



THE IMPACT OF MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM ONELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Arising from the premise that a multi-party system and periodic elections are essential ingredients of democratic practice, yet in Nigeria, elections are inseparable from violence. This paper examines the interrelationship between the multi-party system and electoral violence in Nigeria. It interrogates how political parties trigger electoral violence despite the existing extant laws to prohibit electoral violent behaviour. The complacency of law enforcement agencies and their failure to arrest and punish electoral offenders comprehensively were highlighted. Furthermore, the paper analyses the conceptual issues of political literacy often associated with electoral violence triggers and its consequences on the general polity. Through reliance on secondary sources of data, the paper contended that electoral violence and lack of political literacy in Nigeria is shrinking electoral participation space by elevating voter apathy and waned confidence in elections. It also looked at the attendant legitimacy crisis suffered by governments, produced through violent electoral processes and the inability of the state to effectively command the loyalty of the citizenry. It concludes that lack of political literacy and pervasive prebendalism is central to electoral violence in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Electoral Violence, Multi-Party System, Political Ecosystem, Rebendalism, Money Politics, Godfatherism, Political Literacy, Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

An election is to representative democracy; what dough is to pizza. Rightly or wrongly it is the medium through which political parties seek to form a government and periodic opportunities for electorates to choose their representatives. The word “rightly or wrongly” as used above is deliberate to underscore how a given electoral process can strengthen or retard democracy. If the government was expected to belong to the people, for the people, and by the people, therefore the process of electing government representatives should be perceived to be largely free and fair. What sets representative democracy apart from direct democracy is the indemnity that political leaders would emerge within the context of the established democratic electoral protocol. This implies that umpires midwifing electoral process and political actors are unambiguously regulated by extant laws. The electoral process is an institutional mechanism through which political parties are formed and registered, present candidates in an election for electorates to choose. The relative calmness or violence witnessed during a given election cycle has a direct correlation with how political stakeholders conduct themselves. To ensure that elections are credibly and peacefully conducted, electoral laws are enacted to regulate activities of political parties, their candidates, and supporters while electioneering.

Despite extant laws guiding political competition in Nigeria, electoral violence has continued unabatedly. There are failures on the part of enforcement agencies to arrest and punish offenders comprehensively. A situation that has inadvertently encouraged various acts of electoral law violations. The continued violation of electoral laws with impunity by political parties and the ruling class at every election in Nigeria has adversely impacted the electoral ecosystem. It has drastically shrunk the electoral political space for citizens’ involvement in the political decision-making process. Its immediate impact is the elevation of voters’ apathy by creating insecurity in the minds of voters to turn out for voting, and loss of confidence in the electoral process by the electorates.

The issue of electoral violence in Nigeria is rooted in the political culture of zero-sum philosophy and prebendal enterprise approach to politicking. Party politics in Nigeria is centered on an ‘investment and return on investment’ mentality by both the party financiers (godfathers) and candidates seeking elective positions. These political gladiators pursue the realization of their political interests through all means possible. This warfare-like



approach includes the deployment of violent strategies such as engagement of thugs to disrupt the voting process, the assassination of opponents, sponsoring pre- and post-election riots, and in some cases arson of voting materials, etc. Political financing is not bad but the ultimate motive driving such financing and the strategies employed to actualize those motives are the core issues. Worried by the dangerous dimension political financing can assume, Vifredo Pareto (1935) developed three typologies of motives driving political financing. They are providing funding on the idealistic or ideological ground, providing funding on a social basis by aiming at social honor and influence, and lastly providing finance to get direct financial gains in return. The third motive is central in impacting the electoral process in Nigeria, especially against the background that Nigeria political parties are not a product of any ideological incubation. So, the justifying principle in sponsoring one for an elective position in Nigeria is based on generating self-material gains in return.

Also, the candidate seeking political office is driven by the intent to use public office to generate economic benefits. Therefore, elected public officials do not use their positions to protect, serve, and advance the interests and wellbeing of the generality of the entire citizenry (Michael, 2008). This approach to politicking is dubbed prebendalism. The political culture of prebendalism is largely at the heart of political actions and public policy administration in Nigeria. All issues associated with a geometric increase in fraudulent electoral practices, widening mistrust gap between government and the citizens, and poor governance at all levels of governments are attributed to deep-seated prebendalism. Discussing electoral violent tactics from the motives and incentives prism would offer a better understanding of why electoral violence is perpetrated.

The term prebendalism is described as the pattern of political behaviour which contemplates, as its justifying principle, that public offices may be competed for and utilized to advance personal material and parochial interests (Joseph, 1987). This description implies the motive to exploit public political offices by its occupants to generate material gains for themselves and their patrons or support service groups. Intrinsic in this view is the issue of political clientele or the role of power brokers (political godfather) in providing active support needed for election victory. After the election, these power brokers and their followers would be obligatorily rewarded using trappings of public office. The dominant socio-political behaviour in Nigeria can be sufficiently defined and mirrored from the prebendal stance. It is against this background that the incentive to corrupt electoral regimes through voter intimidation and rigging are birthed. The prevailing entitled mentality of political actors in the country is to win elections at all costs including the deployment of violent strategies.

In February 2007, President Olusegun Obasanjo in the build-up of the 2007 general election declared to his party members that the “election is a do-or-die affair”. Perhaps this explains why the incumbent party at the federal level militarise elections to influence its electoral fortune. Even at the state level, incumbent governors deploy state resources towards getting re-elected or installing a successor. To Nigerian political gladiators, the end justifies the means. Money is the purveyor belt through which the perpetuation of intense electoral fraud and violence rotates. Ranging from vote-buying or cash inducements, bribery of electoral officials, recruitment of political thugs, and other election manipulative strategies. If the electoral process were compromised, the idea of making vote count is defeated. Compromised elections do not only deprive citizens of their rights to participate in the political decision-making process, but it also hangs the legitimacy burden crisis on the neck of the elected government. In fact, the collapse of Nigeria’s first and second republics are placed at the door of electoral violence (Dudley, 1982; Osaghae, 2002).

Yet political parties and political office seekers in Nigeria are irretrievably condemned to violent electoral tactics. Therefore, the core factor in conceptualizing issues associated with the multiparty system and electoral violence in Nigeria is anchored on “money politics” and prebendalism. This paper will explore some of these conceptual issues and examine how they influence electoral violence. And the extent to which this situation has impacted the general polity. The evolution and historical factors that shaped the nature of the multi-party system in Nigeria will be analysed. Party development will be interrogated with election violence and the factors fuelling violent electoral behaviour thereof.



This paper is divided into four categories namely: evolution of the multi-party system in Nigeria, electoral violence and its conceptual issues, the implications, and consequences of electoral violence on the polity. At the heart of this work is the issue of pervasive and widespread electoral violence in Nigeria orchestrated by political elites in their prebendal drive to win elections at all costs. And the extent to which prebendalism and multiparty system mutually reinforce electoral violent tactics.

2. Evolution of Multi-Party System in Nigeria

Ethnologically the territory known as Nigeria today was amalgamated in 1914 by the British colony. Nigeria is product of British commercial conquest, she achieved independence on October 01, 1960. Her modern forms of political institutions like multi-party system and elections found their origin under the colonial rule. However, that does not mean that prior to colonial conquest various identities that made up Nigeria do not have their respective forms of political interactions. Though not within the context of formal structures, they have unique means of arriving at decisions and resolving disputes. The Northern Nigeria had emirate system, South Western Nigeria used 'Obaship' system and Eastern Nigeria had cephalous system or tree shade democracy. In developing system of administration for amalgamated Nigeria, the colonialists capitalized on these pre-existing traditional institutions and its effective traditional power structure. As an endogenous process colonial administration carefully preyed on pre-existing economic conditions (natural resources) and socio-political institutions (traditional political power structures) before introducing colonial institutions in the colonized territory of Nigeria.

The British colonial administrative theory of direct and indirect rule was premised on this reality. The indirect rule adopted for Northern Nigeria was to reflect the region's pre-colonial local realities. And the choice of direct rule in South Eastern and South Western Nigeria followed the same logic of evaluating pre-existing local socio-political reality. This differential system of administration in preserving cultural differences of local people inadvertently shaped the pattern of partisan politics during the nationalist movement. Political parties that emerged during this era fragmented along ethnic or regional lines. The fragmentation created suspicion and animosity among nationalist parties because they were not exposed to each other's culture abinitio. Colonial policies and structures of administration shaped the pattern of nationalist movements that emerged in Africa prior to independence and continued with post-independence state institutions (Markovitz, 1977).

It is also important to note that British colonial system of administration sowed the seed of multiplicity of political parties in Nigeria along sectional lines (Akinlola, 2014). Perhaps if the colonial masters had applied monolithic approach of rule in Nigeria, political parties would not have emerged along sectional identities. However, imperialism flourishes on division.

The colonial constitutional developments which supplied oxygen for partisan politics in Nigeria mutually reinforced political parties' reliance on regional social networks rather than on national driven agenda especially the Macpherson Constitution of 1951. The first political party in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) formed in 1923 emerged within the spirit of elective principle provided in 1922 Clifford Constitution. This constitution was the catalyst for the development of legislative representative election and party politics in Nigeria. It was the first time the colonized people of Nigeria were offered opportunity to vote and to be voted for. Since then party politics has continued to be integral component of the Nigerian political ecosystem.

Prior to 1922 there was no well-established political party in Nigeria, although there were sporadic attempts to organize pressure groups to register protest certain colonial issues their sponsors had interest (Azikiwe, 1957). Subsequently, party, and partisan politics were accelerated by three constitutional developments of 1946, 1951 and 1954. The major political parties which greatly impacted political development of Nigeria during pre-independence movements and at independence emerged from cultural or ethnic leanings. From then political parties in Nigeria have not ceased to incline to ethnic and religious attachments. These constitutional developments culminated in the 1960 independence of Nigeria and becoming of a republic in 1963.



Nigeria has continued to practice multiparty system since then although she has suffered five military interruptions of the democratic process. She is currently operating uninterrupted democracy since 1999. From the above historical background on evolution of party politics in Nigeria, it is evident that party formation preceded Nigeria as an independent political entity. Therefore, it was the political parties that nurtured and shaped institutional body politic of pre-independence and post-independence Nigeria. This backward integration relationship between political parties and the state is largely responsible for why ruling political parties disregard and compromise institutions of state, especially its electoral process.

3. Electoral Violence Conceptualized

Election is one of the distinctive cardinal pillars of democracy. It is a periodic process through which political parties present their preferred candidates to the citizens to be considered as representatives in government. In representative democracy, voting in election is an inalienable right of adult citizens. The condition under which voting is expected to take place, requires to be free and fair without fear of intimidation or being maimed. Election meeting the criteria of free and fair principle is the sine qua non for any elected government to be considered as government of the people. In other hand when election is compromised or marred by violence it enthrones unpopular government. It will also deprive citizens the ultimate right of being part of political decision-making process.

Therefore, election should clearly promote rules that empowers ordinary citizens to choose among contestants for top political offices (Bratton, 1998). It is essential for institutionalization of popular participation, competition, and legitimacy, the three core foundations of democracy (Lindberg, 2004). Unfortunately, violent tactics has become an inseparable component of elections in Nigeria. If an objective analysis of Nigerian political trajectory were to be carried out, it would reveal that political violence has been part and parcel of the country's history (Alfa, & Otaida, 2012).

From pre-independence political movements till date, elections in Nigeria have continued to assume dangerous violent dimensions. The ten general elections (1964, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019) conducted so far in Nigeria are all characterized by various forms of violent acts. Electoral violence in Nigeria is on the verge of going beyond the level tolerance and portends danger to democratic development of the nation. Election is gradually turning into a mere periodic ritual where people have little or no voice on the emergence of political leaders (Adejumobi, 2000). Every succeeding election has become a radical rupture from those before it (Ademola-Olateju, 2019). Election assuming this dangerous dimension is described as electoral authoritarianism (Schedler, 2002).

Conceptually, electoral violence is coordinated, or random act aimed at manipulating people and electoral process to influence the result of an election. This act can be expressed in form of threat, verbal intimidation, physical assault, destruction of property, and assassination of political opponents (Fischer, 2002). To compromise electoral process, perpetrators of electoral violence may strive to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll and influence the result of competitive races for political office (UNDP, 2019). In a similar notion, electoral violence is perceived as a certain kind of activity carried out with express intent to achieve political goals and objectivities within the context of existing power relation in a political system (Anifowose, 1982).

Implicit in above definitions, is that the express intent of employing violent tactics to compromise electoral process is to influence election result advantageously. In order to realize this goal, dominant faction of the political class does not only intimidate, terrorize and oppress the poor masses but they consciously strive to use state power for supplanting other factions who are opposed or not sufficiently subservient to its authority (Nwankwo, 1989:9). Electoral violence can be perpetrated at different stages of the election cycle, it could occur before, during, and after election (Nwachukwu, & Uzodi, 2012). There are three fundamental phases of an election cycle namely pre-election phase, election period and post-election phase. In respective of the phase electoral violence occurred, the offenders are usually political parties, their candidates, and supporters while their targets are people, places, data, and things.



Electoral violence is largely organized or instigated by the political class, is hardly a spontaneous act. Therefore, there are sponsors and those sponsors are driven by selfish material benefits guaranteed in seizure of political power and its trappings. This is where the push and pull factors of electoral violence is located and can be examined.

4. Central Issues of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

In Africa, the premium placed on political power is steadily on the increase with bitter political competition (Ake,2001:5). The starting point in trying to understand the phenomena of electoral violence is to locate motives and incentives driving bitter political competition. Simply put, what are the motives behind seeking of elective positions and the incentives of political power capture? Most electoral violence related cases in Nigeria are coordinated and targeted to influence election outcome. Although there are few occasions is employed to register dissatisfaction towards election outcome as witnessed in some parts of Northern Nigeria after 2011 presidential election result was declared. Whether spontaneous or organized, understanding political positions of the offenders are imperative in underscoring the why factors of violent electoral behaviour. Political elites' motives and incentives to violently influence election result are not in the same measure with that of their supporters.

However, irrespective of the complicity level of offenders, they are all driven by certain kind of motives or incentives. For instance, political actors in their desperation to consolidate their political positions usually exploit the prevailing harsh economic conditions, and monetarily enticed disillusioned youths to the path of electoral violence and bloodshed. To the youths or thugs recruited are incentivized with money. But the motive of their sponsors is to capture political power and incentive premised on the appropriation of public office for self-economic benefits.

Therefore, there must be something extraordinary in political power that makes political class or political parties irretrievably condemned to the idea of employing violence in the pursuit of their political interests. This special luxury in political power is perhaps the underlining factor fuelling electoral violence in Nigeria. Causes of electoral violence are usually colorized with deprivation, frustration, and relative deprivation, ethnicity, and religion reasons. No doubt these factors are evident in political and electoral violence, but they may not be the malignant trigger.

At the heart of acquiring political power through violent means possible is the conversion of state resources as estate largesse. It is fundamental on why elections in Nigeria, irrespective of the level electioneering is taking place has remained a fierce contest. This unbridle desire to retain or capture political power without recourse to rules of engagements has continued to reproduce and reinforce electoral violence cycle. Nigeria political ecosystem is dominated by the utilization of public office to generate direct economic gains and use of political offices to service and enrich support groups like election financiers, friends, ethnic and cultural groups. This established pattern of political behaviour based on exchange political support for material resources and public office as estate largesse is called prebendalism.

Prebendalism was coined by Richard Joseph (Director of African Studies, North Western University, USA) while describing patron client or neo-patrimonialism political relationship in Nigeria (Oluchukwu,2010).Prebendalism refers to socio-political culture which emphasizes the utilization of political positions for selfish economic gains. Truly the dominant drive to hold political office in Nigeria today is anchored on the unfettered criminal access political power grants to national resources. Nigerian brand of politicking can describe as a prebendal enterprise undertaken essentially for crude appropriation of national resources (Ogundiya, 2010). In Nigeria prebendalism expresses itself in two ways, political power as entitled means to loot state resources for personal economic benefits, and the use public office positions to service support groups. This has become the prevalent political culture driving electoral contest for political offices and invariably election violence. Therefore greed, primitive acquisition, and unending propensity to amass wealth is the dominant mental process of an average political office holder in Nigeria (Ogbo, 2003).



Over the years this prebendal perception of political power incrementally became the bedrock of electoral violence in Nigeria. In the sense that it deepens unhealthy political rivalry by elevating political stakes which in turn pushes political parties into employing various kinds of electoral violent strategies. We can relate this to President Obasanjo's declaration that "election is a do or die affair" in the build up to 2011 General Election (Alemika, 2011).

Prebendal attitude tend to privatize the state and deploy same as enormous force in pursuing parochial interests especially in retaining power. Once politicians recognize and understand the profitability of acquiring power, the party and its members would naturally use governmental machinery to stay in power and become self-recruiting oligarchy (Dudley, 1965). To achieve this the incumbent party will ultimately develop strategies to compromise the electoral process, and opposition on the other hand would resort to violence means in their aspiration to dethrone incumbent. In this circumstance both the ruling and opposition parties are not pursuing political office positions for benign good of the people, rather they saw politics as the quickest means to affluence and influence status. So, politics means money and money means politics, therefore being a member of a ruling party means open avenue to government patronage, contract deals and the like (Dudley, 1961). This is where the soul of electoral violence is birthed and sustained.

5. Political Literacy in Nigeria

The concept of political literacy means the state of having political information. Some scholars define political literacy as the ability of individuals to comprehend issues regarding a political incident and their political awareness. It could also be defined as an individual's state to be acquainted with political affairs and political processes ranging from the grassroot to the national level, as responsible and effective citizens to perform their roles and the comprehension of these political issues by the individuals. Several concepts of political literacy hinge on the phenomenon of political awareness and the knowledge.

Although, political literacy cannot be defined as only the political awareness/knowledge or the functions of government and political institutions. It is highly related not only with awareness and knowledge, but also with skills and values. These skills require absolute and effective participation in the social aspects. However, except the individual is enabled to participate in the political processes, these skills cannot develop. Thus, a politically literate individual is not only an informed bystander, but an active participant in all social occurrences relating to her/his own issues (Zafer, K., 2014 cited Fyfe, 2007).

These citizens do not only understand their current position, but also involves actively in the activities of the state by directing them effectively to their own advantage. The citizens also possess the capacity to comprehend the viewpoints of others in any given debate and responds effectively with the realization of its impact on them in an ethical manner. Hence, a politically literate citizen has the basic skills, values, and knowledge relating to how he/she expresses their ideas in everyday life. A society that is arrayed with values, knowledge and skills which are needed in a democratic sphere performs better.

This includes the awareness about party systems that exists both in principle and practice, and the ability to accept and support any political party that wins elections and is in power for the common interest of the citizens. Nigeria has a low level of political literacy and high level of poverty, which emanates into an outcome of poor governance. Today, the average Nigerian is hungry, illiterate, and deprived of the necessities of life and cannot think about politics in the sense of development but on how to fulfil their urgent needs (stomach infrastructure). In Nigeria, politics is propagated by rogue politicians who mislead the citizens through religion, ethnicity, and violence.

To revive the political zeal of the citizens, and the multi-party system in Nigeria, democracy must be practice properly to reduce violence. After several years of dictatorship from the military, one would expect that the responsibilities and the freedom democracy offers will provide a better country for all. But this is far-fetched as sixty years after independence and twenty-one years of uninterrupted civil rule, Nigeria is yet to reap the benefits.



The reason is the poor quality of political literacy and involvement by the citizens. Many Nigerians do not agree with the quality of politicians and political parties and their ideologies.

6. The Nexus Between Party System and Electoral Violence

Electoral violence is endemic and pervasive in Nigeria. It has continued unabatedly with every election in Nigeria and has assumed a very scary dimension today. So much so that the rate at which it reoccurs is averesly shrinking political space. This paper predicated the fuelling of electoral violence in Nigeria at the doorstep of prebendalism, which in turn shapes the form of violent behaviour of political parties manifest. The participation in the political process from registration of political parties, to the conduct of party primaries, campaigning, and presentation of candidates for election requires funding. Money is an essential element in electioneering activities globally, but money politics becomes an issue when it is deployed lethally to compromise the electoral process.

The centrality of money as the dominant factor in influencing the outcome of the electoral process gave rise to the phenomenon of “Money Bag or God-Fatherism” politics in Nigeria. Money Bags or God Fathers are financiers, political influencers, and people of political weights who are highly sought after by political parties and candidates because of their capability in influencing the outcome of an election. They are highly connected individuals in politics, security, and as well with a financial war chest to determine the direction election would go. God Fathers are not necessarily popular people, but they enjoy enormous political clout because of their political connections with the powers that be. Because of their approach of monetizing every aspect of the electoral process, the cost of elections is usually up and makes it the highest bidder game. They invest in politics to install their protégé, with intent to rule by proxy or at least have unfettered access to government. You can describe them as political merchants. God's fathers an attempt to ensure the election of their godsons and to secure their investments usually circumvent the extant law guiding the electoral process.

To them election must be won at all cost therefore reliance on money and violence became inevitable thereby making election warfare like. Money is used in buying votes, bribing electoral officers and enforcement agencies to aid rigging, and lastly, the deployment of force using thugs as the need arises. It is some sort of exchange support system of you rob my back, I rub your back. All the major political parties in Nigeria share the same character and history of formation. In fact, political parties are basically platforming to capture political power and not ideological driven. Based on this reality, the political party's membership is made up of strange bedfellows. A situation which makes intra party crisis highly intractable and difficult to resolve, thereby heating up the polity. Build up to every election comes with an acrimonious intra party crisis relating to part primaries in the ruling party and major opposition parties.

This rift usually comes with cross decamping of party members from one to the other. It played out well in the build-up to the 2015 general election in the ruling People Democratic Party (PDP), when an internal party crisis led to the formation of a group within the party dubbed New-PDP. The New-PDP group eventually decamped to the All Progressive Congress (APC). Also, in the build-up to the 2019 general election, there yet an internal crisis in the ruling party APC which culminated in a group called New-APC. The decamping of New-APC to PDP led to a crisis in PDP which caused some PDP members to decamp in the opposite direction. The internal party crisis rocking the ruling party APC and the major opposition party PDP aggravated an already tensed electoral environment. Their foot soldiers went further to stoke the political tension by weapon zing fake information on social media. Those who are not savvy with the social media ecosystem employed physical threats to advance their party's interests.

Expectedly, the scenario elevated the risk level of election tragedy. After elections, the relationship between godfather and godson could deteriorate leading to yet another cycle of violence. Several instances abound in this regard especially since Nigeria return to democracy in 1999. Anambra State under the governorship of Dr. Chris Ngige witnessed series of violence resulting from a broken relationship between the governor and his godfather Chris Uba. A soured relationship led to the abduction of a sitting governor by the police on July 10, 2003 (Agbo, 2004). During this feud, the godfather through press conference announced how he rigged the governor into



power, yet he got away with the confession of the electoral crime. The Anambra scenario buttresses the point about how political connections protect godfathers in their nefarious act of subverting the electoral process. Chris Uba being rightly connected to the ruling government at the centre was able to get away with orchestrating a failed attempt to abduct a sitting governor, the mobilization of riots, and the open confession for an electoral crime. Even when there are extant laws prohibiting these activities, no charges were pressed against him by the government of the day.

There are other notable cases of such feuds between godfathers and their political sons, such as Governor Rasheed Ladoja of Oyo State and Alhaji Adedibu which culminated in the impeachment of Ladoja in January 2006. An impeachment which was later upturned by the Supreme Court in December 2006. From 1999-2003, there was also the acrimonious relationship between Governor Mala Kachalla and Alimodu Sherriff of Borno state. A situation that pushed Alimodu Sherriff to contest against his god son in 2003 and won. Yet another interesting case is the feud (1999-2003) between Governor Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State and his godfather Jim Nwobodo. Their problem began with the suspicion that the godson is about to deconstruct the political machine of the godfather (Oparah, 2008).

That struggle eclipsed the godfather status of Jim Nwobodo because the governor having the backing of the government at the center was able to disperse the godfather. Lagos State is also one of the states in Nigeria that can be used to demonstrate as a classic case of godfather effects. Since 2007 he left office as Lagos State governor, has continued to make, and unmake governors of the state to date. In the 2015 gubernatorial election, he singles headedly coordinated the denial second term ticket for the incumbent and subsequently influenced the election of the current governor. The last Edo State gubernatorial election acrimoniously pitched Governor Obaseki against his godfather Oshimole. This fight led to the governor decamping from APC to PDP, where he contested and won his re-election bid. Their battle of life caused some bickering in both parties, but the height was the removal of Oshimole as APC national chairman. Since godfathers can do and undo without any attendant repercussion to their blatant actions, it tends to reinforce electoral violence.

The complacency of enforcement agencies in collaborating and protecting godfathers have furthered exacerbated electoral violence culture. Once those entrusted with the administration of the electoral process are not ready to enforce rules comprehensively, it will inadvertently create opportunities for electoral violence and the impression that there is an absence of a law governing the conduct of elections (Smah, 2008). Recruitment and inducement of people into electoral violence behaviour by the political leaders is aggravated by pervasive poverty in the country. The issue of youth bulge and the high unemployment rate makes youth readily available for violent actions with the slightest material inducement. Endemic poverty places gullible youths into the hands of unscrupulous politicians who induce them with irresistible baits to undertake electoral violence (Usman, 2009).

Electoral violence in Nigeria is usually sponsored and paid for. There may be few instances where electoral violence is spontaneous especially post-election violent actions that are normally anchored on perceived rigging of the election outcome. Rigging is yet another factor that corrupts the electoral process. Since political parties are not ideological driven, they are constantly trying to outmanoeuvre each other in their respective manipulative prowess. It is against this backdrop that election results are usually contested and turns into violent protests when a perceived unpopular candidate is declared the winner. The lack of political ideologies by the political parties in Nigeria is one of the factors facilitating unpleasant electoral behaviour. Since they do not have an ideological support base to tap during elections, they tend to fill that vacuum through other means especially resorting to self-help manipulative antics.

We can trace the issue of the non-ideological stance of political parties in Nigeria to how they emerged during the colonial rule. As a colonial heritage, political partisanship and competition during the colonial era were primarily aimed at attaining independence, and concentration on regional political dominance which produced rivalries among the regional leaders. With the attainment of independence, this regional competition for political dominance continued to shape the nature of political parties we have today. General elections are contested and



won on regional alignments rather than based on deliverables. It is against this background that ethnic and religious electoral violence festers. In electoral practice, all political parties tend to adopt a similar approach of patronage and corruption of the electoral system in their pursuit of elective positions, to them, it is not about manifestos. It is all about strategic alignments of ethnic and religious sentiments.

7. The implication of electoral violence in the political system

Electoral Violence has deep socio-economic cum political consequences on the polity. Democratic development is anchored on a regular and credible electoral process. However, since independence elections in Nigeria have continued to be pervasive and marred by intense fraud which has diminished people's confidence in the elections. That means after decades of independence Nigeria remains a country in search of a form of government to successfully institutionalized democracy (Beckett, 1987). Therefore, an election in which outcomes are perceived not to be free and fair, non-competitive, and a poor reflection of the peoples' mandate would lose its real meaningfulness. Disillusioned by this development Nigerians are resorting to self-help approaches in the pursuit of their desires.

A classic example is the "#EndSARS" protest by Nigerian youths against the brutality of police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The protest which started on 07 October 2020 in Lagos to demand the disbandment of the SARS, spread to Abuja and other states. By 20 October 2020, the protest was hijacked by hoodlums in Lagos and turned chaotic. This led to the declaration of curfew by Lagos State Governor and culminated with the unfortunate incidence of shooting protesters at Lekki toll gate. The Lekki Toll Gate shooting helped to worsen the already charged situation with burning and looting of properties across the nation. Before the current security issue created by the protest, the government is battling several sectoral agitations and high internal insecurity. Internal insecurity ranging from highway robberies and kidnappings (Abuja-Kaduna road as a classical case), farmers-herders crisis to violent agitation for ethnic independence.

These conflicts have led to the loss of lives and properties that worth millions of naira. The farmers-herders conflict has not only led to the malicious killing of people but has also put food production in jeopardy. In fact, it is a situation that has generated serious ethno religious tension in Nigeria. So much so that Christian bodies are accusing the Buhari led government of sinister agenda against the Christians. These accusations from the Christian bodies against the government eventually led to the placement of Nigeria on the US Special Watch List (SWL) of countries that engage in severe religious persecution. There is relative fear in travelling by road across Nigeria. Not only that the roads are in bad condition due to poor infrastructural development but compounded by the activities of criminal elements on the roads. Whether you are travelling from the East to South, or West to North and vice versa the fear remained the same. Nigerian highways are unsafe, and travellers are doing so at their own peril. This is despite a huge amount of money budgeted yearly for security and the one dedicated to road construction and maintenance.

For the fact that election into public offices does not reflect the will of people, public office holders have lost consciousness of being representatives of the people thereby not interested in developing the nation for the wellbeing of the citizenry. This is self-evident in how Nigeria has continually descended into low economic status with the high rate of poverty, a high number of out-of-school children, a high unemployment rate, the decline of national infrastructures, and an entrenched corrupt system. The system has become so corrupted that admissions into public universities and employment into federal public service are commoditized. Even in public policymaking and implementation process, political office holders are driven by potential material gains that would accrue from the process. Therefore, the distributional import of public policies is aligned to the private interests of the political office holders who were instrumental to their design, passage, and implementation (Mala, 2010).

8. Findings

From the above discussion and analysis on elections, electoral violence, political literacy, and the multiparty system in Nigeria, it has shown that electoral violent actions are driven by lack of political literacy, and a win at



all cost syndrome of the political parties. This syndrome of winning at all costs is anchored on prebendalism because political office positions are unabashedly used and exploited for personal and parochial considerations. The lack of awareness on political events has hindered development. This culture has been the bane of credible elections in Nigeria since independence. Unless this situation abates, it would continue to undermine the Nigerian democratic development process especially as it relates to election credibility and legitimacy of government. There is widespread majoritarian disdain for governmental institutions in Nigeria. Umpires of the electoral processes have become subservient to the political actors. The pervasive political culture of electoral violence in Nigeria is engineered and sustained by political parties. The attitude of political parties can be traced to how they evolved from the colonial era and to militate against electoral violence would require the tinkering of the Nigerian party system. Do not forget that political parties preceded Nigeria as an independent entity. It was the political leaders that nurtured and shaped the institutions of the state after independence. To them, state institutions are their creation, and such should be subservient to their interests. To reignite the political awareness of the citizens in Nigeria, democracy must be properly practiced reducing violence.

9. Conclusion

If all the constitutional developments and electoral process experimented since independence have failed to guarantee credible elections and good governance, why can't we think of using zero party system in our elections? A zero party or independent candidature election would eliminate and dismantle political parties rigging machinery. Adopting this will rekindle the people's confidence in the electoral process because the focus is now on candidates and issues they present not on political parties. Political literacy is also a great tool for development in Nigeria, as the values, skills, and knowledge acquired by the citizens enhance their chances of an informed and good political decision, and better their lot in the political process. The current party system favours only the candidates of the big parties and their sponsors. The candidates' people would have preferred are in small parties and because of the violent influence of big parties they do not have chances. Big parties have the financial war chest to corrupt the electoral umpires. That is why in Nigeria today, we can hear people resentfully saying good candidates in a wrong party. A wrong party is usually a small party perceived by the public to lack capability elements to influence the election outcomes. Zero party system would to a very large extent ensure issue-driven electioneering and people ownership of the process. The beauty of zero party system is that it is an electoral process embedded in a bottom-top approach. It is a system in which the disconnect between the process and the people is very marginal, unlike the multiparty system. The zero-party system is not entirely new to Nigeria, Obasanjo in 1976/1977 and Abacha in March 1996 used it to conduct local government elections. The Local government multiparty election following zero party election of March 1996 was marred by irregularities, despite the fact it was the umpire that conducted both. The 1997 local government elections held to on party basis, which were intended to fill 774 council chairmanship and 8,184 ward council seats, were riddled with irregularities(www.hrw.org).

In adopting zero party system, it will also take care of anthropological or sociological determinism issues associated with contests in Africa. Electoral violence has "brought disenchantment and disillusionment in the entire polity and the democratic project" (Ikyase, 2015). Traditionally, the contest is seen as a must-win in African culture and this behaviour reflects in the attitude of political leaders towards every contest including elections. With the elimination of alignment based on political party bloc to an individual, it will improve the electoral process instantly by reducing the burden of intraparty conflicts and political party registrations.

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