Chapter 6
Political Violence and Civil Fight in Nigeria

Ihekwoaba Onwudiwe
Texas Southern University, USA

Edidiong Mendie
Texas Southern University, USA

ABSTRACT

Nigeria's landscape is plagued with increased insecurity fueled by political violence and civil unrest. The political violence stems from ethnic chauvinism, power dominance by Nigerian politicians, and the military. The resulting consequence has driven investors and forced locals to find solace in other nations through mass migration. This chapter seeks to examine events surrounding key political violence in Nigeria and its causes. The authors address practical strategies to address the civil unrest in Nigeria. Policy implications for Nigeria's national security and sustainable development are suggested.

INTRODUCTION

The political climate of a country plays a huge role in its local and international affairs. As seen in the Nigerian space, political violence and unrest have led to disastrous consequences that are toxic for citizens, the government, and the world. Political violence has been classified as attacks by a larger group that involves physical and violent conflicts (Krug et al., 2002) or force towards achieving a political agenda (Raleigh & Dowd, 2016). Importantly, Bardall et al. (2020) contended that intentionality is a core element of political violence that disrupts civic engagement.

Political violence is an affront to people's rights and liberties. Fundamental human rights are sacrosanct, must be respected by all, and protected from abuse (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Political violence violates citizens' fundamental and human rights, constitutional freedom, and civil liberties. These violations (seen through the lens of political violence) stifle human rights and freedom and must be frowned upon and curtailed. This chapter explores political violence and instability in Nigeria, the resulting consequences, and strategies to regulate such actions.

BACKGROUND: DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND CIVIL UNREST IN NIGERIA

Nigeria's Federalism is a double-edged sword that has led to its growth and destruction. Power concentration is mainly seen in the central or federal government (Afolabi, 2006) and usually results in an abuse of power without proper checks to hold the center accountable. Similarly, Local, State, and Federal elections are constantly filled with power tussles leading to violence.

Political aspirants empower miscreants to instigate violence and civil unrest against opponents and citizens who share different political beliefs. Such "touts," as they are popularly called in Nigeria, are equipped with weapons and money for their oppressive acts. Politicians prey on each other through violence (Aver et al., 2013) in a bid to assert power dominance (Alfa & Otaida, 2012) and obstruct the fundamental tenets of democracy (Anweting & Ogar, 2019; Ikyase & Egberi, 2015). Discord among political parties is on a constant rise in Nigeria, and these contentious practices have enabled militancy to thrive on overcoming oppression (Segun, 2013) from those in power. The exposure of citizens to such violence creates intense fear and political apathy leading to low voter turnout in the many Nigerian States. Suffice it to say that democracy at its worst is the current state of the Nigerian political system.

Post-election seasons find the weapons used by miscreants in public circulation and control exploited for personal gains and further violence. The weapons and mechanisms used for election purposes are the nation's worst fear as they become the nation's deadly and daily instruments. The Nigerian States with a high level of violence are those usually empowered by politicians during election periods.

Recent Trends of Political Violence in Nigeria

Conflict is inevitable in a heterogeneous society such as Nigeria. Nevertheless, when such conflict becomes a recurring tool exploited by those in power to advance their political agenda, society bears the brunt of it. This section analyzes two recent cases of political violence in Nigeria seen in the Lekki massacre and the Presidential election of 2019.

The Lekki Massacre: An Offshoot of #EndSars

A striking incidence of political violence in Nigeria is seen in the Lekki tollgate shooting (Lekki massacre) of 2020 against the #EndSars social movement. The #EndSars campaign was an invention on Twitter where young Nigerian citizens spoke against the injustices meted out by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a division of the police force.

SARS was known for its brutality seen in abuse, torture, rape, and killings of Nigerian citizens to extract information on corruption. As a result of this increased abuse, citizens embarked on a peaceful protest against police brutality in the streets. The Nigerian military opened fire on peaceful protesters leaving about 12 dead and many injured (Amnesty International, 2022). The violent actions of the Nigerian military during the #EndSars protest are against international guidelines of military-civilian engagement. The military is created to fight external threats and not use force or violence on peaceful civilians. According to the United States Posse Comitatus Act (1878), the military is estopped from being used as a domestic police force.

Citizens continued to the media and Twitter to voice their displeasure with the Lekki massacre, the #EndSars protest, and calling for aid from the international community. The Nigerian government has

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