

# POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF THE YOUTHS

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## **Abstract**

*This paper presentation, political violence and democratic process in Nigeria (the role of the youths), was written to examine the role of the Nigerian youths' involvement in political crises or violence in the Nigerian democratic process. It was observed that the Nigerian youths are actively involved in political violence and democratic process in Nigerian politics. In this paper presentation, an attempt was made to discuss some behaviour that can be termed political violence such as revolution, military coup d'état, riot, party clashes, political assassination, political thuggery, terrorism, looting, Election malpractices, such as rigging, stealing of ballot boxes, arson, kidnapping of political candidate and corruption. The paper also discussed and analyzed the causes and consequences of political crisis with some models such as psychological model, structural or systemic model, and inter group conflict model. It was discovered that that political violence indulged in by the youths in the democratic process in Nigeria lead to political instability, withdrawal of foreign aid and investment, scaring foreign investors from investing in Nigeria, isolation and sanction by international community, destruction of lives and property, stagnation of nation's economy and poverty and*

*breakdown of law and order.(under development). The paper concluded with the recommendation that government should create jobs for the youths so as to prevent them from being used as the instrument to carry out political violence.*

**Keywords:** Political violence, democratic process, Nigerian youths

### **Introduction**

There is a popular saying that “youths are the leaders of tomorrow”. Owing to this statement above, it is imperative to take into consideration the various political roles played by the Nigerian youths during the election and other democratic processes such as politics. If the statement above is true that youth are the leaders of tomorrow, it therefore means that the youths are the builders and the pillars of the nation. The youths are supposed to play great role together with our leaders for social, economic political stability of the nation. But judging by the happenings in the present day Nigeria, the reverse is the case. Before proceeding with the discussion, it is imperative to understand who is a youth. According to the New Webster's Dictionary (n.d.), youth is the state of being young. It is the period of childhood to maturity. It is an early stage of development. The youths are categories of young able body people (adult) ranging from age 18-40 years. On the other hand, youth can be described as driving force for economic, social and political development of a nation.

From my working definition of a youth, it is a pity to note that the Nigerian youths who are supposed to be an instrument for political development transformation and political stability are now instrument for political violence which is a threat to the Nigeria democracy. It has been observed by social scientists and other scholars that the Nigerian youths are alike. If not always used by some Politicians to commit election malpractices such as political thuggery, stilling of ballot boxes, ringing, political assassination, military coup d'état etc., which in turn lead to political violence. It is true that political violence which our

youths get involved in especially during election and other forms of political violence does slow down political development and national development in Nigeria. This is because it does not allow us to elect the true and right leaders of our choice that are capable to transform this nation from poverty to prosperity and take Nigeria to her promised land.

The aim of this paper presentation is to sensitize or create awareness regarding the youth's negative role played during election such as rigging of election, political thuggery and other forms of political violence like terrorism, riot, political assassination, arson and corruption. It is also to sensitize the Nigerian youths on the social implication of political violence; the nation's economy at large; examine the causes of political violence in Nigeria based on the three models used as instruments for political violence; bring to mind that despite the youths playing active roles in political violence, they are the victims; and educate the youths on the negative effect of political violence as well as create the rising consciousness of the youth.

To draw the attention of the general public and the Nigerian youths in particular not to do anything inimical during the forthcoming elections or subsequent elections that can lead to political violence in Nigeria. On this note the follow will be discussed:

- ❖ Political violence
- ❖ Types of political violence
- ❖ Causes of political violence
- ❖ Consequences of political violence and
- ❖ Recommendations to the problems discussed and analyzed.

### **Political Violence**

The term political violence has no all-embracing definition. For this purpose of this paper presentation, political violence can be defined as all violent behaviour that is politically motivated

whether at the individual, group or party level. Political violence can as well be defined to as an act of disruption, destruction, injury whose purpose choice of target or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effect have political significance that tend to modify the behaviour of others bargaining situation that has consequences for the social system (Agweda and Aghemelo, 2005). They further argued that in this context, political violence refers to any forceful activities cum disruption of life and properties whose surrounding circumstances may be aimed to bring about modification in the system.

Political violence can also be defined as the deliberate use of power and force to achieve political goals (World Health Organization) (WHO), 2002). As outlined by W H O, political violence is characterized by both physical and psychological acts aimed at injuring or intimidating populations.

In a related manner, it is opined that political violence refers to any political behaviour which is criminal in nature that is inimical to the democratic process and political development of any society. Besides, it is a kind of behaviour that is economically and politically motivated, based on bargains, which is capable to inhibit the political, social and economic development and democratic process of a nation. Although this paper is not interested in reviewing much definitions of political violence, it is much more interested in the aspect of political violence that can threaten the democratic process of Nigeria, where the youths are used by the political elites and business men as machinery to gain political power.

### **Types of Political Violence**

To pick the type political violence, or define behaviour as political violence, the determinant is largely pinpointed by the state. According to Max Weber, is the state that can determine what is acceptable as violence or political violence and what is not acceptable as such? Therefore whatever the government of

the day defined as political violence stands. However, over the years some of these following political behaviours have been regarded by social scientists and the state as political violence.

- (i) Revolution.
- (ii) Military coup de 'tat.
- (iii) Riot.
- (iv) Party clashes.
- (v) Political assassination.
- (vi) Political thuggery.
- (vii) Terrorism.
- (viii) Looting.
- (ix) Election malpractices such as rigging, stealing of ballot boxes etc.
- (x) Arson
- (xi) Corruption.

### **Meaning of Revolution**

There is a type of political violence that deals with violent overthrow of existing government and drastic change in the political situation of a country. It is the total overthrow of the political economy. In like manner Macdonic (1995) defined revolution as the overthrow of one political system in order to establish another. It is either sudden or bloody for example the French revolution in 1789 was bloody. Revolution is different from reform. Reform involves changes within the system rules while revolution implies the change of the system as a whole. Revolution takes different form(s) in some cases it takes the form of military overthrow or coup de tat. Scholars have been able to adduce that certain factors precipitate revolution or political revolution. Some of them are relative deprivation, rising expectation, lack of improvement in the social, economic and political affairs of the state, injustices, inequitable distribution of wealth or resources inability of the existing government to answer some particular elite group or non-responsive of the old government.

### **Military Coup D'état**

This involves the use of force, naked power or brutal action (violence) to take over the government by some group persons/ military officers. It is an aspect of revolution. This is not new in Nigerian society or her political system. It is belief that what precipitate revolution can sometimes, if not always can cause military coup de tat. Nigeria had experienced seven (7) to eight (8) military coup d'état.

### **Riot**

Riot is destructive and sometimes violent collective outburst. According to Marx Gary (1970) riot might be classified into dimensions. That is does the riot have a specific goal or not and does it have unifying belief or not. The riot in political violence thought destructive sometimes it has the two dimensions as suggested by Marx Gary. Because it involves group of persons who belief that they are relatively deprived of certain things they ought to have enjoyed as a citizen of her state and they belief that the only way to correct or revamp the situation collectively is through riot. We have experienced various forms of riots in Nigeria. It not new to us again but not all of them can be classified as political violence. Therefore, riot becomes political violence when it is politically motivated to bring about change. An instance is the recent 'End SARS' nationwide protest of 2020.

### **Terrorism**

Terrorism can be seen as aspect of political crime, it is that aspect of political violence that has elicited great interest and concerned from the general public. Therefore terrorism is deliberate creation and exploitation of fear for bringing about political change (Igbinovia, Okonufua, Omoyibo, osunde and Obaro). Simply put political terrorism can be seen as illegal use of force or violence use of power to compel or force people or government to do certain things in order to bring about political change in the system. For example, the Boko Haram in the north East and part of the country, Banditry in the northern and all over the county and the Niger- Delta youths activities of kidnapping of oil

expatriates government officers, police and military personals etc. All these terrorism are carried out by the Nigerian youths in Nigeria.

### **Party Clashes**

This has to do with intra or inter against parties. It is the fight and struggle between or with political parties. It involves conflicts between chairmen versus chairman of different political parties or conflict within one political party. Clashes between parties stake holders and the subordinates. Party clashes are regarded as political violence that the military or some elites see it as an impetus to overthrow the existing government. So it is capable to kill or destabilized the democratic process of a nation.

### **Political Assassination**

Almost everyone has heard about someone being assassinated, murdered, robbed, raped, beaten, riot and mass demonstration have ravage our cities and assassinations has claimed the lives of many influential political figures (Igbinovia et al, 2005). Political assassination therefore involves an organized means of eliminating top political officers or political aspirants. In fact it is an organized crime because the act is usually sponsored by some political elites (God fathers) and is politically motivated. We have experienced several political assassinations in Nigeria. For instance the murder of Furoso Williams, the Lagos State P.D.P gubernatorial aspirant (2007), the murder the murder of former Senior advocate of Nigeria SAN chief Bola Ige etc., are political violence and done by some Nigeria youths.

### **Election Malpractices**

This has to do with all forms electoral frauds or misconducts such rigging, stealing or stuffing of ballot box (es). This behaviour is violent and criminal in nature which is capable of ruining the democratic process in Nigeria. This is one of the greatest political violence that can happen to country because it denied the public violence the right candidate of their choice

who would have been potent, capable efficient and effective enough to take from grass to grace, zero to zenith and poverty to prosperity. Unfortunately, some Nigerian youths are used by some politician or elites for their selfish interest or gain for this act. Sadly enough the youths will suffer it at the end.

### **Political Thuggery**

This is violent and criminal behaviour / act which are capable of threatening or destroying the political system or the democratic process of a nation. The Nigerian youths are used as thugs to still ballot boxes from one polling center to another, they are also used to commit other electoral frauds such as rigging and assassinations etc. virtually all the political parties in Nigeria have one form or other of political thugs. Incidentally Nigeria are used for this act.

### **Arson**

It is a violent and criminal act which has to do with deliberate setting fire on public or government properties, buildings or offices when frauds or gross misconducts have been committed by some corrupt politician or highly placed personnel. Sadly enough the Nigerian youth are used in the name of supporting their political leader(s). All the types of political violence above can be summarized into three:

- (1) Turmoil
- (2) Conspiracy
- (3) Internal war. For detail explanations see (Agweda and Aghemelo, 2005).

### **Causes of Political Violence**

We have discussed the types of political violence. It is imperative we also discuss the causes of political violence. You will agree with me that in every human action there is a cause. Although there is no single causation of political violence which is more or

less capable or potent enough in explaining political violence, Scholars over the years have been able to developed models for the explanation of political violence. They include the following.

1. Psychological model
2. Structural model
3. Intergroup model

### **Psychological Model**

This has to do with the rising expectation from individual(s) and the relative deprivation of certain opportunities and when these expectation are not met, the individuals or actors feel deprived of such need(s) when this occurs, it lead to frustration which in turn result to aggression. The psychological model argues that these variables above i.e, relative deprivation, rising expectation and frustration and aggression when not met or managed properly it can lead to political violence (Agweda & Aghemelo, 2005, Igbinovia et al, 2005). For instance a graduate who graduated from school seven to ten years no job and no money to set up his /her business and may have enough attended many interviews and he might even passed the test/ interview(s) but yet he/ she is not employ, simply because he/ she has no God-father to help to help secure the job. The individual(s) will feel deprived relatively and his /her rising expecting to work in order to a decent living will be aborted and the end product is frustration/ aggression. As you know that frustrated human being is always aggressive, once one find him/herself in this situation is prone to violence of any kind especially political violence. The great problem of the Nigerian youths is high rate of unemployment. This could explain why the Nigerian youths are prone to political violence.

### **Structural or Systematic Model**

This model argued that aggression should not be located in the individual rather large scale change(s) in the system. That when there is a change or drastic change in the political system which do not favour large summed of the people, it can lead to political

violence. According to Agweda and Aghemelo (2005), in explaining causes of political violence, the structural model direct it attention on such variables as the breakdown of consensual norms. They further argued that this model discusses the effect of large scale changes the social structure and process, such as industrialization which is assumed to create new classes with different perception and life style.

### **Inter Group Model**

The proponents of this model argued that violence is a product of a struggle for power among various group within the society. That, cleavages within a society especially between ethnics racial and religion groups. Here attempt is made to explain mostly inter ethnics conflicts and cleavages between political organization (Agweda and Aghemelo, 2005). To the proponents, the crystallization of direct conflict between pre -model and civil sentiment give rise to the problem variously called tribalism, parochialism and communalism etc. Thus the source of political violence or instability is identified in cultural pluralism, increase the likelihood of conflict between members of the communal group and increase the probability of communal and elite instability in the nations in quest.

Although no single model is capable enough to explain the causes or the origin of political violence in a political system. For the purpose of this paper, I will suggest that the psychological model is very potent and useful in explaining the causes why the Nigerian youths are involved in political violence. Although this model have been criticized by psychologists for lacking empirical proof. The challenges by psychologists that frustration lads to aggression and lastly guilty of hasty generalization, that is a direct derivation from micro concept macro analysis which is often difficult to support.

However, using a particular model or perspective to view and explain a phenomenon of this nature depends on the topic at hand and the interest of the writer, on this wise I belief that the

three models listed and discussed above are potent enough to explain the political violence in Nigeria from the individual, inter group (communally) and state (structurally) level. All these models collectively complement each other.

### **Consequences of Political Violence**

The negative effect of political violence can be summarized as follows:

1. Political instability
2. Withdrawal of foreign aids and investment. In other words it scares foreign investors from investing in the host country.
3. Isolation and sanction by the international community (ies).
4. It leads to destruction of lives and properties in the host nation
5. Stagnation of nation's economy and poverty and
6. Breakdown of law and order.

All these consequences or negative effects as listed above are capable of jeopardizing the political, social and economic development of a nation that is why the Nigeria youths should desist from any form of political violence that is capable to destroy the nation because the youths are ones to suffer from it greatly rather the politicians or elites who sponsored them.

### **Recommendation or Solution to the Problems of Political Violence in Nigeria**

Karl Marx (1818-1883) thought that social scientists should not only describe the world but should change it. That means social scientists should not only describe a phenomenon in the society but should also profile solution to such phenomenon. With this, the following contributions as a solution / recommendations to the problems of political violence in Nigerian society are made.

- Government at all levels should create more economic opportunities or jobs for the youths because they are the major instrument used for political violence.

- There should be perfect labour market. Employment should be based on merit. Not on whom you know or Godfatherism because this can lead to relative deprivation and rising expectation, which is one of the major cause of political violence and under development in Nigeria and Africa as a whole,
- Nigerian leaders at all level should see themselves as servants who are called to serve the people. They should be committed to execution of projects.
- Nigerian youths in particular and the entire citizens should be patriotic and be their brother's keeper no matter the situation.
- Nigerian politician should endeavor to play politics without bitterness and hatred. They imbue the spirit of sportsmanship and love, this help to reduce election malpractices and in turn political violence in Nigeria.
- There should be equitable distribution of natural resources and human irrespective of the ethnic group, geo-political zone and the state.
- Nigerian political leaders should promote the true nationalism instead of primordial ties, because this does not depict the sense of Nigeria as one nation. And as result this lead to political violence some ethnic group or communities feel deprived of their benefits from the nation and the expense of some state or people.
- Nigerian at all level should try as matter fact and urgency to shun all forms of corruption at the individual, family and at the institutional/organizational level because corruption is the grand patron that precipitate and presuppose political violence in Nigeria. In that sense we should make concerted efforts to join Mr. President, the governors, local government chairmen, the EFCC and ICPC to fight against corruption in Nigeria.

According to C. Wright Mills in his work "Sociological Imagination", argued that, "it is not only information we need in this age of fact, information dominates their attention and overwhelms their capabilities to assimilate it. It is on only skills of reasons that they need although their struggle to acquire these often exhaust their limited moral energy, what they need and what they feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them to use the information and development reason in order to achieved lucid summation of what may be happening within themselves." (Mills, 1983/1859). From the foregoing, the Nigeria youths in particular and the members of the society at large should endeavour to have this quality mind as we have got the information that can help us (Nigeria) to move this nation forward and make it a better place for us to live and to ensure political stability and development for the country. Conclusively if all these recommendations (information) are taken into consideration and acted upon by the Nigerian youths, Nigerian politicians, and the Nigerian citizens and government and its agencies as whole, political violence will reduce to minimal level and there will be political stability and development and even development. The writer added that political violence is one of the hall marks of under development in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general, the issue of political violence must be tackle with seriousness.

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