

Chapter 10

Politics and Violence: Its Challenge to Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

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Introduction

THE moment man started interacting with his peers, he has entered the realm of politics. Accordingly, man is described as a social animal by Aristotle, hence the social interaction and relationship that often arise over limited resources determines the political action of a man. Politics itself is said to have inherent mechanisms of brewing, nurturing, escalating, taming and resolving conflict. Ironically however, politics in most parts of the developing world tends towards conflict escalation than resolution, to the extent that one can conveniently say that politics in the developing world is inseparable from violence because the latter has been often employed as a viable and valuable tool to attaining political power. This is why we conceived politics as "polling tricks" where violence is part of the tricks employed. Consequently, political violence is referred to in this paper as encompassing all acts of violence, that is, politically motivated or with political undertones. It could be in form of electoral problem, viz; election rigging, political assassination, deliberate perversion of truth to the people, mayhem in the polity, among others. The by-products of this includes underdevelopment, production of social miscreants, loss of democratic culture in the people, and the like. This work delves into the historicity of political

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violence in Nigeria while at the same time locating the contemporary causes and effects this has had on consolidating democracy in the country.

Conceptual Discourse

Violence, as a generic term, has a number of connotations. It may mean 'an encounter with life-threatening forces that affect millions of persons in their individual and family lives, in the lives of their communities and in the global economy (Echoes 2004).

It could also take the form of exertion of physical force so as to injure and abuse the weak or innocent people by forcing one's will on the victim; this could also occur in cases of rape and wife-battering (Dokun, 2003).

Anifowose (1982:4) defines political violence as the use of threat or a physical act carried out by an individual (or individuals) within the political system against another individual (or individual and/or property) with the intention to cause injury or death to person and/or damage or destruction to property and whose objective, choice of target or victim, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effects have political significance, that tend to modify the behaviour of others in the existing arrangement of power structure that has some consequences for the political system.

Often, political violence is geared towards, or is a struggle involving those aspiring for political office or an intent to consolidate one's stay in office. This becomes problematised when the player involved in this struggle sees it as a do-or-die affair. Where violence is seen as a tool to achieving political right, politics in this sense is conceived as a zero sum game, where the winner takes all and the loser, loses everything and is often dislocated to make unfit for 'war'; that is, future political contest. In this wise, political office seekers put all their weapons to use and will even prefer to die than lose the chance to rule. This is further replicated in Ake's submission, when

he was writing on a weak state system in Africa which, more often than not, brings a recourse to violent political struggle. He writes *inter alia*:

What needs to be kept in view is that limited autonomisation means that the African state is extremely weak to perform adequately the essential functions of the state. The African state hampers the realisation of the law of value and the development of the productive forces... The state in post-colonial Africa is unable to mediate the struggle between classes and even within classes, particularly the hegemonic class. The net effect of this is that politics, essentially the struggle for control and use of state power, becomes warfare. Power is overvalued and security lies only in getting more and more power. There is hardly any restraint on the means of acquiring power, holding it or using it. Might is coextensive with right (Ake, 1989:45)". Where this kind of situation prevails, it will attract bad leadership who could not fathom the essential needs of the state but rather, will be buried in power acquisition to consolidate their wealth and status. This, in no little way, will automatically hamper development.

The concept of development evolved in the realm the social sciences for the guidance of new nations that won their independence after the Second World War (1939-45). Indeed, the idea of development itself was not new. It was largely expressed in the theory of social change which could be conceived as a transition from simple to complex forms, from less efficient to more efficient forms, or from ordinary to better forms. (Gaub, 2007: 476). Commenting still on developments. J.H Mittelman (1988) defines it as 'the increasing capacity to make rational use of natural and human resources for social ends,' whereas underdevelopment denotes 'the blackage which forestalls a rational transformation of the social structure.'

Other important definitions of development also tend to this idea in more or less elaborate forms. Thus, Paul

Baran (1957) describes development as 'a far-reaching transformation of society's economic, social and political structure, of the dominant organisation of production, distribution and consumption.' Then, Walter Rodney (1974:15) identified development as 'a many-sided process,' implying for the individual "increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being." In other words, people wish to make the best use of their natural and human resources in order to achieve their social ends. The process which facilitates their effort in this direction is called 'development'; the factors which hinder them in this effort are called 'factors of underdevelopment'.

Underdevelopment, within this context is conceived as economic and political impoverishment of any country coupled with absence of development indices such as good health facilities, high level of literacy, high rate of employment, and absence or minimal number of social miscreants in a country. A social miscreant is defined as the social wrongdoer and socially perverted group of people in the society. This set of people often resort to banditry, thuggery and a host of other inhumane acts in the state. Because the miscreants are the tools used by politicians to perpetrate violence in politics, they have become a vital resource that should always be in abundance and available whenever needed. Thus, the need to keep the country low and underdeveloped is deliberate, which simply implies that election in such country will never be free and fair; to consolidate democracy in this kind of country will be an elusive task.

Democratic consolidation is about regime maintenance and regarding the key political institutions as the only legitimate democratic rules of the game (Ilufeye, Ogunniya and Baba, 2005:375). According to Diamond (quoted in Zayyan, 2002:210), democratic consolidation is the process of achieving broad (and) deep legitimisation such that all significant

both the elite and mass levels, believe that the democratic system is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine.

To consolidate democracy in a country will mean the people of such country imbibing the democratic culture and values that place a premium on rights which guarantee the freedom of the individual from state abuse and infringement of rights by other individuals (IDEA, 2000:27). It further guarantees equality before the law as well as providing opportunities for all citizens to have equal access to the material and cultural resources that guarantee their basic livelihood. Democratic consolidation is the introduction of popular participation (e.g. by holding elections), competition and democratic liberties into a previously authoritarian or totalitarian nation. More specifically, Linz and Stephan (1996:7) have identified five arenas of consolidation:

- (i) A free and active civil society that facilitates the freedom of association and communication;
- (ii) a relatively autonomous political society that leads to political competition through free and inclusive elections;
- (iii) the introduction of the rule of law in order to ensure democratic liberties/freedoms;
- (iv) a state bureaucracy that can be used by the new democratic government; and
- (v) an institutionalised base for the pluralism and autonomy of civil and political society. Election alone may not suffice as an indicator of whether or not a country is democratic, but such election must be able to entrench the changes needed for making the country democratic and must affect both political institutions and the society as a whole.

Diamond *et al* (197:16) argue that democratic consolidation is "a process by which the rules, institutions and constraints of democracy come to constitute ... the one legitimate framework for seeking and exercising political power." Linz and Stephan (1996) add that the goal of the process is to deeply embed

democratic principles and values in societal institutions and the fabric, as well as in the mindsets of the population; in short, a widespread liegitation of democracy through the society. Essentially, the need for substantive, as opposed to merely procedural democracy is pointed out: an electoral façade is not sufficient and must be backed by a democratisation of political, civil and economic society (Adrian, 2010:3). Succinctly put, this is the only way democracy can be consolidated and strengthened; but in Nigeria's case, violence, as alluded to earlier, is seen as the only resource by political office seekers to achieve their political cravings, this unbridled lust for power makes violence inevitable in the country's political power play. This explains why the country is underdeveloped, in the first instance, and is being deliberately kept so by the political elite. In other words, underdevelopment and its attendant effects of poverty, the breeding of social miscreants, poor health facilities, electoral violence and manipulation, among others, hamper democratic consolidation in the country. A further exposition on how political violence emanated will be the subject of our next discourse.

Theoretical Explanation of Political Violence in Nigeria

In recent times, many efforts have been made at unravelling the causes of political violence. Scholars like Arnold Forster, as well as the United States Government conclude that there is no monocausal effect of political violence. Anifowose (2006:5), perusing literature, classifies the causative factors under the following models of political violence:

- (a) The relative deprivation, rising expectations and frustration, aggression hypothesis;
- (b) The system hypothesis; and
- (c) The group conflict hypothesis.

The relative deprivation, rising expectations and frustration, aggression hypothesis tends towards a psychological explanation of political violence. Among its proponents was Feierabend, who stresses a "revolutionary gap" or, in their famous phrase,

the "want-get ratio," that is, the distance between expectation and achievement. Ted Gurr, in his own view, emphasises the relative deprivation gap between expectation and capabilities, the central premise of this theory. Put simply, the hypothesis holds that aggression is always a result of frustration. The second variant of this theory is the notion of relative deprivation, interpreted to mean a state of mind where there is a discrepancy between what men seek and what seems attainable. The third variant of the theory is "revolution of rising expectations." Specifically, the latter locates the genesis of violence in the feeling of dissatisfaction arising out of the comparison between what one currently enjoys and what one expects; what one thinks one ought to have or what one regards as ideal. The shortcomings of psychological explanations have been identified by various scholars. Anifowose, for instance, argues that political scientists and sociologists who adopt it have become more psychological than psychologists. Psychologists have long established that it is not always the case that deprivation would lead to frustration, which would in turn instigate aggression. It is also suggested that "the extensive focus on the individual or group internal mechanisms is asystemic; the attempt to translocate micro to macro behaviour could be frustrating" (Ukiwo, 2007:165).

The second explanation for violent conflict identified by Anifowose is the *systemic theory*, which proffers a socio-structural explanation for the aetiology of violent conflict. According to Johnson (2002), "any analytical penetration of the behaviour characterised as 'purposive political violence' must utilise as its tool a consideration of the social context in which it occurs."

Potholm (1979:149) writes, "When the system did not deliver what its leaders had promised, and the political elite continued to ask the masses to make sacrifices that the elite themselves are unwilling to make, much of the aura of legitimacy gained during the decolonisation period was dissipated. The symbolic times were eroded." Consequently,

the modernisation theory explains violence from the deficiency of the political system in performing legitimacy, coercion and distribution functions. Thus, the onus is on the system to perform its divine functions effectively.

Commenting still on political violence, Claude Ake contends that political violence depends on the propensity to invest; that the interest a political actor has to invest or not to invest will determine his political involvement. He opines that the political instability in new states can be explained by the high propensity to invest, the provenance of which Ake locates in the repressive and exploitative regime of colonialism, which socialised the political elite into a political culture characterised by a lack of public-spirited restraint in the quest for, and the exercise of, power. This is devoid of morality of power, the limit of political obligation or good government. The nationalist leaders were left with no other option than to make the system ungovernable. This makes the use of violence a probable and enduring lesson in political strategy, Ake writes:

To a very great extent, the influence of the colonial experience persists. This is manifest in the statism of the new states, and in their political authoritarianism: the refusal to hold elections, the abolition of higher courts – arrest and imprisonment of counter-elites. It is evident in the tendency to construe politics as a struggle for rulership (Ake, 1973:357-359).

Furthering the discourse on the causes of political violence, Afeaye Anthony and O.J. Offiong (2007:16) through their article on the outcomes and effects of political assassination in Nigeria between 1986 and 2005, identify the following as part of the reasons why violent politics thrive in the country: The insecurity in the country resulting from ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the national security outfit; the love for political power/position and consolidation of self in power; and the unhealthy rivalry among contending political parties, which has made youths easily susceptible to manipulation by the political money bags.

Succinctly put, while one unequivocally agrees with the fact that the security network and apparatus of the state are inept, incapable and not viable enough to provide an unblemished security for the state, one cannot jettison the fact that most political killings and violence go unresolved and unravelled because of the connivance of the security outfits with the state. As the agent of the state, the security outfits are easily vulnerable to state manipulation, and it is not likely that a violent act perpetrated by such hegemony would be uncovered.

Historical Antecedents of Political Violence in Nigeria

Political crises during the colonial period were engendered more from Nigerians showing resentment to foreign rule and laws that were inimical and strange to local traditions – more often than not, violence was resorted to, as a way of showing resentment the colonial policies and a re-affirmation of the willingness of Nigerians to rule themselves. The Egba uprising or Adubi war of 1918 occasioned by accumulated grievances over the administrative innovation of the British authorities, especially the imposition of direct taxation in 1918, the Aba women's riot of 1929, ignited by a rumour over payment of tax by women, both supported by the general strike of 1945 and the Enugu Colliery strike of 1949 (Anifowose, 2006:31-54), are common examples in this direction.

While we cannot discountenance the fact that colonial legacies like the 1914 amalgamation and its corollary, indirect rule, imposition of warrant chiefs, among others had their own devastating effects and thus contributed to post-colonial political violence, the bid to readjust the artificial boundaries created and reasserting the hitherto deprived authority within the ethnic nationality of the pseudo warrant chiefs itself poised a problem. Conversely, our discussion of political violence here dwells more extensively on the period from the 1950s to date when political violence has assumed a more selfish and self-aggrandising coloration from Nigerian political leaders. In 1953, there were a series of political crises in Lagos and Kano

resulting from the independence motion moved by Chief Anthony Enahoro, and the subsequent sensitisation campaign that followed in Kano. Here, many lives were lost and valuable property destroyed.

Again, as noted by Anifowose (1982:56), the 1959 federal elections marked the beginning of a bitter and intense political competition in Nigerian politics. The election was said to be important to the three major political parties – AG, NCNC and NPC – because it was to decide the balance of power between them at independence. In the bid to make the AG a national party, the party made concerted efforts to woo the two major parties, but its overtures were, however, rebuffed by both the NPC and NCNC located in the northern and the eastern states respectively. It was against this background of deep-rooted distrust and conflict among Nigerian politicians, that Nigeria became independent.

In the early years of independence, the monster called violence reared its ugly head in the Western Region and the Middle Belt. The violence that ensued ultimately led to the collapse of the First Republic (Anifowose, 1982; Dudley, 1973; Ziclar, 1982). The intervention of the military did not, however, abate the persistent political violence, which witnessed unprecedented acts of ethnic cleansing against easterners in the North, the event that later culminated into reprisal killings of northerners in the East and the subsequent outbreak of civil war.

Through much of the seventies, there were fewer incidents of political violence: notable though were the 1975 coup d'état against the Gowon regime; and the assassination of Gen. Murtala Muhammed in the botched Dimka coup of 1976 and the execution of the coup plotters (Ukiwo, 2007:169). The major acts of political violence during this period were directed against the remaining vocal elements in civil society – labour unionists, students and university lecturers (Ukiwo, 2007).

By and large, when the military eventually handed over the reins of power, the political elite, who had been out

so long, began the scramble for power in 1979. Though there were minimal incidences of violence recorded, maybe due partly to military presence, the litigation that greeted the election outcome showed that the players were not willing to play by the rules. An indicator of the nature of politics in the Second Republic was the deep divisions among the political actors during and after the elections, when petitioners' objections were thrown out of the court for 'lack of merit' and the military went ahead to swear in the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) candidate, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, at the federal level. Falola and Ihonvbere (1985:769) however note that the tension during this period had become heightened, as was clearly evident in the intergovernmental relationships, especially when different parties controlled states. The ruling federal government seemed not to enjoy legitimacy over the states where different parties ruled. This, of course, made the situation during this time so appalling, as corruption was on the high side, and austerity measures had a telling effect on the populace. Nigerians therefore hoped for a messiah to come.

Consequently, the coup of December 31, 1983 was most expected. Many Nigerians actually took to the streets to celebrate their liberation from dictatorship by politicians and unwittingly gave legitimacy to the incoming military dictatorship. Thus began another round of political violence by the Buhari-Idiagbon military administration, where freedom of the press, freedom of speech and association, as well as freedom from arbitrary arrest, were thrown overboard. Politicians were the major targets of political violence during the time; the way the trial of politicians was conducted left no one in doubt with them (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985).

There is no gainsaying that the dawn of another military era in Nigeria always comes with more devastating consequences on the polity. Eghosa Osaghae has aptly described the Babangida years as the "best of times and the worst of times." This explains in brief, the kind of person Babangida was: a maximum ruler who ruled for eight solid years during which

era political violence was carried out with military precision; where any would-be detractors were either sent to the goal or put summarily to death. To be precise, the case of a letter bomb sent to Dele Giwa, the plane crash involving young, intelligent and ambitious military officers, the anti-state riot and pro-democracy demonstration were all incidences of political violence committed during his tenure. These were however climaxed with the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections, which, of course, was what eventually led to the demise of that regime.

The Shonekan Interim National Government was short-lived and soon gave way to the General Abacha regime through a palace coup. In the bid to succeed himself as a civilian ruler, Abacha adopted series of strategies from phantom coup allegations to extrajudicial killings of political activists and politicians alike – the killings of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight Ogoni leaders is still fresh in own memory, just as those of Chief Alfred Ruwane, Mrs Kudirat Abiola and a host of others. Prominent Nigerians like Generals Shehu Musa Yar'Adua (rtd), Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd) and Oladipo Diya were clamped into jail for allegedly plotting a coup. Unfortunately, while Obasanjo and Diya eventually regained their freedom, Yar'Adua died in incarceration. The death of Abacha however brought succour to the nation. Shortly after his death, Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar assumed the mantle of leadership and announced his intention to return power to civilians, a promise that led to the inauguration of the fourth Republic on May 29, 1999.

It is, however, important to say that the reintroduction of civil rule has further heightened the spate of political violence in the country. The Fourth Republic alone accounts for the highest number of political assassinations in history. A statistical look at the cases that have occurred during this period alone reveals that it accounts for more than those of the first three republics put together (Afeaye and Offiong, 2007: 14). This is further complicated by hostage-taking, kidnapping at the threshold of

the new civilian dispensation in 2007, yet, the spate of violence is still unending.

The different incidences of electoral rigging and violence in the 2007 election is a case in point – in most of the 36 states of the federation, violence erupted everywhere, in Lagos, Ibadan, Edo, Ekiti, Benue and host of others. While the federal government deployed troops (soldiers) to ensure its political victory, the state employed police and hoodlums to achieve the same. Money was lavishly spent and many eligible voters were scared away from polling stations due to the incidence of violence that pervaded the polls, for example in Lagos, the local government election witnessed low voter turnout. This was not due mainly to the PDP boycotting the election, but because people had developed political apathy over the years; their vote had not counted; as election outcome had always been subject to the whims and caprices of the incumbent leader.

In the Benue Local Government poll, for instance, the feelings of distrust and fraudulent acts led to wanton destruction of lives and property. Such violent acts were recorded in virtually every state where election took place.

The post-election violence and the array of petitions filed at the various electoral tribunals testified to the level of distrust and fraud perpetrated at the polls. Needless to say, many election results were upturned, as in states like Ekiti and Edo, and a re-election ordered in other states like Ondo and Benue. All these are an indictment on the electoral process in the country. The federal government agenda now through revered Justice Uwais is to stamp out political violence and entrench justice through the democratic process. To achieve this, electoral reform committee was set up and it has since submitted its controversial report which is currently being debated in the National Assembly. The extent to which this can curb rigging and violence in the electoral system can only be seen with time.

Political Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

The pervasive violence and its spectre have tended to raise questions of whether democracy will survive more so as, the frame of mind of many Nigerians are now tilted towards a violent political culture. This finds its root in military incursion into Nigerian politics. The politicians embraced this culture after the demise of military rule because it soothes their purpose for seeking power. Violent political culture in this context explains the unbridled and unrefined, chaotic ways in which politician seek political office – Nigerians now live in a proverbial situation of 'every man to himself, God for us all.' Any systematic consideration of democratic governance in Nigeria or its blossom would have to come to terms with the challenges and dilemma of economic underdevelopment, poverty, weak institutional structures, corruption, as well as the problem of political legitimacy occasioned by disputes arising from the electoral process, ethnic-based conflicts, religious bigotry, prodigious nature of the elite and more encompassingly, the nature of the Nigerian state (Ilufeye, Ogundiya, and Baba 2005:374).

Moreover, the problematic nature, of the controversies and violence that always characterised the electoral process have unrivalled the efforts potency to stifle democracy. Indeed, political violence has been the bane of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. More worrisome is the fact that the political history of Nigerian elections has failed to produce a procedurally legitimate government, as election results are juggled, inflated or annulled (Ogundiya, 2000).

No doubt, the craze for power and the consolidation of same cause a resort to political violence, because violence is seen as a tool by the politicians for achieving their political yearnings. This, I have argued here, culminated in a misrepresentation, where political office holders are only gold diggers and give little or no consideration for the country's development. I have

equally said this is deliberate because it is only when the country is kept at the lowest ebb and underdeveloped that the army of unemployed youths can become pronounced and available as tools for political gangsterism and manoeuvring by the political moneybags. All these I have emphatically stated here, work against democratic consolidation in Nigeria. To achieve the long-sought-after democratic consolidation in the state, Linz and Stephan (quoted in Zayyan 2002:210) advise a tri-dimensional perspective, viz: the behavioural, the attitudinal, and the constitutional perspectives. He writes, inter alia:

Behaviourally democracy becomes the only game in town when no significant political opposition seriously attempts to overthrow the democratic regime or to promote domestic or international violence in order to secede from the state.... Attitudinally, democracy becomes the only game in town when, even in the face of severe political and economic crises, the overwhelming majority of the people believe that any further political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic procedure. Constitutionally, democracy becomes the only game in town when all the factors in the polity become habituated to the fact that political conflict within the state will be resolved according to established norms and that violation of these norms are likely to be both ineffective and costly.

They conclude that, with consolidation, democracy becomes regularised and deeply internalised in social, institutional and psychological life as well as in political calculation for achieving goals. Here, people naturally follow democratic ideals, the same way the sun, the stars, day and night follow their natural orbit without infringement. The Political goodwill of our leaders, coupled with an attitudinal change from Nigerian politicians, which would reflect in other areas of political life, will help in achieving democratic ideal.

Conclusion

Politics in Nigeria, as advanced in this paper, has assumed the new meaning of "polling tricks." The political history and the theoretical explanation examined reveal that though the colonial legacies have a telling effect on the aftermath of Nigeria's independence, the situation is deepened by the fact that at the threshold of independence, the 1959 election was fiercely contested because the three major parties were aware that it would determine the political balance of power at independence. This distrust, coupled with the political crises in the Western Region and the Middle Belt, eventually put an end to the First Republic.

Be that as it may, the military legacy has bestowed on Nigeria an authoritarian political culture. The struggle for power and consolidation of same on the part of the political elite, more often than not, have helped to exacerbate violence in the state, because, as alluded to earlier, political office seekers see violence in itself as a viable tool for achieving political relevance. This, in no small way, has retarded democratic consolidation in the country, with a backlash effect on the whole process of development, stifled the growth of the democratic culture, as well as encouraged bribery, corruption and gangsterism within the political terrain.

However, for democracy to thrive, the institution of justice must be strengthened, our economy should be improved; education and employment should be given prominence in our national policy; our security machinery should be overhauled and strengthened. Really, all these are possible if there is political will and attitudinal change on the part of the political elite, which, it is hoped, will permeate all strata of our political life. For, Nigerians cannot afford to compromise democratic consolidation which already is being frustrated in the country.

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