

# Implications of Political and Electoral Violence in Southeastern Nigeria

**Agbegbedia Oghenevwoke Anthony**

*Peace and Conflict Studies Programme, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.*

*Since the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates, political violence and problem of ethnic nationalism have found their way into the nation's polity. Conservative politics became so desperate mostly in the Southeastern part of Nigeria, following the destruction of the Eastern bloc during the 1966-1970 civil wars, which erupted in the country. These struggles have great impacts on the political, socio-cultural and economic aspects of the nation. In a number of well-publicized instances, the loss of ethnic identity and related armed violence have required state interventions to attempt to halt these political violence. This work explores what political and electoral violence is all about, and discusses history of political violence in Nigeria but in particular reference to the Southeastern zone. It states that, Igbo nationalism could be traced to the pre-colonial era, but has changed in structure and function. Though, politics and nationalism are regarded as being complex and ambiguous, they remain a challenge to the development of democracy in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Politics, Electoral violence, southeastern

## Introduction

Elections and electoral practices shape the fate of the modern nation state. This is because, elections provide the means by which the different interest groups within the given state can stake and resolve the claims to authority, through peaceful means. Thus, elections act as the yardstick for changes taking place in the state. However, in a situation whereby this method fails, individuals and groups may be abandoned to their fate—including assassination, *coup d'états*, revolutions, insurgency to mention but a few, to obtain their claim to power. It is this reason more than anything else, that makes the subject of elections and political violence in Nigeria in general, and the southeast in particular, so crucial today. Historically, the controversial elections of 1965 partly led to the first *coup d'état* in the country on January 15<sup>th</sup> 1966. Again, the flawed elections of 1983 produced another military *coup* of December 31<sup>st</sup> 1983. Above all, Babangida's flawed and annulled elections of 1993 gave room for the Abacha's palace

*coup* and also paved the way to his memorable dictatorship.

As we look forward to the 2015 general elections against the background of the flawed elections of 1999, 2003/2004, 2007 and 2011, the question naturally arises as to whether the country can be known worldwide to conduct free, fair and credible elections that will enable us survive as a nation. In view of this, General (rtd) Muhammadu Buhari has threatened that, if the election of 2015 is rigged or he loses again, there will be a resort to violence. According to him, the dog and baboon will all be soaked in blood. He made this belligerent declaration simply because he lost at the 2003 polls and went up to the Supreme Court to contest the election of Obasanjo Olusegun for a second term where he lost the judicial battle. He contested in 2007, lost to late Umar Yar'Adua, and sought a judicial intervention because he believed the



election was rigged. Again, for the second time, he lost in the Supreme Court. Then came the last election (2011) where he contested under the umbrella of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) having lost twice under All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), lost again and went up to the Supreme Court and lost.

The objective of this work is to discuss how political and electoral violence have been carried out in the southeastern region of the country and its effects on the region. For us to answer these questions, issues such as political party, violence and political violence *cum* ethnic nationalism in the southeastern part of the country will be the main point of this discussion. The paper suggests ways of avoiding such violence not only in the southeastern region, but in the entire country.

### Political Party

It is a truism that no elections can take place without political parties, since political parties are the major actors in every political system. They are seen as the organizations through which people take actions. According to Key (1961: 433)<sup>1</sup>, political parties are the basic institutions for the translation of mass preference into public policy. Richard Rose (1974)<sup>2</sup> concurred to the above when he stated that, political party is an organization concerned with the expression of popular preference and contesting control of the policy-making offices of government. For Schlesinger (1976)<sup>3</sup>, it is an organization which goal is to capture public office in electoral competition. The necessary characteristics of what political party is could be deduced. First is the existence of a group. Secondly, this group is an organized one, and lastly, the objective of the group is to control political power. Being a group implies that, it is a body with clear identity, fully registered and recognized members. It is also organized into various levels of authority (Ujo, 2000: 11-12)<sup>4</sup>. Political parties play vital roles in any democracy as they serve as mobilization agencies, give people with political ambitions a sense of reason and direction, and recruit people for various positions. In essence, they are intermediaries between the people and the government (Ujo, 2000: 15-17)<sup>5</sup>. It is also the role of the political parties to educate the electorate and spread political awareness about important public issues. They

help to ensure that the electorates observe electoral rules, regulations and constitutional provisions. The citizens are given the opportunity to participate in the management of national affairs. Political parties also act as means for national integration as people are brought together from different nationalities or ethnic groups to work for national interests as opposed to regional or parochial interests (Nwolise, 1988:35)<sup>6</sup>. Although, this ought to be the case, but it has not always been, because, some parties are basically formed to protect sectoral, national or ethnic interests. It, however, becomes problematic when all parties are founded with the sole aim of protecting sectional interests, as the case has been in Nigeria, such as Action Group (AG) in the West, NPC in the North and NCNC in the East.

Oyediran (1990: 105)<sup>7</sup> opines that, Nigerian political parties were moulded in an ethnic cast for the sole reason of sharing 'political goodies' and not creating them. This characteristic of political parties in Nigeria has deprived them from being avenues for national integration. However, political parties in Nigeria are regarded as serving ethnic interests; they as well serve the interests of the elite within the group. No wonder Osaghae referred to them as 'expression of the political ambitions of individual politicians' (Osaghae, 1999: 122)<sup>8</sup>. Thus, instead of voicing the opinions of the whole group, it only voices the opinions and interests of the elite to gain support for their interest. Despite these limitations, political parties in Nigeria still give the citizens the opportunity of exercising their freedom of association and interactions among themselves.

### Violence

It is a concept that has been defined in different ways by several scholars. Wolf defines it as the illegitimate or unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will of others (Wolf, 1969).<sup>9</sup> Audi (1971: 72-73)<sup>10</sup> succumbed to the fact that violence is the unjustified use of force. Tamuno (1991; 93)<sup>11</sup> concurred that violence is an unlawful use or threat of force. Anifowose's view is not different from the above as he stated that it is an illegal use of force (Anifowose, 1982: 3)<sup>12</sup>. He agreed with Weber who sees the state

<sup>1</sup> Key, V. O. 1961, *Public opinion and American Democracy*. New York, Alfred Knopf. p. 433.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Rose, 1974, *The problem of party government*. London, Macmillan.

<sup>3</sup> Schlesinger, J. A. 1976, *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*. London, Macmillan.

<sup>4</sup> Ujo, A. A. 2000, *Understanding Political Parties in Nigeria*. Kaduna, Namidan books. p 11-12

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p 15-17

<sup>6</sup> Nwolise, O. B. C., 1988, "Political parties and electoral process" in Soremekun and Ayeni (eds), *Nigeria's 2<sup>nd</sup> republic: Presidentialism, politics and administration in a developing state*. Lagos, Daily Times Publication. p35

<sup>7</sup> Oyediran, O., 1990, "The present and future election in Nigeria" in Adele and Tony (eds). *The 1987-1988 local government election in Nigeria*. Vol. 1 p105.

as the exclusive source of the right to use of violence. However, the government, which sole duty, is to protect the state and its citizen often relies on force and violence, which they justified. Nevertheless, this is not always true since law enforcement agents could easily exploit the states monopoly of violence to violate a person's right, their use of force is backed up by the state.

Contrary to the above definitions, Englander (1999: 2-3)<sup>13</sup> regards violence as aggressive behaviour with the intent to cause harm being physical or psychological. For her, the word 'intent' is the major word within this definition. Thus, harm occurring by accident does not qualify to be called violence. In essence, force used on an individual with intent to violate the person's right or will is what he defines as violence. The above definitions of violence show that violence involves the use of force and could therefore, be demonstrated as a physical, psychological or structural act. Moreover, if such situation is not contained at the latent stage, it could lead to political violence. What then is political violence?

### **POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

From the above few definitions of violence, one will agree that violence is a common means used by people and governments all over the world, to achieve political goals. Most individuals and groups believe that, their political systems will never respond to their political demands. Therefore, they believe that violence is not only justified, but also, necessary for them to achieve their political motives. Besides, many governments around the world believe they need to use violence to intimidate their populace into acquiescence. According to EdCairns (1996:11)<sup>14</sup>, political violence involves all acts of an inter group nature, which are seen by those on both sides or one side, to constitute violence behaviour carried out, in order to influence power relations between the two sets of participants. In line with the above, Hoffmann and McKendrick (1991:14)<sup>15</sup> define it as acts of destruction that impact on power relations in society. Anifowose opines that, for violence to be considered as political, it must be carried out with the intention

of affecting the political process. In essence, violence, particularly political violence, represents a disturbance to the political equilibrium of a state, a break down of its political system. In asserting this, Ted Robert (1970: 1-2)<sup>16</sup> states that political violence refers to all collective attacks, within a political community against the political regime, its actors including competing political groups, as well as incumbents or its policies.

It could be deduced from the above definitions of political violence that, it is a violence carried out with a specific aim, to cause changes in the political system or change power relations. The intent could also be within a specific context such as, a social structure. This could involve riots, assassinations, assaults, kidnapping and all other violent actions carried out with political intentions.

### **ELECTORAL VIOLENCE**

This could be defined as, that form of violence, which is related to issues of electoral contestations. This form of violence may take place before, during or after elections within a social environment. Hence, conflict as incompatibility of positions, interests or goals is in-built into the idea of elections. Drawing conclusion on the relationship between the election process and violence during the presidential retreat on the electoral process and violence, held at the international conference center, Abuja, on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002, Angelini argued that, conflict is another synonym for electors. She opined that, elections by their very nature are conflictual; their underlying premise is a contest for power (Angelini, 2002: 1).<sup>17</sup> She went further to pose a number of questions, which sought to draw out the essence of electoral contests. According to her:

*If competing ideas and interests are not at the heart of an electoral contest...if the choice of one candidate or the other and thereby, the result of the election were irrelevant, what would be the point in holding the contest in the first place? At best, it would be an exercise in futility (Angelini, 2002: 1)<sup>18</sup>.*

<sup>3</sup> Osaghae, E. 1999. *Democracy and national cohesion in multiethnic African states: South Africa and Nigeria compared. Nations and nationalism*. 5(2) p 122.

<sup>4</sup> Wolf R. 1969. "On violence" *Journal of Philosophy*, 16(19).

<sup>5</sup> Audi, R. 1971. "On the meaning and justification of violence" in Jerome A (ed) *Violence*. New York. David Mackay co. inc. p 72-73.

<sup>6</sup> Tamuno, T. 1991. *Peace and violence in Nigeria conflict resolution in society and state*. Lagos, F.G Press. p. 93

<sup>1</sup> Anifowose, R. 1982. *Violence and politics in Nigeria: the Tiv and Yoruba experience*. Enugu, Nok Publishers. p 3

<sup>2</sup> Englander, E. 1999. *Understanding violence*. Mahwah, L Erlbaum and Associates. p 2-3

<sup>3</sup> Edcains, 1996. *Children and political violence*. Oxford Blackwell Publishers Ltd. p 11.

<sup>4</sup> Hoffman and McKendrick, 1991. "The nature of violence" in B.W McKendrick and Hoffman (eds) *People and violence in South Africa*. Cape town, Oxford University press. p 14

<sup>1</sup> Ted, R. 1970. *Why men rebel*. Princeton, Princeton University press. p 1-2.

Free competition of ideas in order to win the hearts and support of the electorates, is all what elections entail. The actors differ in terms of their worldviews, plans and their programmes do not usually reflect much agreement on priorities. This divergence in programmes and plans of the different political actors competing for the same political space, determines the choices that the electorate make on who represents or governs them. The attempt to manipulate this process is what results to violence on the part of some failed political actors.

### Brief History of Political/Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Without mincing words, the people of Nigeria were living under various political groups and systems, with different degrees of sophistication in terms of organization, before the arrival of the British colonialists. In essence, empires, emirates and well organized kingdoms were already in existence before the imposition of colonialism. There were also, multifarious proliferation of principalities, small chiefdoms and village republics dotted all over what is now known as 'Nigeria'. Indeed, the country (Nigeria) is the creation of colonial Britain, deriving her name from the two great Rivers of Niger and Benue. The country covers a geographical area populated by people of several ethnic nationalities as aptly recorded by Human Rights Watch 2003: 1<sup>19</sup>, Lloyd, 1970: 1<sup>20</sup> and Ikejiani, 2002: 629<sup>21</sup>. Since the country gained independence in 1960, competition for both political and economic power has been fervent and heavily moved towards ethnic lines, with the various nationalities employing ethnic patronages to its own gains.

It is interesting to note that, the conduct of all the post independence elections at local, regional and federal levels, have followed the same format. The organization of all the elections were entrusted to an ostensibly neutral commission, whose name but not structure and functions, have varied from one regime to another. The first of such commissions was the electoral commission that conducted the federal as well as regional elections in the early sixties. Three sets of elections were held in the period 1960 to 1965. These

were the elections in the Midwest Region in February 1964, the Federal elections of December 1964 and the Regional elections of 1965. The prelude to the December 1964 Federal elections was provided by the census exercise and the creeping crisis in the Western Region from 1962 onwards. The census results released in March 1961 had shown that, the South had a higher population than the North. As the time of the Federal elections approached, the Balewa NPC government not only cancelled the 1961 census results, but also, slated a recount for 1963. Then, just before the elections in 1964, the new census results were released. The results declared that the North had 55% of the population of the country.

The October 1965 elections into the Regional Government of the West were so ridiculous that the people clearly rejected the Akintola government at the polls, and voted massively for the AG opposition party. However, the Akintola government publicly interfered with the results of the elections. In many cases, AG candidates who held certificates that they were duly elected in their constituencies, later heard their names mentioned as defeated candidates through governmental news media" (Ademoyega, 1981:21-22 cited by **Iyayi**)<sup>22</sup>. There was therefore, a wide orgy of arson, assassinations and eventually total breakdown of law and order in the region after the election. The insecurity of lives and properties in the region, as well as the de-legitimation of the authority of the federal government due to the acrimony and distrust generated by the 1964 election, provided the excuse for the military take over in January 1966 (Egwu, 2003: 181-183)<sup>23</sup>. This according to Chuba Ezeh (2009: 532)<sup>24</sup> indeed represented a chequered history of one of the democratic outings by Nigeria immediately after her independence.

After thirteen years of military rule between 1966 and 1979, other democratic activities resumed which threw the country into a syndrome of party formation with strong ethnic flavours, but minimal national consciousness. The target date was 1979 and five political parties were cleared and registered by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) to

<sup>2</sup> Angelini, M, 2002, *Election process and violence* Remarks by Country Director. International Republican Institute (IRI) at the Presidential Retreat on electoral process. p. 1

<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2003, p1

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd, C, 1970, "The ethnic background to the Nigerian crisis" in Panter Brick SK (eds) *Nigerian Politics and Military rule prelude to the civil war*. London, Athlone press. p 1

<sup>4</sup> Ikejiani, M, 2002, "The Igbo in contemporary Nigeria" in G. E. K Ofomata (ed). *A survey of the Igbo nation*. Onitsha, Africana First Publishers. p 629.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p21-22

<sup>2</sup> Egwu, S, 2003, "Challenges of democratic consolidation: the role of civil society" in Birsh Olasopu (ed) *Electoral violence in Nigeria: Issues and perspectives*. Lagos, Franked publisher Ltd. p 181-183.

<sup>3</sup> Chuba, E, 2009, p 532.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

contest for the elections. The registered political parties were The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) with Alhaji Shehu Shagari as its flag bearer. Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) whose flag bearer was late chief Obafemi Awolowo. Nigeria's Peoples Party (NPP) with late chief Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as its flag bearer. Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP) with Waziri Ibrahim as its flag bearer and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) having late Alhaji Abubakar Rimi as its flag bearer. Between July and August 1979, elections were conducted into the various political positions including that of the executive president (Chuba, 2009: 536-537)<sup>25</sup>. The formation of these parties indicates that, ethnicity was a critical yardstick for party followership and allegiance, thereby denying the country the benefits of unified, cohesive and true political parties with national outlook.

Within a short time after the election, series of crisis overwhelmed the nascent democracy. The crises were in diverse forms ranging from breakdown of the accord between the NPN and NPP. The NPN and PRP crisis in Kaduna state which led to the impeachment of the then governor of the state, Balarabe Musa. The intra-party wrangling within the PRP itself and within the GNPP to the various levels of misunderstanding between the UPN on one hand and PRP and GNPP on the other. The various crises began yet another spiral of realignment, which led to the emergence of primordial and clientlist leadership that fell short of forming a full political alliance for subsequent elections (Adeyinka, 2003: 108)<sup>26</sup>.

However, on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1983, the military struck, thereby ending the life span of the second republic and Shagari's government that was only three months old into its second tenure. Their reasons for intervention was the notable lapses which arose from the elections, through massive rigging and killings during the elections, worsening economic condition, corruption and the general ineptitude of the Shagari's administration, coupled with rising mass unemployment and political instability. Major General Muhammadu Buhari became the new military head of state with the late Tunde Idiagbon as his second in command. Nevertheless, this regime was

overthrown through a palace coup, by Major General Ibrahim Babangida in 1985, who later initiated transition programme in 1993. The political parties were certified to contest the election by INEC namely; The Social Democratic Party (PDP) with late chief Moshood Abiola as its flag bearer and the National Republic Convention (NRC) having Alhaji Tofa as its presidential candidate. The elections were actually held and regarded as, the most credible, fairest and freest elections the country ever had since independence, by different international monitoring bodies; but the military government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida annulled it. The annulment became a source of worry to many, especially against the backdrop that it was adjudged as the fairest democratic opportunities the country ever had. This annulment threw the country into political crisis that forced Babangida to step 'aside' on the 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1993, handing over power to Chief Shonekan to run an interim government. Thus it was public knowledge that Professor Henry Nwosu, who was the electoral agent, was brutalized by security agents on account of the fact that he dared in 1993, to announce some of the authentic results. In 1993 as in 1999, the political parties were the creatures of the military despots. They were, as the late Chief Bola Ige characterized them, "all leprous fingers on the same leprous hand" (Iyayi, 2004)<sup>27</sup>.

Between 1994 and 1998, General Sani Abacha reinforced military rule. In spite of claims that he was preparing for return to civilian government, he replaced elected legislatures with military appointees ([www.photius.com](http://www.photius.com) retrieved August 17<sup>th</sup> 2010)<sup>28</sup>. Abacha lifted the ban on political activities that he himself imposed, but he imprisoned M.K.O Abiola and obstructed the formation of legitimate political parties. His abrupt death was followed by Abiola's death in prison. In 1999, however, another democratic transition took place in the country through General Abdusalam Abubakar, and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was elected as the democratic president of the country with Alhaji Abubaka Atiku as his vice, thus began the fourth

<sup>25</sup> Adeyinka, B. 2003, "Political violence and democratization in Nigeria: An overview" in Birsh Olasupo (ed) *Electoral violence in Nigeria: Issues and perspectives*. Lagos, Franked Publishers Ltd. p 108

<sup>26</sup> Iyayi, F. 2004, *The conduct of elections and electoral practices in Nigeria*. A paper delivered at the NBA conference in Abuja on 24 August.

<sup>27</sup> [www.photius.com/country/nigeria/government](http://www.photius.com/country/nigeria/government), retrieved August 17<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Report by the Transition Monitoring Group 2003.

<sup>1</sup> Ologbenla, 2003, "Political instability conflicts and the 2003 general elections" in Anifowose, R et al (eds) *General elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria*. Lagos, Franked Pub. p 79

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p 80.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p 84.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p 85.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

republic, which was characterized by political thuggery, intimidation and violence.

In 2003 and 2004 respectively, elections (local, state and federal) were conducted under the Obasanjo government. These elections (including the various party primaries) would go down in history, as the most fraudulent and equal only to a *coup d'etat* against the people. All commentaries on these elections, except those from the PDP government in power, are unanimous in their verdict that all aspects of the elections were fraudulent. The following excerpts from the Report by the Transition Monitoring Group are indicative of the general texture of the 2003 elections:

*“...Twenty-nine of the registered political parties that either contested or did not contest the elections have variously rejected the results as announced by the INEC declaring the results as fraudulent. Both Domestic and International Election Observers documented massive irregularities that characterized the elections and refused to endorse the elections as free and fair. Some political parties and their candidates decided to challenge some of the results before the various Election Petition tribunals, and have gone ahead to do so, while others declared “mass action” to pressure a government without popular mandate to abdicate power.”<sup>29</sup>*

It is self evident that elements within the political class and the different political parties, drawing from their experiences during the 1998 voters registration process, perfected the art of rigging the 2003 elections. The full import of their actions dawned on the country, when INEC on its own, excluded millions of names from the voters register. From the report of Domestic election Observers during the 2003 elections, there are so many voters' cards that are still in the hands of “ghost” and underage voters (Report by the Transition

Monitoring Group, 2003). Those who sought to corrupt the electoral process used those cards effectively and to their advantage during the three strands of elections conducted by INEC. In 2007, Obasanjo handed over to late Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua with Goodluck Jonathan as his vice. Unfortunately, Yar'Adua died in May 2010 creating the room for his vice, Jonathan to take over the mantle of leadership. This platform created the opportunity for him to contest and eventually won the 2011 presidential election, thus, making him the incumbent President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

### ***Political Violence in Southeastern Nigeria***

The South East region is one of the six geo-political zones in the country and often equate with the South-South zone or the Niger delta region. It is highly populated by the *Ibo* speaking ethnic group, one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Political violence in Southeastern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general, started as a result of fierce political competition during the colonial period. It expanded and became widespread in the postcolonial period to the extent that, it contributed among other factors, to the fall of at least, two democratic dispensations in postcolonial Nigeria. The phenomenon originally began in the old western region of the country. A combination of ethnic politics and stiff competition for political power among political parties, contributed to the emergence and escalation of election violence across the country in 1952, 1959, 1964, 1965, 1983, 2003, 2007 and even 2011 elections. Prior to the 1952 elections in the western region, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) political party, which was founded by Herbert Macaulay with Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as its first secretary general, was the most popular political party in the western region. The emergence of Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group (AG), which rode on ethnic sentiments, reduced the support base of NCNC and eventually, forced Nnamdi Azikiwe to retreat into his ethnic area in the eastern region, to expand his political support. This trend sparked violent competition during elections between the supporters of the NCNC and AG, and each side resorted to the

<sup>29</sup> WANEP, 2007. *Policy brief, election barometers. Nigeria April 2007 Polls: Preparedness, stakes and threats*

<sup>1</sup> Onuoha, B, 2003, “A comparative analysis of general elections” in Tunde Babawale et al (eds) *2003 general elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria*. Lagos, Frankard publishers. p.4655

<sup>2</sup> Nwankwo, A, 1987. *The military option to democracy*. Enugu, Fourth dimension publishing Co.ltd.

<sup>3</sup> Malu and Ogbu, 2006, “Introduction” in Malu and Ogbu (eds) 2006, *Enforcement of electoral laws and reduction of electoral violence*, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Albert, I. O, 2007, “Reconceptualising electoral violence in Nigeria” in Albert et al (eds) 2007. *Perspectives on the 2003 elections in Nigeria*. Abuja, IDASA-Nigeria.

<sup>5</sup> Uroh, C. O, “Indigenous Igbo political philosophy and the quest for political legitimacy in African” In Vaughan, O (ed) 2004 *Indigenous political structures and governance in Nigeria*. Ibadan, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Uroh, C. O, 2004, “Indigenous Igbo political philosophy and the quest for political legitimacy in African” In Vaughan, O (ed) *Indigenous political structures and governance in Nigeria*. p.276

use of thugs and other violent means during the elections, to indulge in ballot box snatching, intimidation of political opponents and other unwholesome violent activities. This preceded the Nigeria civil war.

During the three years (1967-1970) of Civil War, necessity gave birth to invention as Biafrans built bombs, built rockets, designed and built their own delivery systems. They guided their rockets, guided them far, and guided them accurately. For three years, they blockaded without hope of imports, they maintained engines, machines, and technical equipment. The state as well as individuals extracted and refined petrol in their backyard gardens, built and maintained airports, maintained them under heavy bombardment. They spoke to the world through a telecommunications system engineered by local ingenuity. The world heard them and spoke back to them. They built armoured cars and tanks. They modified aircraft from trainer to fighters, from passenger aircraft to bombers. In three years of freedom, they were able to break technological barrier. In three years, they became the most civilized; the most technologically advanced black people on earth. The region presents a classic case of the manifestation of ethno-nationalism in Nigeria. The same thing is applicable to the Niger-delta region today. The region, since the dawn of the fourth republic democracy, has witnessed intensified agitations for resource control and increased militia activities.

The old Southeast of Nigeria now polarized as South-South and South-Eas has not known peace since the country gained independence in 1960. The group called the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) were said to stage a long walk protest from all the crannies of South east of Nigeria, to celebrate its independence remembrance day in Enugu on the 30th May 2008. The walk, which started on May 20, recorded hiccups as well as success. The success was that, the fearless group carried out the protest they have been announcing for a long period, without the Nigerian government paying heed to the people's clarion calls. The Nigerian security agents staged a vibrant attack to destabilize the agonic crusaders. The Nigerian police, in particular, went on the exercise of removing Biafran flags the MASSOB hoisted in the Southeast region and tore them into pieces.

The spate of political violence and deadly conflicts in the months preceding and after the 2003

and 2007 general elections in the country, seem to lend credence to the notion that in most of Africa countries, political conflicts and violence increased tremendously as elections approach. Though, a simplistic way of looking at political violence, it does nevertheless highlights a very significant paradox of the fact that, elections are suppose to be significant pillar in the democratic process. Since they underscore the twin principles of political participation and accountability yet, it is precisely in and through elections that the greatest and most notable violations of these principles occur. Every contestant wants to win and none wants to loose.

History has it that before the 2003 general elections, the country was in the grip of fear due to the dreadful and heart-rending increase in the state of dastardly acts of violence and politically motivated assassinations. These cut across all the political divides of the country with the Southeast and North Central been the major flash points. For example, in the Southeast which is the region for this study, Chief Uche Ugbonanya, a former commissioner in Chief Achike Udenwa's government and the All Nigerians' People Party (ANPP) Senatorial candidate for Orlu Senatorial District of Imo state was assassinated for political reasons. Similarly, Mr. Theodore Agwatu, principal secretary to the Imo state governor, was brutally murdered by unknown gunmen (Ologbenla, 2003: 79)<sup>30</sup>.

Also, on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2003, few weeks to the general elections, Chief Harry Marshal, a chieftain of the All Nigerian Peoples' Party was assassinated in his Abuja residence. On February 6, 2004, Chief Aminasoaru Dikkibo was assassinated on the highway. Barnabas Igwe and his wife, Abigail were murdered in Onitsha on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003. In addition to the above list, other political and office seekers who had raised an alarm about threats to their lives or who had eventually survived assassinations mainly from the Southeastern region is almost inexhaustible. Some of these include Chief Chekwes Okorocho, Nya Asuquo, an ANPP Senatorial candidate in Cross Rivers state, Joseph Okonkwo, UNPP chairman in Anambra state and many others (Ologbenla, 2003: 80)<sup>31</sup>.

The relationship between political godfather and their godsons had also led to many political crises not only in the Southeastern region, but also in the entire country. An instance of this situation was demonstrated

in Enugu and Anambra States before the 2003 and 2007 general elections as well. In the case of Enugu state, Dr. Chimaroke Nnamani squared up against his political godfather, Jim Nwobodo. The political battle between the godfather and his godson was fought on every corner, in the media, in the church, in the state house of assembly, in the national assembly and even in the presidency (Ologbenla, 2003: 84)<sup>32</sup>. The Anambra scenario presents an even worse situation as it involved the former governor, Chris Ngige and his erstwhile godfather, Chief Chris Uba, a multi billionaire businessman. The duo leading political actors parted ways, albeit abruptly, when six weeks into the former's tenure, the latter instigated a 'palace coup' against him as a result of disagreement over the list of appointees for commissionership positions and other political appointments within the government (Ologbenla, 2003: 85)<sup>33</sup>. On Monday July 9<sup>th</sup> 2003, Uba who had caused all the people whose elections he bankrolled to sign a letter of resignation in advance, gave Ngige's letter to the speaker of the House Assembly with firm instructions that the governor should cease to be the governor of Anambra state. Chris Uba and his supporters in the House of Assembly said that Ngige had voluntarily resigned and a new governor, Ngige's deputy had been sworn in to replace him. Uba boasted in the Sunday Champion, 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2003, when he said,

*"I am the greatest of all political godfathers in Nigeria because this is the first time one single individual single handedly put in place every politician in the state". He also warned darkly, "I also have the power to remove any of them who does not perform up to my expectations anytime I like". (Chris Uba in Sunday Champion, 20 July, 2003 quoted in Ologbenla)<sup>34</sup>.*

In October 2006, dozens of people were reported to have died as a direct result of political violence. During the campaign for the primary elections, much of the violence was between supporters of competing prospective candidates within parties and in particular within the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) (WANEP, 2007)<sup>35</sup>. With this development, potential politicians and sincere individuals become highly apprehensive of the political climate. Those who want to join politics genuinely for the upliftment of the living standards of

the people are therefore forced to withdraw. The repercussion of this is that, the country would continue to drift and if the situation is not abated, real development will elude us. It is only through the democratic process that a country could forge ahead and attain any meaningful development. In fact, development is not measured in terms of the structures a government is able to put on ground or the amount it spends, but rather, the basis of the people's attitude to work, and how they relate to one another and it is the result of these that constitute development.

### *Causes of Political/Electoral Violence*

Conflicts exist when at least two people or groups have incompatible aims. Conflicts are basically about change. Inevitably, there will be a conflict arising from differences of opinion in any free society, given the variety of human experiences and abilities and the existence of different aspirations (Onuoha, 2003: 4655)<sup>36</sup>. Political violence will occur over the main goals or priorities of a state. Even if broad agreements exist on aims, there may be differences over a wide spectrum of political ideas. Conflicts need be recognized through encouragement of competing political interests because, suppression of political interests may create tension, which may invariably lead to political violence. For instance, Nwankwo (1987)<sup>37</sup>, Malu and Ogbu (2006)<sup>38</sup> and Albert (2007)<sup>39</sup> submit that the problem of electoral conflict is deep rooted, and could be traced to the culture of violence in the country. They argue that, this could be traced to the culture of violence by many years of military rule and the attendant brutality, poverty, illiteracy and massive unemployment in the country.

Discontent which gives rise to political violence may be due to poor living and environmental conditions, disagreement with prevailing moral standards or political beliefs and inadequate opportunities to effect changes. The problem of the fragmentation, which has in recent time, become a terminal problem of Nigerian politics, became more compounded in the last three electoral dispensations. The problem manifests in terms of deeper intra party conflicts all over the country, but was most symbolized at the national level by the hostility between former President Olusegun Obasanjo and his deputy, Alhaji Abubakar Atiku. In addition, the negative impact of godfatherism on the future of democracy in Nigeria became more evident during the period under



review. The phenomenon promotes political violence and hinders the speedy entrenchment of fairness, justice and equality in Nigeria's democracy. For example, Uroh (2004)<sup>40</sup> stresses that the privatization and personification of political parties in pursuance of personal selfish interests by few individual politicians and the elites, remains a fundamental cause of electoral conflict in Nigeria. For him, political parties are formed, financed and run more or less as private estates of a few rich individuals, "the money bags". These influential individuals usually stand for elections or sponsor people into offices. In this regard, these influential individuals constitute themselves into political kingmakers who are popularly referred to as 'political godfathers'.

The mass media as vital institution in the democratic process, contributes to electoral violence in Nigeria. In the process, it has contributed to the successes and pitfalls that have been witnessed in the various elections in the country. Citizens reflect and articulate their opinions and feelings about elections in the media and this goes a long way in determining the outcomes of elections. However, since political elites have realized the importance and power of the media during elections, they often exhibit the tendency to manipulate it to further their political agenda during elections and during ensuing conflicts. In the process, the media inadvertently report elections issues in manners that lead to escalation of election conflicts and sometimes violence.

Other causes of electoral violence include religious fundamentalism, commoditization of politics, elite fragmentations, the framing of Nigeria elections as 'zero sum' events and lack of independence of the judiciary and the police force to mention but a few. Thus, elections have failed to enthrone the genuine representatives who assume public offices on the mandate of the electorate. Instead, they have served only as mere instruments for the political elites to short cut their ways to political limelight (Uroh, 2004: 276)<sup>41</sup>. This is the reason why politics of bitterness has become the order of the day, and the contests for political offices has become a do or die affair by these over ambitious politicians.

### **Implications for Human Development**

The consequences of political violence can be devastating, especially on human development. Political violence has resulted in damage, against not only private and public property, but also, resulting in grievous bodily harm and in extreme cases, deaths. With the above record of political violence in Nigeria, hundreds of people mostly politicians have been killed, many injured and property worth millions of Naira destroyed. These incidents slow down development in every aspect of the society. The orgy of political violence has sent waves of panic and fear through a shocked and outraged public in the city. Besides, the various violent crimes have destroyed social relationship among the people of some particular zones. Such violence had also provoked, entrenched and accelerated the cycle of violence in the country. The occurrences of the violent incidents is a categorical inference of saying that something was wrong within the system, and that it would equally be adduced that the politicians enjoyed violent more than peaceful campaign during an election period. Apart from the astounding increase in both number and magnitude of loss, destruction and wanton human carnage, it is also a truism that the country has been stereotyped by this virulent violence. There is no disputing the fact that, the phenomenon of political violence scares away many visionary people, who can run the affairs of the country efficiently. Having synthesized some consequences of political violence in this section, it is important to suggest some ways out of the problem as concluding part of this paper.

### **Suggested Ways of Avoiding Political/Electoral Violence**

Without doubt, political/electoral violence has not contributed in any way to the democratic progress of the country since its independence. From this discourse, it is pertinent to make some suggestions to redress the alarming rate of political violence in the southeastern part of the country in particular and Nigeria in general. In the first place, there is the need for the government to embark on massive political education of the Nigerian populace on the ideas of democracy. Since election is the fulcrum of any successful democracy, the populace should adequately be enlightened about their constitutional right to vote and protect their votes, towards the election of the qualified leaders.

Appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to monitor and check the activities of political godfathers. Such mechanisms may include legal and financial regulations to ensure that, money politics is discouraged so that political office aspirants may not necessarily rely on financial backers before contesting for offices. Nigeria should borrow from the examples of some developed countries where a ceiling is placed on individual or group contributions to campaign funds of contestants in elections.

Government should embark on a comprehensive revision of the electoral system in Nigeria, including the relevant laws and codes of practices for all participants in elections. Appropriate institutional frameworks should be established to ensure that fairness, justice and humanism are displayed during elections, and credible umpires and monitors are appointed and allowed to carry out independent works during electoral processes. The judiciary and the law enforcement agents should be encouraged to re-examine their conscience during elections.

The youths are supposed to be at the vanguard of building a successful future for a nation. Thus, Nigerian youths should stop selling themselves cheaply to politicians who use and dump them and render them wasteful in the course of attaining selfish ends. If they do not present themselves as foot soldiers during election violence, politicians will definitely have a re-think in sponsoring violence.

### Conclusion

Southeast zone like any other zones in the country is not insulated from any act of political violence. Elections in Nigeria are always marred by wide spread political violence which include political killings, assassinations, assaults, arson murder to mention but a few. Elections have been problematic not only in the southeast zone, but in the entire country due to the fact that our politicians see politics as an avenue to amass state resources. This explains the reason while there is high degree of rigging and ballot snatching during elections. In addition, the nature of the party system is a factor that is affecting the evolution of a credible electoral process, which will always promote conflicts during election. The fight to win election is not based on trying to establish alternative plans for social progress, but

based on personalities and other parochial sentiments such as regionalism, ethnicity and religious differences.

Furthermore, the rising tide of political violence in Nigerian politics can be explained in terms of the high level of poverty, unemployment and under development in the population. Such a high level of poverty is directly and indirectly responsible for most of the social, economic and political problems that are bedeviling our society. Thus, moneybags in Nigerian politics can raise an army of supporters who are ready and willing to intimidate, maim and even kill the political opponents of their paymaster. Almost all the elected representatives always desire to stay in power by hook or crook despite their apparent dismal performance in office. They use the machinery of government and its resources, which they control to achieve their goals.

For democracy to be advanced in Nigeria and specifically in the southeast zone, political violent and issues of ethno nationalism need to be stopped or minimized. As a first step, government, ethnic nationalists and politicians should respect and protect human rights before, during and after elections.

### Bibliography

- Ademoyega, A. 1981, *Why we struck?* Ibadan: Evans brothers.
- Adeyinka, B. 2003, "Political violence and democratization in Nigeria: An overview" in Birsh A Olasopu (ed) *Electoral violence in Nigeria: issues and perspectives*. Lagos: Franked Publishers Ltd.
- Albert, I. O 2007, "Reconceptualising electoral violence in Nigeria" in Albert et al (eds) 2007. *Perspectives on the 2003 elections in Nigeria*. Abuja: IDASA-Nigeria.
- Angelini, M. 2002, "Election process and violence" Remarks by country director. International Republican Institute (IRI) Electoral Retreat on Electoral Process. Feb, 8.
- Anifowose, R. 1982, *Violence and politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba experience*. Enugu: Nok Publishers Ltd.
- Audi R. 1971, "On the meaning and justification of violence" in Jerome A. Shalfer (ed) *Violence*. New York: David Mackay.
- Chubah, E, 2009, "Politically motivated killings and social conflicts in Nigeria: implications for democratic stability" in Ikijiani M (ed) *Peace studies and*

- conflict resolution in Nigeria. Ibadan; Spectrum books.
- Dudly, B. J, 1967, *Instability and political order: Politics and crisis in Nigeria*. Ibadan. Ibadan university press.
- Ed Cains, 1996, *Children and political violence*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Egwu, S, 2003, "Challenges of democratic consolidation: the role of civil society organizations" in Englander, E. 1997. *Understanding violence*. Mahwah Lawrence: Erbaun and Associates.
- Hoffman, W and Mc Kendrick, 1991, "The nature of violence" in B. W McKendrick and Hoffman (eds) *People and violence in South Africa*. Cape own: Oxford university press.
- Horowitz, D, 2000, *Ethnic groups in conflict*. Los Angeles: University of California press.
- Ikejiani, M. I, 2002, "The Igbo in contemporary Nigeria" in G. E. K Ofomata (ed). *A survey of the Igbo nation*. Onitsha: Africana First Publishers.
- Iyayi, F, 2004, The conduct of elections and electoral practices in Nigeria. A paper delivered at the NBA conference in Abuja on 24 August, 2004.
- Key, V. O, 1961, *Public opinion and American Democracy*. New York: Alfred Knoop.
- Lloyd, P. C, 1970, "The ethnic background to the Nigerian crisis" in Panter Brick SK (eds) *Nigerian Politics and Military rule prelude to the civil war*. London: Athlone press.
- Malu, N and Ogbu O, 2006, "Introduction" in Malu and Ogbu (eds) 2006, *Enforcement of electoral laws and reduction of electoral violence*. Enugu:Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Nwankwo, A, 1987, *The military option to democracy*. Enugu: Fourth dimension publishing Co. Ltd.
- Nwolise, O.B.C, 1988, "Political parties and electoral process" in O. Soremekun and A. Ayeni (eds), *Nigeria's 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic: Presidentialism, politics and administration in a developing state*. Lagos: Daily Times Publication.
- Ologbenla, 2003, "Political instability conflicts and the 2003 general elections" in Anifowose *et al* (eds) *General elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria*. Lagos: frankad publishers.
- Onuoha, B, 2003, "A comparative analysis of general election" in Tunde Babawale *et al* (eds) *2003 general elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria*. Lagos: Frankard publishers.
- Osaghae, E, 1999, "Democracy and national cohesion in multiethnic Africa states: South Africa and Nigeria compared; nations and nationalism". 5(2).
- Oyediran, O, 1990, "The present and future election in Nigeria" in Adele and Tony (eds). *The 1987-1988 local government election in Nigeria*. Vol. 1, Lagos: National electoral commission.
- Report by the Transition Monitoring Group 2003.
- Richard, R, 1974, *The problem of parties government*. London: Macmillan.
- Schlesinger, J. A, 1976, *International encyclopedia of social sciences*. London: Macmillan
- Tamuno, T, 1991, "Peace and violence in Nigeria" in *conflict resolution in society and state*. Lagos: FG Press.
- Ted. R Gurr, 1970, *Why men rebels*. Princeton: Princeton University press.
- Ujo. A. A, 2000, *Understanding political parties in Nigeria*. Kaduna: Namidan books.
- Uroh, C.O, 2004, "Indigenous Igbo political philosophy and the quest for political legitimacy in Africa" in Vaughan, O (ed) 2004 *Indigenous political structures and governance in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Bookraft ltd.
- Vol.38(3)
- WANEP, 26<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2007, Policy brief. election barometer. Nigeria. April 2007 polls. Preparedness, states and threats.
- Wolf, R. 1969. "On violence". *Journal of philosophy*. 16(19).

#### Biographical Note

Agbegbedia Oghenevwoke Anthony is a PhD student in Peace and Conflict Studies Program, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.

Email: [omonoghens@yahoo.com](mailto:omonoghens@yahoo.com)

+2348034964368, +2348051173335