
POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL

By

Michael Egbuta Ukah, (Ph.D)

*School of General Studies,
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,
Umudike.*

Abstract

The way governance is directed can either be responsible for unleashing or controlling violence. Good governance implies constant effort to go out of one's way to create a social frame work where the real enemy can be removed, for example where there is an effective and sustainable effort to find solution to the problems of unemployment, illiteracy, lack of basic infrastructure, crime control and housing. These are inevitable but at the same time controllable sources of social or political violence that governance is obliged to address or wage war against. It also implies that governance itself would be generating unnecessary violence unless it wins the war. The stagnant socio – economic situation has made most countries not to take Nigeria serious. Even we in Nigeria tend to have a feeling of hopelessness. What reason is there to be optimistic in a country known for a very long history of economic and social crisis? Here we have much political intolerance and corruption –these are really veritable tools for political violence and they tend to constitute themselves as a political sub-culture. So in summary, we can now say that bad governance is the root cause of crisis. It is therefore the aim of this paper to explore the causes of this political problem and proffer a solution on the way forward

Conceptual Analysis /Framework

Electoral violence includes all forms of violence that emanates at any stage from differences in views, opinions and practices during the process of elections. According to Tafa Balogun, a onetime inspector- General of Police,

Electoral violence is the employment of force by political parties or their supporters to intimate opponents which often constitutes to a democratic regime an accounts for seizures of political power by the use of undemocratic means , such as force(Balogun 2003:1)

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Schmit (1968:3) posited that violence, particularly political violence, represents a disturbance to the political equilibrium system. According to Gurr (1970:2), political violence refers to all collective attacks within a political community against the political regime, its actors including competing political groups as well as incumbents – or its policies. Political violence is associated with thuggery, which is an act characterized by rudeness, hooliganism, touting, intimidation and harassment. It is a behaviour that contradicts peace, harmony and co-existence among groups. Political thuggery is an illegitimate and violent means of seeking political power with a view to subverting national opinion for parochial ends through self imposition.

From the foregoing, one can observe that there is a correlative relationship between the two concepts. As a matter of fact, they are complementary. The end-product of thuggery is violence. Violence is the means through which thugs achieve their aims.

It is quite clear to everyone that political violence has taken the centre stage in our country. There is a huge crisis all over. This crisis has taken a lot of toll on the people of Nigeria. We have all become the unfortunate victims of this problem. At times we are turn into a fear stricken and hopeless people. This violence creates certain psychological problems that the people are to grapple with. This ranges from mental slavery that makes the people optimistic to wait for a better day ahead that never comes. Many if not all seek for a way out of this quagmire. They want to run away from this political climate that has so much threatened their being. This very disappointing situation places the Nigerian socio-political milieu at the top of discussion in Africa. So we now have a problem of philosophizing on an ever-flogged issue that tend to have more of a practical than theoretical significance. There is a fundamental question of who would turn the table of under-development, poverty, greed, corruption and unemployment and the like, for better living condition for an average Nigerian. The situation in Nigeria is fraught with a lot of anomalies that can easily affect our philosophizing.

Bad governance and lack of development is very much associated with violence. There have been many opinions on governance and violence. For instance Thomas Hobbes looks at violence as being co-terminus with human nature--homo humini lupus (man being a wolf to man). Many believe that it is intrinsic to governance; and that violence can neither be good or bad, moral or immoral, rather it will be amoral.

This paper tries to look at violence from the point of view of morals. Metaphysically, violence that makes things happen or possible, is said to be synonymous with force, power, struggle, chaos, and even war. It must not be forgotten that there is a violence-free society that is occasioned by peaceful co-existence.

Earlier, the sophist held that the state or the polis is a child of social contract. It came into existence as a result of human deliberation. Also according to Plato, “a state arises out of the need of humankind; no one is therefore self-sufficing, but all of us have

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many wants.' Aristotle also says that no one can exist in total isolation without being either a god or a beast. All these views are very pertinent in the discussion on governance. All of them almost tend to contain all that is needed for understanding of the state. Aristotle made it quite explicit that the state is not a result of after-thought. Human beings deliberately originate the polis. Ontologically, it can then be said that the state is the final cause and the end of the individual and the family. Tasks and advantages are shared according to rules made and accepted by the citizens of the polis or city state. These rules, the rule of law, would be the defining character of the state or in the community. And it should equally guide members toward attaining their utmost goal.

Aristotle maintains that morality should take its essence from the ultimate aim of human and inter-human relationship. From this classical conceptual analysis of the state, it follows logically that it is the most convenient place for humans to be. Besides, it ought to be a place where people's right and happiness can be assured. If we should succinctly interpret Aristotle, it would be that the socio-political frame work ensures that whoever wins legitimate power is to be allowed to exercise it through legitimate means. When in power the elected should realize the need for peace in the state, as well as work for the self-realization of the people's goal. He must be concerned with the common good or what would guarantee people's welfare. With this kind of frame of mind and its assurance, not in place, peace is likely to elude the state, then its antithesis, conflict, strife, war, violence and the like would be inevitable.

Causes of Political Violence in Nigeria

When the leaders are legitimately elected, most of the strife or violence are abated. But then what is obtainable in our country Nigeria is not election but selection. Several reasons are actually responsible for electoral violence in Nigeria. Kalu (200:42) located the sources of violence within the context of reckless manipulation of candidates by the party leaders, disrespect for the constitution, injustice, and lack of tolerance among stake holders in political arena.

From the above, it is now very pertinent that credible election plays a major role in guaranteeing peace in the state. How credible is the political election in Nigeria? It must be borne in mind that credible system is identified through content-dependent and composed sociability for all. It upholds and projects trustworthiness, honesty, fairness, caring and unselfish explanations. A credible democratic election, on the grounds of the above, expresses a citizenry whereby decision-making is inclusive and not a privilege of cabals or selected untouchables. Credibility is a language of experience and qualification through which care is shown to other with their interest at the heart of all social operations. It (credibility) has politeness and openness as the commanding virtue. According to Okonkwo(2009:15)Credibility of the system will bring out the following

a).no implications and / or allocation of mob role or violence .b) . Free debate and expressions of personal / or party positive opinion. c). No

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dictatorship or domination. d). there must be inclusive polity or accountability; e). There must be gender equality and openness .f). Finally, no racial, ethnic, religious, majority nor minority political commands; etc.

Can one then beat one's chest and say that we have had a credible election in Nigeria? Although April poll of 2011 is adjudged the most credible election ever since the country became independent by both local and international observers, we still have our reservations. It might be better to say that it was fair compared to the previous ones.

It is quite obvious that the electoral and the electionary history of Nigeria has been a distorted one. The electoral histories of 1966, 1983, 1985, and the massive scandal of 2007 elections with their incredible electioneering shams exemplify the type of credibility of Nigerian political group. The consequences of these incessant political democratic lapses have been noted to be the cause of political violence.

The collapse of virtues of credible election in our history since independent created a corrupt avenue that mare public confidence on mandate of the electorate. Ajibola Taiwo in the Vanguard newspaper of 15th April 2009, says it all in his article "WHY ELECTIONS FAIL IN NIGERIA" .He states

There are several reasons why elections fail in Nigeria. There include the mind-set of the politicians to win electoral contests at all cost. The ambition of Government officials to perpetuate themselves in office; The willingness of the electoral officials and security agents to be compromised, as well as the electorate's morbid desire to sell their votes to the highest bidder.

The worst of the scandals were the 2007 elections held 47 years after the Nigerian independence. From all angles of independent group-domestic and international monitors; the general comment and constructive criticism have been that this election was worse than the previous ones.

'Extremely fraudulent, extremely not credible, extremely not free, extremely not fair ;extremely not transparent ,extremely flawed election' (Adejunobi ,2007:1)

In confirmation to this, Mr. Max Van Den Berg of European Union observer mission (EUOM) has this to say, during a World press conference in Abuja:

The 2007 polls were marred by poor organization,lack of essential transparency. Wide spread procedural irregularities, significant evidence of fraud particularly during the result collection processes , voter's disenchantment at different stages of the process .lack of equal conditions for contestants and numerous inadequacies of violence.(Okonkwo,2009:17)

It must be pointed out that for democracy to strive and survive; it must operate in an atmosphere of openness and accountability. To minimize the opportunity for intimidation, voters in any given democracy must be permitted and expressed to cast their ballots, and the ballot must count as their mandate. Party agents and their officials, electoral monitors must freely collect and certified duplicate of electoral result of each of the polling centre. Only in this way that would citizens become confident that their vote's count, that the result are accurate and that what the government does, indeed, rest upon their consent.

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For a long time in Nigeria, what has been obtainable is selection and not election. The ruling class, normally select the leaders, under the aegis of 'fake election' Another reason or cause of political violence is Poverty and unemployment – The majority of youth in this nation are jobless, with no means of livelihood, they are impoverished, and mercenary politics becomes the way out. The politicians capitalize on this and recruit the youth who not only constitute the pillar of society but also the most vulnerable to the self-inflicted poverty, as their thugs and touts to perpetrate violence.

Also, included in the reason for political violence is: Sit-tight Syndrome – This has become a phenomenon, not only in Nigerian but in African politics. Oyatope(2002:115) observes:

This is a situation in which an individual tries to hold on to power for personal aggrandizement or gains. In an attempt to hang on to power, leaders often create a regime of violence, repression and bloodshed. They organize political thugs, hooligans and scavengers to sing their praises, intimidate opponents and kill them if they become intransigent

The unnecessary and inordinate urge to control, dominate and amass wealth for their progeny in the infinite future by the politicians informs the emergence of the sit-tight phenomenon. Olusegun Obasanjo (2002: 50-51) asserts:

We fight, and sometimes shed blood to achieve and retain political power because for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for too long been the gateway to the economic kingdom

The foregoing statement captures the content and context of political thuggery and violence in Nigeria. The statement demonstrates how blood is being exchanged for political power in Nigeria. The use of thugs in Nigerian politics has not only led to waste of human resources, but it has also resulted in the dearth of able-bodied men who may be useful in the future of Nigeria, and low participation of women in politics. All to the ambition of those who would not like to relinquish power.

Other reasons are refusal to accept electoral defeat in good faith,(most of our politicians do not believe in defeat , so take politics as do or die affairs; when they are defeated they make some inflammatory statements that can trigger off violence) ,absence of good governance and low political culture and prebendal politics. Prebendal politics – In Nigeria, politics is conceived as an investment. The politicians, having invested colossally on campaigns and other political activities, coupled with the existing system of winner takes all, would want to win at all cost. And the need to employ the use of thugs and touts to destabilize and rig elections becomes inevitable, especially when such politicians are not popular candidates.

Absence of good governance and low political culture are also contributive factors to the menace of thuggery and violence. Hunger, marginalisation, incapacitation, intolerance, domination, apathy and cynism etc can also cause political violence. Esey (2003:232) Summarizes the causes of political violence as follows:

Domination and marginalization of sections and groups and persons in the acquisition and sharing of political positions, rigging of elections and manipulation of political process in favour or against certain groups, sections and persons; and falling apart of sponsors and those sponsored (Godfather and God sons) over contracts, appointments or methods of management of states.

Governance as Synonymous With Violence

As has been seen from the foregoing, politics as an effort to control power makes it naturally a volatile phenomenon. Vying for power implies and actually involves conflict. Being in power is also a conflict as long as the rulers' own view is imposed on others whose party or ideology may be different. However, for anybody to ascend to power, to wield influence, there must first be the guarantee of doing so without hindrance. For instance, it is for the institutional framework to ensure that whoever wins an election should be able to ascend to power. He or she should in turn be free to lead the state still as a member of political party with a political ideology. Once in power, however, such a person should ensure that all decisions and actions taken are for the good of the populace made up of the people of various political parties and ideologies. It is in acting within the limit of the generally accepted law that the leader may avoid unnecessary conflict and illegitimate violence. But then for conflict or violence, must always be there.

Sometimes, governance is almost synonymous with violence. The difference between the developing world and most western democracies is that in the former violence is easily resorted to, while in the latter there is a relative peace and stability, differences tend to be amicably and peacefully resolved. Also, while the developing world does not busy itself with people's welfare, governance in the western world preoccupies itself with the common good.

We are equally aware that in many developing countries the power of being in power to say how a country or state or local government is run is very often seized by force and by the military, just as we experienced here in Nigeria, not quite long ago. On many occasions power to rule is 'won' through unfair and unfree election as we have pointed out already. Governance cannot avoid being violent, but it can be in control of illegitimate violence. A state of social injustice and illegitimate claim to power invariably spells more violence and social unrest. While we recognize that in some developing countries power is got through free and fair means, we still maintain that it is not enough to come to power through free and fair elections, good governance would still be required to make the difference. Good governance implies constant effort to go out of one's way to create a social framework where the real enemy can be removed. For example, where there are effective and sustainable efforts to find solution to the problem of unemployment, illiteracy, lack of basic infrastructures, security control and housing etc. These are inevitable but controllable sources of social violence that governance is obliged to wage war against. And governance would be generating unnecessary violence unless it wins the war.

Conclusion

Since violence as shown from the paper is not intrinsically evil i.e legitimate violence , the responsibility of the populace would be to wage war against bad governance and this could be done through popular struggle for necessary change, when the need arises, and it must be done through rightful means , that is , credible election. This would involve such groups as the churches , intellectuals, human right activists, peasant workers and the media.

Much has been said and written on how Nigerian problem is that of lack of leadership. Still the essential role of the citizens must not be de-emphasized. Aristotle, long ago, referred to the ideal citizens in the following words:

The citizen whom we are seeking to define ,is a citizen in the strictest sense. And his special characteristics is that he shares in the administration of Justice and in the office (Aristotle's Politics 111,1271.p.23.)

Just as the free fighters did not fold their hands before the colonial masters, so must the populace of today prolong the battle and send away the bad leaders.. The populace must assume their role to bring governance under them. A strong populace is necessary so that power-intoxicating rulers do not get at all to power. When they do, they should not be allows to stay put.

Actually, liberating the people from their socio-economic problem would not be a simple task but then, that is exactly what is expected from good leaders so as to curb violence.

Such governance as result from our analysis is utilitarian and pragmatic. It is relevant in so far as it is at war against the socio- economic problem of society. For us in Nigeria, this is very urgent for we need a Nigerian pragmatism that makes governance result- oriented. Legitimacy in governance would be based on satisfying the needs of the people and enhancing their well being. Such an alternative would not be a mere system; it is social action as well, involving one and all

Recommendations

There is a general desirability of good governance. All the causes of political violence could be easily tackled by 'good governance. From the discussion so far, it is clear that the whole problem of socio-political violence is from bad governance, that is, when the aim and the end of government is not geared towards the common good. Good governance in Nigeria and in Africa, as a whole has remained a mirage. Although the desire for good governance is very universal. What is highly needed actually is to put the desire into a concrete reality. People may easily disagree about the best means to achieving good governance, but then, they agree that good governance is absolutely imperative. It must be pointed out that good governance is endowed with the authority to ensure a violent free society. It may not totally resolve all social conflicts. It rather makes available effective solutions to the issues of normal and peaceful coexistence in society.

Though the struggle for power is a conflict, but such a conflict is limited by the rule of law and controlled by the refinement of civilized society. Anarchy is simply absence of good governance or neglect of the rule of law. A society under good governance is equally ruled by the law. Such a society brings violence under control. Law restricts excesses from governance and equally restrains the action of the individuals. The individual may have the right to challenge or criticize, and even, change governance but not the right to infringe on other people's rights. This is one of the ways, the ever-present violence comes under control.

Another solution to the problem of political violence is re-orientation of our value system. Right now Nigeria is one of those countries where what count is the amount of wealth one has amassed. Society has not helped matters at all, as she celebrates those that have made it to the top, in terms of material acquisition without daring to ask or enquire on how they made it. The consequence of this ugly trend is the enthronement of Machiavellian principles of "the end justifying the means". Our politicians are desperate and also in a hurry to make quick money. The result will be nothing but political violence.

It must be pointed out that when the rebellious tendencies in people are unleashed by harsh and unfriendly socio-economic conditions that make them feel oppressed, violence is always inevitable. Somalia remains a special case where lack of good governance has led to a state of anarchy and total collapse of governance. The best way to check this is to remove all that can affect the common good.

Finally, there must be a social context for good governance to thrive. This might sound negative, but at the same time very true, violence can be profitably be used in creating the society. It is the measure a government is knowledgeable and efficient in the use and control of violence that such a government can be said to progress. It must hurt feelings as it carries out useful programmes to benefit the people. It can also have control over violence in the measure it concentrates on projects that benefits the populace. From the paper so far one can say without equivocation that good governance is indifferent to system and ideologies of government. What matters is their usefulness in controlling violence, that is, analyzing the people's basic needs and relieving them of their basic socio-economic worries.

To avoid the diverse and indiscriminate interpretation of laws relating to elections and the indiscriminate issuance of injunctions and ex-parte motion, it is recommended that a Constitutional Courts should be put in place to interpret and handle election and Constitutional matters. This, it is believed will curtail some excesses that in many instances generated electoral violence.

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