in Nigeria Polity. It could either be physical or psychological violence. A lot of lives and property are lost in electoral violence. For example, "it was revealed by the Ahmed Lemu Report in 2011 that 943 people were killed while 838 others were injured in the political violence which

greeted the announcement of the result of the presidential election in some States in the North and Akwa-Ibom in April 2011” (Falana, 2015).

It was unfortunate that the 626 suspects who were arrested in connection with arson culpable homicide and other grave offences perpetrated during the civil disturbances have been left off-the-hook on account of official impunity that has become the order of the day under the current political dispensation (Falana, 2015).

Hence, electoral violence has created threat to lives and property un-abated in the country during electioneering.

All these has created political apathy on the part of the electorates; where they are no longer showing interest in political activities; and most especially indifference in the electioneering process. Firstly, there is usually low turn-out of eligible voters to register and vote in an election. Irrespective of public enlightenment campaign by the government, some people now see public holidays given them by the government for voters’ registration as ample opportunity for them to go to farms or relax at their various homes while some adult male youths take advantage to play football openly on major streets. Even when few people are out to vote it creates poor legitimacy on the government that will eventually come into power; and exhibit poor governance. The populace makes jest of the period set aside for the registration of voters being declared and created by the government. These political attitudes of adult populace arise as a result of threat to lives and property during electioneering process or period in the country.

Secondly, political apathy is also exhibited by the electorates when a definite period of time is created for the revision of voters register by the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC). This is the period when and where the eligible voters that have registered go back to authenticate their names, addresses etc. Most Nigerians are no longer interested in it because they often feel that their vote will not count at the end of the day due to electoral violence before, during and after election; that could take place physically or psychologically. Moreover, the registration of eligible voters are seen as exercise in futility because they hardly see the need to go and collect their permanent voters card (PVC). They are indifferent about

the electioneering process as their enthusiasm is brought down as a result of electoral violence which has remained prevalent. For example, prior to the 2019 General election as August 2018, it was reported by INEC that over five hundred thousand (500,000) PVC were yet to be collected from them by the electorates in Edo state. The electorates often complain that they no longer have confidence in any official electoral result in the polity. There is the usual belief that any official result announced by INEC must have been manipulated by the political elites through electoral violence; hence becoming indifference in the collection of their PVC.

In addition, electoral violence discourages substantive number of electorates from going out to vote in an election. With unprecedented political thuggery and uncontrolled violence characterized by wanton destruction of lives and property, election is then described as warfare (Ake, 2001). The electorates have become scared for the question of their lives and property safety. These electoral politics have signalled serious danger for the consolidation of democratic and partisan politics in the country. Essentially, any electoral violence in an election usually has a “ripple effect” in the number of electorates that will vote in an upcoming election. The electorates in the country are now seeing their voters’ card as means or medium for personal official identification and not for use in an electioneering to vote.

Again, electoral violence has made some citizens to be indifference as regards any political activities. Lack of confidence in the electoral system has resulted to the renting of crowds for political rallies and campaigns; because the populace now sees such as being violent ridden. Political campaign and rally grounds have been turned into places for thuggery and assassination. This is more worrisome because all these nefarious political activities are even optimized with the presence of security operatives at political campaign ground. In the campaign for the gubernatorial election in Ekiti State in July 14th, 2018, there was electoral violence as the governor was “tear-gas” by the police during a rally (Vanguard, July 12th, 2018). The election was more scaring to the extent that over 30,000 police personnel were drafted to control or prevent violence in the election. Other scaring aspect of electoral violence is that it has led to the unwillingness of some good and zealous Nigerians to contest into

elective political offices, due to lack of confidence in any incumbent government political attitude, etc.

Causes of Critical Electoral Violence in Nigeria

There are many causes of electoral violence in Nigeria. There has been a high cost of contesting election into political public offices via political parties in the country. Overtime, after the spending of huge amount of money by political office seekers, they then go at all cost to ensure that they do not lose; having the “zero-sum game” as their guiding principle. This high cost poses huge threat and constraint to the electoral process; the cardinal principle of democratic consolidation (Yagboyaju, 2012).

This cost is so high as to be prohibitive to all but the richest men, or those who have their hands on public fund (Ebohon and Obakhedo, 2010). In the 2015 General election, the fees for the collection of nomination form by the People Democratic Party (PDP) candidates and the All Progressive Congress (APC) candidates were quite shocking. This is shown in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1: Fees for nomination form for 2015 elections (PDP)

Position	Fee for Nomination form ₦ (Naira)	Fee for Expression Of Interest (EOI) form ₦ (Naira)
Presidential candidate	20 million	2 million
Governorship candidate	10 million	1 million
Senatorial candidate	4 million	500,000
House of Rep candidate	2 million	500,000
House of Assembly candidate	1 million	200,000

Source: Vanguard (2004: 4)

Table 2: Fees for nomination form for 2015 election (APC)

Position	Fees for nomination and EOI form ₦ (Naira)
Presidential candidate	27 million
Governorship (Incumbent governors)	10.5 million
Governorship (Fresh aspirants)	5.5 million
Senatorial candidate (Sitting senators)	5.3 million
Senatorial candidate (Fresh aspirant)	3.3 million
House of Rep. Candidate (Returning)	3.2 million
House of Rep. Candidate (Fresh aspirants)	2.2 million
House of Assembly (Sitting Law makers)	800 million
House of Assembly (Fresh aspirants)	550 million

Source: Adopted and modified from Odunsi, 2014

The fallout of these, account for the undemocratic attitude of most of the elected and appointed public officials since the commencement of the Fourth Republic (Yagboyaju, 2012). Some of them even go out to take loans from friends and financial institutions, which must be paid back; and even with interest. Hence, the political class and elite now see politics as investment where financial returns are expended and can go at any length and extent to use any means; mostly violence to win election. The mindset of investing high monetary cost in politics often leads to poor governance on the part of the political class.

There is buying of votes by some political parties; most especially by those in power or strong financial base. There has always been the intimidation of voters with “vote buying” by the political class in different polling stations and polling booths during electioneering in the country. This act is often perpetuated directly with the use of political thugs; thereby

exhibiting the act of thuggery at different polling station. This hinders the public and electorates confidence in the electoral process and a spontaneous civil unrest in most cases whenever election official is announced by the electoral empire, INEC. Financial fraudulent means are used to induce the political party-choice of electorates at different polling unit and polling booth. This offence is committed by anyone who by abduction, duress or any fraudulent devices or contrivance impedes or prevents the free use of vote by a voter or thereby compels, induces or prevails upon any voter either to give or refrain from giving his vote (Mohammed, 2014).

Vote buying was prevalent in the Edo State gubernatorial election in 2016 and that of Ekiti in 2018. No fewer than five persons were arrested by the Nigerian Police Force in Ado-Ekiti, the State capital for allegedly distributing money to voters during the election (Vanguard, 2018: 4). It was obviously seen and known that both the APC and PDP were involved in the vote buying. Consequently, any political party that feels it not being able to pull the upper financial muscle upon the other will result to multiple voting and ballot snatching. In order to recoup the huge money spent in electioneering by the buying of votes, The political class in power will never think of good governance, as they now see politics as money making venture. The incidence of rigging in election is another cause of electoral violence in the country. Election rigging is an act of influencing election process and its outcome in a dishonest way in order to get the result that is wanted. Election rigging could be before, during or after an election. It could be in any of the following forms:

- The use of fake ballot paper;
- Diversion or snatching of ballot boxes or paper;
- Through Jerry-mandering;
- By multiple voting;
- By obvious under-age voting;
- Voting by unregistered person;
- Ballot box stuffing;

- Creating artificial scarcity of ballot papers;
- The use of thugs to scare away voters;
- Manipulation and forgery of official election results etc.

Any of these forms of election rigging often makes official election result to be outside the expectations of the majority of the electorates. It usually leads to spontaneous negative reaction at the declaration of election results; leading to violence. This is possible according to Awowede (2003) “because elections are not won through hard-fought electioneering but through rigging,” Thus, those in political power will never think of probity and accountability. Following the political violence which greeted the announcement of the result of the Presidential election in some States in the North and Akwa-Ibom in April 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan setup the Ahmed Lemu Panel to investigate the crisis (Falana, 2015). The declaration of the election result in the election led to wanton destruction of property and loss of lives.

Another cause of electoral violence is the gale of defection from one political party to another. This is a cause of violence where politicians decamp (move) from one political party to another; most especially in a year penultimate to any general election. This act often brings hatred and the flexing of muscles between those that defect to another political party and those that are existing members of the political party on how to win election at all cost by getting involved in violence. The defector(s) to other political part are now seen as political enemies.

The lack of level playing ground for different political parties and political contestant. The same level of play-ground is never created for the political parties and contestant that contest in election in the country. A ruling party or incumbent political leaders in power use undue influence in power to subjugate the oppositions. Adequate official securities are never provided for the opposition party members because any party in power control security operatives in the country. A case in point is the Ekiti gubernatorial election, where the APC has the Federal might; the Nigerian Police did not approve the political campaign rally that was done by a PDP gubernatorial candidate and party members. The police gave security

reasons as the excuse for not permitting the political campaign rally. In an attempt by Governor Ayodele Fayose, a PDP member to forcefully organize the political campaign rally turned into political violence; where “the governor was said to have sustained a neck injury, following the melee that trailed the firing of tear-gas by the police” (Vanguard, 2018).

There are so many abuses of electoral practices in the country; most especially during electioneering and the perpetrators go unpunished. Political office seekers and supporters do not operate within “the rules of engagement”. They are exhibited in most ways: as deliberate false campaign propaganda, where top political leaders make inciting statements by dissemination of calumny rumors about political opponents, total disregard of electoral outcome by incumbent office holders, the illegal use of official vehicles by public officers for political campaigns, the use of private vehicles to carry electoral materials. A case in point was the use of Edo City Transport Service, (ECTS) buses by the Action Congress for political campaign in the Edo State 2012 gubernatorial election. The crisis of impunity is compounded during electioneering by the partisan involvement of the authorities of the police, the armed forces and other security agencies in the electoral process. These acts of corruption have become a way of life in Nigeria which any government incumbency finds it difficult to ignore (Ejragbe, 1997). It is intriguing to note that members of the political class responsible for instigating the plethora of violence as well as their foot soldiers who undermine the electoral rules by perpetuating this impunity are always left the hook (Albert, 2011).

The incidence of Godfatherism is also an issue in electoral violence. A godfather is a father figure and mentor who guide a godson to the positive path due to his financial and political status. However, in Nigeria, “political godfather carries a pejorative connotation of a small band of willful individual who monopolizes power and use it for their own advantage” (Wilson, 1996). The godfathers often recruit unemployed youths as political thugs to perpetuate electoral violence. One of the problems of the Nigerian State today is the democratization of violence and since the state had lost its essential attribute of violence (a process in which the godfathers themselves had been complicated), the godfathers’ cash in on

that to use their ill-gotten wealth to hire and equip unemployed youth with latest weapons which they use as political thugs to maim, terrorize and kill those who oppose them in the game of politics (Ogbonmwan, 2005).

The issue of “Winner Takes-all” syndrome in the Nigerian polity. This is another cause of violence in election in the country; where the system of government is inherent in where only the contestant that wins an election takes it all. These factors make political contest a “do-or die” affairs and most especially as a result of the lucrative nature of political offices. This winner takes–all syndrome is more heightened in the country as politicians see politics as a lucrative business to venture into; and apply Machiavelli in philosophy that; the end justifies the need.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper has attempted to show the relationship between electoral violence and political apathy. After the initial introduction, efforts were made to review the existing literature on the subject and made conceptual clarification. It is the position of this paper that there appears to be a robust relationship that exist between electoral violence and the increasing trend of political apathy in the country.

In the light of the above, it is necessary to recommend that the Electoral Act of 2010 in the country should be strengthened. Section 150 of the Electoral Act has empowered the INEC to deal with and prosecute electoral offenders, but it lacks the capacity to discharge the onerous statutory duty. Hence, the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) should take up the task of prosecuting electoral offenders throughout the country. To tame the surge of electoral violence and offences, the punishment for electoral offenders should be firmer because it has been observed that the punishments are too weak. Any Politian or anybody found guilty of any electoral violence should be banned in active politics for ten years. This will help to deter would be offenders. Complementary, it is also recommended that political elites and their agents be banned from active politics for the years after serving the jail terms on conviction.

Besides, political campaign should be based on issues and not on individual personality. This should be implemented absolutely to curb campaign of calumny that most times precipitates electoral violence in the polity. Political parties in the country should be registered by INEC based on their parties' ideologies and discouragement of money politics. This is because an ideology supporter and sympathizer (in case of sympathy votes) religiously believe in an ideology which gives direction and form the basis for intra-party unity and cohesion (Epelle, 2006). This, according to scholars would lead to the discouragement of money politics and the encouragement of the politics of debate, ideas and competing programmes; the defense of the interest of the people and the accomplishment of the public purpose and the only way the people can be protected from the ravenous appetite of political godfathers and money-bags (Osagie, 2006). This will discourage the gale and inordinate defection of political elites from one political party to another; and reduce the "do-or-die" syndrome in election.

A level playing ground should be created for both those contestants in the ruling party and the non-ruling party. This should be equity in the provision of publicity and security to any ruling party contestant and constants in other political parties. When this is done, all the contestants will be able to campaign within the conferment of the Electoral Act. Still on the level play-ground, vote buying and other forms of electoral rigging should be condemned by all parties involved for the proper prosecution of those involved.

The suggestions may not be the magical ways or solution that can purify the society of political violence; and the contemporary trend in political apathy; but they are worth considering.

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