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Electoral Violence in Nigeria: A Review of 2011 Post-electoral Crises

Haruna, Mageed Oshogwe
Okunola, Muyiwa Olabode
Ocheme, Innocent

Abstract
Electoral process is a democratic requirement all over the world. However, electoral violence hinders global political system and Africa is not an exception, but the intensities of the electoral crises vary among countries. This review examined the electoral violence in Nigeria with the 2011 post-election crises as a focal point. The paper used materials from the secondary source. The paper posited that electoral violence have claimed many lives and properties and as such poses a serious threat to democratic process and peaceful co-existence. The paper stated that the inability of some people to achieve their political goal and greed, inflammatory rhetoric, institutional changes, suspicion and partisanship of the members of electoral umpire and the general belief that the election was rigged and manipulated on the part of politicians induce electoral violence in Nigeria. The need to stem the tide of widespread electoral violence including violent protest, thuggery, assassination, kidnapping, etc. especially as the 2019 general elections draw nearer is apparent in this paper. Thus, the paper recommended that governments should make stringent laws aimed at curtailing electoral violence, and people perpetrating such act should be arrested and prosecuted, and if found guilty should be dealt with in accordance with the electoral laws. The electoral tribunals

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should be strengthened and empowered to effectively stem the tide of electoral violence in Nigeria. Also, people should refrain from making inflammatory statements, etc.

Keywords: Political system, violent protest, inflammatory rhetoric, institutional changes, greed

Introduction
Electoral process is a democratic requirement all over the world. However, electoral violence hinders global political system and Africa is not an exception, but the intensities of the electoral crises vary among countries. In Nigeria, electoral violence tends to occur before, during and after elections. According to Fischer (2002), electoral violence is any spontaneous or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, deception, physical assault, forced protection; blackmail, assassination and/or destruction of property. Thus, electoral violence is aimed at influencing the electoral process by attempting delay, disrupt the process and derail a poll and determine the winners of competitive races for political office (UNDP, 2009). It is noteworthy to explain that electoral violence can take several dimensions and manifests in physical forms, such as kidnapping, killing, and destruction of property and non-physical forms like threats, intimidation and blackmail (Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance, 2011). Moreover, the main objective behind electoral violence is to influence the outcome of elections. Similarly, the violence can take any form either at the beginning of the election, during or after the elections.

Thus, electoral violence usually takes three phases in the form of ‘pre-election’ which means the build up to the election proper; specifically the party nomination and
campaign process (Adoke, 2011; UNDP, 2009; Sisk, 2008). This stage usually arises from infighting among parties and party members over nomination of candidates or candidates registration. It is important to note that pre-election violence builds up to violence proper. The second phases of election violence include the activities that deal with election itself. This ranges from distribution of electoral materials, voting and snatching of ballot papers and boxes, stuffing of ballot boxes, etc. Violence usually reaches its climax at this stage and could result to any outcome. However, third phases, post-election violence commences from the polling units during announcement of result to electoral tribunal for adjudication on electoral dispute among contending parties and party members. This phase could be carried out in form of attacking the rival candidates, burning of houses, kidnapping and harassing party supporters. It could also include shooting, killings, arson; wanton destruction of property usually perpetrated by officials and or supporters of different political parties (Adoke, 2011). Thus, post-election violence is a specific form of violence that usually happens after election. However, the prevalence of post-electoral violence in many parts of Nigeria, especially after the 2011 elections necessitates this study aimed at curtailing or averting such occurrence as the 2019 general elections draw nearer.

**Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts a combination of deprivation and frustration-aggressive hypothesis as the theoretical framework to explain the causes of electoral violence in Nigeria. The deprivation theory is traced to the work of Gurr (1970) and is based on the assumption that the discrepancy between what people think they deserve and what they actually think can get may lead to violence,
there is a feeling that people's expectation cannot be met if the status quo is maintained. The first situation may be a desperate one. But is the second that will be frustrating and produce aggression at individual, group and societal levels. This explains why some people engage in violence, such as riots, kidnapping murder, etc when they perceived failure in their electoral system. Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939) proposed that aggression is direct result of frustration. They examined the psychological causes involving frustration and aggression as the primary source of human capacity for violent activities, such as electoral violence. Thus, people tend to become violent as a result of being blocked from realizing their desires. However, it is important to note that frustration in some cases may not necessarily lead to aggressive behaviour, but greed may cause the greater probability for aggressive behaviour (Ajeagbu, 2012). According to Bartol and Bartol (2005), when behaviour directed at a specific goal is not achieved as a result of blockage of opportunity, arousal increases and individual experienced a drive to reduce it. Thus, behaviour is energies, but more expressly, the responses that lead to a reduction in the arousal may be strengthened or reinforced. This suggests that people who employ violence to reduce their frustration in electoral process will under extreme frustration become more vigorous than usual, possibly even resorting to thuggery, violent protest and assassination, etc. According to Haruna (2013), frustration-induced behaviour may be expressive and are difficult to curtail unless the rudiments of the frustration are effectively tackled. This explains the need for Nigeria to tackle the causes of electoral violence before 2019 general election proper to prevent violent behaviours.

The frustration theory explained the frustration from the supporters of the opposition candidate, Gen. Muhammadu
Buhari of Congress for progressive Change (CPC) during the 2011 post-election violence. The violent protest was due to the declaration of former president Goodluck Jonathan, a minority extraction from Balyesa state as the winner of 2011 presidential election. The 2011 election which was adjudged to be free and fairest in Nigeria’s electoral history was the bloodiest in election series in Nigeria. The frustration, impunity and aggressive behaviour that followed the outcome of the elections led to negative reactions from followers of the opposition candidate across many northern states of the country. Thus, Skocpol (1979) asserts that post-electoral violence occurs when many people in the society became angry, especially if existing social and political conditions provided encouragement for aggression against political targets. According to frustration-aggression theory, it is what a candidate sought for and what he or she was able to achieve that bring dejectedness and frustration which in turn lead to grievances and violent behaviours. The theory has been able to explain politics in Nigeria, the likely reactions of candidate and supporters most especially where presumed popular party or candidate would lose election which in turn transformed to violence. The theory has also proved to be the best approach to explain contemporary electoral and post-election violence in Nigeria and its attendant consequences.

**Historical Overview of Post-Election Violence in Post-Independence Nigeria**

Post-election violence is an endemic feature in Nigeria’s political system. The various elections held during pre-independence Nigeria were devoid of violence because of the restrictive electoral laws imposed by the colonial masters. However, post-election violence has remained part
of Nigeria political practice after independence. Therefore, the election of 1962 in South-West Nigeria, 1965, 1983 and 2011 elections in Nigeria witnessed significant incidents of post-election crises. However, 1979, 1993 and 1999 took place without any significant reported cases of violence. The post-election violence that shook the Nation’s foundation was 1965 western regional election and this culminated to first military coup in Nigeria.

The crises which occurred after federal election of 1964 presented itself the opportunity for United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and Action Group (AG) to test their popularities and prevent the emergence of other parties, particularly Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) from gaining in road to the South-West. Similarly, the killing of electoral officials in Lagos constituency (1) and declaration of the NNDP as the winner of the controversial election soar into imaginable crises. It was officially reported that the 1965 electoral violence led to the death of 153 people. This is aside sixty-four killed by the police. But observers put the number of causalities at over 2,000 deaths with many more seriously injured and properties destroyed (Anifowose, 1982).

The political violence of 1983 was a replica of 1965 post-election violence. The quest for National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to avoid another “twelve-two-third” saga of 1979 and the need to control more states in the country at all cost pushed the NPN to rig 1983 elections even when Late Micheal Adekunle Ajasin was presumed to have won the election. Therefore, several towns and villages in Ondo state erupted into violent protest following popular reaction against perceived rigging of the gubernatorial election in favour of NPN candidate, Akin Omoboriowo (Kurfi, 2005; Babarinsa, 2003). Several lives including political figures were lost, especially the associate of Chief
Omaboriowo. Also, among the dead were the Majority Leader of Ondo State House of Assembly, Honourable Tunde Agunbiade, his wife, two children, a driver and five other persons as well as Honourable Olaiya Fagbamigbe, a member of the National Assembly and Secretary of NPN in Ondo State who was burnt with ten members of his household (Guardian, 22 August, 1983:2,16). When the dust settled down, over 300 houses including the officer of FEDECO in Akure were destroyed (Orji and Uzodi, 2012).

In spite of the open fraud in 2003 and 2007 elections, it did not produce any significant form of violence like post-independence elections in 1964/65 and 1983. Nonetheless, the fraud that characterized the 2007 elections badly dented Nigeria’s image. This was reflected in the acknowledgement of the late former President Umaru Musa Yar’adua that election that brought him to power was full of irregularities. Fundamentally, history of election in Nigeria has remained a turbulent one. However, the 2011 presidential election was the fourth election conducted since the country’s return to democratic rule in 1999. The election was adjudged by many observers as largely credible and well organized (EU EOM, 2011). However, the violence that followed the outcome of the election was very severe in terms of magnitude and its consequences on Nigerians. Human rights watch reported that over 800 lives were lost with several properties destroyed.

**Causes of Electoral Violence**

One of the causes of electoral violence is credibility and integrity of elections. Violence often occurs when the integrity of electoral process is in doubt. This could be from partisanship of the electoral umpire and the general belief that the election was rigged and manipulated. This definitely leads to violent protest, as often happens in
Nigeria and other African countries. This is illustrated in Ethiopia experience in 2005, as delays by National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) in announcing the 2005 election results triggered public protest which culminated in several days of violence (Barne, 2006). The issue of election credulity is even more problematic in a plural society like Nigeria where ethnicity and tribes are salient in politics. Also, where irregularities prevent a candidate from clinching victory in such region, zone or community is often opposed and sometimes violent protests ensue in the entire community (Orji, 2010).

Another cause is making inflammatory rhetoric. This triggers electoral violence. Most electoral violence that had occurred in Nigeria's history particularly the 2011 electoral violence were caused by inflammatory statements and comments made by candidates and supporters of candidates. Inflammatory statements and comments triggered the post-electoral crises that occurred in neighboring African country like Kenya in 2007 and 2017 between the supporters of incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta and the opposition candidate Raila Amollo Odinga. In Nigeria several unguarded utterances were attributed to candidates while some politicians were accused of using innuendos to incite members of the public to violence (Williams, 2011). This partly triggered the electoral crises of 2011 where series of articles were published in national dailies against the then President Goodluck Jonathan particularly the one published in The African Herald Newspaper (2010:110) that titled ‘North Unites Against Jonathan as IBB, Atiku, others meet.’

Another similar factor that causes electoral violence is institutional changes. This means a sudden change of arrangement in electoral process either from the start of the election, interval or after the election could arouse
suspicion from the opposition. In fact, this was a critical reason that made opposition candidate in Kenya (Mr. Odinga) boycott the rerun election held in November, 2017. The opposition leader boycotted the election as a result of the rule changed few weeks to election proper.

Although, many factors accounted for Nigeria’s post-election violence in 2011, but it is important to emphasis that ethnic and religious division of the country coupled with the effect of the death of former President, Umaru Musa Yar’adua’s contributed immensely to the 2011 post-election violence. The death of Yar’adua created conflicting situation on whether Jonathan has moral right to seek for election after the death of his boss since the northerners had yet to finish their term based on agreed rotational formula. Thus, the emergence of Jonathan, a Christian and a minority from the southern part of the country upset some northern power brokers, particularly the then candidate Rtd. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari whose frustration can be seen having failed to reclaim the northern control of the presidency from Jonathan after series of legal battles. Thus, the violent protest that trailed former President Jonathan’s victory in 2011 was as a result of deep seated frustration of former (RTD) Gen. Muhamadu Buhari now the incumbent President.

Conclusion and Recommendations
The menace of electoral violence is pervasive in Nigeria’s electoral process with its attendant consequences of impeding peaceful coexistence and loss of lives and properties thereby jeopardizing security which is an indispensable tool for development and the essence of any government. Therefore, any government, whose intent is to transform a state or country, must as a matter of necessity, prevent and tackle violent behaviours including
electoral violence. The expositions of deprivation and frustration-aggression theories show that the politics of "must win" often result to dejectedness and frustration which in turn lead to grievances and violent behaviours, which is synonymous to party politics in Nigeria. The reactions of candidates and supporters most especially where presumed popular party or candidate lose the election transform to violence with its attendant consequences on human lives and properties. This should be prevented at the 2019 general elections. Thus, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Governments should make stringent laws aimed at curtailing electoral violence. Thus, people perpetrating electoral violence should be arrested and prosecuted, and if found guilty should be dealt with in accordance with the electoral laws. The electoral tribunals should be strengthened and empowered to effectively stem the tide of electoral violence in Nigeria.

2. People should restrain themselves from making inflammatory statements. Thus, the proposed bill on hate speech is commendable and should be passed into law, but it should not be a tool for government in persecuting political opponents.

3. Aggrieved candidates of electoral process should employ non-violent means; through appropriate courts to address their grievances. Thus, those found guilty of using violent means should be made to face the law. This would curtail electoral violence including political assassinations and deter the perpetrators of such act.

4. Political offices should be made less lucrative by slashing the jumbo salaries and entitlements attached to it. This is because the entitlements
encourage politics of “must win” which occasionally leads to electoral protest, kidnappings and assassination.

References


