

**ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA:
A REVISIT OF THE APRIL 14, 2007 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN
ABIA STATE**

Eleagu, Green Ifeanyichukwu, PhD

Department of Political Science, Gregory University, Uturu, Abia State

&

Okwara, Emmanuel Chukwuma, Ph.D

Department of Political Science, Veritas University, Abuja

Abstract

Over the years elections in Nigeria have been characterized by violence. What has varied from one election to another and from one area to another has been the degree or intensity of such violence. One of the reasons advanced for the Nigerian civil war of 1967 was the violence that defined the 1964 general elections in Nigeria. Various attempts at democracy through elections have only succeeded as veritable battle grounds for hooliganism, ballot-snatching, kidnapping of political opponents, assassination of rivals, arson, assault and physical destruction of election materials and even intimidation and outright molestation or killing of election officials. Using the theory of violence as expounded by Hannah Arendt, this study attempts to evaluate the presence of violence in the April 14, 2007 gubernatorial election in Abia State as well as proffer solutions to the problem in Nigeria.

Introduction

The health of democracies, of whatever type and range, depends on a wretched technical detail- electoral procedure. All the rest is secondary. If the regime of the elections is successful, if it is in accordance with reality, all goes well; if not, though the rest progresses beautifully, all goes wrong.

- Jose Ortegay Gasset (1930:114 cited in Ngwu & Ugwu, 2012:232)

In point of fact, elections generally, as aptly captured above, have come to be the major index for measuring democratic balance and soundness in countries of the world. It was in this vein that Bratton and Posner (1999:378) argued that “elections provide the best criterion for orderly leadership succession because they entail popular participation. That way, responsibility and responsiveness on the part of government are ensured”. The United Nations (cited in Wanyonyi, 1997:21), similarly declared that “... the will of the people shall be the basis of authority of government and that this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections...” just as Amuwo (1996:16) sees election as an important point for democratization.

Regardless of the consensus around the centrality of elections to the democratic enterprise, it has been acknowledged that elections in themselves do not create or consolidate democracy. That for sound democracy to be established, civil rights and due process of law must be respected or observed, which is why countries

that lack democratic principles are often labeled pariah states in the comity of nations. Furthermore, the lack of respect for civil rights and due process of law often leads to electoral violence thereby discrediting the elections so conducted.

With respect to Nigeria, the phenomenon of electoral violence is by no means new. Defined as “any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at any person or property involved in the election process, or at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period” (International Foundation for Election Systems, 2011), the history of electoral cum political violence in Nigeria has been traced to the colonial period (Adesote and Abimbola, 2014). It has been argued that the colonial setting laid the foundation of future political conflict in Nigeria. This argument was hinged on a number of British political experiments in West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular among which were, the introduction of the elective principle in 1922 and on the emergence of the 1946 Richards constitution (Omotola, 2007).

The elective principle which was introduced in 1922 with the advent of the Clifford constitution gave room for voting in Nigeria for the very first time paving the way for electoral contestation. At first, the process was generally peaceful owing in large part to its limited scope as elections were conducted only in Lagos and Calabar. Beginning from the 1959 general elections that ushered in independence in 1960, the incidence of election-related violence began to rear its ugly head. Even then, electoral violence was minimal during the 1959 elections because of the overwhelming presence of the colonial masters. Beginning from the 1964 general elections, Nigeria began to experience exacerbated electoral violence varying from physical, structural and psychological violence (Nwolise, 2007:162) and this largely accounted for the collapse of the First Republic through military intervention.

Following the military incursion into Nigerian politics, power tussle among top military hierarchy on who is eligible to takeover power plunge the polity into a 30 months agonizing civil war (Ojo, 2007:19). The military however held sway of power for 13years (1966-1979) from the time democratic experiment was truncated in the first republic. When the military eventually handed over power to civilians in 1979, general elections conducted for that purpose was not devoid of malpractices but due to the overbearing presence of the military serious violence did not break out (Malu, 2006; Ojo & Azeez, 2006).

When the civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu conducted the 1983 general elections, malpractices were commonplace as the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was determined to remain in power at all cost. Thus, the anomalies led to an upsurge of violence before, during and after elections and ultimately resulted in the military takeover of power in December of that year. The military incursion altered Nigeria’s march as Nigerians were unable to exercise their civic duty of voting for close to ten years (Malu, 2006).

The 1993 general elections were conducted by General Ibrahim Babangida, the then military head of state widely were adjudged the most free and fair election the country ever had and was devoid of violence. However, the Presidential election was annulled and Babangida handed over to an interim government led by Chief

Ernest Shonekan. After three months, General Sani Abacha succeeded Ernest Shonekan, whom he overthrew in a palace coup arrangement. Abacha's bid for self-perpetuation eventually failed following his demise on June 8, 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar who succeeded him effected a transition from military to civil rule in less than a year. The 1999 general elections that ushered in Obasanjo only witnessed flickers of violence as Nigerians were tired of military rule (Nwolise 2007; Malu, 2006; Ojo & Azeez 2002).

The 2003 elections conducted by the PDP led government of Olusegun Obasanjo reignited electoral violence as witnessed in 1964 and 1983 by incumbent civilian government. Elections were blatantly rigged through illicit means varying from ballot stuffing and snatching of ballot boxes with aid from security agents. Before, during and after elections were characterized by various forms of electoral violence. Factionalisation within political party, collapse of pact between godfathers and godsons and political homicides heated up the polity (Elaigwu, 2006:18; Nwolise, 2007). The 2003 election was however eclipsed by the 2007 elections both in malpractices and violence. In the words of Cashmir Igbokwe, a columnist for *Sunday Punch*, the 2007 elections was war by another name with the scores of violence and attendant irregularities that characterized the conduct of the April general elections (*The Punch*, 22 April 2007:170). The attendant electoral fraud that permeated the conduct of 2007 elections was vividly captured in so many write-ups varying from (Adetula, 2007:227-260; Ojo, 2011; TMG, 2007; Ugoh, 2007). As documented by Human Right Watch (2007) scores of violence remained unabated as at least 300 people including policemen were killed in election-related violence.

Unbridled malpractices and malpractices were particularly the case with respect to Abia State, Southeast Nigeria. Against this backdrop therefore, this paper sets itself the task of x-raying electoral violence as a recurring decimal in Nigerian elections, especially in the gubernatorial election in Abia State on April 14, 2007. This it set to do with a view to unearthing the causes, consequences and solutions to the monster of electoral violence.

State of the Art

Electoral violence as a rampant global phenomenon has attracted a reasonable volume of scholarly literature and even casual comments. However, in this study attempt is made to compartmentalize the literature into (1) Electoral violence, (2) The Political Class and Electoral Violence, and (3) Political Exclusion.

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence, as distinct from other forms of violence, like domestic violence etc, has to do with elections. The *International Encyclopedia of Social Science* (1972:1) defines election as "a form of procedure, recognized by the rules of an organization, whereby all or some of the members of organization choose a smaller number of persons or one person to hold office or authority in the organization". Nnoli (1990:42) posited that "an election may be defined as the manner of choice agreed upon by a group of people which enables a few people out

of many to occupy one or a number of positions of authority". According to Fischer (2002) elections "are the mechanism by which public questions are resolved and public contests are determined". They constitute one of the key foundations of modern democracy (Anifowose, 2003:4). Writing generally on elections in its briefing on Nigeria's 2003 elections the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) noted that "Elections have always contained potential for civil unrest". The Centre continued that "Elections have typically been marred by distrust, apathy and usually violence that have resulted in losses of lives and properties and ultimately increased the odds against the establishment/consolidation of democracy and a democratic ethos" (CDD Year: 2).

The implication from the above position is that elections, especially in Nigeria, have a potential for igniting violence. Therefore there is a temptation to construe that more violence occurs during and about elections. This may be subject for a different study. Another centre, The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) looked at elections in Sri Lanka (Tamil Net 2004:1) and observed that state organs as the police can be used to mar elections. Takiranbudde (2007), Africa Director of Human Rights Watch observed that guarantee for citizen's basic rights to vote freely in elections is government's responsibility. However he further observed that in the April 2007 elections in Nigeria "instead of guaranteeing citizen's basic right to vote freely, Nigerian Government and electoral officials engaged in the fraud and violence that marred the presidential polls in some areas. In other areas, officials closed their eyes to human rights abuses committed by supporters of the ruling party and others.

Looking at elections as the basis for democracy and politics Joseph (1987) calls the system which encourages closed competition in which established 'brokers' vie for positions and divide up potentially lucrative jobs between themselves as "prebendalism". The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Carter Centre observed, in their first statement on the 2003 Nigerian Electoral Process, two types of elections: 'transition election' and ordinary elections. According to them "the 1998-99 elections were widely seen as 'transition elections' from military to civilian rule". Earlier elections since independence had been conducted by the military. The NDI (2007:2) noted the 1998 and 1999 transition elections as the beginning of a process of democratization and the rebuilding of a political infrastructure that could sustain and broaden the efficacy of civilian rule. "Consequently, the flaws of a rushed electoral process were largely overlooked".

Chukwuma (2007:12) looked at the April 2007 election generally and noted thus:

The April 2007 election have come and gone! What has not gone, however, is the paint brush of shame it splashed on all Nigerians at home and abroad and the huge credibility deficits it handed down on Yar'Adua Government... Abroad, friends of Nigeria are shocked by the Country's scandalous failings in the conduct of elections at a time war turn countries as Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo

and Sierra Leone are advancing in their conduct of elections and democratic practice.

Commenting specifically on the 2007 elections Grignon (2007) observed that in spite of the great historic promise the 2007 elections held for Nigeria as the first ever transition from civilian leadership to another:

The process was marred from the start: preparations for the election produced dubious and shoddy voter registration lists; the parties' primaries selected candidates using stolen state funds and violence; and the campaign itself was the most violent in the country's 47-years history, devoid of any new idea for improving governance. ...Things went from bad to worse during the first phase of actual voting, (being) the elections for governorship and state assemblies held on 14 April...

Also, the TMG's final report on the 2003 elections "Do The Votes Count?" documented the constraints and manipulations that marred the conduct of the process leading up to the 2003 elections in Nigeria and the conduct of the elections held valuable lessons to be utilized for future elections. The Group held that the elections were not free and fair but marred by violence, rigging etc. Some writers have also argued that the limit between election and democratic rule is no more than a tenuous one. This is in the light of the reality that democratic systems do collapse in spite of the holding of elections, indicating that the ritual of elections is not enough to sustain democratic practice. Then they argue that if elections do not sustain or guarantee democratic rule, it could be difficult to conceive of elections as being a primary building block for democracy (Olaitan, 2005). He further argued that the "democratic pretenders" have failed "to lay claim to democratic credentials on the basis of conducting elections" (Olaitan, 2005:44).

For Jackson and Jackson (1994:414) elections assume special significance in liberal societies. They organically and symbiotically linked elections and political parties. Also, according to Fischer (2003), electoral conflict and violence can be defined as any random or organized act that seeks to undermine, delay or otherwise influence an election process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced 'protection', blackmail, destruction of property, or assassinations. He further notes that the victims can be people, places, things or data. Looking at electoral violence Robert Pastor in his article, Election Administration in Democratic Transitions notes that "The failure to conduct an election that is adjudged fair by all sides can pre-empt a democratic transition. Repeated failures can lead to violence and chronic instability.

The Political Class and Electoral Violence

Electoral violence has often been linked to electoral malpractice either as a cause or consequence. Nwabueze (2003) looked at electoral violence as comprising

malpractices and other irregularities. He thus separated the legal consequences between electoral malpractices and election irregularities. Generally, he held that while electoral malpractices can invalidate an election, election irregularities cannot. Consequently, in his detailed analysis of 2003 electoral malpractices in Nigeria, Ezeani (2005:422-428) highlighted three major aspects of electoral malpractice:

- a) Those pertaining to infringement of electoral laws,
- b) Those pertaining to improper and unethical infringements, and
- c) Those pertaining to improper conduct or arrangement by the electoral body.

Impersonation, use of quasi-military organizations, voting by unregistered persons, under aged voting, registration offences among others constitute the infringement on the Electoral Law. According to Ezeani (2005) improper and unethical infringements include unlawful possession of election materials, assaulting election officials, campaigning on election day, bribery, arrest of opposition members, forgery, multiple voting, etc. The malpractices that pertain to improper conduct or arrangements by INEC, according to him, include falsification of result sheets, stuffing of ballot boxes, forgery of results, tampering with ballot papers and boxes, among others.

Electoral violence has often been linked to electoral malpractice has various dimensions. These include institutional and individual. Among the institutional are delay of or non arrival of election materials and personnel, inability to display valid voter's register as stipulated by the electoral law, removal of qualified but dreaded candidates' names and logos from the list of contestants on election days, use of state media to announce inaccurate results, use of security agents to secure votes of rival parties by incumbent state functionaries, lack of secrecy of voting, denial of access to polling stations, announcements of fake results, even where elections failed to hold, use of improper votes procedures to presidential and ruling party endorsement of candidates regardless of what the election results say. In the Abia case, elder Imo, a man who ran on the platform of All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) was declared the winner by INEC on account of the majority of vote he received. Shortly thereafter, another certificate of victory was given to his PDP opponent, Adolphus Wabara. It was alleged the decision to rob Elder Imo of his victory and to hand it over to Chief Adolphus Wabara was endorsed by the PDP hierarchy and the presidency which had decided on his choice as the next president of the senate. It was therefore not surprising that a few days after the election in which the defect of Senator Wabara was widely reported, INEC issued him, a certificate of victory, and he subsequently emerged as President of the Senate. However Elder Imo refused to contest the suspected theft of his mandate, and allegations were that he had been financially compensated to sell his mandate (Ibrahim 2005:36).

The situation was not limited to Abia State. Some other states also had their share. In the Plateau State case, Philemon Dewaan ran on the Alliance for Democracy (AD) ticket in the Plateau Central Senatorial District, and was believed to have defeated the then incumbent Senator Ibrahim Mantu of the PDP. Despite wide media reports of the defeat of Senator Mantu who had been Deputy President of the Senate

as one of the biggest upset in the elections, corroborated by obtained by party agents from the polling stations, INEC declared Mantu the winner. It was obvious that the leadership of AD compromised the victory of Philemon Dewaan. The National Chairman of the party, Alhaji Abudulkadir, who was expected to spearhead the campaign to defend his victory had been appointed by the President as Adviser, and was believed to have played a central role in the sell out. Mantu was not only declared the winner, he was immediately re-elected the Deputy President of the Senate.

In view of these and others the TMG which was active in monitoring the elections concluded that the analysis of reports of Domestic Election Observers group as received from monitors deployed during the gubernatorial and state legislative elections revealed clearly that:

the elections on April 14 were marred by serious irregularities and malpractices so much that the results announced in many states such as Anambra, Kogi, Nasarawa, Ogun, Ondo and Rivers states cannot be said to have reflected the will of the people of the states and therefore remains unacceptable (p6).

Political Exclusion and Electoral Violence

Epelle (2005) sees violence as a consequence of exclusion of the majority from political participation. He opines that as a consequence of "...Effectively obliterating (or at best restricting) other channels of political expression and advancement, then post electoral violence is a *sine qua non*". A prominent Kenyan newspaper, the *Daily Nation*, in its editorial observed impunity as the prime cause of electoral violence in Kenya: "There were many causes of violence, some associated with spontaneous anger and disappointment at the results of the election. However, the most powerful force driving the ethnic butchery was simply impunity" (*Daily Nation*, 15 October, 2008).

In agreement with the position of the Daily Nation was then General Secretary of the United Nations, Kofi Anan: "The tendency sometimes to protect for the sake of peace, forgive and let's move on doesn't help society. Impunity should not be allowed to stand." Meanwhile, approaching electoral violence from a religious perspective, The Muslim United People Front organized a demonstration in front of the Periya Pallivasal (Mosque) in Batticaloa and chanted slogans demanding an end to violence and called upon all parties to respect democratic values, free and fair elections" (Tamil Net 2004). The immediate implication is that religions abhor violence yet they are often behind or in the middle of various incidents of violence, especially in Nigeria.

For Odofin (2005), there is need to minimize thuggery, violence, intimidation and brutal assassination that usually accompany electoral politics in Nigeria. This, he said, is because the crisis in the political process is not the problem of democracy, but the inability of the political leadership to exploit the opportunities offered by democracy for the development of the nation.

Other writers (Appadorai, 1975: 54; Nyerere, 1962; Chukulo 1987: Nwabueze 1993:119-20) observed that instability in government, including electoral violence in developing societies can be traced to multi-partism. Such multi-partism they claim is un-African.

Some others insist that colonialism is to be blamed for the post independence violence in African states tending towards one-party nations. According to them authoritarianism, intimidation, domination, domestication, acculturation, and statism were imparted on the domestic elite groomed specifically for the purpose of protecting their corporate interests at the twilight of colonialism.

A Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical framework adopted in this research is the theory of violence as posited by Hannah Arendt (1969). Arendt, a German Jewish philosopher, in her book "On Violence" viewed violence as the product and manifestation of irreconcilable power acquisition differences. According to Arendt, when rulers use force to fulfill their design against the wishes of the people, there will be resistance and what will ensue is export-import of violence and crisis between two competing groups namely, the political power seeker and the masses whose aspirations are robbed. Power essentially belongs to the people and they have the right to choose whom to give their collective mandate. Power is not the property of an individual. When genuine power is absent, violence may emerge to fill the gap (Arendt, 1969:78). She warns that with violence there is a danger that the means will overwhelm the end, even as she describes her discomfort with social scientists trying "to solve the riddle of 'aggressiveness' in human behavior." She asks why we should ask humans to take their "standards of behavior from another animal species." In Arendt's own words: The end of human action, as distinct from the end products of fabrication, can never be reliably predicted. The means used to achieve political goals are more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goals.

This framework of analysis by Hannah Arendt could also be seen in the statements of Martin Luther King Jr. (1961) who said that "violence is the voice of the unheard", and it would be used to establish whether the April 14, 2007 gubernatorial election in Abia State had situations of irreconcilable power acquisition as a result of absence of genuine power thereby forcing the people who own power but whose voice was unheard to react the other way. Briefly stated, we will find out if the gubernatorial election of April 14, 2007 was spruced with violence of appreciable proportions. This theory will also help us to ascertain if the political class contributed to the presence (if established) and magnitude of the violence. Lastly the framework will guide us in determining whether poverty or political and economic exclusion contributed to electoral violence in Abia State during the period in focus.

Applying this framework to elections and electoral violence we see that lack of sound political culture, which as a sub-system, can breed upheavals in the entire system which we see as electoral violence. The volatile nature of electoral contests as a result of the attractive nature of the state, perception of leadership as permanent and

the manipulation of politics of the governing elite were carefully observed by Onu and Momoh (2005:41). It is therefore believable that the political class or elite who hold political and economic powers perpetuate themselves in power through selection that pass for party primaries, elections fraught with irregularities and outright attempt at voiding the constitution by clamour for third term (Chukwuma 2007:17) and cross carpeting as Governors, Isa Yuguda and Mahmud Shinkafi, elected under ANPP had done, moving over to PDP while in office with ANPP tickets. Such seemingly unprincipled cross-carpeting actions “constrict the development, if not completely destabilize, the political process (Okosi-Simbine 2003: 17)”.

The political class ensures a strangle-hold on the mass majority by reluctance to build factories and or maintain existing ones. Nigeria has three aging refineries that, if rehabilitated and additional ones built, can empower more people economically and bring down the pump prices of petroleum products. However, the political class has always preferred to export crude oil and import the same oil products from abroad as refined products, at higher rates. That way they create employment and empowerment for foreign youths and others abroad and perpetuate local impoverishment. Monies fraudulently gotten from such illicit oil deals are often used to buy exotic houses and world class hotels in South Africa, Dubai, etc. When the local youths migrate to such places in search of jobs in the same hotels, they often fall victim to xenophobic attacks by the South African youths who wrongly see the Nigerians as coming to take their jobs. The fraudulent award of import licenses for the petroleum products are the exclusive preserve of the political class.

As a strategy for poverty alleviation the political class gives out barrows and motorcycles (Okada) for commercial use to the local youths. Instead of alleviating poverty the motorcycles and their users are threatening to decimate the entire populace through road accidents. Indeed in 2007 alone motorcycle accidents accounted for 78 % of total 1,785 accidents recorded by the FRSC in Abia State. Many more could have gone unrecorded.

Babangida (2004), one time Nigeria’s Head of State, noted:

If you observe, the problem of this country is not always from the ordinary people. They are never the problem. They live together in peace...The problem is rather from the elite class the people who think they know better how the country should be run... The people who start a crisis, even a war in most countries are only a few manipulators... And we are very good in this country in creating such situation of tension. During elections the guns, machetes, and other dangerous weapons were provided by the political elite who see elections as do or die events.

The gap between the rich political actors and the mass majority, often youths, usually translates into high degree of frustration and volatility. This situation is then seen played out as electoral violence because it happens during and is often related to elections.

A Brief Political Overview of Nigeria

Nigeria as we know it today came into being in 1914 when the British Administrator, Lord Lugard, amalgamated its Northern and Southern Provinces, which previously had been administered separately (Commonwealth Observer Group: 4). Nigeria's independence path was largely evolutionary rather than revolutionary. The legislative council had limited African representation. At the local level the British used the "indirect rule" method, using the traditional rulers, to administer. The British introduced the 1947 constitution following internal and external pressures. This constitution established a federal system of government based on three regions: Eastern, Western, and Northern. The 1958 Constitutional Conference agreed that Nigeria should be independent by 1960. The federal elections of 1959 produced no clear majorities. Thus the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) formed a coalition with parties from the South-East, thus producing the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Bewlewa under the renamed National Convention of Nigerian Citizens. The Action Group, largely from the Western Region, produced Chief Obafemi Awolowo as the leader of Opposition in the Federal House. By October 1960 Nnamdi Azikiwe of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC), with mainstay in the South-East became the Governor-General, a constitutional monarch representing the Queen of England.

The weird political nature of Nigeria began to unravel soon after independence. A confrontation between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Samuel Akintola, then premier of the Western Region, led to the Federal Government declaring a state of emergency in the region. Awolowo subsequently bagged a 12 year jail term for treason, plotting to overthrow the Federal Government in 1962. After the six months of state of emergency, Chief Samuel Akintola was reinstated as the Premier and leader of the United Peoples Party (UPP). Three years from 1960, that is 1963, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe became the non-executive President of Nigeria following adoption by the country of the Republican constitution. The first post-independence general election in Nigeria took place in December 1964 "and was marred by violence and corruption" (Commonwealth Observer Group: Statement on Nigeria's Elections of April 2007).

Beginning from 1960 "Nigeria has had a tumultuous political history, ...experiencing a succession of military coups" (Commonwealth Observers Group, 2007:4). Indeed by 1964, less than four years as an independent nation Nigeria had its general elections which "were marked with massive rigging; conflict and political violence of high degree, which culminated in the military takeover of power in 1966" (Mudasiru, 2005:476). Other factors like the 1963 controversial census also aggravated the situation. The incursion of the military in 1966 lasted until the 1979 elections and hand over of government. The civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari which had just entered its second term in 1983 was overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida via the December 31, 1983 military coup. Another attempt at democracy was half-heartedly made in 1993. Although the elections of 1993 which produced Alhaji M.K.O. Abiola were generally said to be the free and fair the military annulled the elections. The violence that was scarce during the 1993

elections then surfaced around the June 12 date that Abiola held on to in pursuit of his mandate.

Subsequent elections came in 1999, when the military finally left, and in 2003. The general elections of 2003 were significant in two areas: First, it (they) marked the first attempt by the country to transit successfully from one civilian rule to another. The 1983 election, which was to be the first attempt at transiting from a civilian rule to another, was truncated by a military coup due to political conflicts that characterized the conduct of the election. Secondly, it (they) marked the manifestation of the phenomenon of retired generals in the democratic political setting of the country. (Mudasiru: 477). In the words of the Commonwealth Observer Group “The 2007 elections were therefore to mark a watershed, when one elected President would hand over to another for the first time in the country’s history.”

Struggle for Democracy in Nigeria

The bloodless coup of August 1985 by General Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) which overthrew General Muhammadu Buhari almost marked the end of military tenures in Nigeria. Indeed Babangida repealed the decree on press censorship (Commonwealth: 3) and released former President Shehu Shagari and his vice, Dr. Alex Ekwueme, from detention. However between 1985 and 1993 the regime had a fair share of criticisms from within and outside the country. Chief Gani Fahwenmi, an erudite Lagos lawyer, had accused the regime of countless misdeeds including linking it with the letter bomb that killed Dele Giwa, editor of a critical news magazine. Civil society groups rose to the occasion in one accord. By 1993 therefore, General Babangida organized Presidential elections for 12 June 1993 that proved controversial... Provisional results suggested that the Yoruba businessman, Chief Moshood Abiola, had a clear lead over his rival, Alhaji Bashir Tofa. However, on 23 June 1993 the ruling National Defence and Security Council (NDSC), which had replaced the AFRC, annulled the elections before the full results could be announced by the National Electoral Commission (NEC), which was itself suspended. Nevertheless, Chief Abiola continued to claim that he had been duly and legitimately elected. Over 100 people were killed in riots protesting the decision to annul the election. General Babangida announced that there would be a new presidential election on 27 August, but this was greeted by general disbelief and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) announced that it would boycott the election.

Following the annulment of the widely perceived free and fair elections in 1993, Protests broke out, including strikes. General Babangida “stepped aside” under pressure from NDSC, handing power on 27 August 1993 to an Interim National Government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, a non-partisan businessman who promised to supervise the organization of fresh elections that were scheduled for early 1994. However, on 17 November 1993 Chief Shonekan was removed from office and General Sani Abacha, the Minister of Defence, took over. The next day General Abacha announced the dissolution of all organs of state and bodies established under the previous transition programme. Precisely in June 1994 Chief M.K.O. Abiola was arrested and charged with treason for forcefully declaring himself President of

Nigeria. Abiola and his supporters had gathered in Tafawa Belewa Square in Lagos and declared himself winner of the 1993 election. Many pro-democracy groups, including National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) chieftains were arrested and jailed for supporting the protests. Some fled the country. The government took strong action against its other perceived opponents. In July 1994 it dissolved the elected executive council of the two main petroleum trade unions - the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) – replacing them with government appointees. The leaders of the two associations were later arrested and detained. In March 1995, former Head of state Chief Obasanjo and his former deputy, General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua and several others, were arrested in connection with an alleged coup plot. Chief Obasanjo was subsequently sentenced to life in prison (later commuted to 25 years imprisonment) while Yar'Adua and 12 others received the death sentence (later commuted to life imprisonment). General Yar'Adua later died in custody in suspicious circumstances.

The event that sparked Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth was the decision by the Provisional Ruling Council to proceed on 10 November 1995 with the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists after a trial by special tribunal on charges of complicity in the murder of four local chiefs. The execution took place when Commonwealth Heads were meeting in Auckland, New Zealand, and despite numerous international appeals for clemency and assurances given by the Nigerian Government to several prominent Commonwealth leaders that it would not proceed with the executions. Commonwealth Heads decided to suspend Nigeria from the Commonwealth. They further decided that the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, created under the Milbrook Action Programme which they adopted during the same summit, should engage with Nigeria to achieve compliance with commonwealth principles.

Following the hostile international attitude towards the military leadership in Nigeria, General Sani Abacha put in place transition programme to civilian rule which was fundamentally flawed. Its sole aim was to achieve his own legitimization. Only five political parties were approved by his regime, and all five adopted him as their presidential candidate for elections that were to be held in October 1998. However, General Abacha died suddenly on 8 June 1998 and was succeeded by General Abubakar, formerly Chief of Defence staff. Following the death of General Sani Abacha and the ugly story about his death in the hands of Indian prostitutes the Commonwealth Group noted that General Abubakar released those accused of involvement in coup attempts (including Chief Obasanjo) and repealed many military decrees which had severely impinged on human rights. Sadly, Chief Moshood Abiola died on the eve of release from detention on 7 July 1998. General Abdulsalami Abubakar announced a detailed plan leading to the restoration of a democratic civilian government by May 29, 1999. The subsequent elections on that date produced retired General Olusegun Obasanjo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) as the winner and new Head of State of Nigeria. Obasanjo had been a head of state briefly following the assassination of General Murtala Muhammed in 1976. Obasanjo

subsequently declared every May 29 as Democracy Day, a holiday in Nigeria to mark the return of democracy in Nigeria.

Background to the 2007 Elections

The 2007 elections in Nigeria offered great prospect for Nigeria “in that they offered Nigeria the first opportunity to achieve a genuine constitutional succession from one civilian administration to another since independence (Commonwealth Observer Group: Statement on Nigeria’s Elections of April 2007). After a largely controversial second term of the President Olusegun Obasanjo administration following resistance to his attempt at continuing in office for an unconstitutional third term the stage was set for violence. Many civil society groups and those who had fallen out of favour with the administration clamoured for rejection of the Third Term agenda. This controversy polarized the country along lines of economic and political interests. When, however, President Olusegun Obasanjo reluctantly consented to organizing the 2007 general elections he seemed all out for a pound of flesh of his opponents and so he labeled the election “a do or die” affair. According to the Commonwealth Observer Group (2007) the challenges of the era could be compartmentalized into security, third term debate and Obasanjo’s feud with his vice, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar.

Security Challenges

Nigeria faced several serious and significant security challenges. There was inter-ethnic violence, such as the August 2003 clashes between Ijaw and Itsekiri people in the Niger delta town of Warri which resulted in the deaths of about 100 people, with 1,000 injuries. There were also serious inter-religious clashes. In May 2004, a state of emergency was declared in the central Plateau state after more than 200 Muslims were killed in Yelwa in attacks by Christian militia and revenge attacks were launched by Muslim youths in Kano. In February 2006, more than 100 people were killed when religious violence flared up in mainly-Muslim towns in the north and in the southern city of Onitsha. Serious violence involving criminal gangs was also reported. In August-September 2004, for example, deadly clashes between gangs in the oil city of Port Harcourt prompted a strong crackdown by troops. Amnesty International, cited a death toll of 500, while the authorities said only about 20 died. Political violence also recorded significant rise during the period as noted by the group. This sometimes took the form of kidnapping and /or assassination of political figures. In mid-December 2006, for example, a prominent PDP politician, Ibrahim Bakare, was assassinated by unknown gunmen barely five months after the murder of a PDP Governorship aspirant for Lagos, Funsho Williams. Violence was also recorded in the form of violent disruption of political meetings and campaign rallies of political rivals. It should be noted that much of this violence was a manifestation of intra-party rivalry. There was also a marked increase in the activities of political thugs. The intensification of the insurgency in the Niger Delta, an area viewed as increasingly lawless and unsafe, particularly, for foreign nationals and Nigerians associated with the oil industry, government officials and security forces has been the

most serious security challenge, however. The insurgency is being perpetrated by militants and bandits seeking a greater share of Nigeria's oil wealth, on the basis that the country's petroleum resources are heavily concentrated in the Delta (Commonwealth, 2007: 12). This low-intensity conflict showed no sign of abating. More than 70 oil workers from a number of countries were abducted between January and July 2006, when the level of militant attacks against the oil industry increased significantly. Not only did the number of abductions rise during that period but the number of casualties resulting from these attacks had also risen. Criminality and profit from ransoms are increasingly the main motive for abductions in the Niger Delta.

The violence in the area had penetrated nearly all the aspects of life in the area. Many of the assaults on oil industry personnel over the past year have been claimed by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), an obscure group that first surfaced in late 2006. This group claim to be fighting for local control of mineral resources and political autonomy for ethnic Ijaws. This group is also demanding the release from Federal custody of a separatist militia, and of the former Bayelsa State governor, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, who was impeached for money laundering and is facing corruption charges after jumping bail in the United Kingdom.

The 'Third Term' Debate

In early 2005, supporters of President Obasanjo began a campaign to increase the number of presidential terms allowed by the constitution of the country. Nigerians were lobbied to believe that this move was essential to sustain and complete the reforms initiated by the president. It was popular belief among Nigerians that President Obasanjo wanted to retain political power; although he never publicly stated that he wanted a third term. Several constitutional reforms were put forward by the president's supporters. The central idea was to prepare ground for the third term agenda. This particular proposal was met with stiff and determined resistance by key stakeholders, including the general public, civil society, the media, opposition parties and even sections of the ruling PDP party itself. On May 16, 2006, the Senate, by voice vote, rejected the proposed constitutional amendment to make a third term possible.

Perhaps the most dominant and important issue as Nigeria prepared for the 2007 elections was the political feud between the president and his vice president, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. The feud assumed dangerous and alarming proportions and posed a serious challenge. Alhaji Atiku had played a key role in the formation of the ruling PDP, and made no bones about his interest in succeeding President Obasanjo. Their relationship deteriorated sharply as the 'third term' got underway. Vice President Atiku publicly opposed the 'third term' agenda. As a consequence, the Vice-President's influence within both the ruling party and the government was deliberately undermined and gradually diminished (Commonwealth).

The apparent schism in the Presidency appeared to have dragged the credibility of crime fighting agencies through the mud. Such agencies were hurriedly

and dubiously let loose on political opponents. Even if they had prima facie cases to investigate or prosecute the timing was largely seen by many as suspicious. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) produced a report “indicting” the Vice President for abuse of office and public funds, specifically the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF). Later, an Administrative Panel Report accused him of abuse of office in the management of the afore-mentioned fund. The President forwarded these reports to the National Assembly and sought Alhaji Atiku’s impeachment. These developments precipitated unprecedented and public accusations and counter-accusations of corruption between the President and the Vice President. Vice President Atiku was suspended from the ruling party in controversial circumstance.

There was a widely held view that the EFCC was doing a commendable job in fighting corruption. Equally, however, its critics believe that the EFCC had been selective in its investigations, and its operations subject to political manipulation. Later, our Report will explain the impact of the role played by the EFCC in the nominations process of candidates for various elective political offices (Commonwealth, 2007: 14). The ruling party, PDP, on December 22, 2006 formerly expelled Alhaji Atiku for joining the opposition and called on president Obasanjo to replace him as vice president, citing a constitutional provision that requires the vice president to belong to the same party as the president. Apparently hurriedly, the following day, president Obasanjo announced that he had sacked Alhaji Atiku and declared the office of the vice-president vacant. The Presidency argued that Alhaji Atiku had forfeited his position in government by defecting to rival party. Alhaji Atiku expectedly rejected his dismissal, arguing that president Obasanjo lacked the constitutional powers to remove him or withdraw his rights and privileges as Vice-President. The Court of Appeal rejected President Obasanjo’s attempted sacking of the Vice-President as unconstitutional. On 23 April 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that the president had no power to strip Alhaji Atiku of his position as vice-president.

By the time the 2007 elections arrived, the stage was already set for the conduct of what would go down in the annals of elections in Nigeria as the worst ever conducted in the country. Following the acrimonious tenure-elongation debate, the then out-going President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, had promised Nigerians that the 2007 election would be a ‘do or die affair.’ Ostensibly, he was determined that his estranged Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, would not succeed him as president. And to accomplish this, the President and his ruling party, the PDP, broke all rules of civilized conduct and elevated election malpractice to an art (Ngwu and Ugwu, 2012).

Following the large scale fraud that characterized that election, the Domestic Election Observation Group, a coalition of domestic monitoring groups, had issued a joint statement on April 16, 2007 in which they condemned the conduct of the elections in very strong terms. The coalition rejected the results in as many as 10 states where observers had witnessed serious electoral malpractices, ranging from the hoarding of results sheets, lack of secrecy in voting, underage voting, the non-inclusion of candidates’ names and/or pictures on ballots, partisanship of INEC, violence and voter intimidation (National Democratic Institute Report, 2007: 31-32).

Similarly, various studies have copiously documented how in the face of the atrocious malpractices, the leadership of INEC either turned a blind eye, or was a willing and active accomplice to the fraud. Such studies therefore laid the blame for the failure of that election at the feet of INEC leadership. The NDI report, for instance, strongly recommended that the leadership of INEC, under the chairmanship of Professor Maurice Iwu, should be held accountable for the lapses that arose from institutional and leadership incompetence as well as malpractices, fraud and lack of adequate preparations that characterized the elections of April 14 and 21, 2007 (NDI, 2007:56).

Summary and Conclusion

This paper aimed at unraveling the pervasiveness of violence in the 2007 general elections in Nigeria with particular focus on the gubernatorial election in Abia State. While the 2007 elections generally received global disapproval for its wide deviation from established electoral norms, that of Abia State was even particularly so giving the spate of violence that characterized the election in the state. To do justice to it, a variant of the power politics theory was adopted as the theoretical framework in this research. This theory is known as the theory of violence as posited by Hannah Arendt (1969). Arendt viewed violence as the product and manifestation of irreconcilable power acquisition differences. According to this position, when rulers use force to fulfill their design against the wishes of the people, there will be resistance and what will ensue is export-import of violence and crisis between two competing groups namely, the political power seeker and the masses whose aspirations are robbed. Power essentially belongs to the people and they have the right to choose whom to give their collective mandate. In terms of methodology the paper relied on qualitative descriptive analysis of documentary sources. It carried out a counterfactual analysis of the opinions and submissions of some well-informed persons (WIPs), including politicians, security personnel, and youths.

From the findings, therefore, the study concluded that the political class contributed to the electoral violence, that majority of those used to perpetrate electoral violence and fraud were youths of lowly background while many of them were indigent students from universities, polytechnics and colleges of education and even secondary schools. The paper therefore recommends that respect for the rule of law should be encouraged by all, that violence should be discouraged among youths, and that elective posts should be made less attractive to reduce the tension involved.

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