

Understanding the Youth, Political Violence and Nigerian Politics

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Abstract

The study aimed at understanding the youth, political violence and Nigerian politics with a view to critically analyzing why Nigerian politicians use the youth to perpetuate violence in Nigerian politics. The youth remains a focus when understanding political violence and Nigerian politics. The paper adopted historical method and also secondary data source in data collection and analysis, focusing on already completed work of other researchers, authors and scholars. The study also adopts the Marxian Primitive Accumulation of Wealth model to explain the reasons why Nigerian politicians use the youth to perpetuate violence in Nigerian politics. It was observed that Nigerian politicians use youths as political thugs or militias which are well organized and structured and their membership comprises mostly youths who have become political thugs and perform sundry activities such as the harassment, intimidation, maiming and the alleged killing of political enemies. However, it was discovered that politicians tend to use youths as political thugs to perpetrate violence in Nigerian politics as a result of corruption and self-enrichment. The paper also made recommendations to the problem.

Keywords: Youth, Political violence and Nigerian politics

Introduction

The youth are very crucial and contribute to a nation's political development. The youth remains a focus when understanding political violence and Nigerian politics. Youths are mostly perpetrators and victims of political violence especially electoral violence in Nigeria. Nigerian politicians, use youths as political thugs or militias which are well organized and structured. Furthermore, their membership comprises mostly youths who have become political thugs and perform sundry activities such as the harassment, intimidation, maiming and the alleged killing of political enemies.

Violence (especially political violence) is a common phenomenon in Nigeria. It is a deliberate use of force to achieve specific political objectives. Since Nigeria gained independence on October 1st, 1960, she has experience violence in politics right from the first republic to this present fourth republic. Recent violence has taken new dimensions, from civil disturbances to bombings at political rallies. For example, the People Democratic Party (PDP), Zone B, rally in Niger state was on March 3, 2011, rocked by a massive bomb blast that killed at least ten people (Source: Vanguard, 2011) ^[12].

Violence is described as endemic, as Mclean and McMillan (2003:560) assert that "violence is endemic to political life". Mclean and McMillan further traced violence to the pre-political state of nature. According to Mclean and McMillan (2003) ^[7] "the pre-political state of nature is often depicted as a place of indiscriminate violence, which we escape by forming a political society under the rule of a centralized authority (the state) that claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence". They further explained that "when the legitimacy of the state is challenged, and legal routes for voicing one's dissent are closed, citizens once again resort to violence" (Mclean and McMillan, 2003:560) ^[7]. Political violence is often triggered by political crisis within the ruling elite. "A range of political crises are triggered off by political differences of the ruling elite" (Onike, 2010) ^[9].

Onike explains the major factors that promote the culture of political violence in Nigeria. Onike, (2010) ^[9] argues that, "corruption, poverty and high rate of illiteracy promote the culture of political violence in Nigeria". He further argued that "discontent, strife action and social disaffection could be predisposing factors and that "the influence of Godfatherism in Nigerian politics further entrenched the culture of violence within the political atmosphere" (Onike, 2010) ^[9]. In other words, politicians tend to use youths as political thugs to perpetrate violence in Nigerian politics as a result of corruption and self-enrichment.

Ademoyega explains in his book "why we struck", the reasons for this violence in Nigerian politics. He looks at it from a colonial perspective. According to Ademoyega (1981) ^[1] "Nigeria political problems sprang from the carefree manner in which the British took over, administered and abandoned the government and people of Nigeria". He went further to explain that "British administrators did not make an effort to weld the country together and unite the heterogeneous groups of people" (Ademoyega, 1981) ^[1]. It becomes obvious that violence in Nigerian politics has become a phenomenon of study in the political history of Nigeria.

Furthermore, this study explores the two vital questions. These questions include what are the reasons why politicians use youths as political thugs to perpetrate violence in Nigeria politics? What are the ways to solve the problems of violence in Nigerian politics? These questions invariably lead to the understanding of the youth, political violence and Nigerian politics

This study aims at understanding the youth, political violence and Nigerian politics with a view to critically analyzing why Nigerian politicians use the youth to perpetuate violence in Nigerian politics. However, the objectives of this study include: to examines the reasons why politicians use youths as political thugs to perpetrate violence in Nigeria politics and to proffer a

far-reaching solutions to the problems of violence in Nigerian politics.

2. Statement of Problem

One of the problems of Nigerian politics is violence. Almost all our political processes have been characterized by violence. However, based on the available literature and empirical observation of violence in Nigerian politics, it appears that corruption, poverty and high rate of illiteracy promote the culture of violence in Nigeria.

Violence erupts in politics as a manifestation of high joblessness of people. Also, money politics has corrosive effects on the political system. The influence of Godfatherism in Nigerian politics further entrenched the culture of violence within the political atmosphere. One of these is the use of political thugs or militias which are well organized and structured. Their membership comprises mostly youths who have become political thugs and perform sundry activities such as the harassment, intimidation, maiming and the alleged killing of political enemies.

This study explains in detail the youth and political violence in Nigerian politics and with effort made to present unassuming but far reaching solution for the above problems. Recommendation will be made on how to prevent future occurrences of the causes of violence in Nigerian politics.

3. Conceptual Clarifications

For the purpose of conceptual clarification, some concepts need to be defined or explained. These concepts include youth, political violence and politics.

3.1 Youth

The term 'Youth' implies young people. According to UN definition, youth are people between 15 and 24 years of age. However, each country might have its own specific definition of youth. As regards this study which focus on Nigeria, "youth in Nigeria includes citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 18- 35 years" (Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia).

3.2 Political Violence

Political violence can be seen as the act of disrupt, injury, harm or assassination of a person or destruction of property in order to achieve specific political objectives. According to Onike (2010) ^[9] political violence is "a deliberate use of force to achieve specific political objectives". Political violence can take the form of civil disobedience intimidation, terrorism or outright revolutions. However, the aftermath effect of political violence is usually political instability.

3.3 Politics

There is no universally acceptable definition of politics. Scholars in the field have defined the concept "politics" in different perspectives.

According to Lasswell (1950: 74) ^[6] politics is defined as "who gets what, when and how". This definition focus on how power is used to allocate resources. Easton (1965) ^[4] went further to define politics as "the authoritative allocations of values for a society". The above definition emphasizes on political activity rather than institution. In every society, values are desired, that is, people have values or interests which must be allocated or distributed by someone. These result to power and conflict

situation. Every society has a political system that allocates values authoritatively.

However, politics is defined as the struggle for power and consolidation of power by individuals and group within a state. Thus, politics deals with power, authority and conflict.

4. Methodology

The methodology employed in this research is the historical method, applying a systematic approach to record and value information acquired from secondary data as they relate to the study at hand. This research adopted historical method and secondary data in data collection and analysis, focusing on already completed work of other researchers, authors and scholars.

5. Theoretical Framework

For a clear understanding of this research, a theory is adopted to explain the causes and effect of political violence in Nigerian politics. However, Primitive Accumulation of Wealth model will be adopted in this study.

The Primitive Accumulation was propounded by Karl Marx. The process, described by Marx, beginning with the gathering together of commodities, then gold and silver and finally money by which nascent capitalism created the material base (through the systematic exploitation of labour, expropriation of resources and colonial plundering (McLean and McMilian, 2003) ^[7]).

According to Marx, before there could be money with which to make more i.e capital an original accumulation must take place. This might take the form of resources extraction, conquest and plunder and or enslavement. This theory explains that Bourgeoisie tend to accumulate wealth or resources by the exploitation of the proletariat (working class).

It has been argued that corruption, poverty and high rate of illiteracy promote the culture of political violence in Nigeria. Greed cut across all the four actors of electoral and political violence-instigators, collaborators, implementers and retaliators. Selfish desire and lack of accountability and transparency as a short cut to becoming wealthy once elected into government is a major catalyst of indulging into violence in Nigerian politics. Politicians see government as big business were they invest little and reap huge profit after winning elections.

Politicians use the youths as political thugs to perpetrate violence as a result of self enrichment. They see politics as big business. With high return on investment as such they consider it a "do or die affair".

Furthermore, what inform the use of this theory is simply the roles play by politicians and youths in perpetrating political violence in Nigerian politics as a result of self enrichment. It is believed that political elites or politicians at all cost perpetrate violence in Nigeria due to corruption.

6. Youth and Political Violence in Nigerian Politics

The Nigerian Polity over the years has been immense with endemic violence in politics. One of such violence is electoral violence. Youths have been instruments in perpetrating violence in Nigerian politics. Political elites mobilize the pool of unemployed youths, often along ethnic, religious and party affiliations, as political thugs to perpetrate violence in Nigerian Politics. Contributions of various scholars and literatures have explained the reasons why youths involve in political violence. One of such scholars is Usman.

Usman (2009) ^[11] has explained the reason why youths involve in political violence. According to him, “the elites are responsible for arming the youths, who mostly are political thugs to manipulate electoral outcomes, kidnap or kill political opponents, threaten and intimidate electorates destroying lives and properties, as electoral processes are disrupted”. He further argued that “usually youths who are largely unemployed, mostly politically ignorant on electoral processes and many who are illiterates are used to score violent political points either in a bid to hold or to wrestle political power, are the unfortunate segment of the Nigerian population who are always referred to as ‘youths in electoral violence’” (Usman, 2009) ^[11]. The above arguments imply that the elites which are mostly politicians are responsible for arming the youth to manipulate electoral outcomes.

A non-governmental organization, Arewa Patriotic Vanguard, concurs with Usman. The organization has blamed the Nigerian politicians for the involvement of youths in electoral violence and the use of youths as political thugs. They stated that “in Nigeria, the involvement of youths in various acts of violence have become a regular menace in the region as youth are frequently seen in the scene of political, electoral and religious violence which often leads to the death of thousands and leaving hundreds youths injured” (Arewa Patriotic Vanguard, 2009) ^[3].

Onike concurs with this view. According to Onike (2010) ^[9] “the use of weapons, arms and ammunition are increasingly been associated with electoral violence. He went further to support his point by adding that “at every stage of the electoral process, politicians employ the service of touts to intimidate the opponents and the opposing parties” (Onike, 2010) ^[9]. Onike made his assertion very precise when he argued that “the quality of their weapons changes with time and sooner than later these thugs become the politicians special squad or private army” (Onike, 2010) ^[9].

Youth are used by politicians to perpetrate political violence as a result of self enrichment. For instance, it was reported in 2010, that some members of the Oyo State House of Assembly were attacked by thugs while sitting in the house. The attacked lawmakers were alleged to have been plotting the impeachment of the speaker of the state assembly, Mr. Moroot Atilola for alleged poor leadership and undue romance with the executive arm of government. Because of this, thugs and hoodlums numbering more than fifty descended on the lawmaker with machetes, axes, daggers, clubs and other dangerous weapons. One of the lawmakers had his two legs broken by the thugs and hoodlums while several others were rushed to the hospital for medical attention.

Okojie have also argued that, the reason for youth involvement in violence is unemployment. According to Okojie (2003) ^[8] “Youth unemployment in Africa has also promoted ‘gangsterism’”. She further stated that, “many youth now run criminal enterprise engaged in violence, armed robbery, car snatching, illegal fuel sales, and illegal importation of arms, many of which have reached alarming levels in several African cities” (Okojie, 2003) ^[8]. Due to unemployment and illiteracy, youths have involved in political violence in recent times. Onike concurs with this notion when he stated that “violence erupts in politics as a manifestation of high joblessness of people” (Onike, 2010) ^[9].

At the centre of electoral violence and rigging in Nigeria are youths who are used as political thugs, party workers and who

are made to form wings used by party henchmen for political violence and criminal activities for a token of money. For instance, at least six people were killed and many other injured in Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State following the Local Government elections conducted by the State Independent Electoral Commission in that state. The elections were conducted on Saturday, April 3, 2010. According to Reports, the killing was done by a militant group loyal to an opposition party that stormed the voting centre and hijacked electoral materials.

According to Usman (2009) ^[11], “youth involvement in political violence includes a range of aggressive acts from bullying and physical fighting, to more serious forms of assault and homicide”. He categorized youth’s involvement in electoral violence into four (4). According to him, “youths involved in electoral violence can be categorized into:

Instigators

Collaborators

Implementers

Retaliators

Instigators could be godfathers, aspirants as incumbents or the opposition; they could be youths by age but would not be seen where electoral violence is taking place or godfathers, whose biological relatives as youths would not participate directly in acts of electoral violence (Usman, 2009) ^[11]. According to Usman (2009) ^[11], “instigators certainly occupy commanding positions to directly incite the use of force to achieve their wanton desires or have financial clout to sponsor electoral violence. Instigators are investors in electoral violence waiting for their dividends after assuming office”. He further explains that “Nigerian politicians see politics as big business, with high return on investment; as such they consider it a “do or die affair” and are always in the habit of manipulating and manoeuvring the process to their advantage, most especially, when they feel the outcome might not be in their favour” (Usman, 2009) ^[11].

The second category is the collaborators. Collaborators are mostly Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs)- electoral officials, civil servants and law enforcement agents. According to Usman (2009) ^[11], “their involvement in electoral violence is their investment contributions for the promised promotions or other appointment by instigators”. He further stated that, “electoral umpires often throw professionalism and ethical standards to the dogs and become brazenly partisan collaborators of electoral violence. The police and other security agents also as collaborators and perpetrators of electoral violence, go out the law to support of one individual or party against the others” (Usman, 2009) ^[11].

While implementers are the category of youths earlier qualified as “vagabonds and gangsters”. They carry out the actual electoral and political violence. These youths are simply ‘tools’ in the hand of instigators of electoral and political violence (Usman, 2009) ^[11].

Usman also explains retaliators. According to Usman (2009) ^[11], “retaliators on the other hand might initially not even be at the scene of electoral violence, but responds in vengeance with more violence because one of their own- a mother, wife, son, daughter, religious or community leader or even political aspirants was a victim of electoral violence”. The instrument implementers’ use is political thuggery, they and collaborators use violence, intimidation, harassment and manipulation (Usman, 2009) ^[11].

However, youths are mostly perpetrators and victims of political violence especially electoral violence in Nigeria. Nigerian politicians, use youths as political thugs or militias which are well organized and structured. Their membership comprises mostly youths who have become political thugs and perform sundry activities such as the harassment, intimidation, maiming and the alleged killing of political enemies. For instance, it was reported in the media, that on Saturday April 9, 2011, three people were shot dead by military personnel during the reschedule National Assembly Election, after an attempt by the persons to snatch ballot boxes and election materials in Ughelli, Delta State.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, youth are very crucial as they contribute to a nation's political development. Youth are the major victims and perpetrators of violence especially political violence in Nigerian politics. As Nigerian youths are mostly used by politicians and political elites as political thugs to perpetrate this heinous violence in Nigerian politics.

Political violence is a common phenomenon in Nigerian politics. However, the study focused on youth involvement in political violence especially electoral violence by categorizing youth involvement into four (4) categories. These are instigators, collaborators, implementers and retaliators. These categories which have been explained above gives a clear understanding of the youth, political violence and Nigerian politics.

8. Recommendations

Having critically examined the reasons why politicians and political elites use the youth as political thugs and militias to perpetrate violence in Nigerian politics. This study takes a step further to proffer some recommendations to the problem of the youth, political violence and Nigerian politics. These recommendations include:

1. Proper Orientation and Education: The youth should be properly educated and oriented on the need to shun violence especially political violence and be made to understand the effect of political violence on the youth and Nigerian politics.

2. Youth Employment: The government should provide gainful employment for the youths. Youth unemployment promotes 'Gangsterism' in Nigeria. When the youth are gainfully employed, no cost will instigate them to perpetrate violence.

3. Reduction in the salaries and allowances of public office holders: In Nigeria, the salaries and allowances of political office holder is huge. They are the highest paid government officials in the country. For example, serving senators in the National Assembly earn far more than a law enforcement agent. Senators and members of the house of representative, once elected earn millions of naira as salaries and allowances. The ostentation lifestyle of political office holders is a great stimulus for those outside to go any length to win election including using electoral violence. While those in power also try to maintain their seats by hook or crook. In other words, often times, politicians use the youth as political thugs to perpetrate violence in Nigerian politics due to self-enrichment.

The salaries and allowances of political office holders should be reduced drastically, that way politicians will not be interested in electoral violence. When the salaries and allowances of law enforcement Agents are increased, it will boost their moral to fight crime and prevent violence.

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