



Violent Protests in Nigeria: Causes, Dynamics and Viable Solutions

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Abstract. Uprising against the state dotted the political history of Nigeria. The First, Second, Third and Fourth Republics as well as the intermittent interruptions by military regimes recorded quite a number of violent protests, demonstrations, secessionist attempts and insurgencies that have claimed thousands of lives and led to destruction of properties. Different interventions including militarisation, enquiries, litigation and negotiations have been deployed to quell uprising against the state with varying degrees of success. The aim of this explorative survey is to examine the trends of violent protests and efforts made in curtailing politically motivated conflicts against the state in Nigeria. Secondary data sourced from extant literature consisting of books, journals and newspapers were used. Findings revealed that inept leadership leads to exclusion of the masses from benefitting from the distribution of state resources and misdirected political participation led to violent behaviours. Many of the socio-politically motivated conflicts in Nigeria were sponsored by economic and political elites whose desire is to cling to the apparatus of the state; engaging foot soldiers from the crop of jobless youths, poverty stricken adults and ethnic jingoists. The use of force to address genuine grievances has not produced desired result. There is therefore the need for the state to engage dialogue as a non-adversarial technique with disenchanting masses.

Keywords: Insurgencies, protests, militarisation, political participation, behaviour, elite.

1. Introduction

In most African countries the relationship between the states and citizens is fragile. Engaging in violent conflict by different segments of the state, as means of registering discontent on bad governance, has become a perennial occurrence. Such socio-political

conflicts in Nigeria are wrongly profiled or tagged ethnic conflict and have heightened trust-deficit among different ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian plural state. These conflicts have also exposed the state's lack of capacity to deal with past and recurrent complex security and conflict matters in a plural society. The shuttle from parliamentary system (Westminster model) to military autocracy and eventually to the presidential system has not really given the state a stable constitutional order that is vibrant to address divergent interests of her different nationalities. The clamour for restructuring resonates periodically and this is often marked with conflicts of varying degrees and the state always criminalises the situation as either disloyalty, felony against the state or cessions' agenda by sections of the country.

In addressing socio-political conflicts, Nigerian state is found wanting. It is always prone to the use of force. Where there is relative peace, it is often considered as peace of the graveyard compelled by the use of force by government. The force is employed to suppress fundamental human rights of freedom of speech, assemblage and peaceful protest. Thus, uprising against unpopular government policies and lack-luster performance is often subdued through militaristic approach. This is not surprising since Nigeria has witnessed switchovers from colonial rule, to military rule and has developed violence as a culture of handling differences. It is rightly argued that authoritarian rule characterized by more exclusionary multi-ethnic coalitions creates legacies that amplify the risk of violence during the shift to multi-party politics (Brosche et al., 2019). Colonial experience and legacy of authoritarian rule also enhance the vulnerability of African states to the use of brute force (Clapham, 2002). This predisposition accounts for why states usually employ suppressive techniques in addressing even genuine grievances

against the state. Thus, in situations where the government does not enjoy the confidence of the citizens, there are regular face-off with the police and other law enforcement agencies. The security agencies psyche is programmed towards ensuring regime security as against human security.

State versus citizens conflicts are of great concern to scholarship. This concern arises from the fact that the socio-economic development of any state rests mostly on the fecundity of its political culture and its approaches to resolving conflicts. As seen in most African countries, violence is employed as a viable strategy both by the state and the citizens. For example in Nigeria, governance crisis triggered by party squabbles, sectionalism and mutual suspicion wrapped in violence led to the collapse of the First Republic. The two successive military administrations after the fall of the 1st Republic, ill-equipped for governance and ill-motivated by primordial sentiments, worsened the situation that culminated in the civil war that ravaged the Southeast between 1967 and 1970.

Previous researches recognised socio-political conflicts as a critical challenge to fledgling democracy in multi-ethnic settings like Nigeria and have espoused the adversarial measures employed in handling such conflicts. Researchers have argued that coercive methods usually employed by government in handling political violence only create short-lived peace (Birch, Daxecker Ho^glund, 2020). However, the use of dialogue to address socio-political violence has not been exhausted. Thus, there is need to continue to explore means of strengthening political dispute resolution mechanism through eclectic approach. In view of this, Omotola (2019) posited that there is the need for collaboration and support of other key stakeholders (political parties, security agencies, media, and civil society organizations) in the resolution of political violence.

In this study, attempts were made to provide answers to the following research questions: What are the causes of violent protest in Nigeria? What are the different forms of socio-political violent protests? What are the intervention strategies employed by the state in addressing violence? Are there successes in the approaches so far employed? What are the challenges? In what ways can non-adversarial techniques be used to ensure political stability in Nigeria? The study relies on qualitative approach, using data gathered from secondary sources consisting of books, journals and newspapers for content and historical analysis.

2. Conceptual Discourse

In this section, political participation, protest and political violence are clarified to situate their use in the context of this study. Political participation (PP) generally refers to activities undertaken by people to express their perceptions, opinions, feelings and attitudes on the socio-political situation around them in order to shape decisions that affect their lives. It encapsulates the gamut of actions, inactions and dispositions of the people or citizenry in the political affairs of a state or political entity (Esuola, 2013).

The post-behavioural theorists believe that every citizen participates in politics though not everybody is a partisan politician. According to Nie and Verbal (1975) pp refers to those legal activities embarked upon by private citizens which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the action they take while in office. It derives from both the fundamental rights of individual to freedom of speech, association, assemblage as well as the principle of inclusiveness in governance. Participation in politics may be in form of engagement in campaign towards selection/election of candidates for political offices, attending constituency meetings, voting during elections, funding political parties, lobbying, protesting, forming social movements, belonging to non-governmental organizations or civil society (Esuola, 2013). Actions that are regarded as PP have to be voluntary (Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970).

Scholars have classified activities that constitute PP into direct or action based and indirect or attitude based. The action based includes voting, money and material donations, attending meetings, campaigning for candidate etc. The attitude based includes agitation, resistance, apathy, endorsement, docility, protest etc. One of the volatile acts of political participation is protest which state often struggles to resist through different legislation and policies. One of such is the requirement to obtain police permit before any protest is embarked upon by civil society organization or group.

Political involvement has changed recently and these changes characterize today's PP repertoire and have led to the distinction between institutionalized and non-institutionalized PP (García-Albacete, 2014). In today's world perceived or obvious structural violence dictates how gender, age, family income and regional affiliation represent important social and economic factors that affect the level of PP and how it is approached either for personal, sectional or national interests. This view negates the proposition

that structural forces that require citizens to take certain actions wouldn't count as participation (Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970). Thus, actions of citizens targeted at political, economic or social institutions for their actions or inactions for the purpose of enhancing governance and welfare of the citizenry are regarded as PP in this study. As rightly argued Sairambay (2020) "civic engagement" should be differentiated from PP because civic engagement fosters PP and refers entirely to social activities. Furthering this argument, Weiss (2020) opined that the question remains regarding the delay in the use of all forms of PP by young adults in contemporary society to benefit political development. Rather than benefit the political system PP is used to achieve narrow end.

Protest is a form of PP. It is a political weapon by the citizens to reject, oppose or call attention of government to policies, situations or actions of government and her functionaries which do not go down well with the generality of the people or a section of the populace. It is to draw attention of government to the social contract obligations involved in the art of governance which have been neglected. Social contract obligations include among others provision of safety, education, healthcare, infrastructure, justice, fairness, inclusive and participatory socio-economic atmosphere, equality as well as free and fair elections for people to determine who govern them.

Protests often coincide with deep-seated societal divides (Kriesi, 2010). In their investigation of support for protest and violent suppression, Akkus et al. (2020) came to the conclusion that both support for protest and support for repression are related to the cultural values people hold and their subsequent political orientations and emotions. Their findings corroborated Milesi and Alberici, 2018 & Osborne *et. al.* (2019) postulation that factors that motivate support for activism of which protest is an offshoot are found in held principles. This postulate is relevant to the Nigerian situation whereby support for or opposition to protest is determined by either political or ethnic cleavages. Thus, no matter the negativity of government policies, opposition to protest will come from their party faithful and ethnic group or clan of leader of government. This is usually the feature of sharply divided society.

Political violence is a very broad term that has been used to cover all activities embarked upon by different non-state actors that involve the use of force which ordinarily should be the exclusive preserve of the state. It is the intentional use of physical force against oneself, another person, or against a group of people. Violence may be self-directed, interpersonal

or collective. Institutional and political violence are a coin of two sides and are usually collective. Violence often results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation (World Health Organisation, 2002). According to John Locke it is a behavioural instinct that derives from the brute nature of man. Political violence is multilayered and diverse (Mimmi, 2018). It includes electoral violence, violent protest, militancy, insurgency, terrorism and guerrilla warfare. For example, electoral violence which is pervasive has been referred to as the use or threat of force against an opponent within the context of electoral competition for state power (Alli, 2016). It is inhibitive of democratic transition and consolidation.

Three distinct classes of violent activity, directed specifically at the state and state actors, are offensive/extremist violence, defensive/reactionary violence and harassment and intimidation (Perry. Hofmann & Scrivens, 2020). In Nigeria for instance, the government has been contending with perennial violent protests, militancy, insurgencies, and secessionist agitations in the last six decades due to perceived abnormalities in the operation of the federation.

3. Theoretical Underpinning

This paper benefits from social exclusion and elite complicity theories. Inclusive governance has become a major discourse in national and international politics. According to the United Nations (n. d.) social inclusion processes involve more than improving access to economic resources. It is defined as the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights. As captured in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals inclusiveness presupposes access of everybody to the benefits of prosperity and enjoyment of minimum standards of well-being and freedom of all nations and peoples as well as segments of society from poverty and hunger. It includes ensuring, among other things, healthy lives and access to education, modern energy and information.

On the contrary, lack of participation in society is termed social exclusion. According to Birchall (2019), social exclusion refers to a process where individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life of a polity. Social exclusion normally leads to structural imbalance and feelings of marginalization that have

been the major causes of violent conflicts against the state. Ethnic and religious identities are often intertwined in Nigeria, forming parts of a complex pattern of social exclusion (Birchall, 2019). Social exclusion increases poverty by reducing groups' access to vital services such as health, education and social protection, and to livelihood opportunities.

Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman (2007) explain social exclusion as a combination of material deprivation, insufficient access to social rights, a low degree of social participation and a lack of normative integration. Indices of social exclusion include inadequate access to government and semi-government provisions, relational and trust deficit, gaps in formal and informal social networks and absence of norms and values associated with active social citizenship.

In a bid to cage and control the socially excluded, both the political and economic elites come together to form a vanguard of defence. In the light of this, we now consider elite complicity as a germane theory to this study. Elite complicity is a kind of collaborative engagement with those who connive with powerful individuals and institutions of social change to exploit the weak (Marcus, 2001). Elite complicity can succinctly be described as class-like relations of exploitation. It is rooted in social reproduction which features are exploitation, precocity, or indebtedness of many by a few (Gilbert, 2018).

Exploitative apparatuses and interdependences that tie the worlds of the complicit elites together are often disguised (Muhammad, 2011). This category of people is called business politician. Business and politics go together in most countries of Africa. This group of people have arrested the political and economic machineries of the state.

4. Why the Prevalence of Violence in Nigeria

Some factors determine nature of PP. According to McAllister (2016), PP is underpinned by political knowledge. Where civic knowledge is higher, people are more likely to participate in the political process in a more beneficial manner than where people lack knowledge of their civic responsibilities. In Nigeria, political education is low and this accounts for why rather than negotiate with the state some citizens show apathy during elections and take to arms to protest misrule usually when it is too late to effect any change of government.

Political violence is a reaction to bad governance. Since independence Nigeria has had the challenge of

nationally acclaimed visionary leadership. Military and civilian politicians failed to provide good security for lives and properties, promote the rule of law, and pursue nationally achievable macro-economic programmes. Since her independence in 1960, Nigeria represents a country bedeviled with series of internal conflicts arising from parochial interests of the political elite (both civilian and military). All successive administrations have been alleged of sectionalism, corruption and lack of vision. The country is witnessing economic growth without development which has led to frustration of the masses and recourse to violent behaviours.

Also, the fault-lines of ethnicity, region and religion run deep in Nigeria (Alli, 2015). These three negative attributes of an average Nigeria constitute major impediments to nation building. In the light of this, Brosche et al (2019) opined that competitive and fragmented inter-ethnic relations and exclusionary systems foreclose the forging of cross-ethnic elite coalitions and make hostile narratives a powerful tool for political mobilization in a plural society like Nigeria. Thus, in instances of genuine uprising against the state like in the #end SARS protest, ethnic, religious or regional profiling is used as diversionary technique to subsume genuine agitation. The participants are branded as adversaries while government media outfits are used to paint them as enemies of the state. Most of these conflicts are also quickly tagged as armed conflicts by non-state actors to pull down the regime or oust a democratically elected government.

Nigerian leaders who emerged through imposition by political parties, disputed and generally rigged elections rarely enjoy the confidence of the electorate (Osinakachukwu & Jawan, 2011). This scenario casts legitimacy doubt on most of Nigerian political leaders since independence and forms the basis for political violence before, during or after elections. Citizens always suspect policies of illegitimate leaders as continuation of imposition.

The job of the government is to equalize opportunities and where access to opportunities are determined by human imposed conditions there surely will be grievance. As in the case of Nigeria where parochial interest determines a lot of government policies and actions, economic marginalization of some individuals or groups has become a major cause of crises (Adebayo, 2010). Thus, failure of the political class to fulfill the social contract obligations in all ramifications is considered as social exclusion that generated conflicts in Nigeria. This position aligns with Gutierrez-

Romero's (2014) thesis that aggregate societal or institutional factors create the conditions for political violence. Institutional violence unleashed on the citizen by the state results in political violence as a form of collective act of political participation to protest structural anomalies. Victims of structural violence are more likely to identify in class, ethnic or sectional terms and support the use of violence against the state.

Partisan politics has become a means of livelihood in Nigeria. Impunity of government officials and their collaborators in the sustenance and use of power and accumulation of wealth for personal and prebendal interests further deepen divisions and hostilities in the country (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019). In this light, Albert (2005) observed that some external forces may use the loose security architecture of the country to foment violence to gain access to the resources of the state. The quest for diamond in Sierra Leone and Liberia is a good example to illustrate this kind of complicity. In the same vein, Department for International Development (DFID) (2011) opined that politicians may deliberately govern badly because globalisation has generated perverse incentives and safe haven to fleece a nation's commonwealth. The exploitative tendencies of elites are more apparent in the neo-liberal economic environment that is dominant today and are largely comparable to the slave trade era's antics when the feudal lords collaborated with powerful natives to ferry African across the oceans to European plantations. More worrisome is the fact that world elites of today are willing to render external support for armed groups as a means to penetrate a nation's natural resources for exploitation in the global trade arena. Also, acts of violence may be driven by private motive of exploiting the situation for theft by the masses. For example, the 2020 #EndSars protest that later escalated to violent proportion was used by hoodlums to loot shops, warehouses and public facilities.

Social exclusion is a major causal factor in conflict and instability, especially when exclusion is based on religion, ethnicity or language. Fractures and divisions that arise are often exhibited in deviant behaviour by groups and individuals who are begrudged. Perceptions around exclusion that "extend to health, education, agriculture, developmental infrastructure and other livelihood amenities, all have a significant nexus with the conflicts and violence in North Eastern Nigeria." (UNDP, 2018, p. xv). Ibrahim (2017) also averred that religious radicalism by 'Boko Haram' in the northern Nigeria and other violent activities by

insurgents in the Niger Delta, such as Niger Delta Avengers are all reflections of people's frustration due to unemployment and poverty. Poverty and unemployment produce foot soldiers that then carry out politically motivated violence.

In related twist, complicit elites may sustain violence for ulterior motives. Kleinfeld and Barham (2018) argue that states may exhibit a governance pattern in which governing factions deliberately weaken security services and collude with non-state violent actors to maintain power and ensure extreme levels of privilege and impunity. This may be called state sponsored violence which may be allowed to fester for some time before third-parties are invited to intervene. Corruption at both executive and bureaucratic levels often dots the socio-economic space of such political setting. By and large, the elites act in connivance with one another to confuse the masses. In such situation, the social and political elites are presented as valiant, while the victims of their atrocities are profiled as belligerents. In developing democracies, the only language that is understood by the rulers is suppression.

The police and armed forces are also complicit in the festering violence across the country. It is alleged that policemen, army, navy and air-force high ranking personnel benefit financially from violence by either sponsoring or fueling embers of disunity. Profiteering from arms procurement was widely documented in the Dasukigate 2.2 billion Dollar scandal. Spending of about \$2.2 billion in the foreign currency component under the Goodluck Jonathan administration was not directed towards procurement of arms but was shared among the economic, political and military elites (Premium Times, 2015).

History is replete with government lackadaisical attitude in engaging the civil populace at the right time. Government's recourse to intimidation was noticeable in the anti-structural adjustment programme protest in 1987, anti-fuel subsidy removal protest in 2012 and #end SARS protest in 2019. Interventions came too late and were mostly militaristic.

In summary, the causes of social uprisings and upheavals against the state range from inequality, injustice, economic hardship, failed infrastructure, corruption, manipulated elections, police brutality, and ethnicity to feelings of marginalization. Yagboyaju and Akinola (2019) summarized the causes of socio-political conflict as inept leadership driven by self-interest and other primordial considerations. In a nutshell, socio-political conflicts

in Nigeria are offshoots of marginalization, social inequality, political exclusion, corruption, economic deprivation, unequal allocation and distribution of state resources (Aning, 2016). Aning captioned the whole milieu as ‘multiple socio-economic injustices’ resulting from mutual suspicion among the different constituent units of Nigeria. We agree no less with these postulations.

The factors highlighted above have widened the trust-gap between the government and the governed especially in Nigeria where after 20 years of return to democratic rule the dividends of civil rule in terms of welfare and infrastructure are still elusive. People in government are largely perceived as rogues and exploiters who get richer at the expense of the generality of the people while people live in abject poverty, state of squalor and deprivation. Class depravity is rather forced that being the intrinsic nature of an average downtrodden Nigerian in such situations.

5. Some Violent Protests in Nigeria

There are numerous violent protests against the state that cannot be featured in this paper. A few of them will be worthy of mention because of their negative impact. In historic precedence, Western Region laid the foundation of electoral violence. According to Osinakachukwu and Jawan (2011) the flaws in the 1964 general election in the West necessitated another in 1965 which was equally marred by rigging, hooliganisms, and obstruction by Federal Government agents. Dissatisfied politicians and their supporters resorted to widespread violence in many cities of the region. The violence tagged ‘operation wet e’ accounted greatly for military takeover of government in January 15, 1966. Omotola (2019) also averred that Nigeria has witnessed a rising tide of contentious elections ending in heated debates, court challenges, protests and legitimacy crises.

Elections in most African multicultural societies like DR Congo, Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe often disregard the choice of the electorate (Mbah, Nwangwu & Ugwu, 2019). Rigging is adopted to win elections in a bid to fulfill politicians’ and their allies’ inordinate ambition to capture state power and retain it at all cost in order to expand their accumulation base (Egobueze & Ojirika, 2017). In the same vein, Egobueze and Ojirika (2017) argued that inordinate ambition of the political class and their allies to capture state power and retain it at all cost has resulted in socio-political conflicts against the state.

Election violence in Nigeria were evident in 1964/1965, 1979, 1983,1993,1999,2003 and 2007 general elections with bloodshed and death of many Nigerians (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011 & West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, 2014). Although the April 2011 elections were adjudged the most credible since the return to democracy in 1999 (International Crisis Group, 2014), yet the violence that marked the post-election was unprecedented in Nigerian electoral history. Factors that contribute to electoral violence include among others lack of trust, fierce infighting among the diverse groups, primitive accumulation of wealth, fierce struggle for power and position, issue of marginalization and minority challenge (Agoha, 2015). Government responded by using the police to suppress uprising against the perceived manipulation of the electoral process and a promise to review the electoral law has not translated to free and fair elections in Nigeria.

The structural adjustment programme (SAP) was proposed as a measure to manage economic problems in the context of austerity and stabilization in the 1980s. It was proposed that there should be a cut-down in the expenditure of government on education and social services and consequent commercialization of some hitherto government enterprises as conditionalities for the regime of Ibrahim Babangida to access International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan. SAP did not go down well with the grassroots people because of the devastating impact on Nigerians which included closing down of institutions of learning, payment of levies in schools, retrenchment of workers, and hike in prices of essential commodities and removal of subsidies on social services.

Opposition to SAP led to protests in 1986 that crippled the entire nation for some weeks. While different groups responded vehemently against SAP, the role of Nigerian students was most critical (Shettima, 1993). Although the labour unions were not left out in the protest against government’s surrender to an institution of Western hegemony and exploitation, government response was to ban them. Government highhandedness to the Nigeria labour caused intense strain and disorganization of labour movements that now manifest in sporadic industrial disputes and strikes which invariably hamper economic development in Nigeria (Danladi, Naankiel & Naankiel, 2016). Government responses to anti-SAP protests were largely adversarial, palliative and cosmetic. Inadequacies in government response at the time have further led to the collapse of social infrastructure and unassailable unemployment till today.

Odu'a Peoples' Congress (OPC) came up as a response to the annulment of the June 1993 elections by the country's military junta led by Ibrahim Babangida (Adebanwi, 2005). OPC became a violent group in Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Kwara, Ondo, Oyo states. The group engaged in violent protests at different times that allegedly resulted in deaths, maiming and other human rights abuses. The activities of members of the OPC have resulted in "violent" confrontations with the Nigerian Police Force at different times (Szajkowski, 2004). The use of force to suppress the organization resulted in clandestine activities. Although the group was outlawed in 1999, however, till today it still has cells spread across states of the southwest of Nigeria. Members are always available as foot soldiers any time there is protest against the state.

Militants in the Niger Delta of Nigeria constitute a major threat to peace and security in Nigeria. The region has turned into a boiling dark spot that has given successive regimes troubles and unsettled the existing political equilibrium in the country (Abang, 2014). Series of conflicts in the Niger Delta had their roots, initially in the protest against injustice, and in recent years in the quest for resource control (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2017). Beneath the agitation is the feeling of marginalization by the ethnic minorities that populate the region. Gleditsch and Urdal (2002:286) have rightly posited that the fight for resource control strengthens the segmentation around already existing ethnic or linguistic cleavages thereby escalating conflict. The struggle which started as a peaceful protest metamorphosed into armed conflict after the killing of Adaka Boro, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni men.

The south-south region harbours the Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV), led by Ateke Tom, and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), led by Alhaji Asari Dokubo, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Liberation Front (NDLF) who have unleashed mayhem at different times. Recently, there has been emergence of Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), the Red Egbesu Water Lions, Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF), Niger Delta Red Squad (NDRS) and the Adaka Boro Avengers. Their activities which include kidnapping of oil workers and expatriates, attacking of oil installation, vandalizing of crude oil pipeline and destructing of public utilities have led to loss of lives, properties and retardation of development in the area. Nigerian economy also loses billions of naira in crude oil revenue daily due to attacks on oil installations by militants.

Militarization of the region as a response to growing agitation has not yielded the expected results. The establishment of Amnesty Programme, Niger Delta Development Commission and the Ministry of Niger Delta has been a positive response. The various court awards to the people for the destruction of their ecosystem as a result of oil exploration, enactment of Petroleum Industry Bill and reclamation of damaged soil have also doused tension in the area.

Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) in the Southeast is a major secessionist ethnic organization led by Nnamdi Kanu that seeks session of its region as a constituent unit of the Nigeria Federation. IPOB is a splinter group that grew out of MASSOB. Its separatist agenda and movement have been a major challenge to the security architecture of the area. Despite the 30 months old civil war led Odumegwu Ojukwu and the proclamation of 'no victor, no vanquished' by Yakubu Gowon in 1970, fifty years down the lane, the Igbo people rightly or wrongly still feel marginalized in the political, social and economic equation of Nigeria. This feeling has led to resurfaced agitations for the independence of Biafra albeit with much vigor and different groups have rekindled the Biafran separatist agitation (Abada et al. 2020). Swedish Migration Agency SMA (2017) noted that IPOB now employs violent rhetoric through the transmissions of Radio Biafra and protests with inciting language and sentimental outbursts against other Nigerian nationalities. The use of inflammatory statements by the IPOB has exacerbated ethnic rancour mainly between the Igbo tribe and their Hausa/Fulani counterpart (Abada et al., 2020) .

The 2012 Anti-Petroleum Subsidy Removal Protest was also violent. Nigerian felt that because Nigeria is ranked the sixth primary oil producer among members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, refined petroleum products prices should be low. Therefore, downstream sector of the oil industry has remained problematic and volatile. Nigeria imports large quantity of refined petroleum products since her refineries are not functioning effectively. This has led to contentious petroleum product pricing and regulation by government agencies and this has weakened the evolution of vibrant downstream oil sector. Government has come to the rescue by introducing fuel subsidy to cushion the effect of rising refined petroleum products imported into the country. A subsidy scheme is when fuel customers pay less than the market price of fuel per litre with the aid of the government via subsidisation of oil prices to ensure fuel user-

friendliness for the residents (Babayomi, 2014). In resource-rich/energy exporting countries like Nigeria people view oil subsidy as part of the social contract ingredients.

The removal of fuel subsidy in early 2012 resulted in fierce protests between January 9 and 16 by many citizens (Ezeah & Abodunrin, 2016). The 2012 protests were triggered by a petrol price hike from N65 to N141 per litre by Jonathan administration. The whole country was set on fire until government reduced the price. At vanguard of the protest were Nigeria Labour Congress, Trade Union Congress, National Union of Petrol Energy and Natural Gas, PENGASSAN, reputable civil society groups and renowned activists and social critics.

Houeland (2020) contended that the 2012-protest against fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria was one of the biggest popular mobilisation in Nigeria's history, and possibly the largest in the wave of protests in Sub-Saharan Africa. In view of perceived oil-led economic growth which has not translated to an engaging sense of economic justice and real political participation by the citizenry, individuals involved in demonstration use the immediacy of their needs and the sustainability of collective action (Gustafson, 2019) as shown in the 2012 anti-fuel subsidy removal protest. As a result of the persistent protests, government offered ameliorative scheme tagged in Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SUREP), with the mandate to utilise subsidy funds to provide basic amenities to the citizenry and cushion the effect of price hike. Also, the protest forced government to establish a panel of enquiry whose findings revealed unprecedented corruption and fleecing of nation resources by a few.

The 2011 fuel subsidy account revealed that about 1.2 trillion naira was expended by government. In 2011 alone, Nigeria's fuel subsidy cost the country an estimated \$8 billion and the price tag for 2012 was expected to be even greater (Moyo & Songwe, 2012). The fuel subsidy in 2011 gulped 30 percent of total government's expenditure amounting to about 4 percent of GDP and 118 percent of the capital budget of Nigeria. It turned out that some of these claims that accounted for this amount were fake; instances of round-tripping and even un-imported fuel vessels abound. Many of the economic sabotage cases are still being prosecuted in the law courts by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission while some guilty ones have been sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, fines or forfeiture of ill-gotten wealth. Unfortunate, successive regimes continue to hike fuel price and claim to be spending

enormously on fuel subsidy. The regimes have also failed to fix the moribund refineries to provide for domestic consumption of refined oil products. Fuel price is still subject to international volatile crude oil pricing.

Most Nigerians perceive widespread corruption in the downstream oil sector and therefore advocated inclusiveness of labour in determining oil pricing regime. However, government opted for faster deregulation of the sector. The Petroleum Industry Bill when signed into law would expectedly address deregulation and consequent new pricing regime. 2020 #EndSARS Violent Protest was a mass action calling for a complete ban of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian police force. The bottled anger of many of the country's youths over unfair profiling and harassment by SARS in particular has found an outlet in protests across the country especially in the South and FCT. It started with no defined or any central leadership (Ojewole, 2020). Hitherto, the citizens have regularly accused the special police squad of harassment, intimidation and extortion of innocent youths. They have also been accused of extra-judicial killings, maiming and illegal incarceration of accused persons without authorization by a court of law. The squad has become a law to itself.

The #EndSARS protests represented a symbol for broader resentment and opened the path for marginalized Nigerian youths to vent bottled-up grievances against the government, though starting with the excesses of SARS other inadequacies in governance were added along the line. Congressional Research Service (2020) posited that the demonstrations started after a video went viral on social media showing an extrajudicial killing by members of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Footage of alleged SARS officers shooting a young Nigerian and driving off in his car went viral on social media on 3rd October 2020. Amnesty International (2020) recorded about 82 cases of abuses and extra-judicial killings by SARS operatives. Earlier in a 2016 report, Amnesty International asserted that SARS officers routinely committed torture and other abuses against detainees—many of whom were arrested arbitrarily, detained incommunicado, and forced to “confess” or pay bribes to secure release. SARS officers habitually failed to charge suspects before a court within 24 to 48 hours as prescribed under the Constitution and suspects were held for several days, weeks and months.

SARS is generally perceived as a brutal and inhuman sub-policing outfit. The perception of SARS as a lawless police outfit incensed the populace to resort to violent protest. Unfortunately, while the state governments were making efforts to douse tension, Federal Government that controls the police failed to respond on time to the demand of protesters; rather the security personnel were deployed to quell the riot. Security forces, including military personnel, reportedly killed dozens of protesters during government crackdown on protesters.

This approach further angered protesters and led to the destruction of police stations and other para-military security vehicles (Nkasi, 2020). Lootings and vandalism at several shopping malls in Lagos and state-owned buildings and facilities also followed. The looting and destruction of public buildings and private businesses led to the discovery of Covid-19 palliatives presumably kept in some warehouses across the Nation for personal use by the political and economic elites.

#EndSARS violent protest revealed division along ethnic divides. While the issues raised with regards to police brutality cut across the nation, the south remained the action spot, the northern youths responded by tagging it as a ploy to bring down the government led by a northern Fulani.

The riot was curtailed after the killings at Lekki Toll Gate and government response by setting up Judicial Panels of Enquiry on Police Brutality in all the states of the federation.

6. Conclusion

Since independence, Nigerian polity has witnessed many violent protests that have resulted in loss of many lives, maiming of persons, destruction of properties and widening of trust-gap among the disparate groups. Civilian and military regimes have not been spared of violent revolt by frustrated citizens due to different reasons that are connected to socio-political injustice.

Manipulated elections and imposition of unpopular government led to the operation 'wetie' in the west shortly after independence. The imbroglio led to the demise of the first republic and intervention of military in governance with the entrenchment of culture of violence in Nigeria.

Government embrace of the use of force and refusal to back-track on unpopular policies has been the breeding ground for public dissidence. For example,

despite opposition to SAP government went ahead to implement it dictates and unfortunately most empirical studies validated the apprehensions of Nigerians against SAP. Danladi, Naankiel & Naankiel (2016) rightly contended that the SAP policies led to the collapse of manufacturing and agricultural industries, heightened unemployment and social insecurity. In the same vein, Nnazor's (1999) survey revealed that implementation of SAP policies limited access to productive and reproductive resources as well as engendered socio-economic hardship in Nigeria.

Perceived injustice in the annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential election brought about violent conflicts that led to the formation of OPC that unleashed mayhem on the southwest for years. Environmental degradation and inequality to resources form the bases of agitation in the Niger. Delta region. Perceived inequality in access to political and economic opportunities is the central factor in the agitation for secession in the southeast.

Neo-liberal economic policies which benefit mostly the rich and enables government to shirk responsibilities to the people under the guise of liberalization, deregulation, commercialization and public-private partnership frustrate the downtrodden masses that see such policies as failure to honour 'social contract' obligations. Protest against hike in the prices of petroleum products is situated within this theoretical frame.

Most of the protests in Nigeria are usually hijacked by opposition elements to push their own political or parochial ethnic agendas in an attempt to discredit government or wrest power. This postulation became obvious in the #EndSARS protest in 2020 as opposition parties and secessionist promoters gave financial and material supports for the elongation of the protest. This observation validates the elite complicity theory adopted for this study.

By and large, how government handles legitimate or genuine complaints from the people determines the course of political participation. Most protests against the state's actions, inactions or policies start as a peaceful action but the use of force or militarized policing often aggravates the protests to violent proportion. Thus, this study agrees with Ives & Lewis' (2019) thesis that protest escalates to violence where government has penchant to opt for repression and posits that poor handling of protest through repression and militarism is adversarial and unproductive. Rather, the state should embrace dialogue as a non-adversarial technique to douse

tension anytime there is genuine complaint by the people. It is also recommended that political actors should take the welfare of the citizens as the most important means of removing social exclusion. Also, using apparatus of state for self-enrichment and promotion of class or group hegemony with the tint of religion and ethnicity should be addressed frontally by all Nigerians.

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