

**VIOLENCE, IDENTITY POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT:  
INSIGHT INTO THE FORMS OF OCCURRENCES IN THE  
FOURTH REPUBLIC.**

**Inyang Martins Nyen**

Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences

Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State

[mnitempest@gmail.com](mailto:mnitempest@gmail.com) /

[martins.inyang@socsci.fulafia.edu.ng](mailto:martins.inyang@socsci.fulafia.edu.ng)

DOI: \_\_\_\_\_

**Abstract**

The fourth republic has been marked by a complex interaction between violence, identity politics and development. The manipulation of ethnic and religious identities, coupled with socio-economic disparities and insurgencies, has led to various forms of violence and hindered developmental progress. Violence and political instability creates a vicious cycle. Conflicts create an unsafe atmosphere for businesses to thrive, as it discourages local and foreign investments, and communities are displaced. These exacerbate grievances and so bring identity politics leading to crime and economic decline. Elections give birth to violence as there is power tussle and this undermines stability in the society, thus stifling development. Consequently, resources that could have been invested in growth and development sectors are rather spent on the aftermath of violence. This study attempted to situate the forms of the occurrences of violence and identity politics in the fourth republic, and thus reduce crime and spur development. The social identity and the deprivation theories are used as theoretical framework. The study argues that identity consciousness has overtaken national consciousness, leaving a sordid plague on our society and has regrettably relegated development to the background. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that



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promote inclusive governance and prioritizes sustainable development. This study therefore posits that transitioning from violence into stability to engender development requires careful planning which involves reconciling communities that are displaced, demobilizing combatants and institutional rebuilding to bring an end to identity politics.

**Keywords:** Identity politics, violence, development, fourth republic, occurrences.

## **Introduction**

The fourth republic in Nigeria, which began in 1999, has seen various forms of occurrences related to violence, identity politics, and development. This period can best be described as experimental, democratically speaking, due to the factors that have defined its politics, and the responses that have attended such factors. **Ethnic and religious conflicts** have been visited on Nigeria within this period, whose occurrences are traceable to competition for resources, historical grievances, and political manipulation. The rise of insurgency, particularly in the North-East part of Nigeria has been a significant source of violence, with catastrophic bombings, kidnappings and deadly attacks on both civilians and security forces, thus undermining development in the particular region and elsewhere in the country.

**Violence, especially** politically motivated violence, including election-related violence and intra-party conflicts, which have led to loss of lives and property in Nigeria has contributed immensely to undermining democracy and development. Ogele (2021) argued that violence is an inalienable accompaniment of a plural society like Nigeria. Many scholars have conceptualized political violence in diverse ways, giving it connotations that best explains the ecology of the views of the scholar



(s). Richard (2014) sees political violence as an aspect of terrorism, arguing that the concept took its roots along with democratic systems of government in many societies, as a delegitimizing tool to describe the violence of those who threatened the status quo. Earlier, Leonard, Pedahzur and Hirsch-Hoefler (2004) had questioned the dichotomy between terrorism and political violence. The scholars opined that political violence is conceptualized from a geographical or psychological point of view, where it is seen as an aspect of non-state actors suppressing the will of the people during election, using guerrilla warfare or other forms of terrorism. In their study, Political Thuggery and Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria, Rasak and Garuba (2017) underscored the concept of political violence to reflect a situation characterized by all acts done prior to, during and after an election or electoral process had been concluded that are inimical to a free, fair, transparent and credible election.

Nigeria's political milestone is replete with identity politics, often coloured around ethnic, religious and regional affiliations (Akinyetun, 2021). Political actors frequently exploit these divisions for electoral gain, leading to a polarized political landscape. The clamour for control over resources, particularly oil revenue, has fueled identity politics over time. Different regions and ethnic groups have engaged themselves in an untoward manner all in a bid to control resource allocation. These polarized agitations often metamorphose to identity-based movements and demands. Occasioned by these perceived movements and demands, the perceptions of marginalization set in, often resulting into violent occurrences.



## Conceptual Analysis

### Development

The concept of development has resonated academic literature for far too long. Scholars have given their different views of the concept of development, with many aligning to their environment, expertise, climate, or academic leaning. A generalist look at the concept sees development as economic, social and political progress in a society. According to the United Nations (UN, 2008) development is thought of in this report as an increase in well-being across the members of a society between two points in time. In most literature, the concept of development is usually infused with sustainable development. In the view of Arop and Inyang (2017), Sustainable development refers to development that responds the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation.

### Identity politics:

Ross (1982) and Bernstein (2005) view identity politics as ethnicity in a contemporary form of politics. The scholars argued that the concept originated with the coinage by Anspach (1979) to describe activism engaged by certain classes with disabilities to transform both self- and societal conceptions of people with disabilities. Identity politics has feasted on Nigeria politics for far too long that Nigerians now formally align very strongly with their ethnic, religious groups, which gives the latitude to manipulations by politicians with selfish intentions. Although some scholars argue that identity politics seek a retreat into abhorrent culture (Connell, 1987), others still argue that it rather demands for a more inclusivity in the political system (Young, 1990).



### **Violence:**

Scholars have given varying definitions of what violence represents, for example, Kolawole (1988), Høglund (2006) and Keane (1996) sees violence as the unlawful application of brute force to command compliance against the will or views of others. However, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) sees violence as the intended application of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either leads to or has a high probability of leading to injury, death psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation.

Gurr (1970) made a description of political violence in his study when he referred to it as encompassing all collective attacks within a political system directed at a political leadership including its opposition parties. Inyang (2023) maintain that Political violence becomes imminent when electorates are teleguided in their choice of candidates in an election. Høglund (2009) gave an elaborate distinction between election-related violence and political violence. The scholar argued that electoral violence is perpetuated during periods of election, and its primary motive the scholar argued, is to ensure that the process is manipulated, tilted and stampeded to predetermined outcomes in favour of the violence perpetrators. On the other hand, Fischer (2002) and Sisk (2009) describe electoral violence as acts of threat, coercion, intimidation, blackmail, physical harm including assassinations and killing directed at electoral actors, events and materials.

This study insist that violence of any form prior to, during and after election is inimical to peace and development. It is not unconnected with the challenges the Nigerian State has witnessed since the advent of the Fourth republic.



### **Theoretical Analysis:**

Two theories are adopted in this study as theoretical explanation. First is the political economy theory of political violence and the rational choice theory.

### **Political Economy Theory**

The Political economy theory examines the relationship between economic factors and violent conflicts within a political context. This theory suggests that economic conditions and disparities can contribute to the emergence of political violence. Lynch (2013) posited that economic theory adopts a Marxian approach in the explanations of the dynamics of power, economic institution and violence. Although the earliest proponents of political economy which include Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus and David Richardo view the concept from the point of its relations to conditions of production and consumption within limited resources, Witte and Witt (2000) argued that theory lays emphasis on the interrelationship of individuals, government and public policy and the effect they have on citizens and their reactions to it. It is in the view of this researcher that when managers of statecraft appropriate state resources to satisfy their nepotistic or prebendal appetites, the negative effect is felt on the underdevelopment of the state. Okoli and Alumona (2020) contended that although the ethnic diversity in Nigerian is perfectly marshalled in the constitution to galvanize its even development, such directive principle of state policy is often severely abused by occupiers of state power. This the scholars believe, effectively promote the culture of violence and identity politics consequently leading to prebendalism and underdevelopment. This study submits that violence and development are two variables that interact very closely such that the absence of one results in the enthronement of the other, and vice versa.



Development will always elude the society when there is violence. The Nigerian society has had a fair share of underdevelopment especially since the dawn of the Fourth republic.

### **Rational Choice Theory**

The rational choice theory was developed by Cornish and Clarke in 1986. This theory is based on the key assumption that the decisions that offenders make are 'purposive'. That is, they are intentional acts, committed with the intention of benefitting the offender (Cornish & Clarke, 2001; Lilly, Cullen & Ball 2007). The rational choice theory offers some promising approach not only to explain criminality, but offers some intellectual lens on taking rational decisions after considering some variables within the environment. From the canon of the rational choice theory, decisions and actions are engulfed in rationality, premised on cost-benefit analysis. The victim or the public decision to report any incident of violence to the police or any security agents is premised or rational choice anchored on cost-benefit analysis. If the public consider the benefit (arrest offender, prosecution of offenders, punishment, prevent further crime) to outweigh the cost (fear of reprisal, safety of the informant, money involved, time distance to the police station, leaving their jobs to visit the police, ability to communicate), the citizen will go ahead to report to the police, otherwise they will not. Criminal acts committed during elections or political periods are seldom reported, oftentimes only when the benefits of reporting are far greater than the cost. To this end, the circle of violence in politics is sustained and upgraded, leaving the vast majority of the people more polarized along identity lines by each passing electoral season.



## Methodology

The survey research method is adopted for this study. Information was got from secondary information. All sources relied on are duly referenced and acknowledged in the study.

The scope was the Nigerian society and the unit of analysis was the Nigerian political environment within the fourth republic. The return to democratic rule in Nigeria christened the fourth republic has been on for more than two decades now, and the observable features are so glaring that rather than spur development, in many fronts the Nigerian socioeconomic realities are bearing the very negative brunt. Development is retarded, standards of living so low, cost of living never been so high and the rapid and constant disappearance of the middle class is worrisome. Rather than applaud the return to democracy, Nigerians are daily groaning in the pains it has wrought on the citizenry by the widening of the gap between the political elite and the lead. Many hitherto corporations that helped fill in the gap of unemployment for our teeming youth have folded up, with foreign investors returning back home or relocating to other more economically viable African countries.

## Overview of Violence, Identity Politics and Development in Nigeria

Violence and identity politics is viewed from many trajectories. The literature suggests that when economic conditions are unfavourable to citizens, they are most likely to become violent, and incidences of group identity begin to ensue as resources get lean, and unlikely to reach everybody at the same time. Factors such as poverty, inequality, and resource scarcity, create the grievances in any given society which may lead to political violence when people believe that their economic interests are not being met or that they are being exploited by those in power or monopolistic groups. **International factors** are also identified



as key players in political violence. Many nations experiencing violence do so owing to the global politics of trade, sanctions, disarmament or interest and intervention. Nigeria has had a fair share of some of these factors all through her existence as an independent nation. Currently, the Northern part of the country is on fire, all thanks to the terrorist Boko Haram sect. The South is in turmoil, stampeded by the activities of militia gangs, unknown gunmen and armed kidnappers. It is antithetical to expect development in such a violent-prone chaotic environment.

### **Incidence and Dynamics of Identity Politics in Nigeria**

Bello (2015) and Rasak and Garuba (2017) traced the historical antecedents of Nigeria's several political attempts at democratization through the ballot box, and argued that in all such attempts, violence, fueled by politics of identity have always created an atmosphere of chaos and mass destruction. Ojudu (2007) asserted that the Firearms Act of 1959 did not deter many unauthorized Nigerians from acquiring arms especially after the post-civil war era of 1967-70, which the scholar argued gave rise to arms proliferation in the country. These proliferated arms in the hands of unauthorized citizens are said to be used in promoting violence and identity politics (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004).

### **Strategic Implications and recommendation**

Identity politics in Nigeria is a complex and deeply ingrained aspect of its social fabric, often revolving around factors such as ethnicity, religion, and regionalism. The strategic implementation of identity politics in Nigeria can have significant implications for political power, social cohesion, and governance. Schubert (2023) argued that understanding the dynamics is important towards resolving the change of identity politics. It's essential to understand the historical, cultural, and



socio-economic factors that shape identity politics in Nigeria. Each ethnic group, religious community, and region is bedevilled with one form of grievances, aspirations, and power dynamics or another. The scholar noted that building coalitions by political actors can enable them to leverage on identity politics to garner support. This involves aligning with influential leaders or groups within specific identity-based communities to secure votes or achieve political objectives.

Bernstein (2005) argued that as a common strategy in Nigerian politics, mobilizing support along ethnic lines is which involve appealing to ethnic pride, addressing perceived injustices, or promising to advance the interests of a particular ethnic group can go a long way to stem the negative tide.

In his work “political economy and crime: an overview”, Lynch (2013) stated that religious appeals, regional considerations, inclusive governance and rule of law and accountability are the basic issues that must occupy the front burner of Nigeria's national dialogue for the desired change. The author noted that Nigeria's religious diversity plays a significant role in identity politics such that politicians use religious rhetoric and symbols to appeal to religious sentiments and mobilize support for their parties. This Lynch (2013) noted, is a key factor for constructing a paradigm shift.

Nigeria's geopolitical divisions often intersect with ethnic and religious identities. Strategic implementation of identity politics requires an understanding of regional dynamics and grievances, particularly in addressing issues such as resource allocation and federalism. This will no doubt include inclusive governance. Nigeria's Political class and stakeholders in the Nigerian project are called to balance the interests of different identity groups to promote social cohesion and prevent further recurrence of inter-communal conflicts.



Ogele (2021) suggested that rather than exploiting identity-based grievances for short-term political gains, strategic implementation should also involve addressing the root causes of identity-based tensions, such as socio-economic inequality, marginalization, and discrimination. Sahabi and Nacho (2020) concluded in their study of “the consequences of political identity for a democratic system” that strengthening institutions and upholding the rule of law are essential for mitigating the negative consequences of identity politics, such as corruption, impunity, and ethnic favouritism.

This study took the stand of Small Arms Survey (2015) to state that checking identity politics in requires emphasis on common bonds of citizenship and national identity to foster a sense of belonging among all Nigerians as well as promoting national symbols, history, and values can help mitigate the influence of divisive ethnic and religious identities. Educational institution and the media are also called upon to lead crusade for the fostering tolerance, diversity appreciation, and critical thinking skills among youth. Constructive dialogue and reconciliation initiatives among ethnic and religious communities to address grievances, promote understanding, and build trust is also recommended to the media. This way, a culture of responsible media reporting that avoids sensationalism and inflammatory rhetoric will be entrenched, while promoting balanced and inclusive narratives at all levels of our national life.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that the strategic implementation of violence and identity politics in Nigeria requires a nuanced understanding of its complexities and implications. The forms of occurrences is a direct pointer to the fact that inequalities and felt grievances fuelled these violent crises. Understanding these complexities and implications is a



roadmap to actualizing development as it ensures the active mobilization of support from the people for outlined objectives.

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