

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN FIVE SOUTH EASTERN AREAS OF NIGERIA, 1999-2015 BY

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Abstract

Elections are the legally instituted framework and platforms by which political representatives are chosen by the electorates in every society. This research is particularly examining elections in five Igbo States of Nigeria, 1999-2015, and specifically electoral violence in this geopolitical zone. The manner of conduct, parties, malpractices and problems of elections in Igboland are highlighted in this discourse. This article uses qualitative research methodology in analyzing the information here. That is, the researcher has used purely narrative technique which includes both primary and secondary materials in this research.

Keywords: election, violence, electoral malpractices, political parties, etc.

Introduction

Elections and electoral violence are not a modern –day phenomenon in Nigeria. The first Republic (1960-1966) collapsed due to the widespread violence unleashed by politicians in the disputed 1964/65 general elections. Historians and political scientists recall the ugly incident tagged, “Operation we-ti-e; wearingly meaning, “operation spray it”, in the western Region in which many notable politicians and their supporters were murdered in broad daylight. This largely warranted the first military coup of January 15, 1966¹. At the return to civilian rule in 1979, politicians still displayed their incorrigibility as they, again, resorted to electoral violence and fraud, especially during the August 1983 general election. Political observers also recall the. Akin Omoborlowo versus Gmerrvor Adekunle Agasin Saga in the old Ondo State where the electoral fraud allegedly, perpetrated by National Party of Nigeria stalwarts in the state led to three days’ mindless killings and arson. That again was part of the reasons the military struck on December 31, 1983².

Fast forward to the fourth Republic, Nigeria has had five successive general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015) with each of them recording high electoral violence. Indeed, over 800 lives were reportedly lost to pre and post election violence in 2011, particularly in about 12 northern Nigeria states. Ten Youth Corps, members in Bauchi State were among the casualties.

Seven years after, impunity still reigns. Rivers state recorded the highest number of cases of election-related violence in the run-up to 2015 general election and afterwards. In fact, the state became the political Golgotha of Nigeria so much so that it was renamed “Rivers of Blood”. What an anathema³.

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Now, bringing our attention home to Igboland which forms the nucleus of this academic discourse, electoral violence in this geo-political aspect of the country, has also recorded a tremendous outburst of public outcry, bloodshed, murder, assassinations and all manners of gruesome killings that have punctuated the peaceful-con-existence and tranquility with which this zone is known to the nation. Elections have been held in the Igbo areas of Nigeria since 1999 with its attendant electoral violences that tended to degenerate into a state of utter despondency. Anambra, Enugu, Abia, Imo and Ebonyi states have had various elections conducted into the Senate, House of Representative, Presidency, Gubernatorial and State Houses of Assemblies, and at the local government levels.

Azaigba posits that: Nigeria's electoral history is as much the history of electoral violence⁴. In fact, beginning from 1959, general elections and electoral violence have formed an inseparable partnership not only in Igboland, but also in other Nigeria's electoral architecture⁵.

Egwemu corroborated the above when he argues that:

The conduct of elections has usually led to the disaffection and dissatisfaction in the polity and the conduct of elections in the aborted third Republic and especially the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections pushed Nigeria to the bricks. Elections in the Fourth Republic have not been radically different from those of the first, second and third Republic⁶.

Since the return of democratic government in 1999, cases of electoral flaws and violence have continued to increase. Illuminating on the nature and character of elections in Igboland and Nigeria in general since 1999, Saliu notes:

the 1999 elections that welcomed democracy after sixteen years of military rule were peaceful and devoid of sophisticated electoral fraud. The 2003, 2007, will and that of 2015 general elections that followed were characterized with massive electoral fraud and violence across the length and breath of not only Igboland as the case may be, but also across the country. The 2003 and 2007 elections were particularly marked by dissatisfaction by candidates, voters and observers⁷.

Beginning from 1960, electoral violence in Igboland and Nigeria in general, have been a recurrent phenomenon that continues to threaten the corporate peace and unity of the political atmosphere of Nigeria. a cursory look at electioneering periods thus show some form of violence. Ugoh, for example argues that:

Electoral violence has become a clog on the wheel of democratic progress as violence always manifest its ugly head at all the three stages of the elections processes-pre-election periods⁸. In fact, the first elections in post-independence Nigeria, as earlier alluded, were clouded with violence. However, the propensity of electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2016) which manifested through acts of manipulations that ranged from intimidation, fear of ethno-religious dominance, character assassinations and imposition of candidates characterized the elections in Igboland in particular, and Nigeria in general, and these continue to impid the nation's democratic processes⁹.

Explication of Concepts

The act of clarifying of concepts is a scholarly practice and ritual in historical research and scholarship. This is because the exercise helps in no small measure to clarify and help underscore certain concept that shall underling or form the thrust of the study. These concepts, when clarified, help to fasttrack the speedy comprehension of what is being discussed. So, for the purpose of this, these concepts include elections, electoral violence and Igboland.

Elections

Many authors and writers have attempted defining the concept of election in their own perspective news and understanding. From all definition offered, one severity point is clear-the process or an act of choosing.

In S.C. Ugoh's perspective, election is generally defined as the process of choosing by voting a person or a group of people for a position, especially a political position by voting¹⁰. In the light of the above definition, election can be seen as a process of choice agreed upon by a group of people. This helps to select persons or group of persons into designated positions of authority. Ugoh's maintains that this process of choice involves rules and regulations enacted and stipulated to ensure a great deal of compliance from the people and also for the purpose of enforcing justice and fairness when the need arises".

Put differently, Dumnoye sees election as the process of selection of one or more persons to serve in public offices. He however emphasizes that it is a government process in which peoples whether opposed or unopposed, secte party's nomination for election into public offices¹¹.

In another definition, Herden conceptualizes election as the competition for votes among contending political parties in a democratic societies¹². It can be inferred from Herden's definition that elections take place when there need arises to select from among competent persons are chosen to perform the designated duties or functions in the society.

Still, the Transition Monitoring Team in 2003 general elections see election as: complex set of activities with different variables that act and feed one another. It can be seen as a formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of concerned antecedent and subsequent behaviour. It involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their own participation in governance.....¹³

Diamond Mustang sees elections as mediating vehicles that symbolized sovereignty and authority. He posts that: 'Elections are mediating agency which popular sovereignty it symbolized, the social pact between the state and the people is defined, and the adjudicating bodies of elections'¹⁴.

Electoral Violence

'The term' electoral violence, has been misinterpreted by many scholars. This is because of the fact that some people tend to understand electoral violence as political violence. Though the two concepts have some striking similarities, still, there are distinct attributes of the two which make them slightly different from each other. The makes Amfowose to conceptualize political violence as:

The use of threat of physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual with the intent to cause injury or death to persons

and or damage or destruction to property's and whose objective, choice of forgets or victims, surrounding circumstances.....¹⁵

Ugoh argues that for a violence to be political, there must be an intent to affect or disrupt political process of election with the intent of influencing the outcome of election¹⁶. Electoral violence, according to Fisher, is:

Any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced protection, blackmail, destruction of property or assassination¹⁷.

We can clearly understand from the above assertion that electoral violence is any act that endangers the electoral process.

Illoh and Nnamani support the Fisher's point of view by positing that:

Electoral violence is an organized act by candidates, party supporters, election authorities, voters, or any other act that occurs during electoral process, from date of voter registration to date of inauguration of a new government, that uses physical intermediation, Blackman, abuse, violent demonstration, hate speeches, coercive tactics,.....to influence electoral process and outcome¹⁸.

The term, electoral violence, therefore, means any act of violence perpetrated in the course of political and electioneering activities that spanned from political consultations, party campaigns, primary elections, general elections and post-election periods.

Finally, Igbozor opines that: 'Electoral violence is any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post-election periods'. The Igbo inhabit the Southeastern part of Nigeria and are found mostly in the state of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. There is also sizeable population of Igbo-speaking people in Delta, Edo, Rivers, Cross-River and Kogi states. Electoral violence may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of brute force to disrupt political meetings on voting at polling stations, or other electoral processes or to inflict bodily harm or injury to any person connected with the electoral processes¹⁹.

Igboland

Who are the Igbos?

The Igbo are one of the majority ethnic groups that occupy the Nigerian land space. The Igbo predominantly occupy the eastern part of river Niger, although some of their kinsmen are found in the west of the Niger. The other two majority ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba, with each of the groups dominating the northern and western geographical zones respectively²⁰. The word "Igbo", which the British anglicized as "Ibo" can be used in three series:

1. To refer to the indigenous speakers of the Igbo language, hereinafter called Ndi Igbo (people);
2. The territory occupied by the people, hereinafter called. "Ala Igbo" (Igboland); and
3. The language spoken by the Igbo people, here referred to as Asusu (Igbo language)²¹.

The Igbo-speaking people of Nigeria have been divided into pre culture areas. According to some anthropological studies, these culture areas are the western or driveline northern Awka, Owerri, Cross River, as well as Ogoja Igbo Culture areas. Whatever may have

been the criteria for the evolution of the present classification, one thing that is apparent is its imperfection and incompleteness, since if against have incorporated the so called "les attractive culture areas"²².

M.A. Onwuegeogwu, and Igbo Anthropologist, successfully attempted defining Igboland culture areas. According to him, the Igboland culture areas encompasses "an area enclosed by an unimaginary line running outside of the settlements of Igbos, buralle (west Niger Igbo). Ahoada, Diobu, Umuabayi (Port Harcourt), Arochuwu, Afikpo, Ishagu (Abakaliki area), Enugu Ezike, (Nsukka area), and Ebu (west Niger Igbo). From this definition, it is possible that the most immediate neighbours of the Igboland within the federation of Nigeria are the Efick, Ibobio, Annang, Igala, Idoma, Ifo, Yalla, Ekoj, Mbembe and a cluster of other minority ethnic groups²³.

But, however for the purpose of this study, the researcher has encapsulated his study of elections and electoral violence in Igboland under the states that make up the Southeast geopolitical zone of the country which include Enugu, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi and Imo states.

Theoretical Framework

To cement this research and make it formidable, this paper rests on Karl Marx's Dialectical Materialism which gives an explanation on electoral violence in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. Karl Marx's dialectical maturation theory suits Nigeria, Stefano. Abbas' observes that dialectical of economics products and needs. Thus man's fierce inchoation and struggle to acquire, control and maintain political power at all cost justifies and inform the choice of the theory. Therefore, the relations between the people in the production processes are symbolically connected with the nature and direction of the political struggles to capture political power in order to determine economic factor²⁴.

Furthermore, this assertion was further corroborated by Dudlong who posits that:

The reality was that Nigerian politicians perceived politics and political office as investment and as an avenue for the acquisition of extra ordinary wealth through computation which they think is not possible through their forms or means of legitimate violation and enterprises. Thus, in Nigeria, the shortest cut to affluence is through politics. Politics means money and money means politics...to be a member of (the government party means open avenue to government patronage, contract deals and the lies²⁵.

In a country where over 70 percent of the population live in extreme poverty, politics is seen as an escape means from poverty. This is worsened by the high level of corruption among public office holders in Nigeria. Over the years, Nigerian politicians and other public office holders have promoted ostentatious lifestyle not being mindful of the sufferings of the Nigeria masses²⁶. One of Nigeria's brightest political scientist, Claude Ake asserts:

Those who won state power can have all the wealth they want even without working, while those who close the struggle for the state power cannot have security in the wealth they have made even by hard work. The capture of state power inevitably becomes a matter of life and death. That is one reason why our politics is so intense, anarchic and violence²⁷.

Patterns of Election Violence in Igbo States

The use of violence as a political tool has been common in Nigeria both before and since President Obasanjo first came to power in 1999. The 1999 elections were also marred by violence and intimidation as well as fraud and rigging. Previous Nigerian governments have used political violence even more brutally and systematically often without any real pretence of operating within a democratic system. Despite the shift from military to civilian rule, political violence has remained prevalent. It has been facilitated by the wide availability of small arms and a large population of unemployed young men who are willing to be hired and armed by politicians to intimidate their opponents. Violence has become such an accepted part of political and other public office holders have promoted ostentatious lifestyles not being mindful of the suffering of the Nigeria makes²⁸. One of Nigeria's leading political economist, Claude Ake asserts:

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We all know that the portrayal of most of the elections, beginning with the 1999 general elections when democracy returned to Nigeria, and those of 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015, etc as being free of violence was crucial to the Nigeria government's efforts to project a positive image to its foreign partners and to continue to manage her impression in the country of nations and consolidated her reputation. This is an arrant nonsense. It is understood that the 1999 general elections in Nigeria could not be said to be entirely violent-free as there appeared pockets of violent disturbances in many areas across the country. But other elections after 1999 were regrettable disasters and display of unforgivable acts of brazen savagery, insolence, injustice and slap on democracy in Nigeria.

Instances of Electoral Violence and Intimidations in Igbo States of Nigeria

Enugu

Just like in many areas of the country, the elections of 1999 in Enugu state did not record much violence as to lead to loss of lives as found in the other elections that followed. After the election of 1999, it was Jim Nwobodo that became the Governor of Enugu State. The election of 1999 in Enugu was not classified as bloody and chaotic, but there occurred pockets of electoral violence and intimidation across the state. Some people lost their lives and property on the election³¹. In the 2003 General election, most of the violent and intimidation were carried out by PDP supporters, especially during the April 12 National Assembly elections in the State. The civil liberty organization stated that at least 5 persons were shot dead and several others injured in the course of electoral violence in Enugu. There were reports of beatings of the opposition supporters shooting and other forms of intimidation³². APGA members reported being beaten in the state capitals Enugu. While other opposition party members including an ANPP candidate in the National Assembly elections were beaten in Udi local government. Some European Union election observers who had reported abuse during the April 12 elections were implicitly threatened by the Enugu State Governor, who complained about their coverage of the April 12 elections and said he could not guarantee their safety if they refused to leave the state polling stations³³.

In 2011 election, the researcher, as an eye-witness happened to be used as a Party Agent Under ANPP for Mrs. Rita Asogwa who contested the Enugu state House of Assembly election in that year. He and his two other Party Agent Ozioko Obinna and Obumena were sent to Ukehe town, at the election polling units of speaker Enugu Odol. No sooner had they arrived than they were subjected to the most gruesome beatings of their lives, in the presence of the Enugu state speaker's of House of Assembly Hon Eugene Odoh. Their money property and belongings were all stolen as they were kidnapped and kept in the speaker's house near to the Primary School. The most annoying aspect of the kidnapping and beating, was that the following day, their three names appeared in the Daily Sun in which they were tagged. "Three young men from Aguleri came to disrupt the smooth flow of the election there³⁴".

To corroborate this, the candidate for the House of Assembly election in Enugu opines that:

the act of kidnapping or abducting my Party agents was a sheer demonstration of impurity and electoral hijack of my opportunity to be in the state House of Assembly. This was an act that clearly reflected their shameful rigging scheme in the presence of my opponents Eugene Odo because after the election, the unprecedented his/her number of votes were lifted from his two polling units at the Primary School, near to his house, while I got more votes than him in other polling units the area³⁵.

Asogwa Rita continues:

The worst aspect of the election was the fact that the power of encumbering was at play during the election. The feature thing of were simply acting out the script of instructions already dished out to them. No single police man was at sight during the kidnap of my Party agents; their clothes were turn to shrewd, money and other

belongings stolen. I made every possible effort to get justice done to that display of injustice, but all to no avail. In fact, it was my stolen mandate. The violence and eliminate of intimidation perpetrated by any opponent facilitated the widespread fraud, cheating election rigging and other illegal election carried out by his boys in other areas³⁶.

Ebonyi State

Ebonyi is a young political entity carved out from parts of Enugu (to its west) and Abia (to its South) states in 1996. It has 13 Local Government Areas. Land disputes is the major driver of violence in Ebonyi State. The Ezza-Ezillo crisis is one ready example. The dispute between the two rivals-eastern-Ebonyi communities was influenced by a 2008 displacement over ownership of a piece of land on which a telephone booth was erected. By the end of December 2011, the disagreement had escalated, with gunmen attacking Ezillo and killing over 70 men, women and children-including the local police chief³⁷.

Other drivers of violence in Ebonyi state include the University based confraternity gangs known as "Cult" that are much reported at Ebonyi state university in Abakaliki as well as the so-called "do or die" nature of Nigerian politics. The common place practice of politicians arming gangs for political purpose is not only a driver of violence in and itself, but result in semi-organized gangs of youths being armed and purposeless after elections time. In 2012, two commissioners and an advisor to Ebonyi states governor barely escaped an assassination attempt after attack at a Petrol station by gunmen.

Oginyi reported that a staff of INEC lost his life in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi state while over 3,366 permanent voters card, (PVC) were snared by handling suspected to have been sponsored by desperate politicians in the political race. This incident was confirmed by the President Electoral Commissioner (REC), Dr. Lawrence Azubuike³⁸. In Afikpo South Local Government Area, thugs reportedly intercepted sensitive materials meant for a polling unit in Oso ward 2. Also in Ebonyi state, there were reported cases of the killing of 6 persons in the wake of the election. The chairman of PDP in Ishielu Local Government Area, Emeka Nworie was killed by suspected political thugs. Two people were also killed in Ikwo Local Government Areas, following the clash between the supporters of PDP and labour party³⁹.

Abia and Imo States

Just like Ebonyi state was carved out from Enugu state in 1991, so also was Abia state from Imo state in 1991.

After the incumbent Ikedi Ohakim (PDP) lost the political support from the voters, (esp. Catholic Church, Okorocha was able to narrowly defeat him a major upset with 44⁸⁶% of the vote to Ohakim's 38⁶⁸%. the CAN candidates came third with 14²⁶%, because of the closeness of the election, political violence was elevated in such places like Oguta, Isiala Ngwa Mbano, Ideato South including violent rallies thuggery, etc⁴⁰.

In January 2015, a serving commissioner in the Imo state House of Assembly was reportedly killed amidst a climate of political tension. In May of 2014, former Governor of Imo state, chief Ikedi Ohakim and his family escaped being killed by a petrol bomb in their home by unknown assailants.

Ochie, a senior lecturer at the Enugu state university of science and technology, maintains that 18 cases of violence were recorded in Enugu state, while 32 of such cases were recorded in Abia state. He said that 84 cases of violence were recorded in Imo state, out of which six people were killed while 306 people were injured⁴¹.

Anambra State

Violence have been a phenomenon due to the role played by political godfathers who imposed their anointed son as a candidate to the detriment of the electorates of which in return will continue to play royalty to whoever impose them and even continue paying royalty fee both in kind or cash. Money meant for the infrastructures will be spent on the so called godfathers and therefore abandoned a lot of projects to be executed into a total decay. This is particularly the case with Anambra State according to Obi-Ani.⁴²

Vigilante activities including political and criminal thuggery as well as extra-judicial arrests, detentions, torture and execution contribute greatly to the armed violence in the state. The separatist MASSOB is involved in clashes with these and other, often government-related, groups. And there are unemployed, uneducated, dropout youths committing crimes both as individuals and in gangs and "cults".

Thanks to years of conflict and state-sanctioned vigilantism, Anambra is flooded with weapons. Despite a lack of specific documentation (if security forces know the extent of arms trafficking, they aren't forthcoming with that information), we can form a picture from recent reports of raids by the State Security Service. In September, 2012, in just three raids, the SSS captured around 30 AK-47 assault rifles, more than 16,000 rounds of ammunition, rocket launchers, grenades and assorted pistols and other rifles. The Awka axis of Anambra is known for producing blacksmiths who are alleged to produce locally made guns.⁴³

Imposition of unpopular candidates by godfathers created a lot of violence in the most African continent and Nigeria in particular. These evil has occurred and continue to occur in the Nigeria political arena which was evident in the Anambra state between 1999-2007. This period witnessed the unprecedented political battle between Governor Chinwoke Mbadinuju with the godfather Emeka Offor that manipulated and as well sponsored his election in 1999. The battle led to the closure of both primary and secondary schools in the state due to non payment of salaries to teachers. The trouble led to the formation of Anambra People's Union (APF) and other troublesome association which terrorized their opponents, many citizen's lost their lives as a result of various assassination executed in the state.⁴⁴

Things fall apart between another godfather Chris Uba who installed Chris Ngige as Governor against the wish of the people. Their fell apart led to the removal and subsequent kidnapped of the Governor. There were series of accusation of election, rigging and the vandalization which took place on 10th November 2004 and the final nullification of the election of Chris Ngige by court of appeal on 15th March 2006 and swearing in of peter Obi as the Governor of Anambra State. This led to political instability by diverting their energy from the peaceful, social and economic development of the state.⁴⁵

Conclusion and Recommendation

This work has examined the electoral violence in the south eastern parts of Nigeria, comprising of the five states of Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Abia and Imo states. The writer believes that

electoral violence in these states is not intractable; they can be stopped and reduced to a barest minimum. The paper contends that factors that instigate electoral violence in these parts of the country are not out of place of such factors that cause electoral violence in other parts of the country. But whatever they are that engender these violence, they could be tackled.

Since external influence plays a major role in election in Nigeria, international actors must focus significantly more attention on the matter of violence prevention in Nigeria. The South eastern Nigeria must invest and reinvest in government-led initiatives for peace and conflict management in these areas. Civil society, religious leaders, and citizens should encourage high voter turnout. This will make for a remarkable opportunity to encourage the eagerness for credible democracy by encouraging citizens to cast their votes. The social media should offer opportunities for early-warning system as well as election-monitoring activities. Finally, conflict prevention programs must reach the right audience.

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