



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF NIGER DELTA

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ABSTRACT

Election- related violence has characterised Nigeria electoral process since attainment of flag independence in 1960. Since the present Fourth Republic, all elections conducted in the country have been marred by violence. This paper examines electoral violence in Nigeria with a focus on Niger Delta region of Nigeria which has been the epic centre of election-related violence. This paper interrogates the role of elites from the region in the political-cum electoral violence. It contends that the fierce battle for political office in the region has to do with the control of oil wealth found in the region. The paper adopts a qualitative research method and relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through interviews of some of the major stakeholders from the region and secondary data gathered through journal articles, books and periodicals. Study findings show that elites support or promotion of violence is the key factor responsible for electoral violence in the region and other factors identify are under development, unemployment and juicy nature of political office or nature of politics. The paper concludes, among others, that political office should be made less attractive, elites found promoting violence before, during and after an election be sanctioned.

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INTRODUCTION

Several studies have shown that a fourth of elections conducted in the world are marred by electoral violence (Fischer, 2002; Bekoe, 2009; Stratus, & Taylor, 2012; Simpser, 2013). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the story is the same, since 1990 one in every five elections conducted on the continent has been tarnished by violence (Borzyskowski, 2013). Similarly, Lindberg, (2004) argues that 80 percent of the elections conducted in Africa are tainted by electoral violence. For example, the Ethiopia 2005 general election was vitiated by violence, over 193 people lost their lives. In Kenya, over 1,200 people killed and 500,000 people displaced in the 2007/2008 elections (Gibson & Long, 2009). While in Nigeria, the 2011 general elections were bloody. The post-election violence after the announcement of the winner of the 2011 presidential election led to the death of over 800 people and 65,000 displaced (Bekoe, 2011; (HRW, 2011) Nigeria, Africa most populous nation is not immune from this problem.

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Since her return to a civil rule after sixteen years (second phase of military rule) of uninterrupted military rule through a transition programme midwifed by the Abdulsalami military administration on 29 May, 1999, the country has joined the club of nations that their electoral process has been stained by electoral violence. That is to say, since the first election that heralded the Fourth Republic, the nation has witnessed five general elections: 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. Besides, these general elections, there are also countless bye elections and rescheduled ones. But these elections have been marred by violence. Despite its prevalence, scholars and policy makers have ignored the role played by the "big masquerades" in electoral violence in the country. In other words, there is a paucity of studies focusing on the role played by the elites in the electoral violence in the country and the Niger Delta region in particular. This paper will fill such a lacuna in the literature. It seeks to address what makes up electoral violence, its causes with an emphasis on the elites as a major cause of electoral violence. The paper adopts the qualitative research method and data for the study are collected through both primary and secondary sources. Primary source of data obtains through interview of major stakeholders in the region and for the secondary data via journal articles, books, periodicals,

newspapers, internet materials, etc. The paper is structured into nine segments of which this introduction is a part. Second section examines the concepts germane to this discourse violence, electoral violence and Niger Delta. The third segment discusses frustration-aggression theory which is the theoretical framework adopts for this study and the fourth part takes a cursory look at electoral violence in the country Fifth segment discusses reported cases or incidences of electoral violence in the Niger Delta and the sixth section discusses causes of electoral violence while the seventh segment analyses the methods used in gathering data and analysis of the data. The eighth segment is the findings and discussion and ninth part is the conclusion and recommendation

Conceptual Clarification

To enhance our understanding and appreciation of this paper, there is need to define and explain the concepts of electoral violence and Niger Delta.

Electoral violence

There seems to be consensus among scholars as to the definition or meaning of electoral violence. Electoral violence is a component of a broader concept known as political violence (Yoroms, 2015). For Albert, (2007, p. 133) electoral violence is 'all forms of organized acts or threats, physical, psychological, and structural aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process.' In the same vein, the UNDP (2009) defines electoral violence as, any acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process, or that arise in the context of electoral competition. When perpetrated to affect an electoral process, violence may be employed to influence the process of elections—such as efforts to delay, disrupt or derail a poll—or to influence the outcome: the determination of winners in competitive races for political office, or securing approval or disapproval of referendum questions (UNDP, 2009, p. 4). For Straus and Taylor (2012, p. 19) electoral violence is a "physical violence and coercive intimidation directly tied to an impending electoral contest or announced electoral result." Ogboaja (2007, p.5) sees electoral violence as "all forms of organized act or threat, physical, psychological and structural, aimed at intimidating, harming blackmailing political opponents before, during and after an election, geared towards influencing the electoral process to one's selfish desire." In the same vein Nweke (2005, p.387) defines electoral violence as "any form of physical force applied at disorganizing electoral process, destruction of electoral materials and intimidating of electorate to vote against their wish." For our purpose in this paper, we shall adopt Laasko, (2007) definition of electoral violence as our working definition. According to Laasko (2007) electoral violence means:

An activity motivated by an attempt to affect the results of the elections either by manipulating the electoral procedure and participation or by contesting the legitimacy of the results. It might involve voters' and candidates' intimidation, killings, attacks against their property, forceful displacement, unlawful detentions and rioting (p. 227-228). From the foregoing definitions, electoral violence aims at specific political objectives. That is to affect electoral process and its outcome (Höglund, 2009). It occurs at all stages or cycle of electoral process, before, during and after elections (Sisk, 2008), it

involves various actors such as government security apparatus like the Armed Forces, Paramilitary such as the police, Department of State Security Service (DSS), Nigerian Civil Defence Corp (NCDS) and non-state actors such as militia groups and cult groups. Electoral violence involves activities such as destruction of properties, abduction, coercion, detention, assassination and torture (UNDP, 2009); it targets voters, electoral officials, electoral materials like, ballot papers, boxes, result sheets, card readers, etc.

Niger Delta

According to Okwechime (2013), there is no single definition of the concept or term Niger Delta. The concept has been defined from either cartographic or political viewpoint (Roberts, 2005; Saka, Azizuddin, & Omede, 2014). According to Roberts (2005, p.95), the cartographic definition emphasises the "natural Niger Delta" and going by this definition, states such as Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers make up the Niger Delta (Adeosun, Ismail, & Zegeni, 2016a; Adeosun, Ismail, & Zegeni, 2016b) while the political definition focuses on the constituent states in the region and all the oil producing areas. The UNDP (2006, p.19) defined Niger Delta as comprising "all the oil-producing areas and others considered relevant for reasons of administrative convenience, political expedience and developmental objectives." And going by this definition all the nine oil-producing States of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Edo, Cross River, Abia, Imo and Ondo constitute Niger Delta. This tallies with the political Niger Delta (Saka, et al, 2014; Etekepe, 2007; Naneen, 2007; Omotola, 2006). For this study, we shall adopt the UNDP (2006) definition of Niger Delta which embraces all the oil producing states, and this paper focuses on Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers. They are the major oil producing states in the region and the epic centre of violence in the region.

Theoretical Framework

The analytical framework for this study is frustration-aggression theory and is credited to John Dollard (a psychologist) and his associates Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (cited in Berkowitz, 1989) and later reformulated by Berkowitz (1962). According to Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears, (1939, p.338), the theory states that "occurrence of aggression always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression." The crux of this theory is that aggression results from frustration and in a circumstance where the actual yearning of an individual is denied either directly or indirectly by the outcomes of the way the society is organised, the feeling of disillusionment may lead such a person to express his displeasure through violence that will be targeted at those he /she considers being responsible for his/her predicament (Faleti, 2006). It relevant to our analysis of electoral violence in the Niger Delta is that it enables us to understand the rationale behind the political behaviour of the political gladiators of the region and their supporters to resort to violence due to the failure of the political elites to accomplish their goals or objectives of holding on to their positions or losing elections and hire thugs to unleash terror on the defenceless electorates or the public

Electoral Violence in Nigeria: An overview

As Alabi (2009) noted, the challenges of electoral competition cannot be fully understood without situating them in the

country's historical experiences. Similarly, Gibson (2007), notes that to understand where we are going as a country, one must understand where we came from. Since the attainment of independence in 1960, the political system has been synonymous with political and electoral violence. The 1959 general elections, which preceded independence were minimal in terms of electoral violence because of the presence of colonial lords. The first post- independence election was conducted in 1964 and it was stained by boycotts, malpractice and violence. Prior to the elections, the contested results of the national census and the intense political campaign by various political parties heightened the political stake and thus affected the outcome of the elections.

There were widespread of violence, such as maiming, kidnapping, arsons and murder (Ojo, 2014). In the Western region violence, political conflict otherwise known as "operation wet e"¹ were recorded from 1964 to 1965 following both federal and regional elections and rift between Obafemi Awolowo and LadokeAkintola. According to Ochoche (1997), the western regional election crisis remains the most electoral violence in the history of the country. The 1979 general elections conducted during the military administration of General Olusegun Obasanjo that ushered in the Second Republic were not devoid of malpractice. Various forms of electoral malpractices were recorded. They ranged from victimization, use of thugs, manipulations of results by the polling agents to bribing of electoral officials as well as policemen (Ugoh, 2004). The 1983 general elections were conducted during the administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and the elections were characterised by post-election violence following the announcement of the National Party of Nigeria candidates in the gubernatorial elections in Oyo and Ondo states as the winners of the election. These states were the stronghold of the Unity Party of Nigeria. As documented by Osaghae (2011, p. 148).

Akin Omoboriowo, the avowed Awoist and former deputy governor who defected to become a gubernatorial candidate of the National Party of Nigeria was at first declared the winner. In a state with an electorate that was unwavering in its practically monolithic support for the Unity Party of Nigeria in all other elections, both in 1979 and 1983, this was a most unlikely result, and there was a widespread conviction that the National Party of Nigeria's victory had been rigged. According to Apter (1987) as cited by Osaghae (2011) violence or rioting greeted Federal Election Commission's (FEDECO's) declaration of Omoboriowo as winner of the election. Hundreds of lives were lost and properties were destroyed in the violence which National Party of Nigeria stalwarts and FEDECO offices were the main targets. A similar incident occurred in Oyo state another stronghold of the Unity Party of Nigeria taken over by the National Party of Nigeria. Violent riots erupted after Dr. Omololu Olunloyo, National party of Nigeria gubernatorial candidate was declared the winner by the election management body. The 1993 general elections were conducted during the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida. The June 12th presidential was adjudged by both local and international observers as the fairest and freest

elections ever conducted in the history of Nigeria. But on 26th June 1993, the election was annulled, and the annulment was greeted with serious resistance both within and outside the country. At home, spontaneous demonstrations and riots were staged all over the country, especially in Lagos and other Southern capitals. In Lagos, persistent rioting paralysed all activities, and only abated after a shoot-rioters-at-sight order went out to police and military anti-riot squads. It was estimated that over one hundred (100) demonstrators and rioters were killed throughout the country by these squads (Osaghae, 2011). Since restoration of democratic rule on 29th May, 1999, Nigeria is still grappling with how to conduct credible elections that will be accepted globally. The 1999 general elections that ushered in the Fourth Republic were characterised by election related violence though not as extensive as some had feared. Indeed, the acceptance of the result was purely on the basis of having no further options having lived under the military for twenty-eight years.

In the 2003 elections, Nigerians experienced an unprecedented level of electoral violence. According to Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart, (2010), violence during the election was more blatant and widespread. Electoral fraud ranges from ballot stuffing, intimidation, etc. According to HRW(2004) at least one hundred people were killed, and many more were injured during the elections. The 2007 general election was described by the former president, Olusegun Obasanjo as do-or-die affair and was worse than the previous ones. The 2007 elections were characterised by violence, with campaign in many states beset by political assassinations, bombings and armed clashes between supporters of rival political party factions. Mere declaring oneself a candidate was enough to put one's life at risk (Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart, 2010). According to IFES-Nigeria (2007) 967 incidents of electoral violence occurred during the election. The reported incidents included 18 deaths from January 13- April 30, 2007. According to Bekoe(2011), three hundred (300) people lost their lives during the 2007 general elections. The 2011 general elections believed to be better run were not devoid of malpractices and violence which marred Nigeria's previous elections. The elections were riddled with malpractices such as logistical deficiencies, procedural inconsistencies and electoral fraud. For instance, it was reported that about 78% of the voter turn-out in the south-south and southeast during the presidential election. This figure exceeded the national average by at least 50 percent (ICG, 2011).

It was the bloodiest election ever conducted in the history of Nigeria. With over 1000 people killed and 65, 000 people displaced (ICG, 2011), in the violence that erupted in some northern states after the announcement by INEC of Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of the presidential election. The 2015 General Elections was also tarnished by electoral violence. Unlike the 2011 general election in which violence occurred during the post-election period, most of the violence in the 2015 general elections occurred during the pre and elections proper. Most of the violence in the 2015 elections occurred in the states that constitute the Niger Delta region. According to the INEC sixty-six (66) cases of violent incidents directed at Commission's personnel, voters and election materials and polling units occurred during the 2015 general elections, Rivers state accounted for sixteen (16), Akwa Ibom -five (5), Bayelsa- four (4), Ondo- eight (8), Cross-River- six (6), Imo-(one), Lagos and Kaduna (three each), Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti, and Osun (two each), Ebonyi (six), Abia, Katsina, Kogi, Plateau, Ogun and Kano (one each) (Muheeb,, 2015).

¹"Operation wet e" is a combination of English and Yoruba words meaning set ablaze. It signifies the killing of an opponent by, pouring him or her a petrol and set him or her ablaze. During the Western regional election of 1965, the supporters of the two dominant parties (the Action Group and the Nigerian National Democratic Party) killed one another through that method.

Published cases or occurrences of Political-cum Electoral violence in the Niger Delta

The politics of intolerance and acrimony that marked the political contest in the Niger Delta rear its ugly head in several states in the region. Rivers state is the worst hit. The following incidents illustrate the intolerance and rancour that characterised the politics of the region. Rivers State suffers a bloody political struggle between the All Progressive Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) over supremacy and control of the state. One of the main victims of the crisis was Mr. Michael Okechuku Chindah. He was struck with a mace by one of the foremost leaders of the House, Hon. Chidi Lioyd, amid a fight on the floor of the House on July 9, 2013. Chindah suffered severe wounds on his head that left him unconscious before being rushed for care in a private hospital in Port Harcourt and later flown to a London hospital for proper medical care (Joab- Peterside, 2015). The Pro-Amaechi rally organised by the Save Rivers Movement (SRM) in Port Harcourt was disrupted by the police and Senator Magnus Abe was shot by some Ogoni youths (Ebiri, 2014; *The Guardian*, Tuesday, January 21, 2014, p. 6). The two court buildings in Ahoada and the Nigerian Bar Association secretariat located in the court premises were bombed by irate youths.

(*The Guardian*, Friday, January 17, 2014). The natives of Rumuigbo and Rumuipirikon in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers were attacked by thugs hired by both parties (APC and PDP). Properties of people belonging to the two parties were destroyed (Joab-Peterside, 2015). In the build-up to the 2015 presidential elections in Rivers state, on January 11, 2015 the APC secretariat in the Okrika local government area was attacked and on January 25, 2015 gangsters razed the venue of the APC meeting damaging vehicles, attacked people and prevented the rally from holding (*The Guardian* editorial, 2015, p.16). Thus, in March 2015, the All Progressive Congress (APC) raised an alert claiming assassination of its members and supporters in the state. The party claimed nine of its members were killed in two separate occurrences along the D-Line hub and the Eastern Bypass in the Marine Base region of Port Harcourt. There were likewise interminable assaults on APC supporters in the Okrika Council Area where the opposition party has been victims of three bomb attacks (Abuh, 2015). According to the then Rivers state governor Rotimi Amaechi alleged that thirty members of his party were killed in the build up to the 2015 presidential election and Nyesom Wike² claimed that 45 members of his party lost their lives (Stakeholder Democracy & Network (SDN), 2015). During the Governorship and Houses of Assembly election in the state in 2015, there were incidents of killings, attacks on INEC officials, hijacking of election materials and arsons. For instance, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Registration Area Centre (RAC) in the Buguma Local Government Area and the house of the state's Commissioner of Women Affairs, Mrs Joeba West were burnt and in Asari Toru LGA, seven vehicles conveying electoral materials were reportedly burnt (Hassan, 2015). Also heavy gunshots were reported in Ozuoba and Rumuolumeni in Obio Akpor local government area of the state. Soldiers were

deployed to Buguma in Asari Toru Local government area where two persons were reportedly killed by political thugs (Ndujihe and Kumolu, 2015). In Ozuaha community in the Ikwerre local government area of the state, thugs barricaded the road leading to the town and in the process opened fire on a team of security personnel who were escorting INEC ad hoc staffs to polling units (Hassan, 2015).

Before the Rivers State Rerun elections on 10 December, 2016, there were documented incidents of disturbances in the state committed by cultists and militants against the law abiding people of Omoku, and other adjoining towns in the Ogba/Ndoni/Egbema Local Government Area of the state. The security operatives were also brutalised by these groups. For instance, on 20 November, 2016, soldiers of 34 Brigade were ambushed and one of the soldier was killed. On 21 November, 2016, four men of Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps were killed and their weapons carted away. On the day of the re-run elections (10 December, 2016), DSP Alkali Mohammed of Mobile Police Unit 48 was beheaded along with his orderly and their weapons and patrol vehicle taken away (<http://www.nta.ng/news/security-news/20170102-omoku-38125/> accessed on 2/1/17). In Delta state, the state 2011 legislative election into Patani constituency involving Mr Raymos Guanah (former commissioner for Lands, Survey and Urban Development) of the Fresh Party and Basil Ganagana of the Peoples Democratic Party was marred by violence. The violence caused the death of Sixtus Ganagana a brother to Basil Ganagana. Also the transitional chairman of the Patani local government council, Mr Paul Atie was shot by unknown gunmen. In Ethiopia local government area, in November, 2014, there was a clash between supporters of the Labor Party and Peoples Democratic Party in which scores of people were reported dead and properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed (Aiwerie, 2014). Akwa Ibom state was also not spare of the violent scene of politically motivated killing in the region. In 2010, a former zonal officer of the Peoples Democratic Party preferred candidate for the state chairmanship position was murdered. Dr Akpan Akpanudo was killed on June 20, 2010 and his name was sought election into the State House of Assembly (Effiong, 2015). In 2011, a gubernatorial candidate for Action Congress of Nigeria was alleged to have used political thugs in the state to wreak havoc especially in Uyo and Ikot Ekpene. On March 22, 2011, supporters of Action Congress of Nigeria and Peoples Democratic Party fought at Ikot Ekpene where they had gone to campaign for the 2011 general elections. Some ACN members alleged they were attacked by PDP supporters. Two people lost their lives and scores sustained injuries in the clash.

This attacked to a reprisal one in Uyo, the capital city of the state in which 20 people lost their lives and 800 new cars and tricycles parked at the state secretariat were destroyed. A PDP stalwart in the state, Senator Aloysius Etok school and properties were destroyed while he escaped being assassinated (Akpan, 2011; Dode & Edet, 2015). In 2014, Engr. Ukpanah was slain at his residence by killers. Mrs Helen Esuene was attacked on October 5, 2014 while on a campaign tour by political thugs for venturing to campaign in the governor's town. She later defected to the Labour Party. The 2015 general elections in the state were marred by violence, a former deputy speaker of the State House of Assembly, who was also an aspirant for the opposition's All Progressive Congress was killed by political thugs led by Chairman of Ukanafun Local Government, Mr Effiom Abai (Effiong, 2015).

²Nyesom Wike is the governor of River state the most populous and oil-rich states in the Niger Delta. Before his present position, he was the Chief of Staff to Rotimi Amaechi and Minister of State for Education and later became the Minister of Education in the Jonathan administration

Like other states in the region, politics in Bayelsa state is a business venture and this accounts for its violent nature because of the struggle for who controls the vast resources of the state that comes from the 13 per cent derivation as an oil producing state from the federation account. The states like its counterpart in the region was not spared of electoral violence. For instance, in the run-up to the 2015 general elections in the state, the two leading political parties in the state, Peoples Democratic Party and All Progressive Congress engaged in a fierce battle to control the governmental machinery of the state. The 2015 gubernatorial election in the state was marred by violence, with accusation and counter accusation from both parties as the culprit responsible for the violence. It was documented that three persons were killed in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of the State, four lost their lives in Nembe and one in Ekeremor. The Southern Ijaw town of Oporoba was attacked by political thugs and scores of people were killed and several others injured. The hoodlum made away with sensitive election materials. The Director of the Media and Publicity of the Syla-Igiri Campaign Organisation of APC alleged that the governor of Bayelsa State Seriake Dickson imported over 5,000 thugs from neighbouring Delta and River States to wreak havoc on APC members and supporters (Eze & Dozie, 2015). At Odioma, the APC gubernatorial candidate was attacked by PDP supporters. It took the timely intervention of the Joint Task Force to ward off the attack and save the gubernatorial candidate and his entourage.

The Minister of Agriculture, Sen. Heineken Lokpobiri was attacked by gunmen in his country home at Ekeremor. It was alleged that the thugs were hired by PDP and they overpowered the security deployed to the Ekeremor and entered the minister's compound causing mayhem with the minister and others trapped inside the house (Eze & Dozie, 2015). The PDP also accused the APC for the spate of violence that engulfed the state. For instance, the party accused the APC of responsibility for the attack in Nembe on a member the State House of Assembly, Princess Ingo Iwowari, who was stripped of all her possessions, including cash (<http://thenationonline.net/five-killed-as-violence-mars-bayelsa-election/> accessed on 19-10-2016). The governor, Seriake Dickson accused the Minister of Agriculture of sponsoring the attacks on his party members and supporters in Twon Brass, Teco in Ekeremor town and Oporoma.

Causes of Electoral Violence

A cursory look at the literature suggests several reasons for electoral violence. Igbuzor, (2009) attributed causes of electoral violence to abuse of political power, alienation, marginalisation and exclusion and the political economy of oil. For Maslow, (1950), it is poverty and unemployment. Galtung (1969) attributed it to the ineffectiveness of the security forces and the culture of impunity, weak penalties, weak governance and corruption as well as proliferation of arms and ammunitions. Similarly, others attributed it to lack of security, partisanship of traditional rulers, abused of office by elected officials, zero-sum nature of our politics, lucrative nature of political office, poor handling of election petitions, lack of faith in the judiciary, lack of compliance with electoral law and enforcement of enabling laws; the partisan disposition of the police and other security operatives, corrupt INEC staff and adhoc officials who connive with greed politicians to rig elections (Ugiagbe, 2010).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper used qualitative research method with semi-structure interview strategy to examine the factors responsible for electoral violence in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The respondents were purposively selected using the purposive /snowballing sampling technique. This study was conducted in four of the nine states in the region, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States. The rationale for selecting these states is that they are the epic centre of violent activities in the region. A total of twelve respondents were interviewed in the four states. The respondents were asked what they feel are the roles of the elites in the political-cum electoral violence in the region and how this problem can be addressed. Data was analysed thematically using Nvivo 10 computer software for identifying patterns and themes from the interview transcript and the findings were generated from the coding frames comprising conceptualized features that explained electoral violence in the Niger Delta. Prior to the interview, the interviewees were notified of the objectives of the study and assured of their confidentiality in accordance with Bryman (2012); Bryman (2012); Cooper and Schindler (2008); Hannabuss (1996) and Lowman and Palys (2007) to ensure that the participants identity and records are well taken care-off when the findings are being published.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the interview analysis, the key factors responsible for electoral violence in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria were identified.

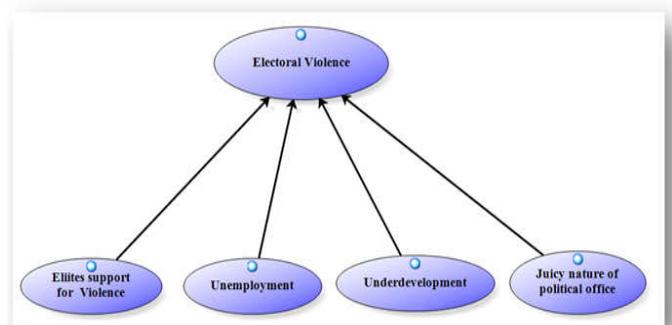


Figure 1. Thematic mapping of factors responsible for electoral violence in the Niger Delta of Nigeria

The main purpose of this study is to identify the factors responsible for the electoral violence in the region and those interviewed on this subject or issue identified a number of factors which were grouped into four themes namely elites support for violence, unemployment, underdevelopment and juicy nature of political office.

Elites Support for Violence

Elites support for violence is one of the main factors responsible for electoral violence in the region and the country. This support or promotion of violence takes the form of sponsorship and the arming of cult and militia groups and inciting one ethnic group against another. The elites of the Niger Delta extraction are behind the electoral violence that have engulfed the region. The elites sponsored armed he Niger Delta Vigilantes Service led by Ateke Tom, Niger Delta

People Volunteer Force led by Asari Dokubo and many others. Besides, they also armed the groups. The extant literature has shown that the elites apart from providing the funds which these various groups used in purchasing the arms and ammunition they also sometimes purchased the arms which they distribute to the “boys” for electioneering campaign and harassment of voters and opponents.

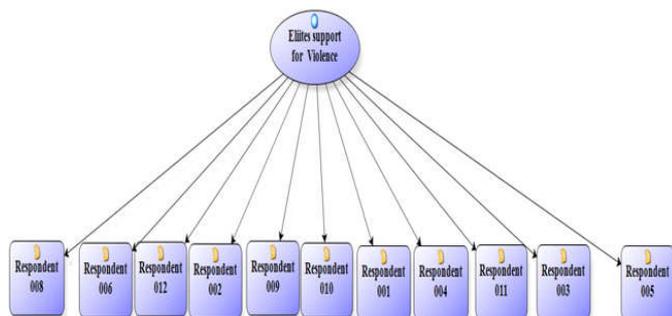


Figure 2. Elite support for violence as a factor responsible for electoral violence in the Niger Delta

As we can see from the figure (2) above, the majority of those interviewed were of the opinion that the elites promoted or supported violence in the region through the above mentioned mode (sponsoring and arming) of cults and militia groups. Commenting on this issue respondent (010). *A kind of political value is attached to violence in the Niger Delta. Violence has a political value attached to it. So from that perspective, we see how the elite promotes violence in the Niger Delta, using youth either as cult groups or as youth organisations. Whenever elections are approaching, we see these politicians equipping and arming a certain group of people as personal security, bodyguards and as agents of violence (Interview at Tombia, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 2/6/16).*

Similarly, respondent (012) noted that

The elites because they are desperate to control the machinery of government. They used all kinds of methods. They sponsored and armed social movements which they use during election to intimidate voters. For instance, Dr. Odili then Rivers state governor sponsored Felix Tuddolor and Asari Dokubo for the President and Vice-president of the Ijaw Youth Council. Asari was used by the governor to rig the 2003 gubernatorial election in the state. Successive administrations in the state have used the boys to disrupt elections in the state. The situation is the same in all Niger Delta state be it Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom and others (Interview at Mariri in Tarauni, LGA, Kano State, 16/7/16).

By the same token, respondent (005) expressed the view that the elites sponsored electoral violence. In his words

They sponsor, finance and recruit the boys. The elites are the one who lead the boys. It is after, they have come into power that the boys become jobless and the arms they have equipped them with, they now turned them to other uses for criminal uses. Those are the things these people gave to them to find their way into political offices and when they get there, they abandoned some of these boys (Interview at Warri, Delta State, 30/5/16).

While another respondent (011) noted that the elites were the beneficiary of electoral violence and also financed those they used to perpetrate it. In his words

Regarding the roles of elites, who are the beneficiary of the electoral violence? It is the politicians. Why do they need electoral violence? Because they don't want the people to have a say on how government is being run. If people have a say in the way we choose our leaders, many people that are occupying positions would have no right to occupy the positions. They are the ones benefiting from election not being free and fair and so they played a huge role. You see somebody perpetrating election related violence doesn't have money to feed his family, but he has access to guns of N100,000 where did it get it from? How does he get the ammunition? How does he move around on election day? When you know as a normal person, I can't move around on election day because of the strong military presence. But he moves around on election day and when he is arrested, how does he get released immediately? These are questions that point that there are people that support this system to work because they are the beneficiary of it. The question is who stands to gain? (Interview at Tombia, Port Harcourt, Rivers state, 3/6/16).

The above views expressed by the interviewees are consistent with extant literature. According to Human Right Watch (2007), Soboma and his Outlaws gang were hired by PDP to rig the 2007 elections in Rivers state. He and other cult groups were paid between N5 million and N10 million (\$38,500 to \$77,000) to rig the elections. Similarly, Asari Dokubo confessed that the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta was created to fight for the liberation of the people of the region but along the line, it was used by the elites to intimidate their political opponents. Moreover, he confessed that during Odili administration, the boys were paid one hundred million naira monthly to pacify them and that the government knew of the various activities of the groups and intervened when there was crisis among them. He also received three million naira as compensation for his arrest by the police from the governor (Emmanuel, 2014). Similarly, Chief Fred Barivule Kpakol erstwhile chairman of the Gokana Local Government Council in Ogoni, Rivers State was the financier of a cult group called the Gberesaakoo Boys. The group executed numerous electoral violence in the area and its members were on the local government payroll (CEHRD, 2006). By the same token, Magnus Abe,³ a financier of a cult group called Seresibra, and this group was used to perpetrate electoral violence in Gokana LGA of Rivers state (Naagbantun, 2008). The views expressed by the respondents is supported by the extant literature and point to the fact that the elites played critical role in the electoral violence that has ravaged the region since the return of democratic order in 1999.

Unemployment

Unemployment is a reason for electoral violence in the region. The argument is that many of those youths who are being used to perpetrate electoral violence do so because they were unemployed. The traditional occupations of the people of the region are farming and fishing and due to oil exploration activities of the transnational oil companies, which resulted in

³He was a former Commissioner of Information in Dr. Peter Odili's administration and Secretary to the State Government under Rotimi Amaechi administration and currently a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

environmental degradation, many of them lost their jobs and migrated to the urban centres looking for jobs that were unavailable and to keep body and souls together, they become a ready-made tool to use by political class during elections to harass, intimidate and killed political opponents. This is the pattern among the two interviewees that expressed their views on this issue. Commenting on this, interviewee 006 noted that *“the bulk of the youths in the region are unemployed and they become a ready-made tool in the hands of politicians who use them to achieve their goals of winning elections.”* (Interview at Warri, Delta State, 31/05/16).

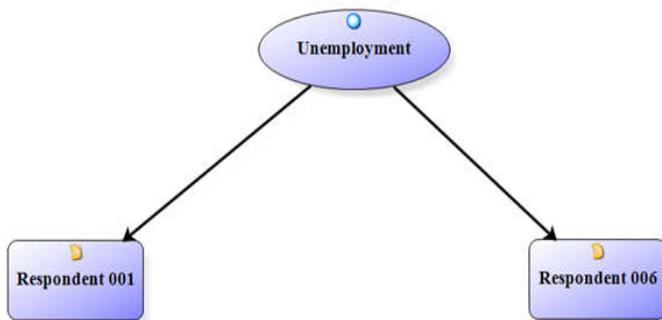


Figure 3. Unemployment as a cause of electoral violence

While another respondent 003 suggested employments for the army of youths from the region and warned of the consequences of failure to provide employment for the teeming youth. In his words: *“They should create jobs, so that the youth can be fully engaged. As the saying goes that an idle man is a devil’s workshop. When the youths are not engaged, they can become agent of violence”* (Interview at Yenagoa, Bayelsa state, 3/5/16). The view expressed above that unemployment is a cause of electoral violence found support in the existing literature (Drumond, 2015; Frimpong, 2012; IPI, 2012; Laasko, 2007; Ugiagbe, 2010). According to Drumond (2015), the army of unemployed youths increase the likelihood of electoral violence and this is because that they can be co-opted of the enterprise increases their access to power and resources.

Similarly, the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) (2011) in its report noted that

Despite vast oil resources, the Delta region is characterised by extremely high poverty levels. 70 percent of youth in the region live below the poverty line. The youth (15-24 years) unemployment rate is 40 percent, far exceeding the national average youth unemployment rate of 14 percent. Youth un and under-employment has ultimately become both a driver of conflict and a formidable obstacle for peace and regional development (PIND, 2011, p. 3). By the same token, the National Bureau of Statistics (cited in Ibaba, 2011, p.33) in its 2010 reports listed three of the four states which are the focus of this study as states with the highest unemployment rates. Akwa Ibom had 34.1 percent, Bayelsa 38.4 percent and Rivers state 27.9 percent, while the national average was 19.7 percent. This support from the literature underscores the important contribution of unemployment to electoral violence in the region.

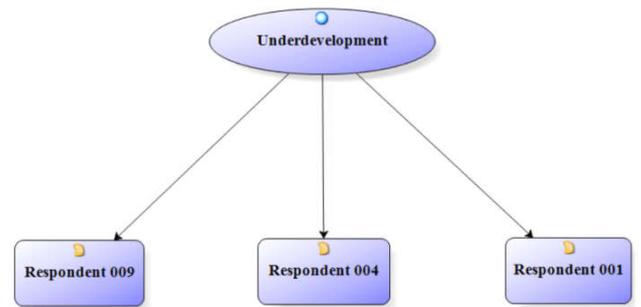


Figure 4. Underdevelopment as a cause of electoral violence

Underdevelopment

The underdevelopment nature of the Niger Delta is also a contributing factor to electoral violence in the region. The Niger Delta region is rich in oil and gas and other natural resources, but remains the least developed part of Nigeria. According to Nyiayaana (2012), the region suffers from socio-economic backwardness. It lacks social amenities such as schools, hospitals, electricity, roads and other social amenities that make life meaningful.

Commenting on how underdevelopment nature of the region contributed to electoral violence, respondent 009 had this to say

These are people that most of them do not have access to industrialisation, we don’t have many companies around here; we don’t have many people who are entrepreneurship minded. The game over here is a game of power and people have a wrong mind-set or notion that when you are in power or government, you can make a lot of money that would take care of your family and maybe your community. So, that is just wrong mind-set and is common here in the Niger Delta, they need to have power, they need to control resources and you don’t know you can control resource and can have power, if you set-up big companies. If four-five big people can come together to set-up something like what the Dangote’s has, Dantata, and Femi Otedola has. But here, the big people you hear about are the former senators, former commissioners for this, former governors for this. So, it is, that what people see is beyond what people see. Everybody wants to be Special Assistant this, and it becomes a do-or die affairs. Here, you know, politics is more or less like a do-or -die affairs (Interview at Tombia, Port Harcourt, Rivers state, 2/6/16).

Similarly, respondent 001 noted that

The state of development of the region is also a factor, especially in Bayelsa where virtually there are no companies except oil multi-national. The nature of this company is capital intensive and not labour intensive. They use less labour and besides, they claimed our people have no expertise in that field and so they are not employed while people from the majority ethnic groups get jobs meant for our people. Apart from these oil companies, there are no visible companies, you can see around this area. The banks that are operating here employ less number of staff. I must confess, we are the architect of our own problems. We have indigene from this area who instead of coming home to establish companies that would create employment for our people, they site their business in Lagos

and other big cities (Interview at Taylor Creek, Yenagoa, Bayelsa state, 1/5/16).

Meanwhile, interviewee 004 suggested the establishment of industries and regular supply of electricity so that the artisans and other unemployed people would be engaged. In his words:

Let's see that industries are establish and steady power supply is guaranteed, so that those who are involved in violence because of lack of employment can be properly engaged and our artisans can also have something to do(Interview at Bayelsa Secretariat, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, 4/5/16).

Similarly, respondent 006 suggested that all hands must be on deck in ensuring that the region develop. He maintained that

The central government working in conjunction with state and local government in the region should see to the development of the region by providing social amenities and also creates an enabling environment for private sector participation in the development of the region (Interview at Warri, Delta state, 31/5/16).

The views expressed by the respondents are consistent with the literature (Ibaba, 2012, 2011; Nyiayaana, 2012; Obi, 2010; Ogonor, 2003; Okoli, 2013; Ukiwo, 2009; UNDP, 2006; Ross, 2003; Watts & Ibaba, 2011). These various studies have posited that the inhabitants of the oil bearing communities suffered from lack of social amenities, poverty and government neglect which, when sum-up points to the underdevelopment of the region. According to UNDP (2006) the Niger Delta is a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict. Enormous possibilities for industrial development abound in terms of the abundance of raw materials in the region, but these remain unrealized. Beyond vast oil and gas deposits, the delta is blessed with good agricultural land, extensive forests, excellent fisheries, and a large labour force (UNDP, 2006:25).

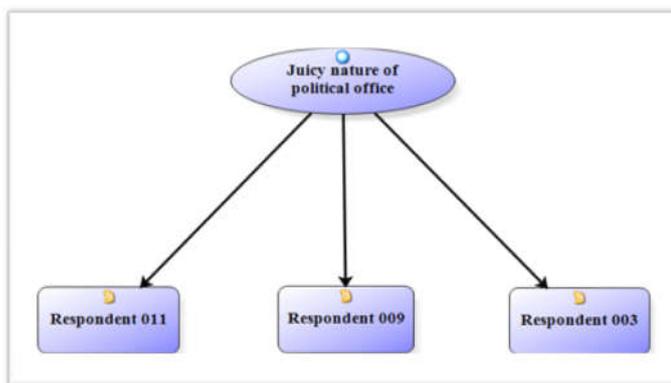


Figure 5. Juicy nature of political office as a cause of electoral violence

Juicy Nature of Political Office

The nature of political office, which is closely linked with nature of politics in Nigeria (Niger Delta inclusive) is such that it is juicy or attractive. It is this attractive nature of political office in the region that has accounted for electoral violence in

the region. Political office is seen as an avenue to get rich quick and not to serve the people. It is because of this that the politics is a zero-sum in nature. That is the winner gets everything, and the loser gets nothing. The winner wins at the expense of the loser. A politician does not want to lose election because of huge investment he/she has incurred and by hook or crook, he must triumph over his opponent to recoup his investment. It is this that accounted for the warfare nature or do-or-die disposition of the political elites in politics in the region. Commenting on this issue, respondent 009 noted that: *The political positions are too juicy, a situation where an ordinary councillor who was lucky to have passed his school certificate examination earned more than a Professor who took many years of scholarship to attain that position. The councillor take home pay is more than N500, 000 while a Prof earns N400, 000 per month* (Interview at Tombia, Port Harcourt, Rivers state, 2/6/16).

By the same token, respondent 011 had this to say:

"..." in the Niger Delta, we operate a neo-patrimonial system where whoever has access to a vast patronage network is somebody to go to, somebody of timber and calibre and somebody that should be reckoned with by politicians because he has access to patronage network, that he can use for election violence (Interview at Tombia, Port Harcourt, Rivers state, 3/6/16).

While respondent 003 suggested that political office should be less attractive. If it is less attractive not, many people will go into politics and that will reduce the fierce battle that characterise our body politic and people with genuine interest to serve their people will be encouraged to aspire for political position. In the words of the respondent:

The political offices should be made less attractive. If it makes less attractive, many people would go into politics. More so, people with lion heart and vision will be encouraged to venture into an arena that has been tainted with violence (Interview at Yenagoa, Bayelsa state, 3/5/16)

The argument on the attractive nature of political office is corroborated by Alemika (cited in Onimisi, 2015). He noted that:

The perception of politics and political office as an investment and as an avenue for the acquisition of extraordinary wealth through corruption, which is otherwise not possible through any form of legitimate vocation and enterprise. As a result of this perception and reality, Nigerian politicians turn electioneering and elections into warfare in which violence and ethnic, religious and other forms of primordial sentiments and prejudices are employed (cited in Onimisi, 2015, p. 244).

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper examined electoral violence in Nigeria with a focus on four Niger Delta states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers. The paper thoroughly examined what constituted electoral violence and Niger Delta. Frustration-aggression theory served as the guiding post of this study and was examined critically. It discussed the relevant concepts that are germane to this study and also examines the history of electoral violence in Nigeria as well as the published

incidences of election related violence in the Niger Delta. The findings of this study showed that the key contributing factor to electoral violence in the Niger Delta was the elites support for violence. This support took the form of sponsorship and the arming of the ethnic militia and cult groups in order to use them for political purpose and also to protect business interests. Other factors identified were the juicy nature of politics, unemployment and underdevelopment as contributory factors to electoral violence in the region.

Recommendations

As this study has shown, elites played a critical role in the electoral violence in the Niger Delta and any solution to the problem must give a pride of place to the elites. The paper recommends that any elite found guilty of sponsorship and arming of youths be banned from participation in elective position for life and should be prosecuted for illegal arms possession. There is a need to sensitise the people to elect credible leaders whose integrity are intact and not those who are questionable character. paraded themselves as leaders. Besides, people should hold their leaders accountable for their deeds by ensuring that leaders are properly monitored and are subjected to questioning on how they are running their affairs of state. As our findings have shown, political offices in the country and in the region are very attractive. There is a need to make political office to be less attractive, to reduce the struggle for them. One way of going about this is to reduce the monetary attach to them. The salary of the political office holder should be drastically reduced and all avenues through which they can accumulate wealth should be blocked. Institutional bottleneck be put in place to make it difficult for the political office to abuse their office. On the issue of development, it is not about physical structure alone but also entails human development. The various levels of government should attach importance to human development of their people by educating them. This the various states and local government in the region can do this by allocating more resources to the social sectors in their budgets, improve on the existing infrastructure, award, scholarship to deserving students to study both within and outside the country and make education accessible and affordable. The development of any nation lies in the education of its people. It is through education that technological advancement can be made and unless our leaders attach importance to this critical sector, we shall continue to rely on others for everything. The issue of army of youths who are not engaged or gainfully employed should be addressed. Unemployment is not an issue government alone can address, but governments at all levels must play their parts by creating an enabling environment for private participation in the economy by removing all bottlenecks that can prevent the private participation and if need be, the private sector should be granted tax holiday and some other concessions in order for them to invest in our economy and create jobs for our teeming youths.

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