ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AS A THREAT TO CONSOLIDATION OF NIGERIA’S DEMOCRACY

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Abstract
It should be emphasized that the trend of violence in Nigeria under the country’s nascent democracy is a paradox, especially when viewed from the fact that democracy and its attendant ingredients of freedom, justice, peace and good governance is supposed to curb violence in all its ramifications. However, the situations in Nigeria as available evidence reveals do not conform to this little opportunity is taken for violence. That which concerns this paper is electoral violence. Since political power is taken as an avenue to amass wealth for selfish interest rather than national, state, Local or community development, people go to any length to grab the power. As a result, peace which is a prerequisite to the survival of democracy is lacking. The paper examines electoral violence under Nigeria’s nascent democracy. It is revealed that issues such as poverty, unemployment, age-long conflicts, rigging, poor security system, lack of well defined ideology by Political parties and political intolerance are threatening the survival of Nigeria’s democracy. Unless these issues are adequately addressed, the chances that Nigeria’s nascent democracy with survive are very slim.

Key words: Violence, consolidation, democracy and electoral violence.

Introduction
Now that Nigeria has crossed the magical “three elections plus one civilian-to-civilian handover” threshold of democratic consolidation, it is time to look both backward and forward (Okechukwu; 2007) as to how the country has fared so far as a very young democracy. Democracy simplified, could be rightly articulated as a game where the theorization is the logical acceptance of the higher number of vote of the majority number of people as legitimate mandate authority over the whole in the management of government affairs. In other words, it is a game of the majority over the rest (Ogundiya; 2003). A very significant way to realize this is through a creditable free and fair election (Yunusa; 2006). Therefore election is central to the realization of the democratic objectives/institutions (Ogundiya; 2003). Election, it is important to note, are not only meant to ensure, confirm or re-affirm the legitimacy of the governors through a regular consent, but also to provide a fertile ground for democracy to thrive (Ogundiya and Baba; 2005).

However, rather than being a political asset and a legitimizing force, since independence, elections in Nigeria have become a political liability, a source of instability and decay. The various experiences with competitive electoral politics in Nigeria have brought the worst in political thuggery and brigandage, unmediated and unrestrained. Perhaps, electoral violence has
proved to be more devastating to democratic consolidation. Quite obviously, any systematic consideration of the problems and prospects of sustainable democracy in Nigeria today would need to come to terms with the challenges and dilemma of electoral violence. Right from the 1950s, elections in Nigeria has been associated with turmoil, killings, assassination and wanton destruction of properties (Ogundiya; 2003).

In fact, it was the electoral violence of 1960s that provoked the first military intervention in the government and politics of Nigeria in January, 15th 1966. Since then, election period is always dreadful. Many will even say that the fear of election is the beginning of political wisdom (Ogundiya; 2003). It is often the case that Nigerians regard election times and look to it with trepidation (Yaqub; 1999). This perhaps prompted Adekanye’s (1989) counsel that election periods in Nigeria should be declared as state of emergency and that the military should be charged with the conduct and administration of election (Ogundiya and Baba; 2005).

Though politically heretical, Adekanye’s proposition showed the gravity of the problems associated with electoral politics and the danger it poses for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The fact that, the latest series of election- 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections have also had their dosage of electoral or political warfare is a pointer to the fact that Nigeria’s democracy is in jeopardy. Since 1999 when the country returned to democracy, election-induced and politically motivated killings have remained a staple on the news in the country. High-profile politicians and their accomplices has been the target. In certain cases, electoral officers are not spared (Ogundiya and Baba; 2005) hence, peace which is a fundamental requirement for consolidation of democracy is lacking. The task of this paper therefore is to examine electoral violence in Nigeria and its threat to consolidation of democracy. To achieve this, the paper has been structured into five parts. Part 1 is the introduction. Part 2 is theoretical and conceptual clarifications. Part 3 is electoral violence under Nigeria’s nascent democracy. Part 4 is the threat of electoral violence to democratic consolidation. Part 5 is the conclusion.

**Theoretical And Conceptual Issues**

A variety of theoretical explanations are offered to conceptualize electoral violence. Prominent among these theories are the liberal and the Marxist theories of electoral violence. The latter emphasized the role of the state in use of open force in favour of the ruling classes; while the former describe electoral violence as actual or potential threat to the state. The liberal theory also explains political violence as the ‘excessive’ use of force on civilians in an attempt to ensure order (Kuna 2001).

A major obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is the lack of a common understanding shared by all concerned of the exact meaning of democracy. Democracy has never meant the same thing to those who have been using the concept let alone its consolidation. Usually, in democratization studies, classification of regime types is based on a distinction between those that are democratic and those that are not and including their levels of democratic attainment. An important step towards democratic consolidation therefore, is to ensure conceptual clarity (Ojo; 2003). Some of the oldest and most widely accepted criteria for identifying a polity as democratic have been provided by Robert Dahl (1971) to include civil and political rights, plus fair, competitive and inclusive elections. This probably explain why the semantic universe of democracy has become so large, requiring that some order be brought into it to avoid what has been acknowledge ‘as chaos of innumerable subtypes of democracy that circulate in the contemporary democratization studies’.

Violence is a multi-dimensional concept, which defies any precise definition. The concept according to Anifowose (1984) “serves as a catch-all for every variety of protest,
militant, coercion, destruction, or muscle-flexing which a given observer fears or condemns. Therefore, violence may mean the use of illegitimate or illegal means to achieve desired political or non-political goals. Violence could be an instrument employed by non-governmental organizations, individual and group to press forward their demand; it is conflict, not violence, that is the essence of a social and political life.

Violence is the unlawful use or threat of force. Violence is the exercise of physical force to inflict injury or cause damage to a person’s property. Implicit in this definition of violence are two basic issues: the use of force, and the abuse of another person’s fundamental rights. Electoral violence therefore, implies actions involving the use of force and abuse of other person’s fundamental rights before, during or after an electoral contest. Possible expressions of electoral violence include murder, arson and vandalism among others (Halloran, 1978; Albert 1994).

Electoral violence represents one of the greatest challenges of many democratizing societies. Segun Jegede (2003) endorses that there are different manifestations of electoral violence e.g. murder, arson, abduction, assault, violent seizure and destruction of electoral materials. These acts are perpetuated by individuals and groups with the intention of influencing the outcome of elections or deter elected officials from consolidating their positions after elections. Electoral violence is a form of violence that is associated with the process of elections in a given society precisely a democratic set up or in the democratic transition (Afolabi, 2003). Electoral violence particularly in Nigeria is a quintessential elite affair arising from the inordinate struggle for places in the structure of power that have often degenerated into open violence among ethno-communal groups or individuals who are deceived into believing that their interest are about to be imperiled (Ogundiya and Baba. 2003). As earlier noted, election is central to the realization of the democratic objectives institutions (Ogundiya 2003). Therefore, what is democracy?

“Democracy” is a term in every context because the good attributes of governance are believed to be encompassed in it. Even regimes that are known to be very authoritarian and dictatorial take a pride in describing themselves as democratic (Bello; 2003). Seward (1998) reflects that democracy is a political system in which the citizens themselves have an equal effective input in the making of binding and collective decisions. In other words, based on this definition democracy simply means rule by the people. Related to this is the exposition which defines democracy as “the form of government in which power is in the hands of the people collectively and is administered by them or by representatives elected by them” (NYSC, 2004). It further reveals that “democracy is a form of political system where there is popular participation by the people in governance; where the majority governs and the rights of the minority are respected” (Sambo; 2006). Some scholars, however, see democracy beyond the simple system of rule by the people. Dahl (1963), for example, see democracy as the institutional arrangement in which individuals acquire power by means of competitive struggle for people’s votes. He also defines democracy as the rule by multiple minorities.

The foregoing definitions, therefore, suggest that democracy, as a concept, does not lend itself to any universally accepted definition. What is very clear in modern practices of democracy, however, is that all its versions in different countries, as highlighted by Chafe (1994), adequately involve people in running of the political, socio-economic and cultural affairs of their societies. Which ever way it is viewed, democracy is all about openness, accountability, transparency, equality, justice and peace. Democratic consolidation is about regime maintenance including its regard for the key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to democratic rule of the game (Ogundiya
and Baba; 2005). Linz and Stephen (quoted in Zayyan, 2002) provide a tri-dimensional perspectives to the question of democratic consolidation as follows: the behavioural, the attitudinal, and the constitutional. These perspectives are expatiated thus:

**Behaviourally, democracy becomes the only game in town when no significant political opposition seriously attempts to over throw the democratic regime or to promote domestic or international violence in order to secede from the state.**

**Attitudinally, democracy becomes the only game in town when, even in the face of severe political and economic crisis the overwhelming majority of the people believe that any further political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic procedures.** Constitutionally, democracy becomes the only game in town when all the factors in the polity become habituated to the fact that political conflict within the state will be resolved according to established norms and that violation of these norms are likely to be ineffective and costly. (Zayyan:2002:pp 80)

They concluded that, with consolidation, democracy becomes regularalized and deeply internalized in social, institutional and psychological life as well as in political calculation for achieving goals. This suggests that consolidation, on the one hand, emphasizes that democracy must “make sense” to the generality of the people, and on the other, it suggests the non existence of delegitimizing challenges, such as endemic and persistent socio-political crises. Thus, democratic consolidation calls for the need of overcoming the challenges of making new “democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression and of building dams against the eventual reverse of waves”.

**Incidence Of Electoral Violence In Nigeria**

It is significant to note that, political violence associated with elections and electoral processes as in Nigeria, started with the 1959 federal elections which were designed by the British to facilitate transition from colonial rule to independence. The problem intensified with the 1964 general elections. Even before the elections were held, it was clear from the extreme positions taken by the two major alliances of political groups, i.e. Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) and United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) that no matter which one of the two groups won, the result would be hotly contested (Nwosu; 1991 and Godowoli 2003). The manipulation of electoral laws by the ruling party (NPC) resulted in the call for boycott of the elections by the opposition parties or groups. Dudley (1982:77) described the conduct of the 1964 general elections thus:

*The electoral officers were terrorized into absconding from their offices once they receive the nomination papers of governing party candidates, leaving the opposition candidates with no opportunity of registering their nomination papers. So, flagrantly was electoral procedure abused that at the close of nominations some 88 out of a total of 174 NPC candidates in the North had their candidature unopposed; in the West, about 20 percent of the NNDP candidates were supposed to have been unopposed. The situation in the East was not much different.*
Thus, as envisaged by many people including the proclaimed winners of the 1964 general elections the result was not only rejected, but the opposition especially in the Western region resorted to violence to contest what they perceived as the reverse of their mandate by the ruling NPC. The situation gave birth to arson, looting, killing, massive destruction of properties and total break down of law and order beyond the control of the central government. Consequent upon this, a state of emergency was imposed and the then prime minister declared the Western region a ‘Wild- Wild-West’. The intensity of the electoral violence recorded after the 1964 general elections affected the legitimacy of the newly constituted civilian authority and the subsequent military intervention in Nigerian politics on January 15, 1966. After prolonged military rule that lasted for thirteen years, the military resolved to hand over power to a democratically elected government in 1979. Although, Murtala Muhammed who initiated the transition to civil rule programme was assassinated in a bloody military coup on 13th February, 1976, his decision was upheld by his successor. As such arrangement was made by Obasanjo’s administration to facilitate the smooth transfer of power to civilians and the disengagement of the military from a dire politics (Ogundiyi and Baba; 2007). The 1979 constitution was drafted and the ban on politics was lifted, which saw the emergence of several political associations seeking for registration as political parties. Finally, five political parties were registered namely, National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), People Redemption Party (PRP), Nigerian People Party (NPP), and Great Nigerian People’s Party (GNPP).

The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was also established to conduct elections at various levels of government. The 1979 elections that were supervised by the military was relatively peaceful, though not violent-free in it’s entirely. Few cases of violence were recorded in some parts of the country contesting the outcome of the elections. The major issue was the question of 2/3 of 19 states which was resolved in favour of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, NPN presidential candidate, by the Supreme Court (Ogundiyi and Baba; 2007).

However, the situation was different in the 1983 elections. The 1983 elections both at national and state levels were a replica of the 1964 General elections. All forms of electoral malpractices were employed to influence the outcome of the elections. The NPN exploited all the opportunities available to it as the ruling party to manipulate political institutions and structures in its favour. This development degenerated into chaos, and mayhem in some parts of the country (Egwu; 2003). The scenario forms part of the problem that triggered military seizure of political power on 31st December, 1983 (Ogundiyi and Baba; 2007).

The return of the military was a one step forward and two steps backward in Nigeria’s democratization project. The military under the leadership of General Babangida initiated another transition to civil rule that was consistently truncated and finally aborted with the annulment of June 12 presidential election, assumed to be won by Chief M.K.O Abiola the SDP flag bearer who is of Yoruba origin. As a departure from the previous military organized elections, the annulment of the June 12 election resulted in mayhem especially in the West and reprisal attacks in some parts of the North (Lewis; 1994). The annulment threw the state into confusion, convulsion and commotion. Hence, in his speech, Ibrahim Babangida chose to “step-a-side” and handed over power to an Interim Government under the leadership of Chief Ernest Shonekan.

The Interim National Government was short-lived and General Abacha who took over power instituted another programme, a programme that never was. His death in the office brought General Abdulsalam to power. The new military leadership under General Abdulsalam
organized another election and subsequently, handed over power to a democratically elected government on May 29, 1999. Since then, the political climate has been bedevilled by political and election motivated crises (Ogundiya and Baba; 2007), some of these are shown on Table I below.

Table I: A Display Of Some Pre And Post Electoral Crises/Violence In Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/NO</th>
<th>Names of victims</th>
<th>Date killed</th>
<th>State of origin</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Mr. Sunday Ugwu</td>
<td>Sept 9, 1999</td>
<td>Enugu</td>
<td>A case of mistaken identity. The victim was an elder brother of Hon. Nwabueze. The target who is a member of Enugu state House of Assembly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Lambert Saturday Dogogo</td>
<td>April 23, 2001</td>
<td>River</td>
<td>The victim died in a fighting that broke out between ANPP and PDP supporters in Ogubolo Local Government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>James Ibori</td>
<td>Feb 4, 2001</td>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>Attacked as the governor of Delta state by hired assassins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Momoh Lawal</td>
<td>March 5, 2001</td>
<td>Kogi</td>
<td>Kogi inter-party conflict between ANPP and PDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Odunayo Olagbaju</td>
<td>Dec 21, 2001</td>
<td>Osun</td>
<td>The victim was a member of Osun State House of Assembly. His death was unofficially linked to the political intra-party crisis in the state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Chief Bola Ige</td>
<td>Dec 23, 2001</td>
<td>Osun</td>
<td>The victim was the late minister of justice. His assassination was also associated with the intra-party conflict in Osun state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Janet Olopade</td>
<td>Aug 13, 2001</td>
<td>-NA-</td>
<td>A prominent PDP leader stabbed to death by assailants, mainly youths, for preventing them from pasting poster of a chairmanship candidate on her house. This was presumably an inter-party conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Ahmed Pategi</td>
<td>Aug 15, 2002</td>
<td>Kwara</td>
<td>Kwara PDP chairman murdered along with his orderly when his car was accosted on his way to Abuja possibly due to intra-party crises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Victor Nwankwo</td>
<td>Aug 20, 2002</td>
<td>-NA-</td>
<td>The victim was the young brother of Authur Nwankwo a higher profile politician and founder of the Eastern Union Mandate (EMU).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Alhaji Isyaku Moh’d</td>
<td>Sept 25, 2002</td>
<td>-NA-</td>
<td>The Victim was Until His Death The National Vice-Chairman of United Nigerian Peoples Party (UNPP) for the North West, possibly a result of inter-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Party Clash</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Dele Arojo</td>
<td>Nov 25, 2002</td>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>The victim was the PDP’s gubernatorial aspirant for Lagos state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Unspecified number of people died from gunshot wounds</td>
<td>Jan 13, 2003</td>
<td>Oyo</td>
<td>This was an intra-party clash at the Oyo state secretariat of the ANPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Adamu Waziri</td>
<td>Jan 18, 2003</td>
<td>Yobe</td>
<td>Inter-party conflict between the rival gangs from ANPP and PDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>One person killed on Owo</td>
<td>Feb 2003</td>
<td>Ondo</td>
<td>Factional fighting in the Alliance for Democracy (AD) Party caused it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ogbonaya Uche</td>
<td>Feb 2003</td>
<td>Imo</td>
<td>He was a popular ANPP senatorial candidate, eliminated because of his popularity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Theordore A. Agwatu</td>
<td>Feb 2003</td>
<td>Imo</td>
<td>He was until his death, a Principal Secretary to the Imo State Governor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eight people died in political clashes</td>
<td>Feb 2003</td>
<td>-NA-</td>
<td>ANPP and PDP thugs engaged themselves in a battle for supremacy in Jato-Aka, Kwande LGA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mrs. Emily Omope</td>
<td>Feb 2003</td>
<td>-NA-</td>
<td>Her death was as a result of Acid poured on her in Dec. 2002. She belonged to Alliance for democracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Marshall Harry</td>
<td>March 5, 2003</td>
<td>Abuja(FCT)</td>
<td>The victim started as a PDP stalwart and later decamped to the ANPP. He was the south-south coordinator of the presidential campaign in Abuja. His death was said to be politically motivated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>20 houses burnt to ashes</td>
<td>March 12, 2003</td>
<td>Kebbi</td>
<td>It was as a result of fracas between ANPP and PDP supporters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>One person killed and several others wounded including two commissioner in Obubra Cross River State.</td>
<td>March 20, 2003</td>
<td>Cross River</td>
<td>Inter-party clashes and several other gubernatorial candidate supporters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Moshood Gidado and Ibrahim rasak</td>
<td>March 21, 2003</td>
<td>Kwara</td>
<td>Inter-party clashes between the supporters of PDP and ANPP gubernatorial aspirants Mohammed Lawal (ANPP) and Bukola Saraki (PDP).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Chuba Okadigbo</td>
<td>Sept 25, 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chuba Okadigbo was the running mate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Event Details</td>
</tr>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Dikibo</td>
<td>Feb 6, 2004</td>
<td>Kano</td>
<td>His death was linked to a tear gas spray in his car by the police at an ANPP rally in Kano on 23rd Sept 2003. The ruling party was accused of using the police to terminate his life. PDP denied this allegation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Mr. Luke Shigaba</td>
<td>March 4, 2004</td>
<td>Kogi</td>
<td>He was the Vice Chairman of PDP south-south zone. There were counter-claims as some believe that he died from armed robbers attack while some believe, he was killed by hired assassins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Attack on George Akume</td>
<td>March 4, 2004</td>
<td>Delta State</td>
<td>George Akume was the governor of Benue State. His convoy was going to Abuja. One person lost his life in the attacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Philip Olorunipa</td>
<td>March 7, 2004</td>
<td>Kogi</td>
<td>He was until his death Chairman Kogi State Electoral Commission.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above table is a graphic of the cases of pre and post electoral violence in Nigeria. It is significant to note however, that quite a number do not usually get reported either to the police or in the press: although this is not to say that such cases might have been less violence (Yaqub; 2003).

Buttressing the above, Human Rights Watch (2011) statistics showed that at least 300 people were killed in violence linked to general election in 2007, more than three times the numbers killed in 2003 election violence.

In the area of electoral justice, the manipulation and fraud, where election riggers forcefully snatched away or hijacked ballot boxes with the cooperation of electoral officials was more rampant and evident in the 1983, 1999 and 2007 elections than that of 2011 election compared with the cavalier manner with which hired thugs of political parties perpetrated electoral fraud in previous elections, particularly in 1983, 2003 and 2007. During these elections, party members collaborated with INEC officials to commit electoral injustice in different ways and manner to the extent that the exercise was merely a sham and a ruse (Ejumudo, 2010).

As far as election management is concerned, there were cases of alleged electoral malpractices and manipulation in different parts of the country during the 2011 elections as evident in under-age voting, ballot box snatching and stuffing and over balloting (vanguard 2011). All the same, while the elections were also rigged and the voting process compromised in
some cases across the country with the consent and assistance of electoral officers and security agents, the elections considerably met the criteria of fairness and transparency (Ejumudo, 2013). Yet, not devoid of all these crises, the 2011, was an improvement on previous elections in Nigeria. Similarly, there were such cases during the 2015 elections noticeably “inconclusive” the 2015 elections is an improvement on the 1983, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections in Nigeria in terms of freeness and fairness.

One important thing to note is that, electoral violence in recent times is not similar to the pre-1999 period; indeed, the extent and dimensions have changed fundamentally. In terms of the instruments and strategy of the various assassination and attacks, the perpetrators have displayed a high level of sophistication. This is not unconnected with the country’s experience with military dictatorial rule from 1983 to 1993. During this period, many Nigerian Youths had access to sophisticated weapons and ammunitions. The porosity of the Nigerian borders further worsened the situation. In short, electoral legacies bequeathed to Nigerians by the prolonged military rule (Ogundiya and Baba; 2007).

An observation of the current electoral violence, also reveals that they are products of aggravated provocations i.e. they could be seen as the extension or carry over of the deep-seated and age-long conflicts between or among individuals, families and communities. Hostile groups or communities are always likely to fall apart at the return of electoral politics after long military dictatorship. A probe of electoral violence in Nigeria by the Human Rights Watch (2004) reveals that, inter and intra imbroglios between and among the political parties and their supporters emanated from either previous dispute over land matters, chieftaincy titles and other personality clashes. The case between the PDP and ANPP supporters in Ogu/Bolo local government area reveals that rivalries and chieftaincy disputes translated not only into political violence but also into electoral violence. The situation in Ogu/Bolo is also true of other areas where pre and post electoral violence have been accused in Nigeria. However, we also need to observe that electoral violence was more pronounced few months before and after the election. The source of worry however, is that this has continued unabated.

Ten years (a decade) of Nigeria’s return to civil rule, for instance, politically motivated killings have continued to haunt Nigeria’s democratic project. In this and other related crises, thousands of Nigerians have lost their lives. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced, while properties worth billions of Naira have been destroyed. In short, the political climate has been very hostile and unstable. Intra and inter-party conflicts, lawlessness and the devastating influence of godfatherism have continue to pose serious challenges to the consolidation of the country’s democracy.

Since May 29, 1999 that the military handed over power to a democratically elected government, political climate has been bedeviled by political and election motivated crisis. The threat of this for the consolidation of Nigeria’s nascent democracy is discussed in the next part.

Electoral violence and consolidation of nigeria nascent Democracy

What is relevant to our analysis is the implication of the seemingly “unstoppable” electoral violence for the country’s nascent democracy. The chances that Nigeria’s democracy will flourish are undoubtedly becoming slimmer and slimmer each day. This is because democratic stability cannot be super imposed or predicated on a shaky, unstable and unpredictable crises ridden, social and political environment. The crisis has altered the affection of an average Nigerian towards the state, including the belief in the capacity of the state to protect lives and property. Therefore, these crises have not only affected the legitimacy of the
incumbent political leaders, but also the citizens’ affection or belief in democracy as a suitable model of government (Ogundiyia and Baba; 2005).

Though conflict is seen as the essence of social and political life and democracy allows for competition among the various ideologically differentiated groups in the society, but when conflict becomes endemic, persistent and insolvent and there is no adequate institutional mechanism to overcome or perhaps reduce it to manageable level, democracy becomes an illusion. Therefore, a genuinely consolidated democracy is perhaps best judged to be one, not only in which the alternation of parties in power is regular and accepted but the one that build up, preserve or sustain a vibrant institution for conflict resolution. The situation in Nigeria since 1999 depicts nothing but gross institutional decay, on the part of the electoral organs of the state. The civil society which would have been the alternative sources of institutional revitalization, is less developed and has become relatively inactive after its struggle for democratization (Ogundiyia and Baba; 2005).

In Nigeria today, it is glaring that, a section of the electorate sell their votes, conscience and rights for a pot of porridge, cubes of sugar, bags of rice etc leading to the election of corrupt and arrogant politicians who neither have respect for rule of law or genuine desire for sustenance of democracy.

Conclusion

The paper’s concern is the elimination of the threat that electoral violence pose to the consolidation of Nigeria’s nascent democracy; it has examined concepts like violence, electoral violence, democracy and democratic consolidation. It is revealed that issues like poverty, rigging, poor electoral administration, ethnicity, religious sentiment, poor security system during elections, political intolerance, lack of well defined ideology by political parties and chronic economic crisis - all contribute to electoral violence. The threats of these for the consolidation of Nigeria’s democracy are loss of faith in the Nigerian state. It is therefore suggested that:

For democracy to thrive and for Nigeria to continue to enjoy international legitimacy, the value orientation of the political elite must change. The ideological and philosophical bases of our political parties rooted in ethnicity and religious sentiments must be altered positively and the psychologically non-transiting individuals must be adequately mobilized for the sustenance of the country’s hand won democracy. Election must no longer be seen as the end of everything. While the majority always have their way, the right of the minority must be protected (Ogundiyia and Baba; 2005).

While democracy is not a definite state of affairs, it must be protected, won and preserved. The preservation and consolidation of democracy though, demands a multi-dimensional approach economic, social, political and psychological, require a crisis-free social and political environment. Electoral violence, when it persists, portends ills for democracy (Ogundiyia and Baba; 2005).

Democracy creates the room for vibrant opposition and competition. But for Nigerians to consolidate this democracy, political hurdles, landmines, killings, assassinations, political witch-hunting and other unconventional means must not be deliberately planted against the opposition.

Democracy is about freedom. But the leaders should understand with the fear of God that, the freedom to starve the citizens to death is an abuse of human dignity. A very strong way to stop electoral violence and sustain Nigeria’s nascent democracy therefore is that, there should be more to the Nigerian citizenship than the mere accident of being born in the geographical area
called Nigeria. Nigerians, both the leaders and the led, have to learn from their past experiences. The history of the people is the future of the people and the future people is the secret of survival. The crow of the cock is the harbinger of dawn. All hands must be on deck. The civil societies and other non governmental organizations have a critical role to play to consolidate or preserve our nascent democracy (Ogundiya; 2003).

Democracy, capable of guaranteeing not only freedom but addressing the overwhelming material poverty of the people, is needed. The nature and the process of state formation in Nigeria demands a type of democracy that could address the problems of uneven development between the various regions of the federation; guarantee individual and group liberty and allow unfettered access to power and resources.

We need a type of democracy, which promotes the equality of all the socio-linguistic groups irrespective of their sizes. Any government, democratic or not that runs contrary to this or pretends that these issues are not important, is moribund; such a government or democracy can never be sustained. If we truly want to consolidate our democracy, we must view democracy as a vital element of the humanization process. In this case, the way in which we should account to each other, to express our human needs and thus best achieve a full realization of the human task in the interest of our present democracy and the people, is crucial.

Clearly, the consolidation of democracy is also dependent on the strength and maturity of political parties. In situation where there is absence of strong, mass based political parties, it has been easier for undemocratic forces to impose their wills on the rest of the society. In addition, parties that are not rooted in the ideology that is informed by the plight and concerns of poor people are unable to respond to the challenge of underdevelopment and poverty. This failure must surely lead to the betrayal of the interests of the people, the elevation of those of the elite and therefore a resort to repression to suppress the dissatisfied masses of the people and to lead them away from recognition of their true interests.

It is important, therefore, that as we consolidate our democracy and use it as necessary platform for the acceleration of development, the progressive movement should ensure that the orientation of our parties is informed by the need to empower the masses of our people so that they themselves can lead the renaissance of democracy in Nigeria.

While we applaud the efforts at electoral reforms made by the Federal Government as necessary steps towards entrenchment of democratic culture in the country, we should not lose sight of other fundamental elements like the rule law, multi-parties system and level playing ground for all political parties. For a free and fair election, there must be a credible and an all inclusive voter’s register, availability of adequate election materials at the right time, use of well trained motivated election officials and observation of transparency at all stages of elections. Let there be justice, equity and fairness in the conduct of elections in Nigeria (Gaidam, 2010).

As we move towards the registration of voters, all efforts must be made to make it free from fraud and avoid attempts by politicians to hijack the process. INEC must maintain its independence and deter its officials from becoming errand boys of politicians. The security agencies must be closely monitored; and reports submitted by whistle blowers and party agents be fully investigated, and if upheld, prompt action be taken to rectify any anomaly observed in the exercise.

INEC must get it right and should employ all lawful means to ensure that it succeeds. Nigerians are tired of vote riggers and election cheats, and if the agency truly identifies with the wishes of Nigerians, the people are willing to support the agency and make sacrifices. However, the only problem INEC might face is from the other governmental departments and security
personnel who do not take orders from agency and are usually the veritable tools, used to stifle elections.

Finally, the challenge to our intelligentsia, and indeed to all of us is, therefore, to ensure that ideas, concepts and hopes of our people are not distorted because the very act of distortion is a threat to our democracy.

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