



ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR NATIONAL COHESION

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Cite this article:

Deinibiteim M.H., Samuel B.K. (2023), Electoral Violence and Political Instability in Nigeria: Implication for National Cohesion. African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research 6(3), 83-95. DOI: 10.52589/AJSSHR-GLPEFE3G

Manuscript History

Received: 10 April 2023

Accepted: 29 May 2023

Published: 20 June 2023

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ABSTRACT: *Nigeria had her first election in 1922 under the Clifford's Constitution. Since then, under different dispensations, elections are held to fill various positions in both the legislative and executive arms of government. Elections in Nigeria are largely characterized with violence leading to loss of lives and wanton destruction of properties. Also, political parties are adorned with ethnic and regional colouration. Consequently, voters are largely ethnically and regionally biased in an attempt to put into office "one of their own." This is the principal basis for the widespread electoral violence witnessed since independence in 1960. Successive governments have made frantic efforts to de-ethnicize and de-regionalize political contests and consequently achieve violence free and credible elections, particularly since the commencement of the Fourth Republic. These efforts have not achieved much in terms of stemming the occurrence of electoral violence. The corollary is fragmentation of the polity along ethno-religious and regional lines, thereby creating political instability and attendant inhibition of national cohesion since independence, six decades ago. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to show that electoral violence and the resultant political instability negatively affect national cohesion. The study adopted the State Compromise Paradigm to explain the need for sincerity among the political leaders of the different ethnic groups in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities in order to achieve national cohesion. The study relied mainly on secondary data focusing on political instability and weak national cohesion in the country. The study revealed that efforts at de-ethnicizing and de-regionalizing political contests as well as discouragement of violence in political contestation with ethno-religious bias had not yielded much positive results in the country. The paper concludes that unless and until electoral contestation in Nigeria is violence free, enduring political stability and national cohesion may remain unattainable. The study recommends, among other things, that state institutions should function for the benefit of all citizens, political leaders should avoid fanning the embers of ethnicity during elections and government should put in motion a sincere policy and programme for national cohesion.*

KEYWORDS: National cohesion, De-ethnicize, State compromise, Discharge, Political stability, Citizens.



INTRODUCTION

In democracies, elections are conducted from time to time to choose representatives of the people to form the government. Nigeria had her first election in 1922 under the Clifford Constitution. Since then, under different regimes, elections are held to fill both legislative and executive arms of government. In Nigeria, elections are largely characterized with violence leading to loss of lives and wanton destruction of properties. It is common knowledge that in Nigeria, during elections, political bigwigs groom, mobilize and arm thugs and cult groups to unleash violence on supporters of rival political parties or disrupt the election processes by perpetuating heinous crimes in their opponents strongholds in what is supposed to be a democratic contest or competition. This makes politics and elections in Nigeria a war like activity. Electoral violence is further exacerbated because of the ethno-religious and regional colouration of political parties and political activities, which make voters largely ethno-religiously biased in an attempt to put into office “one of their own.” As Adolfo *et al.* in Ashindorbe (2018) opined, “when electoral outcome produces ethnic exclusion, ethnic mobilization for violence become the inevitable consequence, especially when alternation in power between or among contending ethno-religious groups masked as political parties is less likely.”

Elites in Nigeria depend on the state for patronage (prebendalism). Thus, there is always the drive to cover up monumental corruption involving political elites. Hence, violence is employed to perpetuate a set of politicians in power to execute the cover up. Consequently, most often, the people’s choice candidates are robbed of their mandates and those picked to protect their “pay masters” interests in power emerge. This creates legitimacy crisis in the polity. According to Brown (2003), “elections provide legitimacy through direct popular participation, and, in turn, legitimacy creates capacity for effective governance.” Ashindorbe (2018) asserts that electoral violence has the capacity to undermine not only the elections but also the legitimacy of the government itself. In addition, electoral violence has perpetuated underdevelopment, alienated the people from political participation, created political tension and instability, resulting in disenchantment, distrust and lack of faith in the political system. This is so because electoral violence divides the different ethno-religious groups against themselves in the struggle to capture state power for plunder. It is not therefore surprising that most coupists accused the civilian government at the time of such coup of coming to power through electoral violence and election rigging, thus using it as the basis for their overthrow. All these are at variance with the principles of democracy and good governance, which are the major ingredients for political stability. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to show that electoral violence and the resultant political instability negatively affect national cohesion. The crucial questions the study will attempt to answer are: (1) What is the extent of electoral violence in Nigeria?, (2) How does electoral violence create political instability?, and (3) What is the combined effect of electoral violence and political instability on national cohesion?

Election and Electoral Violence

Election is a major feature of democracy to the extent that not only is it impossible to imagine a democratic regime without elections (Nnadozie, 2007), but also there is now a real risk of confusing the holding of regular, reasonably competitive and transparent elections with democracy (Hounkpe & Gueye, 2010). Indeed, in the direct democracies of Ancient Greece, elections were used to take decisions in various fields. For example, elections were used to nominate people to the most important positions for which a minimum level of competence is



considered as vital. The indispensability of election to democracy appears obvious in contemporary democracies, described as representative democracy. As the contemporary representative democracy is defined as a system in which people are governed through their representatives, election remains the most appropriate widespread mechanism for selecting their representatives who will be responsible for governing on behalf and for the people (Hounkpe & Gueye, 2010). Today, therefore, a political system which does not select its leaders through competitive, free, fair and credible elections can hardly be considered as a democracy. Osumah and Aghemelo (2010) defined election as a process through which the people choose their leaders and indicate their policies and programme preference and consequently invest a government with authority to rule. They see election as “one of the means by which a society may organize itself and make specified formal decisions, adding that where voting is free, it acts simultaneously as a system for making certain decisions regarding the power relations in a society and a method for seeking political obedience with a minimum of sacrifice of the individual's freedom.” Similarly, Eya (2003) sees election as the selection of a person or persons for office by ballot and making choice between alternatives. In his own right, Ozor (2010) succinctly gives a more encompassing and comprehensive definition of election when he noted that; the term connotes the procedure through which qualified adult voters elect their politically preferred representatives to parliament (legislature) of a county (or any other public positions) for the purpose of forming and running the government of the country. To Osumah (2011), the basic objective of election is to select the official decision makers who are supposed to represent citizens’ interest. Elections, according to him, extend and enhance the amount of popular participation in the political system.

Electoral contests in which political parties compete for the votes of citizens at regular intervals have been viewed as the common defining property of democracy (Adigbuo, 2008). In fact, the quality of elections is part of the criteria for assessing the level of consolidation of new democracies. Elections are, therefore, considered as vital and indispensable for determining the democratic nature of a political system. When election is not managed quite satisfactorily, it can pave the way for deeper ethnic and regional divisions, loss of legitimacy of elected authorities, protest, violent contestation, social explosion, doubt about institutions, violence, and instability, or even threaten the entire democratization process. In fact, poor management of elections is a real and prolific source of conflicts, violence, insecurity and political instability in many countries (Hounkpe & Gueye, 2010).

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence in the context of this study is not limited to an action which intends directly to hurt persons. It is conceptualized as tactical, psychological and confrontational devices adopted by political actors to win elections. Essentially, electoral violence refers to “any threat of attack or actual attack meted out against persons or groups of persons in relation to an election before, during and after the election” (Harry & Kalagbor, 2020). Similarly, Birch and Muchlinski (2018) depict electoral violence as “coercive force directed towards electoral actors and/or objects, that occurs in the context of electoral competition – can occur before, during or after elections and it can target a variety of factors including candidates’ activities, poll workers, election observers, journalists and voters.”

In addition, Fischer in Wallsworth (2015) define electoral violence as “any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay or to otherwise influence an electoral process.” In the same vein,



Albert (2007) holds that electoral violence can be seen as the use of threats or force whether physical, psychological and structural to intimidate, harm, blackmail an electorate before, during and after an election in an attempt to influence the outcome of the electoral process. The continued perpetuation of electoral violence over the years has bridged the principles of democracy in the aspects of decentralization of power, presence of multi-party system, universal participation, free, fair and credible election and respect for the rule of law, dialogue and negotiation.

A critical investigation into the incidences of electoral violence in Nigeria exposes some factors that trigger electoral violence. These are situations that on a regular basis fuel various levels of violence which are inimical to our democracy. The factors include among others:

- a. **Issues of Fairness and Transparency in the Electoral Process:** This has been identified as the major cause of pre-election violence in Nigeria. A situation where electoral processes at any stage is shrouded in secrecy or the parties that fielded candidates for elections are not 'carried along' as expected could be an invitation to political violence. For instance, it has been observed that the ruling party takes undue advantage of their privileged position to select their party members and supporters to serve as INEC adhoc staff. The implication of the foregoing is that those adhoc personnel strive strenuously to scuttle the whole electoral processes in favour of their party. Incidentally, other political parties that feel threatened that such irregularities could mar their electoral success always mobilize their army of supporters and thugs to protest the perceived injustices. This situation nosedives to political violence, especially as other parties or disenfranchised public counter their perceived monopolies of anger or strength.
- b. **Non Credibility of the Electoral Body:** A situation where the electoral umpire is perceived either through its actions or inactions, such as late or non-deployment of electoral materials to voting centers, to have reneged from its constitutional duty of ensuring impartial administration of the electoral process could spell doom in the country. A non-credibility question arises whenever the electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is seen to be romancing with the ruling or a particular party or certain high profile political figures to manipulate election results in their favour to the exclusion of other parties or contestants. In this circumstance, electoral violence will no doubt erupt as other secluded parties or contestants could incite their members and supporters against the electoral body and or the apparent preferred party supporters.
- c. **Ineffectiveness of Law Enforcement Agencies:** The lack of lustre disposition of Nigerian law enforcement agencies is a major contributory factor to turbulent elections. It is no longer news that Nigeria is acknowledged to have the best legal frameworks but her predicament appears majorly to be non-enforcement or poor enforcement of those rules. Essentially, we have Electoral Act (2022 as amended) designed for the purpose of guiding the conduct of everyone before, during and after elections; it is rather unfortunate that these rules are often times flouted with impunity even at the watchful eyes of the security agents. In extreme cases, police aid and abate the rigging of elections as well as intimidate voters which implies that the institution set up to protect the electorates usually turn against them. This ugly phenomenon is blamed on lack of political will on the part of the government of the day to religiously ensure the enforcement of laws especially electoral laws.



- d. **Inordinate Political Ambition:** Politics in Nigeria has been perceived as a gold mine where many aspiring billionaires should venture to satisfy their quest for wealth while incumbent billionaires do more to sustain their exercise catches with more catches. This has been unarguably responsible for the huge number of persons who go into politics in the country. Thus, in order to achieve their ambitions, they go through extra mile to truncate the rules of the game so as to succeed at all cost. This explains why politicians keep and maintain armed thugs who are deployed as ready instruments to wreck havoc on perceived political opponents before, during and after elections. In addition, politicians use ethno-religious divisions in the country to their advantage during electioneering activities, which is also a recipe for violence.
- e. **Juicy Nature of Nigerian Politics:** Way back in the beginning, political offices or positions did not attract huge money, hence the unwillingness of people to run into politics in droves as obtainable today. As it stands today, politics is a lucrative business with huge financial attachment such that Nigerians appear to have difficulty in pursuing other professions other than politics. Currently, according to Audu (2010), “the 109 senators receive ₦4,066,212,458.00, the 360 members of the House of Representatives receive ₦1,496,523,333.00, the 36 members of the State Houses of Assembly receive ₦17,129,465,597.00 while the about 600 councillors receive ₦74,766,456,000.00 per annum.” The juicy nature of the positions prompts people to go into politics with negative mindset to kill, maim and destroy lives and properties to secure, perpetuate and consolidate political power for their personal aggrandizement.
- f. **Corruption:** A large proportion of Nigerian population is corrupt; they do not adhere to rules and regulations serving as guides to the conduct of any government business. Most of the regular staff and the adhoc staff of the electoral empire see their appointments as great opportunities to enrich themselves, especially during election periods. They, in most cases, connive with desperate politicians after financial inducements to manipulate election figures in their favour; the outcome of this phenomenon is always a burning anger on the part of the electorates who perceive the result of the elections as not reflecting their choices. Thus, they resort to violence to vent their bottled-up anger as well as express their displeasure. Cases abound where adhoc staff on the field sell ballot papers to the highest bidders, which are clear cases of electoral irregularities.

Electoral violence makes leadership recruitment process flawed and opaque as issues of merit, competence, integrity, accountability, etc are disregarded or thrown into the dustbin. The corollary is political instability as “leaders” become parochial and less nationalistic.

Political Instability

The primary purpose of government anywhere in the world is the maintenance of law and order to achieve stability of the society or political system. To do this, the state must have the capacity to control the social forces in the polity. When a state fails to control the social forces in a political system, to a large extent, it means the inability to maintain law and order and achieve national consensus and cohesion in the polity. This, in simple terms, is called political instability.

According to Alberto et al. (1996), political instability is “the propensity of a change in the executive either by constitutional or unconstitutional means.” Presenting a broader perspective



to political instability, they assert that it does not occur only through military coup, but through constitutional means, such as the frequency of change of government in a country. Similarly, Hussain (2014) sees it as the propensity of a government collapse either because of conflicts or rampant competition between various political parties (or groups). In the same vein, Dzacka (2021) describes political instability as a situation whereby the control of a state is affected badly due to civil war, or due to gross misunderstanding between groups of persons with different political affiliations. He added that striving for political power is one of the main causes of political instability.

Ivar (2021) proffered three ways to define political instability. The first definition conceived of political instability as the propensity for regime or government to change. The second approach sees political instability as involving the incidence of political upheaval or violence in a society, such as assassinations, demonstrations, and so forth. The third perspective describes political instability from the angle of instability in policies rather than instability in regimes, that is, the extent to which fundamental policies of state change. For instance, change in the property rights, ill-advised change in monetary/fiscal policies, etc.

What is clear from the above definition is that political instability is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional, manifesting itself in various forms in a country. Political instability takes the form of violence, demonstrations, military coup, terrorism, insurgency, policy somersault, agitation for self-determination, etc.

To many Western political scientists, stability and orderly political change (that is, orderly change of political power) are the indicators of the level of political development in a country. Therefore, political instability is a function of the level of political development, particularly in the area of the capacity to control social forces and maintain order through institutionalization of political organizations and procedures. Ake (1973), presenting the Western (modernization) perspective, argued that the dysfunctional style of political system (i.e., political instability) in the “new states” is variously attributed to “cultural heterogeneity, low regime legitimacy, lack of coercive power, economic backwardness and structural simplicity.” As Ibeanu (2015) observes:

Huntington perceives the problems of instability as one of creating political order, which has to do with the level of institutionalization of political organizations and procedures, a process by which they acquire value and stability. Institutionalization could be measured by the level of adaptability, complexity, autonomy and coherence of these organizations and procedures, and political instability is a function of decay of political institutions. Thus, Huntington argues that coups d'état and interventions in politics are one of indices of low levels of political institutionalization; they occur where political institutions lack autonomy and coherence.

These arguments are not without their weakness. For instance, the assertion that political instability is a product of the level of institutionalization of political organizations and procedures, which necessarily prompts military coup, military intervention (and perhaps other forms of political instability) in the new states or third world countries, is faulty. The western countries or modernized societies are not immune to political instability. Ibeanu (2015) disclosed that there had been coups and counter-coups, agitations, insurgencies, etc in Spain and Portugal; for instance, until the death of General Franco of Spain, the country was under an authoritarian rule. Portugal have also had a long history of authoritarian and military rule before the Carnation Revolution, a peaceful leftwing takeover of the government on April 25,



1974 (Ibeanu, 2015). Recently, in Western Europe, there had been Catalonia separatists' terrorism by ETA (Euskai Ta Askatasuna) in Spain, the Irish Republic Army bombings and attacks in the United Kingdom and the Yellow-vest movement's demonstrations, resulting in the destruction of lives and properties in France.

In sum, political instability is the act of questioning the authority and legitimacy of a government, the political system or the state to rule by some elements or groups in the polity, thus challenging the ideological and forceful means of the state to maintain law and order. This is a global challenge and is not limited to the "new states."

National Cohesion

National cohesion is a challenge for many, if not all ethnically diverse countries. The desire for national cohesion in such countries is borne out of the need to achieve political stability, national consensus and development. Odongo (2011) asserts that "for a country that seeks to fast track its development profile and include a right base approach to development, social cohesion must guide policy," with social cohesion being the foundation of national cohesion.

Chege (2016) defines "cohesion as a conscious desire for diverse groups of people to belong together and affirm the condition of mutual dependence." Cohesion simply means being glued together. According to Smith (2017), national cohesion is a process or act of holding diverse groups of people together as a nationality. Similarly, Chege (2016) describes "national cohesion as a process and an outcome of instilling and enabling all citizens in the country to have a sense as well as a feeling that they are members of the same country, engage in a common enterprise facing shared challenges. It entails constructing an integrated citizenry with a sense of belonging among members of different ethnic groups and regions of a country, thereby providing them with a sort of national identity. Smith (2017) emphasized that culture is almost always the source of national cohesion, because without a unified culture, it is nearly impossible for a nation to have cohesion. In the words of Atiku Abubakar:

National cohesion refers to a sense of unity and oneness by citizens of a country to the extent that, despite their diversity, they see themselves as forming a nation. That sense of solidarity encourages them to invest economically, socially, politically and emotionally in the well-being of the nation-country. National cohesion does not mean the absence of disagreements, but those disagreements play out and are resolved within the parameters laid out by the country's laws and regulations in a manner that preserves that sense of oneness (Okogba, 2017).

Nations push for national cohesion upon the realization that their full potentials can only be achieved when they live and work together in harmony, peace and unity. As Chege (2016) posits, national cohesion can only be achieved through the regulation and reconciliation of differences, competing interests and demands. National cohesion could be said to have been achieved when everyone in the country has the opportunity, the resources and motivation to participate in society as fully as they wish and on an equal basis with others (Chege, 2016). In this case, no one would have any reason to feel marginalized or excluded in the scheme of affairs of the country. This is the highest and strongest point of national cohesion. Some challenges to national cohesion are ethicized politics, less regard for rule of law, culture of selfishness and greed, divisive ideologies and deterioration of morals and values. On the other hand, some benefits of national cohesion are stronger institutional and national identity; enhancement of unity and harmony among different groups; and increased national solidarity



or togetherness and peaceful co-existence among the diverse groups. The approach to national cohesion includes sharing and devolution of power, inclusiveness and absence of discrimination, equity, adherence to the rule of law and massive participation of the people in governance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted the State Compromise Model or Paradigm to explain the need for sincerity among the political leaders of the different ethnic groups in the discharge of the duties and responsibilities, especially during elections to eliminate violence, achieve political stability and national cohesion. The model was put forward by Harry and Kalagbor in 2020. It is a modification of the State Fragility Theory. While the State Fragility theorists argue that the failure of the state to perform its functions, particularly in elections, to curb violence was due to its lack of capacity, authority and legitimacy, the State Compromise Paradigm holds that the state is complicit in perpetuating electoral violence to support the government in power. Such complicity creates an atmosphere of distrust and rejection of the state/political system, hence the insurgencies, terrorism, agitation and secessionist tendencies witnessed in the country.

The State Compromise Model is relevant for this paper on electoral violence and political instability because it points to negative effects of state complicity in the country's efforts at achieving political stability and national cohesion. For there to be political stability and national cohesion, the state must, through its agencies, guarantee violence free elections so as to recruit credible political leaders who are the actual choices of the people. This would enhance inclusiveness, non-discrimination and equity in the polity.

METHODOLOGY

The study made use of mainly secondary data focusing on political instability and national cohesion in Nigeria. The data were drawn from textbooks, journal articles, magazines, facsimile, etc. The materials used were selected on the basis of their relevance and suitability to the subject matter of examination. The content analysis method of data analysis was used to explain the relationship between electoral violence and political instability and its implication for national cohesion in Nigeria.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Nigerian nation state has had its fair share of political instability and threats to national survival. One of the major sources of stress and strain to the nation's survival is electoral violence. As a multi-ethnic society, the desire for the different ethnic groups to capture state power for the promotion and advancement of their cause is the reason for the electoral violence in the country. This has negative consequences for political stability and national cohesion in Nigeria. The study will attempt to provide answers to the following questions:



- (i) What is the extent of electoral violence in Nigeria?
- (ii) How does electoral violence create political instability in Nigeria?
- (iii) What is the combined effect of electoral violence and political instability on national cohesion in Nigeria?

Nature and Extent of Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Electoral violence is very pervasive in Nigeria, cutting across all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and is witnessed in all elections, federal, state and local government elections. Ashindorbe (2018) posits that Nigeria's history has a plethora of narratives of how the country's electoral process has been marred by colossal rigging of elections, violence and the subversion of the will of the people. Electoral violence has been a regular feature in the country's history since her independence in 1960, prompting the collapse of previous attempts at entrenching democratic system of governance. Ashindorbe (2018) asserts that the scale and intensity of election-related violence had increased greatly since the return to civil rule in 1999, to the extent that it seems to have dwarfed what the country has ever experienced in the past.

In Nigeria, those who control the state play a dominant role in the national economy, which leads to the amassing of huge wealth (primitive accumulation) and this encourages electoral violence, manipulation and fraud. Jega (2000) opined that those in power see the state as a primary institution for wealth accumulation that provides power, domination and control. In addition, it has been observed that most electoral violence in Nigeria is in favour of the government of the day; therefore, there is usually no punishment for perpetrators. Consequently, election is seen as a do-or-die affair. So often, violence is encouraged publicly from leading political actors, who use existing ethnic tension to divide and conquer (Wallsworth, 2015). Commenting on the mindless killings during electioneering activities in the country, Majeed (2019) posited that the electoral processes have steadily degenerated into criminal franchise of power grab and state capture for self-service and self-aggrandizement.

A study by Harry and Kalagbor (2020) revealed that, "most often, acts of electoral violence in Nigeria were state sponsored in the sense that security agencies controlled by the government deployed for election duties usually provide cover for or turn a blind eye when gangsters/thugs unleash terror on voters and opposition parties' supporters on election day." This argument was strengthened by Wallsworth (2015), when he deemed it acceptable to assert that in Nigeria, electoral violence is occasioned by the government's repression of potential political competition. Furthermore, the study disclosed that, electoral violence also took the form of arrests and detention of opposition parties' leaders on the eve of the election by security agencies and these have become a common phenomenon across the country, thus giving credence to the earlier assertion that electoral violence is state-sponsored in Nigeria. There is also threat of use of violence and actual deployment of violence in what has become popularly known as "the use of federal might," in which case the federal government in charge of the security forces uses them to intimidate members of opposition parties and their sympathizers among the voters. Indeed, violence in its multifaceted manifestations is so visible across the country during elections that most Nigerians describe politics as a "dirty game" in that it involves brutal force by political actors to capture state power at all cost (Harry & Kalagbor, 2020).



Electoral Violence and Political Instability in Nigeria

Many scholars have strongly associated electoral violence to political instability in Nigeria and other African countries. Part of the reasons advanced by the military for the overthrow of the democratic government in the first and second republics was the massive rigging in the 1964 and the 1983 general elections and especially the violence that characterized these elections. In every election circle, Nigeria is like a country at war because of the widespread political and electoral violence perpetuated by the ruling class in their bid to capture state power. For instance, in 1964 and 1965, the Sir Abubakar Tafawa Belewa regime organized both general and regional elections respectively. Osaghae (1998) noted that the polls returned the NPC government to a second term in office amidst allegations of widespread fraud, violence and intimidation. Also, Osaghae (1998) and Anitowose (1982) disclosed that the regional elections were characterized with violence resulting from “competitive rigging” that claimed more than 200 lives. According to them, during this period, political cum electoral violence was more in the South West, the heartland of the Yorubas (the then Western Region). Interestingly, the earlier political crisis that ensued in the Western Region by 1962 led to the imposition of a state of emergency in that region (Harry, 2008). This and many other political cum electoral violence across the country led to the 15th January, 1966 coup d'état, which put the country under military rule till 1st October, 1979, when Alhaji Shehu Shagari was elected as the First Executive President of Nigeria. After four years in office, the Shagari government was also embroiled in massive electoral violence, political chaos, amidst other inadequacies, and consequently toppled by Major General Muhammadu Buhari on the 31st December, 1983 (Harry, 2008).

Nigeria returned to democratic rule after many years of military regimes. However, the country's political elites have not been able to part ways with electoral violence; rather, electoral violence has been taken to an unprecedented new height, resulting in the destruction of lives and properties across the country. For instance, the country has witnessed some high profile political killings in the Fourth Republic like those of Marshall Harry; A.K. Dikibo; Bola Ige; Dipo Dina, a governorship candidate in Ogun; Engineer Funso Williams, a governorship candidate in Lagos; and the personal secretary to the former Edo State Governor, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole in 2012, to mention a few (Harry & Kalagbor, 2020). As earlier noted, most often, electoral violence is orchestrated by the state. For example, in the November 2019 Kogi State Governorship election, the deployment of over 35,000 policemen and other security agencies did not stop political thugs from executing their violent plots to rig the election; rather, the security agencies put up cover for the thugs to perpetuate their mayhem. All these acts of violence in the electioneering processes create the necessary environment for political instability as the people are usually pitched against one another along party lines, ethnic lines, regional lines and religious lines. Today, Nigeria is a hot bed for insurgencies, separatist movements, micro-nationalism, etc, all of which disunite the people and threaten the survival of the country as a nation state.

Electoral Violence and Political Instability in Nigeria: Implication for National Cohesion

Nigeria, like most African countries, has suffered consistently from electoral violence, which to a very large extent has impeded the institutionalization of democratic culture in the polity. Consequently, the country has been plagued by political instability since her independence in 1960, making national cohesion difficult, if not impossible. Electoral violence leads to power misfits resulting in poor leadership and bad governance. Poor leadership breeds political



instability as politics is ethnicized, thereby creating disenchantment among members of the different ethnic groups in the country. This manifests in biased policy articulation and implementation, lopsided appointment in favour of one's ethnic group, nepotism/favouritism, clientelism/patronage, corruption and underdevelopment. As Mayer et al. (1996), observed, "Poor leadership has led to stagnation and alienation of the citizenry, causing a low level of the system, affecting the sense of belonging to and identity with the political system."

Essentially, electoral violence and the attendant political instability gave rise to governance issues such as "lack of participation and consensus building," which Mayer et al. (1996) and Kessleman et al. (1996) called "the lack of a sense of national community." Fagbadebo (2007) argued that achieving meaningful development and political stability in a society requires the collective identity (national identity) of the citizenry. Where the situation is to the contrary, Ake (1995) stated:

Well-meaning development projects are regarded with suspicion, indifference or even hostility and at best as exploitation of resources, something to be taken advantage of rather than something to be committed to.

A sociological perspective to the effect of electoral violence and political instability on national cohesion indicates that the Nigerian people are more ethnically divided now than ever before, while the political perspective shows that the people now lack interest or faith in the political system or political entity called Nigeria. Hence, as electoral violence increases in every circle of election in an attempt by groups to put "one of their own" in power, so do agitations, clamour for self-determination or greater autonomy, etc, by groups increase.

Political stability is very critical for the attainment of national unity and cohesion, integration and enduring constitutional regime (Chawdhury, 2016). Political instability is never a good situation that any country will wish for herself or her citizens (Dzacka, 2021). However, political instability does not start in a day but grows over time in the social relations in the country, occasioned by leaders seeking to retain or capture political power through whatever means. This is so because the masses, most often, rely on the utterances of their leaders (elites) to act, and when their actions are not controlled, it affects the stability of governance in the country (Dzacka, 2021). Indeed, electoral violence and the resultant political instability are very harmful to national unity and cohesion. Essentially, over the years, there has not been a well articulated and conscious effort at national cohesion by successive governments in the country. As Chawdhury (2016) asserts, "the biggest impact of political unrest/instability is the loss of human lives, injuries and long term sufferings incurred by the families," as well as lack of national consensus or cohesion. Consequently, in his attempt at solving the problem of electoral violence resulting from the concentration of political power in one region or group the Governor of Rivers State, His Excellency Governor Nyesom Ezenwo Wike proposed and popularized the application of political philosophy of "Nye ndi eba, nye ndi eba, nye ndi eba, nye ndi eba," which literally means political power or offices should be shared to the different regions and groups and leave no group out, so as to achieve inclusion of all ethnic groups and achieve national cohesion.



CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it has become very clear that electoral violence and the resultant political instability has negatively affected the unity and oneness of Nigerians since independence. Electoral violence is quite pervasive in the country, cutting across the 36 states and the FCT. It manifests in form of threats of use of violence and actual use of violence against opponents, before, during and after elections. Also, the state has been identified to be complicit in the encouragement of electoral violence in the country. This has resulted into injuries, deaths and loss of properties. Electoral violence has divided the people of Nigeria along ethno-religious lines and pitched them against themselves in their struggle to compare state power for plunder. It results in poor leadership recruitment which has led to political instability because of the parochial and less nationalistic tendencies of such leaders. National cohesion is an imperative for the maintenance of law and order as well as development. Cohesion obviously would create national identity, enhance unity and harmony among the different ethnic groups, and increase national solidarity or togetherness and peaceful co-existence. However, all these are missing in the present day Nigeria because of the instability occasioned by electoral violence. Therefore, the conclusion of this paper is that unless and until electoral contests in Nigeria are violence free and credible, political stability and national cohesion would not be attained. Essentially, this would demand sincerity on the part of political office holders to put the interests of the nation first over and above their parochial ethno-religions and personal interests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, this paper recommends the following:

- (i) That state institutions should function for the benefit of the citizens.
- (ii) Political leaders should avoid fanning the embers of ethnicity before, during and after elections.
- (iii) The government should put in motion sincere policies and programmes for national cohesion.

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