

An assessment of the political violence in nigeria politics essay



Though man is by nature, gregarious, diversity of goals and interest among individuals and groups has made conflict leading to crises a recurrent phenomenon in human communities. To discuss about violence whether political, religious or ethnic is to also to talk about conflict which serves as the major platform for such violence. Conflict of interests creates the ground for all forms of crises and violence witnessed in Nigeria. There is need therefore to set the ball rolling by explaining the concept of conflict.

According to Mkpandiok (2006, p. 116), conflict occurs when two parties (individuals or groups) possess opposing goals and interests in a manner that the behavior of one or both parties threatens the other`s goal attainment.

Corroborating the above opinion, Bagaji (2006, p. 181) defined conflict as a situation in which one identifiable group of human beings (which could be tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic, political or otherwise is in a state of conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human group(s) in pursuance of what appear to be incompatible goals.

Milton in Olagunju (2007, p. 87) specifically maintained that real liberty is only expressed where and when complaints are freely heard, deeply considered and quickly reformed. In other words, since no society is absolutely homogenous, absolute absence of conflict is rather a demonstration of covert oppression and suppression. This is contingent on the competitions that characterize struggle for the acquisition of the social status, power and resources which are by nature limited in supply.

Wright in Ologitere (2008, p. 14) contends that conflict can be between individuals in a group, groups within state, factions and the state or between states. According to him conflict may refer to a particular relationship between states or rival faction within a state with implications of subjective economic or military hostilities.

According to Imobighe (2008, p. 20), conflict represents a condition of disharmony within an interaction process which usually occurs as a result of a clash of interest between parties involved in some forms of relationship, with the parties pursuing incompatible goals or using incompatible means to pursue their chosen goals. Okibe (2002) and Osagie (2008) in Ologitere (2008 pp. 16-17) attempted to throw more light on the nature of incompatibilities that breed conflict in group interactions.

To Bagaji (2006, p. 154) , individual's regular compliance to rules, regulations, plans and procedures is determined by their degree of emotional attachment to the surrounding values which include their expectations from others from within or between the groups. According to him, clash of ideas, opinions, or beliefs can produce emotional antagonism and struggle between individuals and groups in any environment. He therefore defined conflict as a social interaction between individuals or groups with incompatible goals.

Aduiba (2009, p. 88) on the other hand contends that conflicts are propelled basically by the same factors which he identified as struggle for scarce resources, social injustice, class antagonism, unequal power relation, differences in values and interests and states and governments partisanship.

Conflicts in whatever situation whether political, religious, cultural and otherwise have good results in the long run if it is violence free. Burton (1987, pp. 137-138) contends that without conflicts, a society would remain static. As a creative element in human relation, he therefore, sees conflict as the means by which societal values, welfare, security, justice and opportunities for personal development can be achieved. On this note, Weeks in Ologitere (2008, p. 14) thus, submitted that given our highly complex competitive and litigious society, conflict is both inevitable and inescapable.

The consensus opinion of most scholars whose contributions have been discussed above is that conflict as a product of interaction, is an expression of dissatisfaction with the existing social order. It may therefore be referred to as a discord that occurs when the goals, interests or values (real or imagined) of two parties intersect at the point where the available resources or opportunities for simultaneous realization or maximization are limited.

NATURE OF CONFLICT

Conflict as described above, may not be necessarily avoidable but it can be prevented from assuming destructive dimension. This is facilitated by understanding the conflict proneness of a given society.

The most common symptoms of conflict proneness Stewart (1998, p. 35) identified include the following:

- (i) A serious past conflict at some time over the previous twenty years.
- (ii) Evidence of a considerable degree of horizontal inequality

(iii) Low income; and

(iv) Economic stagnation.

Ogban-Iyam (2005, p. 2) observed that conflict could be non violent or violent but further submitted that violent conflict is more often an extreme form of conflict that emanates from a poorly managed non violent form. He however submitted that most conflicts that have challenged the integrity of most states across Africa are both organized and violent with attendant large scale humanitarian emergencies.

Contributing to the analysis of these conflicts, Gberie (2007, pp. 26-35) has identified horizontal or relative inequalities as the major cause. For instance, in as much as every inequality (vertical or horizontal) is undesirable, relative (rather than absolute) is more often the underlying determinant of conflict because, group mobilization which is essential to effectiveness of conflicts is easier when there are sharp political, social and economic differences among the people. He added too that even if these indicators of relative inequalities are available, conflict may be latent until it is effectively triggered by the factors such as information, ready leadership, resources and the possibility of changing the contradiction through the force of arms.

Corroborating this position, Nzongola-Natalaja (2008, p. 4), while reacting to the orthodox idiolects of the underdevelopment scholars which had often blamed all African woes on what they called the `imported or `arbitrary` states of the colonial systems, contended that African leaders had ample opportunities to nurture the nationalistic sentiments they had generated in the cause of their independence struggles, if they had focused on

<https://assignbuster.com/an-assessment-of-the-political-violence-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

comprehensive state-building projects through leadership integrity.

According to him, the emergent ruling class rather compromised their emancipation promises shortly after they inherited the privileges of their masters. Accordingly, their idea of power soon became how to plunder the state resources solely for the benefits of themselves, their immediate families and their collectivities to the detriment of the entire people.

Given the enormous powers of the state in this region, not only are the advantages and opportunities of the collectivities of these leaders outrageously visible but the competition for powers became too multiple for the narrow political spaces in most African states. Thus, instead of inter-class conflicts, most conflicts in Africa are inter-ethnic, secondary to the manipulation of group`s (ethnic) symbols by the elites of each group either to change or to maintain these existing contradictions. From this perspective, conflict does not just happen but a reaction to series of negligence of the need to address the principal causes of conflict.

POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Violence or the threat of violence as a phenomenon is human activity which has been recognized in African countries as a dimension of local, national and international politics. Individuals and groups throughout history in one form or the other resorted to violence or its potential use as a tactics of political action. Direct violence refers to acts of deliberate violence resulting in a direct attack on a person`s physical or psychological integrity. This category includes all forms of homicide (genocide, war crime, massacres, murders (terrorism) as well as all types of coercive or brutal actions involving physical or psychological suffering (kidnapping, torture, rape, maltreatment)

<https://assignbuster.com/an-assessment-of-the-political-violence-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

such behavior corresponds in all instances to illegal acts running counter to the most basic of all human rights, the right to life.

Salami (2006, p. 99) opined that indirect violence on the other hand is intended to cover harmful, sometimes even deadly situations or actions which, due to human intervention, do not necessarily involve a direct relationship between the victims and the institution.

Olagunju (2007, p. 57) defined political violence as “ the use or threat of physical force or group of individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals, and/or property, with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction to property”.

Political violence is endemic in most of the world`s political system today. This is particularly true of the developing countries including societies where political violence has become a prominent feature of the political process, especially after independence.

After political independence of Nigeria in 1960, it was hoped that the country will embrace and consolidate democracy devoid of political violence because of the peaceful, free and fair nature of the 1959 election, even through the results were disputed by some political parties. However, it is rather unfortunate that after independence, Nigeria has gone through a series of political violence and assassinations as the country witnessed a marked increase in the bitterness of party politics.

After a long period of military rule, the ban of political activities was once again lifted and democratic rule was received in the country in 1999 with a

lot of hope and expectations for a better state because the people were once again given the opportunity to participate in the ruling of their own fatherland through representation. The April, 1999 general elections were conducted in an atmosphere of relative peace and stability as much as political violence and assassinations were not witnessed. This was perhaps because the people were tired of military rule and decided to remain calm to ensure the enthronement of democracy.

However, when the 2003 general election drew near, there were a lot of pointers that the country's nascent democracy was under threat because of the spate of political violence and assassination that were witnessed in the country. During the elections, there were numerous reports of assassinations of political candidates, clashes between supporters of different politicians both within political parties and between rival parties, and intimidation and harassment of political candidates and supporters. Often ethnic and local conflicts led to political violence, supported by politicians both candidates and those holding political office - and traditional rulers. The large number of firearms available in Nigeria and the creation of armed gangs enabled politicians to instigate political violence at local and state levels. Government officials and legislators were reportedly harassed and intimidated by rival candidates and their followers. More than a hundred people were killed and many more injured.

The Pre-election period of the 2007 election was marked by intimidation and harassment of party candidates, violence against supporters, and several political candidates were assassinated, reportedly by political opponents.

There were allegations that individual political candidates as well as some
<https://assignbuster.com/an-assessment-of-the-political-violence-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

local and state political parties hired armed gangs to instigate political violence. In many cases law enforcement authorities failed to take adequate steps to protect human rights and perpetrators were not brought to justice.

Several candidates running for political office in the April 2007 elections were killed, including two candidates who were standing for the state governorship in the primary elections in Lagos and Ekiti States. Many other politicians and political candidates were subjected to violent attacks and attempted killings, but managed to escape.

On 3 February 2007, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducted a by-election in Iree, Osun State, for the National Assembly member for the Ifelodun/Pdo-Otin/Boripe federal constituency. Men heavily armed, and allegedly paid by politicians, invaded the polling booth in Iree, smashed the ballot boxes and destroyed the INEC registers used for the election. The officer who registered the voters, reported that an ANPP member, was beaten to death. Many other people were wounded.

Violence erupted in Aliade, Benue State, on the weekend of 9th and 10th December 2006 after a PDP appeal panel's nomination of a candidate for the House of Assembly. Rampaging youths protested against this nomination, blocked the road, attacked his supporters and torched houses.

A woman prospective PDP candidate for the Senate received several threatening phone calls in October 2006 warning her that she should withdraw from politics. Several of those standing against her reportedly told her to stay out of the contest and stressed that if she continued to contest the nomination, the consequences would be more than she could handle.

<https://assignbuster.com/an-assessment-of-the-political-violence-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

After two weeks, the police reportedly arrested someone who confessed that he had been hired to kill her.

In November 2006, another woman prospective candidate for the Federal House of Representatives received several threats, allegedly from opponents within her own party, the PDP. She lodged a complaint with the State Police Commissioner and was put under police protection. On 18 November 2006, when she attended a political meeting in her constituency, she was again threatened by her opponent and his supporters beat her and dragged her out of the venue.

Sometime this year (2010), the former Ogun State Action Congress (AC) gubernatorial candidate in the 2007 election was assassinated in the state capital. Not a few pointed accusing finger on the ruling People's Democratic Party in the state as having hand in the assassination. AC is the major opposition party in the state. The cases mentioned above are just but a few out of many.

THE NATURE OF THE STATE AND ETHNIC VIOLENCE

There are over (250) distinct ethnic groups in the country. Post colonial politics has been dominated by the three major ethnic groups- the Hausa/ Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo. However, the minorities became restive, particularly those in the oil producing region of Nigeria. Their restiveness arises from the feeling that while the petroleum on which the country is also dependent on is found in their territories, they got little of the benefits accruing from oil revenues. Instead, they suffered environmental degradation, loss of

livelihood, punitive state action that was mobilized against them by a combination of security forces and oil producing companies. For many of these ethnic groups, petroleum is a scourge rather than a blessing. This necessitated the emergence of dare devil militant youths who have taken up sophisticated arms and resorted to kidnapping and pipeline vandalism. The amnesty programme instituted by late President Yar Adua is intended to curb militancy in the Niger Delta area. The effectiveness of this programme leaves more questions than answers as militancy activities are still very much on ground. A new dimension has even been introduced- Bombings. When stakeholders of the Niger Delta amnesty programme gathered in Edo state in March 2010 to deliberate on the way forward, the meeting was cut short when there was a bomb blast which was planted in a car nearby. The Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) claimed responsibility for the blast threatening to heighten their violence if they were not included in the amnesty programme. Another bombing took place in May 2010 in a hotel owned by the Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State which is also in the Niger Delta. He cried foul and insinuated that the Governor who had been in a feud with him was after his life.

The minorities of the Niger Delta have been engaged in many instances of ethnic conflict- the Ijaws Vs Urhobos and Itsekiri and each of them Vs Chevron, the Ogori Vs Shell and the state government, these groups call for a change in the revenue allocation formula in a way that acknowledges their contribution to the state well being by rewarding them handsomely.

In the middle belt, the latest Jos inter-ethnic clashes between indigenes and settlers were traumatic. The once peaceful and serene city of Jos, capital of <https://assignbuster.com/an-assessment-of-the-political-violence-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

Plateau state leaves one with much worry. Hundreds of lives were lost, properties were destroyed, and many saw Jos that used to be a tourist attraction as death zone. In Lagos and Ibadan, there were prolong clashes between a faction of the Odua people's congress and the Hausa/Fulani Youth. Thirty years after the civil war, there is still a silent feeling by the indigbos (Elders forum of the Ibos) that the Ibo people are being marginalized and excluded from political power especially the presidency.

RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Religious violence has had its own prolonged effect on Nigeria. The menace caused by various religious violence have become a very big embarrassment to Nigeria and her citizens. In November 2002, riots and protest from some Moslem youths that were opposed to Miss World contest in Abuja led the organizers to cancel it and subsequently relocated the show to London. About 100 people lost their lives in that incident. Ironically, a lady from Turkey (a Moslem country) won the contest in London. All these religious disturbances run contrary to all " efforts" of the federal government to boost tourism. The talk of attracting foreign investors in the face of regular religious mayhem might be a total waste of energy and resources.

Local investors are even tired of the instabilities in Northern Nigeria. A number of Ibo business people had to relocate completely to Owerri, Onitsha, Aba, Lagos etc due to these riots. Many have completely lost their means of livelihood. The truth is that a single religious crisis will have a negative multiplier effects on other sectors of the economy. Some people became armed robbers when their means of livelihoods were destroyed.

Many innocent non-Moslems paid costly prices for these religious crises.
<https://assignbuster.com/an-assessment-of-the-political-violence-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

The Muslim dominated northern part of Nigeria hardly has a year passed without witnessing crises between the Islam faithfuls and Christians. Such crises always lead to mass killings, burning of churches and mosques as well as property. Last year a group known as "Boko Haram" that is opposed to western education unleashed so much terror on people in trying to push their ideals that only Arab and Islamic religion is worth learning.

Victor A. (@ <http://countedforchrist.blogspot.com/2009/07/causes-of-religious-violence-in-nigeria.html>) gives the following reasons the frequent religious crises witnessed in Nigeria: -

Colonial Rule System:

The British Colonial rule and the administrative policy of Sir Frederick Lugard and his successors created a bedrock for Muslims-Christians hostility. After the conquest of northern Nigeria and the imposition of indirect rule system, Christianity was restricted. This is to ensure the continuous use of their emirate system for a good tax collection system. Later attempts therefore to extend the influence of Christianity and western education in the areas that were predominantly Muslims, gave rise to inter-religious riots in some parts of northern Nigeria. This has continued up till today.

Increasing Acts of Religious intolerance:

Religious intolerance means the inability of some people, be they individuals or groups to tolerate the weak or deviant behaviour of other members. In Nigerian context however, religious intolerance is vividly manifested as the inability of members of one religious group to tolerate the other, such

intolerance often leads to tension, discord, hostility, and possibly violent confrontation.

The Upsurge of Religious Fanaticism:

The increasing incidence of violent and religious conflicts in Nigeria can be linked to the growing number of both fanatical Islamic and Christian groups in some parts of the country. These religious fanatics carry their dogma, beliefs and sectarian religious views to the extreme. They are often prepared to wage war against those who have contrary beliefs, and who maintain different mode of worship or religious principles and practice that are not acceptable to them. The fanatics have no regard for the fundamental human rights, which guarantee freedom of worship for the citizens. The United States Government agrees with this when it stated through its Secretary of state, Mrs Hillary Clinton on Monday 10th May, 2010 that religious crises in Nigeria were being fuelled by “ violent extremism.” It said this development was one of the greatest worries of the President Barrack Obama-administration in trying to build a new relationship with the Islamic world, a US-based Nigerian news agency, Empowered Newswire, has reported.

Politics of Religion

The use of religion as a tool for achieving political ends has contributed immensely to the problem of religious conflicts in Nigeria. Some politicians in Nigeria are known to engage in reactionary recourse to religious fervour as a means of either holding on the power, or as an instrument for political ascendancy. In such circumstance, their fellow religious adherent are often manifested, mobilized and utilized to achieve selfish political goals.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN KOGI STATE

Violence, under whatever guise, has a very negative impact on the life of people and has suddenly become a nightmare in political coat tormenting citizens of Kogi state. Indisputably, the political scenario in Kogi state is in consonance with Karl Max's political philosophy resulting from political violence like killing, thuggery, blackmail destruction of lives and property as individuals struggle for selfish interest. This philosophical diction has become a landmark in Kogi state which is a macrocosm of what obtains in the country as a whole.

More so, this political crises or clashes have successfully enabled other forms of violence under the umbrella of religion and ethnic crises. The Igbiras of Okene in Kogi state are known nationally for their notoriety. Their incessant massive violence with utmost brutality characterised by merciless killings has become a nightmare in Kogi state. Several lives have been lost in the past; houses, business ventures, markets, offices, cars, police stations etc were set ablaze at instances of violence. Many people over time have been rendered homeless and jobless. In Okene, anything can just cause a fight. Misunderstanding between two people resulting in a fight can graduate into inter communal clash if both parties are from different communities. Defection of a prominent person from one party to another can stem up crises among the youths. This unfortunate situation has led to mass exodus from Okene to other parts of the state.

In addition to the violence in Okene and Ogaminana are the frequent crises in Ejule, Ofu Local Government Area. At every political transition period, the town becomes dreaded. The activities of thugs are at its peak there. So <https://assignbuster.com/an-assessment-of-the-political-violence-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

much that when at a time, armed policemen were deployed to the town to curb the mayhem thugs afflict on political opponents and people, the thugs overpowered the policemen who eventually gave up and ran for their lives. It is said that the thugs equip themselves with charms that make their skin bullet proof. With that, they are fearless and take laws into their hands.

Anyigba in Dekina Local Government Area is not left out of the thuggery saga. The killing of innocent citizens, forcing people out of their houses, and committing all forms of crime in the name of politics, causing civil disturbances, making people run away from their farm works and businesses have become associated with their operation. Across the other Local Government Areas, you hear of thuggery operations. The use of thugs by self seeking politicians to intimidate and victimise political opponents is a regular phenomenon in Kogi State.

Well one question that might agitate the mind of any right thinking individual is why are they not being arrested even when you know who they are? One manifestation of the inadequacies of the Nigerian criminal justice system is the failure to carry out inquiries in cases of politically motivated killings, Most politically motivated violence and killings committed in the 1999 and 2003 elections were not investigated or punished, the scenario has immensely contributed to the culture of impunity that characterizes the political climate in the country today. The last eight years has witnessed much political killings in Nigeria, such as the murders of Bola Ige, Marshall Harry, Aminasaori Dikibo, Barnabas Igwe and Dele Arojo among others. In the months before federal and state elections in April and May 2003 political killings were reported throughout the country, with allegations of the

<https://assignbuster.com/an-assessment-of-the-political-violence-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

involvement of individual members of state and local government's officials and political parties.

The failure of the police to investigate political killings effectively and to bring to justice the perpetrators is a concern for current cases of political killings. The UN Special Reporter on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions stated:

“ In recent years many leading political figures have been assassinated. Prosecutions have been rare and convictions almost non-existent... The de facto impunity enjoyed for these crimes risks undermining Nigerian democracy, and the 2007 election year threatens many more killings unless impunity is ended.”

There are so many social factors that influence people's decision to indulge in violence or crisis as their way of resolving political issues and sure way to survival such as: -

Poverty

Unemployment

Ethnic differences

Insincerity on the part of the government policy

Government policy

Lack of effective communication

Selfish interest

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Since the issue of violence cannot be discussed without bringing in conflict, so violence cannot be tackled without talking about conflict resolution.

The contention of Burton (1982, pp. 137-138) that conflict is desirable does not contradict the position of Bagaji (2006, p5) which held that unresolved conflict drains the society of its capacity to maximize its diversity to satisfy its needs and that contending parties might even retort to the use of violence to achieve their purpose. Rather, it emphasizes that every conflict provides an opportunity to renegotiate desirable social changes among the disputants through the process of resolution.

According to Meyer in Akowe (2007, p. 117) conflict resolution refers to the entire process of settling disputes, disagreements or doubts by listening to and providing opportunities to meet each side`s needs and adequately address their interests so that each party is satisfied with the outcome. Here, identifying the needs of the parties in conflict is very crucial to the realization of resolution objectives.

Aduiba (2009, p. 23) refers to conflict resolution as a shift in the mode of interaction between contending parties. At the point of resolution, according to him conflict is terminated and legitimacy is restored while crude forces previously used for attack or defences of values are substituted for enlightened bargains. By implication, conflict resolution is an analytical process of dispute settlement which can only be achieved in a free and stable environment.

<https://assignbuster.com/an-assessment-of-the-political-violence-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

Burton (1987, p. 13) distinguished conflict resolution from allied terms such as conflict management and conflict settlement by the durability of the solutions each offers. According to him, conflict management simply employs skills that confine or limit or contain conflict while conflict settlement connotes legal/authoritative procedures and may be imposed by the elites. These two, according to him, are characteristically temporary in nature. Conflict resolution to him refers to terminating conflicts by methods that are analytical and get to the root of the problem. To him, it focuses on an outcome that in the views of the parties involved, is a permanent solution to the problem as it initiates the process of changes in the political, social and economic system that address both the individual and collective needs of the disputants.

Obasanjo (2005) described conflict resolution as including peace-making, peacekeeping and peace-building, which according to him requires clear identification of the core issues underpinning the conflict and development of strategies aimed at the balancing of power, matching of power with responsibility and reduction of the possibility of a successful violence.

From the foregoing, conflict resolution covers the entire process of reconciling the disputants in a manner that addresses the causes of the dispute, heal the consequences of the dispute and reduce the possibility of its re-occurrence. This often connotes an adjustment in social relations through effective redistribution of the societal values to address the needs that underpinned the conflict. This depends on the willingness of the disputants, the capacity and integrity of the third party and the stability of the environment of the conflict. To achieve these, Mkpandiok (2006, p. 128), <https://assignbuster.com/an-assessment-of-the-political-violence-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

contends that the knowledge of the following facts about conflict is imperative:

That conflict is typical of human interactions and should thus be anticipated.

That people are drawn into conflicts where and when their interest, values and needs are threatened.

That it is difficult for parties in conflict, even with outside assistance, to satisfy all their needs at the same time.

That third parties or intermediaries can only facilitate the resolution process while the real resolution lies within the proper sphere of the conflicting parties.

That the role of the third party is mainly to assist with their knowledge, experience, perspectives and power to make previously unconsidered option visible and feasible.

That elites in conflicts who double as the principal beneficiaries, tend to be hawkish, fanatical and more resistant to resolution than the average victims.

STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Imobighe (2008, p. 77) identified three strategies for conflict resolution.

These are conciliation, mediation and arbitration. According to him, conciliation is a process whereby the parties to a dispute agree to the services of a conciliator who meets them separately in an effort to resolve their differences. A conciliator, according to him has no legal standing or authority to seek evidence or call witnesses. He therefore usually writes no

decision or make awards but merely seeks concession among the disputants. When that understanding is secured, it is committed into writing and signed by the parties in dispute. At this stage, the understanding becomes binding on the parties.

Mediation according to Miller in Ologitere (2008, p. 26) refers to voluntary, informal; non-binding process undertaken by an external party that fosters the settlement of differences or demands between directly invested parties. According to this thesis, mediators generally have a vested interest in the resolution of a given conflict or dispute but are required to operate neutrally and objectively.