10. Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Focus on the 2011 General Elections

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Introduction
Elections were first organized and conducted in Nigeria by the colonial government in response to the pressures of the nationalists who were agitating for greater participation in the colonial government. In 1922, Nigerians were given the first opportunity to occupy certain political offices. Though, the franchise was restricted and representation limited, it was an achievement for the nationalists who were struggling for the enthronement of a democratic order as a pre-requisite for greater participation of the people in the process of government (Moru, 2004). After 1922, several elections were conducted in different parts of the country to elect leaders at national, regional and local levels. However, it was the 1959 general elections that paved way for the emergence of Nigeria as an independent country. Since then various elections have been held either in transition, from one civilian government to another or in transition from a military regime to a civilian government. What is paramount or central to this chapter is the nature of the political violence and assassinations that beset these elections, which not only undermine the Social Contract theory of the state, but in most cases culminated in the collapse of democratic governments in Nigeria and the credibility and acceptability of elections. The Fourth Republic (1999-date) has not been any different, cases of political violence and assassinations have been rampant in virtually all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

For the sake of understanding political violence in Nigeria, elections can be broadly categorized into three, that is elections organized by the colonial government in 1922, 1951 and 1959, the military regimes in 1979, 1993, 1999 and finally the ones
organized by civilian governments in 1964, 1983, 2003, 2007 and 2011. Among these three categories, the latter appears to be more violent and crisis riddled compared to the former (Enojo, 2010).

This chapter argues that like the colonially supervised elections, the 1979 and 1993 general elections presided over by the military were not beset by the problem of political violence. Therefore, it can be rightly argued that military regimes in Nigeria have organized relatively violence-free elections though such elections suffer from the problem of credibility. Ibrahim and Egwu (2006) argue that the logic behind this success is the excessive powers wielded by the military in coercing the citizens to operate within the bounds of the existing laws and decrees.

It is significant to note that political violence associated with election and electoral process in Nigeria started with the 1959 federal elections designed by the British to facilitate the transition from colonial rule to independence. The problem intensified with the 1964 general elections. Even before the elections were held, it was clear from the extreme positions taken by the two major alliances of political groups, i.e. Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) and United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) that no matter which one of the two groups won, the results will be hotly contested. The manipulation of electoral laws by the ruling party, Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) resulted in the call for boycott of the elections by the opposition (Ogundiya, 2003). Dudley described the conduct of the 1959 general elections in the following words. "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, fragrantly was electoral procedure abused that at close of nominations some 88 out of a total of 174 NPC candidates in the North had their candidature unopposed. In the West, about 30 percent of the NNNDP candidates were declared to be unopposed. The situation in the East was not much different. Therefore, as envisaged by many people including the
proclaimed winners 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 reversal 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 election affected the legitimacy of the newly elected civilian authority and subsequently led to military intervention in Nigeria’s politics on January 15, 1966 (Dudley, 1982).

After prolonged military rule that lasted for thirteen years, the military resolved to hand over power to a democratically elected government in 1979. Although, Murtala Mohammed who initiated the transition to civil rule programme was assassinated in a bloody military coup of 13 February, 1976, his decision was upheld by his successor Olusegun Obasanjo. As such, arrangement was made by Obasanjo’s administration to facilitate the smooth transfer of power to civilians and the disengagement of the military from active politics. The 1979 constitution was drafted and the ban on politics was lifted, which saw the emergence of several political associations seeking for registration as political parties. Finally, five political parties were registered namely NPN, UPN, PRP, NPP, and GNPP. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was also established to conduct elections at various levels of government. As argued earlier in this chapter, the 1979 elections that was organized and supervised by the military was relatively peaceful, though, not violent-free in its entirety. Few cases of political violence were recorded in some parts of the country with the opposition contesting the outcome of the elections. The major issue was the question of 2/3 of 19 states, which was resolved in favour of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the NPN presidential candidate, by the Supreme Court.

However, the situation was different in the 1983 elections. The 1983 elections both at national and state levels were a
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The chapter argues that the political violence that gripped the Nigerian state since the country’s return to democracy in 1999 and the aftermath of the 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections, has posed a great challenge for the survival of the Nigerian state. Thirteen years after the return of the country to civil rule, for instance, politically motivated killings have continued to hurt Nigeria’s nationhood. In this and other related crises, it is estimated that over 5000 Nigerians have lost their lives; hundreds of thousands have been displaced, while properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed. In short the political climate has been very hostile, frustratingly uncertain and unstable. Intra and inter-party conflicts, lawlessness and the devastating influence of godfatherism have continued to pose serious challenges to the survival of the country’s statehood. It is within this context that the issue of the theory of the state of nature and political violence is examined. Political violence, the state of nature and a stateless society cannot be separated from each other considering the interrelatedness and interdependency. A stateless society is a term developed by political anthropologists, which draws attention to the fact that the state has not always been present in human societies. Hunter-gathering society was founded based on kinship-exhibited forms of political organization but they evolved no formal division of labour or coercive institutions empowered to exercise force over the people. The present states are consequence of the development of social stratification and class relations, or exogenous, resulting from military conquest (McClean, 2008) or in a Hobbesian state of war against all. This is similar to the state of nature.

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Political violence is a phenomenon of politics that has been known for a relatively long time in world history. It is a veritable consequence of political conflict that characterized most political systems including Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. Political conflict which often results to violence including assassinations is an endemic feature of most developing nations. In Africa,
political conflicts, crises, violence and assassinations became essential characteristics of the political process shortly after independence. The nature of the state in Africa has an historical background and that history is inevitable for our understanding of the state’s violent nature and how the citizens also imbibed the culture of violence. The way and manner the once distinctive and separate traditional societies were galvanized for Euro-colonial purpose and interest had great impact on post-colonial state behavior towards the people in it and this view has been expressed in this chapter. As these artificial colonial creations later emerged into independent nation-states, they almost always and invariably do not exhibit that essential sense of commonality occasioned by shared values, cultural and historical homogeneity common to nation-states in the west. This has definite implication for the nature of politics played in these states after their political independence which is largely conflict, violence and assassinations ridden. Colonization as the conquest and domination of the people of a given territory by an imperial power has its whole essence as an alien rule. Nigeria is a product of these forces or externalization, which began at the point the constituent units were conquered, dominated and brought together. The same can be argue that the imposition by the PDP-led government from 1999-2011 and the exclusion of other political parties especially the opposition led to some kind of frustration and despair among the political class and the masses making both to have no trust and faith in the political system and the leaders thereby creating unhealthy atmosphere for politics.

After successive military regimes, Nigeria recommenced democratic governance in May 1999. Since then, the country has experienced unprecedented rise in political violence ranging from increased crime wave, religious riots, inter and intra-ethnic clashes, communal crises and the extreme of it, assassinations. Azeez (2005) noted that the violence appeared initially as a means by which Nigerians expressed themselves, but the aftermath and the unimaginable extent of the manifestations cannot but be explained beyond that of freedom
of expression. He continued that on a number of occasions, problems of increasing unemployment pool which served as ready source of hungry and angry youths recruited for violent acts, deprivation and marginalization, injustice and inequitable distribution of national resources especially among different levels of government and the political actors had been considered.

Most violence are also exploiting popular discontent with a deteriorating economy, the collapse of social services, widespread corruption and a system of governance inherited from the military that places disproportionate power in the hand of those who control the federal government (New York Times, March 21, 2011).

The challenges arising are many. One, how can the state manage the polity with regard to the internal crisis or violence such as incessant political conflicts, violence, and assassinations in Nigeria between 1999-2011 considering the poor nature of her security network, lack of political culture, socialization and ideology. Another challenge is whether political violence and assassinations itself can be sufficiently contained for democratic institutions to float above it relatively untouched. It has been observed that political violence and assassinations and other forms of violence do not only drain government resources and divert attention from other critical development issues, but frequently provokes undemocratic responses from both the state and the citizens.

This is because violence or the threat of violence is a universal phenomenon. Individuals, groups and even states resort to violence or its potential use as a tactic of political action (Arnold, 1964). The most common notion is that violence entails the use of physical force, usually with the purpose of injuring or damaging the object of the violence. The tools of such violence can range from flying fists and feet, to clubs and bullets to nerve gas and nuclear missiles (Danzinger, 1998). Alanamu (2005) attempts a broad categorization of violence into direct and indirect violence. Direct violence refers to acts of deliberate violence resulting in a direct attack on a person’s physical or psychological integrity. The category includes all
forms of homicide (genocide, war crime, massacre, murder, and terrorism) as well as all types of coercive or brutal actions involving physical or psychological suffering (kidnapping, torture, rape, incarceration and maltreatment).

Indirect violence, on the other hand is a category intended to cover harmful, sometimes even deadly situations or actions which, though due to human intervention, do not necessarily involve a direct relationship between the victims and the institution. This type of violence he observed could be by omission. Use of any of these forms of violence for pure political ends is described as political violence. Political violence, roughly defined, is a considerable or destructive use of force against persons or things, use of force prohibited by law, directed to achieve change in the policies, personnel or system of government, and hence also directed to changes in the existence of individuals in the society (Honderish, 1989).

For Gurr (1970) political violence is defined as the use or threat of violence by any party or institution to attain ends within or outside the political order. Thus he classifies political violence into three types: Turmoil - such as riots, strikes, demonstrations and localized rebellions. Conspiracy - which include assassinations, coups d'état; and small-scale guerrilla wars and internal war, such as large-scale terrorism, mass-based guerrilla warfare and revolution. For Moser and Clark (2006) political violence is seen as the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious to obtain or maintain political power.

On a general note, political violence occur within the purview of the struggle or competition for state power, resources, appointment or patronage as well as human emancipation or liberation and it often takes the form of intra or inter-state hostilities as well as group of individual clashes. The desperate bid to outweigh or outdo the opponent or other party(s) sometimes takes such extreme crude measure of political violence as 'life-taking' known as assassination. Assassination is considered to be the extreme form of political violence. This is an attempt, whether or not successful, to kill a pre-selected victim(s), usually with small arms or bombs for
political ends. The targets are usually the political figures or instrument of the state institution (for instance, the army and police) whether in power or in its corridor or jostling to be.

Political assassination simply put means an injury or a murder committed by an assassin for hire in money, without any provocation or cause of resentment given by the person against whom the crime is directed. In time, assassin came generally to mean one who killed an unsuspecting victim without warning, but the original sense of political purpose was never quite lost, and has become increasingly strong. To assassinate is to kill for a political reason (the death of Murtala Mohammed through military coup), to secure or resist authority, (like the Boko Haram resisting western educational value) to eliminate a rival for power (the deaths of Marshall Harry, and Bola Ige), to prevent or avenge a political defeat (the death of Abacha and Abiola), or to express a political grievance (Wikipedia, 2008). Political assassination according to Sanni (2007) is premeditated murder of a person who holds or intends to hold a position of public importance, for reasons associated with the victim’s prominent political profile.

Electoral Violence and Democratic System of Government

Every society is subject to challenges from within and without. Such challenges determine the course of its history over a period of time. It is the responsibility of scholars to capture, analyze and prescribe solutions to such challenges. The conclusion which can be drawn from these developments is that there is a geometric increase in the level of electoral violence in Nigeria. Electoral violence has become a major problem in the democratization of Nigeria. Officially, Nigeria operates a liberal democratic system of government. One essential feature of such a system is the recognition of the views of other political parties. This is why opposition parties are accorded special recognition and protection in such a system. Any government that suppresses the views of others is on the way to authoritarianism. Some examples of best practices are relevant here. In the United States of America, the Republican Party and Democratic Party have existed side by side for a long period
of time, alternating as ruling and opposition parties. The same situation obtains in Ghana, between the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party. A democratic political culture is based on reconciliation and compromise and not violence. Political parties are the institutions through which these objectives are to be realized. Another requirement of a democratic system of government is the promotion of a peaceful atmosphere for the people, through political parties to compete for elective offices. Electoral violence is dysfunctional to democratic politics as it restricts political participation.

The incidence of electoral violence is as old as mankind. Wherever there is political competition, there is always an element of electoral violence. As observed by Anifowose (1982) Violence or threat of violence is a universal phenomenon. Individuals and groups throughout history have in one form or another resorted to violence or its potential use as a tactic of political action. Violence has been used by groups holding power, and by groups in the process of losing power. Violence has been pursued in the defense of order, by the privileged, in the name of justice, by the oppressed, and in fear of displacement by the threatened. The genesis of electoral violence is related to the nature of politics. It has been argued by Hobbes and others that, in a State of Nature there "was war of all against all" (or situation of total violence). A political community is established to save mankind from the violence of a State of Nature. A political community when established is not free of conflicts some of which are violent. Politics is expected to manage the conflicts which vary from one political system to another. No political system has succeeded in eliminating political violence. It is in this connection that Hobbes once observed that, governance without swords is but mere words. In a similar view Mao asserted that political power emanates from the barrel of the gun. Like other concepts in social sciences, the meaning of violence is a subject of debate by scholars (Tilly, 1978; Bienen, 1968; Rodney, 1972). For the purpose of the discussion, violence can be defined as the illegitimate use of force. Electoral violence is the use or threat of physical act, carried out by an individual or individuals,
with the intent to cause injury or death or persons before, during and after election.

It is necessary to mention that, the Nigerian nation-state cannot be built on the foundation of lies and falsehood. In discussing a serious matter such as the survival of the nation, the truth must be told. We must call a spade a spade. The truth is that Nigerian politicians are responsible for promoting, arming and funding electoral violence. Unfortunately, there is no politician who has admitted supporting or organizing electoral violence. They always speak from both sides of the mouth. Even those caught red handed will go to any extent to deny their guilt. One of the pre-requisites of electoral violence is that thugs must be hired and paid handsomely; sophisticated weapons used by thugs are bought by politicians. Thugs need people with connection and resources to rescue them after every operation. That is why it is difficult to prosecute electoral offenders. Thugs are recruited from retired military and police officers, unemployed youths and ex-convicts. Those hired as escort to politicians are ex-body builders with intimidating looks. Almost all politicians are guilty of electoral violence. Those with a lot of resources have more thugs at their disposal. The main problem with engaging thugs is what to do with them after their assignment has been concluded. With arms at their disposal, ex-thugs develop new anti-social career paths as soon as elections are over. The origin of Niger Delta militants, Boko Haram and other similar organizations can be traced to them. The acceptance of liberal democracy on one hand and the encouragement of electoral violence on the other hand is a major contradiction in the electoral politics of Nigeria. This contradiction is of particular interest to observers of Nigerian politics because; it prevents party competition from achieving its philosophical goal - a democratic political system of government. Other factors responsible for electoral violence include:

- The activities of the institutional structure responsible for conducting elections.
- The poor economic environment, which makes it impossible for democratic values to thrive.
• The lack of political integration, which makes the electorate to interpret modern politics in primordial terms.
• The universal law of organization, which makes party leaders to adopt undemocratic means as a strategy of survival in power.

Electoral violence can develop if the election management body is not impartial and transparent. Some of the elections conducted in the Fourth Republic manifested this ills resulting in burning of offices and vehicles of the Independent National Electoral Commission. The case of the Ekiti state re-run election is a good example. The appointment of Professor A. Jega, a person of high integrity as INEC chairman was aimed at making INEC play a progressive role in the 2011 election. Nigerians are sharply divided along ethnic and religious lines. This has resulted in many crises, including political violence all over the country. Examples of such crises include those in Plateau, Bauchi and Borno states. The Plateau crisis started from the disputed Jos North local government election. The assassination of the gubernatorial candidate of the ANPP and a few others in Borno state was politically motivated to prevent the victim from contesting the 2011 election.

Violence and the 2011 Elections
Several issues were raised before the 2011 general elections by both the political elites and the masses. Among them are the zoning system among political office holders and political parties. Another important issue was the problem of accountability, constitutionalism, free, fair and credible election, and above all, how to tackle corruption, poverty, insecurity, inflation, unemployment and underemployment. To begin with, additional political parties were registered to accommodate and expand the political space for participants. The period of illness of Late President Musa Yar’adua was a litmus test for both executive, legislative and judicial arms of government. The media which is the fourth estate of the realm together with civil society played important roles. The issue
was resolved with the death of President Yar’adua. President Goodluck Jonathan pledged to make the 2011 elections free and fair. It must be stated at this point that both mass media and the organized civil societies must be commended for their robust, constructive and analytical actions during and after the episode. Then came the primaries of the various political parties. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) primary election drew much attention. The reason for this is obvious. For two important reasons – PDP is the largest political party with a sitting president, many state governors, senate president and the speaker of the House of Representatives. Secondly, PDP has been in power since 1999 and was not prepared to relinquish power. Aside these, the Late President Yar’adua came from the North, and President Jonathan from the South-South. The aforementioned reasons drew the attention of both the international communities, friends of Nigeria such as Britain, the USA and South Africa. Two things presented themselves: law and morality.

The decision of President Goodluck Jonathan to contest created a monumental challenge for the political party. Jonathan a Christian, hails from the South-South State of Bayelsa, an oil producing state. That zone had never produced a president. The second reason is that, the Late President Yar’adua, a Muslim from North, took over from President Obasanjo. He did not complete his 4 years (first term as president) before he died. The North felt alienated in the political power equation. The Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) picked General Mohammadu Buhari from the North and Pastor Tunde Bakare as their flag bearers. The Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) had Ribadu from the North as its flag bearer. The All Nigerian People’s Party (ANPP) had the former Kano state governor Ibrahim Shekarau as its presidential flag bearer. The stage was set for the general elections. The general election was adjudged as free and fair, though, there were pockets of allegation of votes rigging by all parties. These allegations sparked-off crisis leading to unprecedented political violence and assassinations across the country. The Northern states of Kano, Kaduna, Sokoto,
Katsina, Borno, Kebbi, Gombe, Bauchi and Plateau witnessed various degree of violence. In some instances, death toll rose to between 60-120. At this point, we give some explanation for the violence.

The post election violence could be grouped into three phases. Namely: anti-PDP protest, anti-South-South presidency and anti-poverty protest. For the record, as at 2011, the PDP as a political party had led the nation for about 12 years. Within these periods apart from external debt forgiveness, there was no concrete achievement other than the private sector led telecommunication revolution. As stated earlier in this paper, zoning was one of the major issue before the general election and became a serious challenge which President Jonathan administration had to contend with. Having said that, for the first group of protesters, which is anti-PDP government, they felt that if after about 12 years of PDP, Nigerians still complain of poor roads, hospitals, water, high unemployment, inflation and poor general living standard, then, there was no need for the PDP to form a government. The second phase borders on ethnicity and religion, which is anti-Jonathan. Again, one can see their feelings. The Late President Yar’adua died without completing his first term of 4 years in office. President Jonathan took over and completed that term. Protesters from the North felt that, they have either been schemed out or cheated in the power equation and they registered their anger in a violent way without due regard to the constitution.

The third phase is classified as a protest against poverty and underdevelopment. The unorganized masses took to the street with ethnic and religious fervor. Nobody can really explain why the protest was notable mostly in the northern states with Kano, Katsina, Bauchi, Kaduna and Borno leading. These states are predominantly Muslim, farmers and educationally disadvantaged states compared to the states of Oyo, Lagos, Edo, Delta and Abia. The fact that, South-South, South-East and South-West did not join in the protest was a sign that the President Jonathan Presidency was deeply rooted in crisis from the day one.
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The point is that the voting in the South-East, South and South-West as against some northern states clearly shows that all is not well with the Jonathan presidency. For example, in the South-Eastern states, President Jonathan recorded almost 100% of the total votes cast, while his closest opponent, Gen. Buhari, recorded zero votes in some polling units, but recorded a high percentage in almost all the northern states. Here, the ethnic and religious seed was showing. The resultant effects were series of attacks in some northern states of the country.

Conclusion
Nigerians waited enthusiastically for the inauguration of a new democratic government on May 29, 1999. The democracy that was attained on this date witnessed many crises in its early days. The extent of the crises raised serious insinuation at a time that the military was on a standby to stage a comeback. The problems were initially conceived as necessary for a young democracy especially giving the profile of its citizenry as a highly militarized population. It is however interesting, that a decade into democratic practice, even though the military has not struck, the situation has always suggested that it is not far from possible.

The democracy attained was accompanied by massive expectations even in relation to material progress and economic pay off. Ake (1993) justifies this expectation when he submits that democracy is underlined by not just clamour for a political birthright but for the fundamental charter of the state which portend for the ordinary citizens and even the generality a second independence, a new beginning with the great hopes that such generates (Ake, 1998). Meanwhile, Nigerians have witnessed exactly the opposite.

The role of politicians, both candidates and those holding political office, in instigating, encouraging or perpetuating election-related violence in Nigeria is widely acknowledged by officials, civil society organizations and the media. In August 2006 the Inspector General of Police stated that politicians were recruiting students to engage in political violence. In the same month the Ebonyi State Commissioner of Police was reported
to have identified political candidates who, according to police intelligence, had started to train "thugs" - armed supporters or gangs - in preparation for the elections. Similar statements made by police and security officials in several Nigerian states about the role of politicians in instigating and encouraging political violence have been reported in the media. However, despite these verbal acknowledgements and warnings by various officials, little effective action has been taken by the government or law enforcement authorities to curb political violence. The Nigerian police is widely acknowledged to be subject to political manipulation and the role of senior political figures in instigating and supporting political violence is frequently ignored. We recommend therefore that:

• When the police arrest people during violent clashes they should be more decisive in prosecuting such people irrespective of who they are linked with. This is the only way to curb the culture of impunity.

• Nigerian authorities, candidates and political parties should respect and protect human rights before, during and after the elections.

• Pressure groups should be formed on professional basis to cater to the interest of the people. This will enable them have focus, direction and also be consistent in their demands, agitation and activities. The more professional pressure groups there are the healthier the political system and the governance process. This will no doubt promote transparency, accountability and responsiveness.

• Opposition parties and bodies should be welcome by the ruling party but there should be a limit. Issues of national security and interest should not be exposed or treated with levity. Also, there must be constructive and analytical criticisms. This will reduce ethnic, sectarian and biased attacks which sometimes results in violence.

• The Justice Uwai’s recommendation of a ten year jail term for electoral offenders should be activated to serve as a deterrent to perpetrators of electoral violence.
References


