

Politics by Elimination: Implications of Political Violence on Nigeria Democratic Governance

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Abstract: This work focus on eliminationist politics in Nigeria. We traced the development of elimination politics in Nigeria right from independence in 1960 to the present day, which is a reminiscence of Hitler's period in Germany and Rwanda genocide. The paper interrogates the escalating political violence in different parts of the country, with increasing loss of lives. We also examine the cause of riot, arson, murder and looting which have become widespread in many states particularly in the northern part of the country which is a clearer image of the danger that comes with intolerance and political violence. We found out that the major cause of the violence is economy, because of the nature of African society that is poverty stricken. The paper then conclude that; Nigeria cannot be run by eliminating those whose political affiliation and values vary from our own; political violence is an ill wind of social phenomenon, which blows no one any good. Dialogue should be allowed to prevail over the language of violence.

Key words: Eliminationist • Independence • Germany • Leaders • Political violence • Rwanda

INTRODUCTION

Daniel Goldhagen[1] an American political scientist in his book titled "Hitler's Willing Executioners" coined the term eliminationism. It refers to a political ideology that is deeply rooted in elimination of opponent during Hitler's period in Germany. Daniel claimed that; the vast majority of ordinary Germans were as the title indicates "willing executioners" in the holocaust because of a unique and virulent "eliminationist antisemitism" in the German political culture, which had developed in the preceding centuries. He argued that this "eliminationist antisemitism" was the cornerstone of German national identity and that this type of antisemitism was unique to Germany and because of it, ordinary German conscripts killed Jews willingly. This special mentality grew out of medieval attitudes from a religious basis, but was eventually secularized.

Phillis Bernard [2] also described elimination politics as the belief that one's political opponents are "a cancer on the body politics that must be excised either by separation from the public at large, through censorship or by outright extermination in order to protect the purity of the nation". The world had witness many extremely bad imperialist eliminationist policy; this include, the elimination of Gaddafi family and the Jamahiriya

practitioners in Libya, the overthrowing and murdering of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the Western interventionism in Afghanistan, the military act of NATO in Yugoslavia, Rwanda genocide of 1994, war rapes in Sudan's Darfour between 2003 and 2010, the Cambodian genocide between 1975 and 1979, the carcinogenic Operation Condor in Latin America between 1973 and 1985, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the Auschwitz concentration camp death marches between 1944 and 1945, the British concentration camp for Mau Mau freedom fighters in Kenya between 1952 and 1960 and the Boer wars of 1880 to 1881 and 1889 to 1902[3].

From the itemized examples above we have a clearer image of the danger that comes with intolerance and eliminationist politics. For example; the dismal failure of western interventionism in Afghanistan, where the elimination of the Taliban has proven to be impracticable, the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the America has yielded no good result because today Iraq is burning to ashes with deadly inroad of ISIS militants reversing whatever it is the imperialist eliminationists ever established after the overthrowing and murdering of Saddam Hussein. Libya has become a failed state run by numerous rival militia groups with helpless government in Tripoli, a clear case of anarchy [4]. The research clearly shows that nothing good come out of the eliminationist policy. Democracy in

its Aristotelian sense is all about running matters of governance in a non-eliminationist way, adopting a tolerant approach where competing political ideas are packaged and put to the vote in search of majority opinion. In this work we want to examine the reason why the eliminationist policy is being embarked upon by the politician in Nigeria despite the fact that the history has never recorded any good consequence from the act. We want to interrogate Nigeria politics, look for the cause of this elimination and its aftermath, not only that look for a way out of this predicament for the sake of this generation and the incoming unborn ones.

Eliminationist Policy and Nigeria Politics: Corsini [5] defines violence as the manifestation of hostility and rage through physical force directed against persons or property. Hook [6] defines violence as “the illegal employment of methods of physical coercion for personal or group ends”. Audi [7] asserts that violence is ‘the unjustifiable use of force’ whether legally or illegally applied. It is evident from the foregoing that violence is the use of physical force against persons or object. However, conflicts that assume violent dimensions could be classified as political violence. Remi Anifowoshe [8] defines political violence as: The use or threat of physical act carried out by an individual or 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; and whose objective, choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effects have political significance, that is, tend to modify the behavior of others in the existing arrangement of power that has some consequences for the political system.

Right from Nigeria independence in 1960, eliminationist policy have been rearing its ugly head often and often in the polity. For instance the first case of political violence that leads to the elimination of many started immediately after independence. The problem started with the elections conducted immediately after independence in the 1960s. In the Western Region, political violence, popularly referred to as “operation wet e”, were recorded from 1964 to 1965 that claimed many lives. There were also political violence in parts of Northern Region that also claimed many lives, especially between supporters of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) and supporters of other parties, mainly the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and Action Group. This led to the military coup of January 5, 1966, in which the then Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa and

Premiers Ahmadu Bello and Ladoke Akintola, of the Northern and Western Regions, respectively were assassinated [9]. The aftermath of the military coup led to Nigerian Civil War 1966-1970 in which the Igbo tribe was almost exterminated. It was a reminiscence of what happened in Germany under Nazi regime and Rwanda genocide, in which a tribe was almost exterminated completely.

Furthermore, Nigeria had another experience again in 1979 with the coming into been of second republic. The national election conducted in 1983 witnessed massive post-election violence following the victory of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in Oyo and Ondo states. Many oppositions were eliminated, both the NPN and UPN ceased the opportunity to visit their vengeance on their supposed enemies thus escalate the carnage. The army came in December 1983, but not until may 1999 that Nigeria had the civilian rule again. And in April poll 2011, the Weekly Trust [10] of April 16, reported that, at least 90 people were killed and over 204 injured. After the elections, supporters of candidates who failed at the polls protested violently in different parts of the North, which led to the death of over 120 people and about 15,000 others were displaced (Leadership, April 20, 2011)[11]. Available statistics show that over 10,000 lives were lost to violent clashes between 1999 to June 2002[12]. More so, the Nigerian Red Cross, was involved in the resettlement of over 250,000 individuals and 32,000 families as a result of various acts of political violence in the country in 2001 alone[13]. However, since the inception of the current democratic exercise in 1999 till the present-day, Nigerians have witnessed tremendous degrees of power struggle and political violence whereby the number of politically motivated murders is said to be equal to the number of people killed during the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 to 1970[14].

Causes of Elimination Policy in Nigeria: We have seen the cases of eliminationist policy in Nigeria polity; here we want to examine the factors that lead to the incessant elimination despite the unavoidable worst consequences recorded in history.

The first noticeable cause is poverty. Abject poverty among people which have made them easy prey to be paid and instigated into violence; poverty has remained Africa problems. The effect is so devastating to the extent that nearly half of the continent’s population lives below \$1 per day, “34 of the world 49 least developed countries are in Africa” [15]. It was discovered that only three countries Mauritius, South Africa and Botswana have made

progress so far, the existence of high level of abject poverty have made it practically impossible for the country to progress, talk less of giving peace a chance. In an attempt to get rid of poverty, Nigerian politician have discovered that accessibility to governance we open a leeway to economic and material acquisition. Thus what we are talking about here is haven to do with political economy, the intending eliminationist policy is base on acquisition legally or illegally the material and economic aspect of the society. Abbas [16], observed that; dialectical materialism is premised on the issue of man's inherent motivations of economic pursuits and needs. Therefore, the relations between people in the production processes are symbolically connected with the direction of the political struggles to capture political power in order to determine economic factors. So man inordinate ambition to hold political power is necessitated by economic acquisition and Nigerian politician can do anything to see that power is not let out to the opposition party. The nature and practice of dirty politics by political parties in Nigeria is worrisome, people see political parties as an instrument for fighting their political opponent and those criticizing the parties for their inability not to perform their expected roles [17]. That has been the reason why any attempt to stand on their way by anybody would be sent to early grave.

Another problem is that the politicians who are expected to manage political conflicts, are the ones found of promoting, arming and funding violence. Nigerian politicians recruited, trained and empowered local secret sect to harass, intimidate and victimize perceived political opponents and opposing views against their political ambition. This culture of violence has been instituted in Nigeria body polity right from independence; this has remained one of the reasons for the low participation of Nigerians in politics and other social activities. This is best explained when we observed what happened during the ward congress of the political parties in Nigeria which suppose to be an intra-party affair, many politicians went to the congress venue armed with assault rifles and acid containers for possible use on opponents. These politicians employed all possible means to compel innocent people to vote against their wishes.

This violence act is further made possible by the willing hand that is made possible by unemployment. The backward state of the Nigerian economy which has created a large and ready pool of the jobless is seen as the factor promoting political violence. Thus has remained one big danger hanging on the neck of the nation and which every right thinking Nigerian must worry about.

Every year our Higher Institutions produced thousand of able bodied, highly educated graduates, without any available employment opportunity. This unemployed youth have become a willing tool in the hands of politicians as instrument of promoting political violence; an idle hand is a devils workshop.

This situation is further compounded by the moral decadence of the society. Unethical conducts or acts of indiscipline are the most important problem confronting Nigeria as a country. This act of indiscipline has eating deep to the fabrics of the society. The moral instinct of many have long dead to the extent that they are ready to do anything in the name of money, anybody that stand on their way could be remove at will. A lot of public funds have been spent experimenting with structures, programs and processes that could lead to moral renewal. These structures and programs have been at times built at the expense of obscuring the very content they were meant to promote. All this has arguably stemmed from the absence of a few vital ingredients necessary for moral regeneration to occur, including serious intolerance against corruption since the dire economic condition of the majority of Nigerians makes social vices like corruption to thrive and politician with unfettered access to public funds are in good position to influence those who are economically impoverished to engage in political violence by inducing them with money.

Various governments at the Federal, state and Local level, in Nigeria, have embarked on various programmes since independence to see that the wrong in the life of Nigeria are rewritten but nothing have been achieved.

Failure of our Justice System is another case; Nigerians are found of indulging in acts that cause political violence with impunity because the perpetrators are never brought to book. The kid-glove treatment of those who engaging political violence has been one factors that encouraging spread of political violence in the Country. The rate of inaction by the government made many believed that governments are the perpetrators of violence in the country. The problem is even made worst if the key actors in the violence belong to the ruling party. One would be forced in some cases to think that we are in the state of anarchy because of the way many of the perpetrators moved around without arrest as if they were above the law. In addition, the Nigerian Judiciary is weakened by corruption, poor funding, inadequate facilities and poor training of judicial staff, to name a few. All these result in slow machinery of justice and therefore encourage politicians to employ every possible means to achieve their aims.

Lack of Adequate Security: the machinery of law enforcement is definitely weak and as long as the police force is weak in terms of workforce and training, political violence will continue to thrive. Furthermore, where security agents are taking sides, compromising their position, political violence will be inevitable because people will lose confidence in them to protect their political interest and therefore take laws into their hands. The situation in Nigeria is so worst to the extent that the violence is being perpetrated in the presence of military and police personnel or by the military and police personnel themselves. They aid and abet well placed individual in the society who committed political violence and go unpunished while punishing others who committed the same crime but are less powerful members of the society, thereby increasing the problem of political violence in the society. Instances of brutal killings in election period are numerous. The most tragic and disturbing aspect of the incidents is that these incidents in most cases either happened in the presence of policemen and soldiers or immediately reported to them, we just discovered that no arrest would be made and no investigations would be carried out. The scenario created from the various incidents recorded so far gave the impression that some persons were in the name of politic, licensed to destroy lives and property of Nigerians. It is a serious dent on our claim to democratic ideals.

Lack of Democratic Culture also contributed to violence activities in the polity. Before independence in 1960, South-West practiced Monarchical system which operated among the Yorubas. It was a centralized form of government. Yoruba refers to a group of cultures linked by a common language. A group that inhabits the South- Western part of Nigeria, bounded by the Niger River and the eastern parts of Benin Republic, formerly Dahomey and the western part of Togo. A Yoruba scholar, Atanda, J.A [18] pointed out that a king is selected from a royal family to head the monarchical system of government. The gerontocracy adopted by the Igbo, Niger Delta and Benue people of Nigeria was a non-centralized political system. The anthropologists refer to this system as stateless or acephalous because the elders and lineage heads performed religious and political functions since there is no institutionalized political authority [19]. Oyemakinde [20] remarked that gerontocracy was a village democracy where the general will of the people was taken into consideration. Instead of royal courts and palaces, market centers were used for religious and political activities such as debate and decision on vital issues of public interest were taken there

as well. Northern Nigeria practiced feudal system. Feudalism describes a set of reciprocal legal and military obligations among the warrior nobility, revolving around the three key concepts of lords, vassals and fiefs. A lord was in broad terms a noble who held land, a vassal was a person who was granted possession of the land by the lord and the land was known as a fief. In exchange for the use of the fief and the protection of the lord, the vassal would provide some sort of service to the lord. There were many varieties of feudal land tenure, consisting of military and non-military service. The obligations and corresponding rights between lord and vassal concerning the fief form the basis of the feudal relationship [21].

Political powers in these systems described were not absolute because there were intervention and people participation. Osaghae [22] contended that political power was divine and almost mystical. It epitomized the unity of the people and was held in trust for the people by the ruler and elders of the community. The ruler could not enforce his personal will on the people indiscriminately. But immediately after independence the culture of violence was instituted into our body politics in Nigeria. It should be noted that political violence is an ill wind of social phenomenon, which blows no one any good; all the election conducted so far right from 1960 till date were mare with violence and elimination of the opposition. In addition, we also inherited culture of dictatorship and violence from the long years of Military rule. For over thirty years we were under a dictatorship with its violence which mature gradually became a part of the spirit and consciousness of the nation. Thus the elected politicians after May 29th 1999 were found of using military slang and command. i.e. with the immediate effect, obey first and so on. That spirit is at the root of the problems now bedeviling our political system.

CONCLUSION

The culture of impunity that encourages political violence should be discouraged by scrupulous enforcement of laws prohibiting political violence and illegal arms trade, possession and use. We cannot run our country by eliminating those whose political affiliations and values vary from ours. Those political leaders who thought that they have the youth at their disposal for the exercise of politics of barbarism must have a rethink of the deadly impact of their primitiveness. The youth that are aspiring to politics should be nurtured into tolerant democratic beings whose role in the politics of the country is to win the hearts of the majority, not to

eliminate political enemies and to coerce the majority into submission. Things like political youth wings at the service of violence prone political leaders are simply tyrannical or non-democratic political institutions that only serve to perpetuate the incidence of eliminationist politics. We need democratic political institutions that are respected by all players in our political landscape, for only these can assure us as a nation that the incidence of eliminationist politics is radically minimized, or even eliminated. There is need to stop overzealous ambition, lost for power, selfishness, voluptuousness, pride, anger and revenge in Nigerian politics. We should learn to have a passion of leadership no matter what will be our political need. Dialogue should be allowed to prevail over the language of violence.

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