DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN AFRICA: THE MILITIA EXPERIENCE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

After decades of military rule in most countries in Africa, the culture of violence became entrenched in the conduct of public and even private affairs. The militarization of African societies permeated politics and social life. The preponderant use of aggressive language and blatant application of force intended to intimidate, humiliate and compel compliance is illustrative. Most transitional democracies in Africa assumed a violent character soon after the military regimes that introduced them as a disparate measure to win or retain political power by the political class. Electoral violence perpetrated by youth militia is adopted by all shades of politicians as mechanism for delivering electoral victories at all cost and this has been part of the democratic process since the return of democracy in the early 1990s. Following the mismanagement of African economies by military regimes, a huge unemployment was created with an overwhelming youth population. Given the imperatives of huge monetary usage in democratic politics, retired military officers turned politicians who had corruptly enriched themselves utilized established social connections and wealth to mobilize and arm unemployed youth (other than their children), as a militia to prosecute electoral ambitions. This paper argues that changing the structure, and level of youth unemployment through entrepreneurial and education schemes in rural economies promises to drastically reduce youth availability for recruitment for violent purposes. This is within the purview of both the state and civil society.

KEYWORDS: Democracy, Political Power, Militia, Electoral Violence, Civil Society

INTRODUCTION

Contestation for political power in Africa has become more often than not a violent process (Biegon, 2009). It appears from available evidence that violent struggle for power has become the norm and is taken as a given by groups in the game. Violent competition for power has therefore become an acceptable infusion in the political process in states of Africa. For instance, since the early 1990s, contestation for power had turned violent in form of armed conflict and even civil war as in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo Democratic Republic, Rwanda and Somalia. Indeed where contestation did not descent into armed conflict violence remained an ineluctable component of the political process.

In the wake of the Huntingtonian third wave of democratisation since the mid 1990s, the introduction of democratic reforms in Africa after the lull of the 1980s, has remained characterised by violence. Electrical violence both well orchestrated by armed gangs and those upon spontaneity occurred in Lesotho in 1998 and 2007, Kenya in 2007, Zimbabwe since 2002-2008, Nigeria in 2003, 2007 and 2011 (Omotola, 2008) Onu and Momoh, 2005; Maltosa, 2009). The ubiquity of electoral violence often systematically orchestrated has produced and sustained fear and insecurity among politicians and the electorate in nearly all of the transition democracies in Africa. This situation has created problems of instability and fragility in African states (Biegon, 2009).

The phenomenon of electoral violence is rooted in the prevailing militarization of politics and governance that has
been entrenched due to decades of military rule in Africa. The use of military language of “capture”, “defeat” and “take over” by politicians against opponents is evidence of this militarization of African democratic politics. The other factor that indisputably explains the prevailing electoral violence in democratic political processes is the patrimonial nature of African politics. The winner takes all mentality of African democratic competition as the only guaranteed access to state resources makes democratic elections a must win and therefore a “do or die” game. To win at all cost politicians resort to recruiting unemployed youth who are readily available to be used to orchestrate violence in the build up to, during and after elections. For the youth it’s a source of livelihood for the political elite raising, arming and funding a militia group is a necessity to guarantee electoral victory. In Nigeria the preponderance of retired military personnel turned politician, leverage their military background and in concert with career politicians who may be financially weak acquire arms readily available since the end of the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone for the militia group to be used in disrupting the electoral process to favour financiers. With arms, money and protection from the youth and their sponsors, militia groups perpetrate violence well after elections. This paper argues that the quest for free and fair elections is nearly impossible with militia groups on the loose. Under cutting the source of availability of youth through structural deconstruction of unemployment in rural economies with entrepreneurial schemes would therefore eliminate recruitment for violent purposes.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES: ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND MILITIA

To further the understanding of the importance of democracy to genuine development as a function of good governance produced by institutionalization of the governance process, conceptual delineations in the context of practical experience of the phenomenon of electoral violence and militia group constitution and operation is deemed inevitable. This clarification will assist in redirecting contemporary scholarly discourse on the role of election in choosing representatives that will spur change in governance outcomes in Africa.

Elections are generally accepted as the “hallmark of democracy” (Ojo, 2008). For Chiroro, 2005) election is the defining mechanism of the democratic order. Biegon, (2009) argues that elections regulate democratic competitions for power and in this contextual role are therefore integral parts of representative democracy. Even though elections are the cornerstone of democratic order, its role need to be understood beyond the counters of election as activities in its build up and post election day combine to define its functional impact on democracy and political stability. In this context violence occupies an integral position in the election dynamics in Africa. Electoral violence describes all forms of organised acts or threats –physical, psychological and structural –aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process (Albert, 2007; Omotola, 2009). Electoral violence is not only dynamic and multi dimensional it also occurs in the build up to elections. Makumi Nwagiru (2001:16) conceives of electoral violence as political violence aimed at the electoral process with the goal of winning political competition or power through violence, by subverting the ends of the electoral and democratic process. Given this grand objective, electoral violence occurs “not just at election time but in periods leading to elections, during the elections and in the period immediately following elections as during counting of ballots (Mwagiru, 2001:16). Electoral violence could also occur after declaration of results.

Electoral violence is a mere sub-set of political violence and it is distinguished by its timing around elections and desire to impact elections by altering its outcome or simply disrupting elections. Electoral violence can be physical to threaten and intimidate voters, opponents, snatch or destroy election materials (UNDP, 2011). The context and nature of electoral violence reflect in different forms. This range from assault to murder of opponents, wanton destruction of property, arson, threats to violence, disruption of political campaigns, hooliganism and fighting. These forms can be scaled up to reflect the degree of determination to influence election outcomes and organisational capacity of the perpetrator
especially the perceived relationship to the state. The build up to election violence may be low scale but once election day(s) are approaching again depending on the strength of the opponent and chances of victory, forms of violence may be scaled up and range and regularity accelerated. At this point bombings or widespread thuggery can be orchestrated to disrupt well attended campaign rallies. Here, hijacking, kidnaping and even assignation of candidates and suspected financiers and backers of a given candidates can be undertaken.

Electoral violence is no doubt not only prevalent but dominant in Africa especially in the last two decades. In other words, it has spread in tandem with the relative entrenchment of representative democracy and has been attributed to contestation over the rules governing elections. In addition to these are more fundamental systematic and structural causes. According to Gilbert Khadiagala (2010:5) “electoral violence ensues where there is uncertainty about the legitimacy and transparency of electoral rules”. Khadiagala also notes that electoral violence may occur by leaning on elections as a platform to manifest underlying and societal issues especially in plural societies. Hence, he underscored three main contributing factors to electoral violence to include “socio-economic decisions, regimes without a stake in political change, and weak institutions and institutional rules governing competitive elections”. Military regimes in African that opposed political reforms but were pressured into introducing transitions to democratic programs sponsored violence to justify slow pace of transition and then buy more time to remain in power. Nigeria under General Sani Abacha was known to have carried out state sponsored assassinations and bombings for these purposes.

Electoral violence manifest in forms such as disruption of campaign rallies, assassinations, rigging by theft of ballot papers and boxes, disrupting elections on election day or chasing away voters, malicious and wanton destruction of property and arson require systematic and detailed planning and organisation. In Africa, especially since the early 1990s, those who organise and orchestrate electoral violence in many countries including Nigeria are members of an organised militia. The adverse economic situation in Nigeria has created an army of unemployed youth as a pool for recruitment into militia groups. These are young men recruited, trained and armed by politicians and deployed to carry out systematically planned and organised violence in election periods. The militia gang members carry arms and other dangerous weapons to intimidate opponents, disrupt campaign rallies, hijack ballot boxes, maim and kill candidates and beat sympathizers of opponent and destroy properties of opponents and political parties. The youth constitute the predominant membership of militia groups but have among their ranks also retired military and police personnel. These bring their experience in handling weapons and combat operation to bear on the activities of the militia. The pay received boost incomes that come from epileptic pension allowances. With enormous wealth acquired by politicians, a good number in the case of Nigeria are retired military officers who made money during military rule and leverage their social connections and established networks to acquire illegal small arms and light weapons readily available due to Africa’s porous borders and the proliferation of arms as a result of the collapse of communism and the wars across Africa. Heavily armed with assured protection from sponsors, militia groups thoroughly undermine the electoral process by orchestrating organised violence to alter electoral outcomes.

Electoral violence as a mechanism of altering electoral outcomes through militia gangs is not a strategy deployed predominantly by the opposition or the politically weak as suggested by Paul Collier, (2009). Strauss and Taylor (2009) in a continent wide study of African elections concluded that desperate incumbents seeking another term in office are principal perpetrators of violence. In the long stretch of election cycles, violence is orchestrated systematically and on a sustained basis in the period leading up to election especially three months to Election Day. Violence at this period is designed to shrink the political space by chasing away opponents or compelling them to pull out of the race. Thus, electoral violence and militia gangs are closely related concepts and mutually reinforcing as the former is both a strategy and
mechanism while the latter is a functional tool for activating a potent mechanism for altering the trajectories and dynamics of elections in Africa in determined directions. Though African states have a shared common in electoral violence, significant variations appear in causes and patterns of election related violence.

**ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN AFRICA: SOME SPECIFICITY**

Since the 1990s, Africa’s experience with representative democracy has shown that the continent can be a fertile space for research, commentaries and debate on electoral violence and the use of armed militia groups as integral components of elections and the electoral process. In Africa, it is no longer possible to plan elections without adequate attention to the issue of violence. For many politicians, evolving strategies for using violence and counteracting some marks the first step to determining how serious a candidate is about contesting at a forth coming election. Conflict and tensions have therefore been palpable during election years in nearly all Africa’s new democracies (Bekoe, 2010). Studies indicate that 19-25 percent of elections in Africa are tainted by violence. Donia Bekoe has therefore noted that recurring electoral violence may be attributed to widespread systematic grievances and tensions over land rights, employment and ethnic marginalisation.

African democracies have also been tarnished by the criminalisation of the electoral process with electoral violence. This has appeared preponderantly in sub-Saharan Africa. In east Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe are replete with chilling incidences of electoral violence that consist of assassination, thuggery, arson, destruction of properties, kidnapping, beating, killing and maiming (Omotola, 2009; Bekoe, 2010; Schwartz, 2001). East Africa posses a rich history of democracy of the one party strategy steeped in authoritarian governance asymmetries. For instance, President Robert Mugabe has ruled Zimbabwe with an iron fist. The ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU –PF) is dominated by war veterans of the war of independence who constitute its militia wing and is deftly deployed alongside the regular army and police personnel especially in the rural areas to intimidate and brutalise people suspected to be sympathisers of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition led by Morgan Tsvangirai to acquiesce. Since 2000 following the introduction of multi-party democratic reforms, political repression has heightened and elections since then have been awash with violence (Chiviru, 2012). The parliamentary and presidential elections of 2008 were plagued by state sponsored intimidation and violence in which over 253 deaths were recorded (Smith, 2011:1). Many Zimbabweans were left homeless and displaced. The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) broke the global political agreement in 2008 which laid the framework for power sharing that MDC produced Tsvangirai as Prime Minister. ZANU-PF has raised youth militias that operate in rural areas and urban slums. As the country considered elections in 2011 that were eventually postponed dozens of MDC youths were arrested and charged with public violence, a sizeable number were shot and stabbed while hundreds were hounded out of their homes while MDC properties were destroyed with impunity (Smith, 2011). It was established in a May 2010 report by the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CZC) that ZANU-PF re-launched “Operation Surrender” used in the 2008 elections as a strategy to arm-twist MDC supporters into backing ZANU-PF. The party militia has been training youth at designated bases and unleashing violence on villages (IRIN, 2010).

Electoral violence is an integral part of the election cycle – from pre-election period to during election and post election. Indeed since 2000 and as elaborately demonstrated in the 2008 elections, post election violence has ever been deeply rooted and entrenched in Zimbabwean politics. President Robert Mugabe and the ruling ZANU-PF loath loosing political power in a multi-party democratic process (Hickman, 2009). The party invoked historical sentiments and unleashed war veterans on anti-ZANU-PF members. War veterans and the military and police fear accountability that may follow should ZANU-PF loose power to MDC. Thus, electoral Violence is systematically used to close the political space,
influence the outcome of the election and guarantee political power for ZANU-PF. Post election violence represents a challenge of electoral outcomes and spontaneous protest that turn violent are an expression of disappointment and despair with the management of elections. These violent protests represent a vote of no confidence in electoral management system and the adjudication process.

Uganda presents another classical example of state sponsored electoral violence arising from a culture of violence due to military rule and the militarisation of politics in the additional wake of prolong military rule. The elections of 1962, 1980, 2001, 2006 and 2011 were all mired in widespread violence. All these elections witnessed electoral violence and intimidation including kidnapping. The 2001, 2006 and 2011 general elections witnessed torture, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention, abduction and kidnapping, arrest without warrants, beatings, and personal humiliation by stripping to nakedness, killings, shootings, death threats and threats of beating. Chasing away voters from polling stations on the pretext that they were non-Ugandans or under age and malicious damage to property all characterised the elections in 2011(Schwartz, 2001:150). President Yoweri Museveni of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) has raised and trained youth brigades and militia that terrorise supporters of Uganda Peoples’ Congress (UPC) the main opposition party by visiting on them all forms of violence in the build up to election (Foley, 2001).

Uganda as Zimbabwe has been ruled by an authoritarian leader for 25 years (Branch, 2011). Leaving power is not an issue to be broach by President Museveni lightly and by NRM. Superficially, the Ugandan state has permitted multi-party politics, the ruling party however does not believe in electoral competition. Again like Zimbabwe the ruling parties are saddled with aging leaders and seem to be short of time and strategies for producing successors to avoid instability and fractionalisation of the party. Thus, the specific contributing factors to electoral violence in Uganda include political repression, the nature of Africa’s’ patrimonial state, lack of faith in the election management process and rising levels of poverty and unemployment.

Tanzania and Kenya provides a different background to electoral violence. Both countries share a more appealing experience with representative democracy even though of a dominant one-party strand. The states however have limited militarisation experiences even with the Mau Mau uprisings in Kenya before independence though. Tanzania’s elections since 1957 until 1990 were dominantly held under Tanzania African National Union (TANU) and were relatively peaceful. However in the 1995 general election held since the introduction of multiparty politics, electoral violence launched itself unto the political scene with ferocity. Both the 1995 and 2000 general elections witnessed assaults, murder, disruption of campaign rallies, fighting, malicious damage to property and even bombings (Schwatz, 2001). The electoral violence is attributed to political repression, lack of faith in electoral management bodies and the adjudication process, uncompromising attitude of politicians and the incumbent determination to retain power at all costs.

The Kenyan experience in electoral violence is well connected also to the dominance of President Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arab Moi one party state structure that gave way only in the 1990s. The 1992 and 2007 elections witnessed over 1000 deaths and several hundreds of thousands displaced (Bekoe, 2010:1). The independent multi-party system symbolised by Jomo Kenyatta’s Kenya African National Union (KANU) gave way to a one party system under KANU in 1964. These political parties were built on ethnic plurality complexities of Kenyan society. Thus KANU was an umbrella for majority Kikuyu and Luo while the minorities took shelter under KADU consisting of Kalenjin, Luhy and Giriama. The minorities’ mobilisation was to weave a bond to checkmate the domination and marginalisation by the ethnic majorities of Kukuyu and Luo (Throup, 1993). Democratic rule in the early years after independence soon gave way to strong ethnic politics and ethnicity became a platform for mobilisation and exclusion of others from power and state resources. The Kenyatta regime was a one party state under Kikuyu leadership and the Kikuyu excluded others from the
state. When Daniel Arap Moi succeeded Kenyatta in 1978 after his death, Moi simply amassed power for the kalenjins such that with presidentialism, state power was further concentrated in the presidency and deftly used in favour of the Kalenjins. The introduction of multiparty system in 1991 did not affect control by Moi because the emerging parties were too fragmented (Joel, 1993). For the first time however, Moi’s trump at the polls was marred by electoral violence in the Rift Valley, Western and Coast provinces orchestrated by state sponsored militias (Biegon, 2009).

The violence was designed to prevent opposition voters from casting votes at the ballot thereby altering substantially the outcome of the election. With that incident, violence was introduced into the electoral politics of Kenya and the process of institutionalization of ethnically induced violence during elections was firmly begun.

The electoral victory of Mwai Kibaki as President in 2002, defeating KANU was a product of resilient negotiation and coalition efforts of 14 small parties that agreed to present Kibaki as a single candidate. The National Alliance Party of Kenya (NAK) produced the Rainbow coalition that defeated KANU’s Uhuru Kenyatta. But the honey moon was to be soon disrupted because Kibaki failed to enact a new constitution within 100 days of assuming power as was contained in the memorandum of understanding signed in the formation of NARC as a prelude to appointing Odinga Odinga as Prime Minister. In addition to this failure, Kibaki acted in policy frameworks and politics as if his presidency was an opportunity to recover the lost position of the Kikuyus in national politics and economy. Thus, attempts for constitutional amendment without the post of premier failed as the referendum for amendment became an ethnic contestation between the majority inclusive verses minorities excluded from national politics. Once the referendum was defeated in 2005 and presidential election arrived in 2007, the contestation was fierce between Kibaki and Odinga who represented the ethnic polarisation of access to the state. In that election stakes were high. Kibaki supporters believed that a lose at the polls would mean exclusion while Odinga believed that a win would turn them into the inclusive. The opposition Orange Democratic Movement of Odinga had absolute confidence of victory boosted by an opinion poll. When the elections were concluded and Odinga lost violence erupted but not as a spontaneous reaction rather as a systematic outburst of premeditated reaction to historical grievances that were unresolved for years (Anderson & Lochery, 2008).

MILITIA GROUPS AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Nigeria in West Africa is a strategic country due to its ethnic complexity and numerical strength. On the score of ethnic mix, Nigeria shares this with nearly all other West African States though not to the same complex degree. The ethnic character of these states has often appeared as a rule rather than an exception as a mobilising platform for democratic politics, despite the legacy of military rule in West Africa. For example, Coted’Ivoire since the death of Felix Houphet Boigny has grappled with electoral violence which plunged the country into a civil war in 2000 after the widespread post election violence (Bekoe, 2010). Togo presents another case of widespread post election violence in 2005 when Faure Gnassingbe succeeded his father and won the presidential election. The violence that followed recorded 500-800 deaths (Bekoe, 2009:4).

Nigeria presents a classical case of enthusiasm of political mobilisation. This element of politics has remained a major part of the country’s democratisation experience. Since independence in 1960 and prior to that, political parties were predicated on ethnic identity such as Action Group (AG) for Yoruba and the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was no doubt dominated by Ibos of Eastern Nigeria (Coleman, 1978, Azeez, 2009). The Second Republic political parties such as National Party of Nigeria (NPN) though with a national spread had a Northern bent while the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) had a strong Igbo and Yoruba inclination respectively (Falola & Ihonvbere, 1985). Ethnic cleavages and regional contexts have defined the parameters of national engagements of the
Thus, elections in Nigeria are contested by candidates who are by the structure of Nigerian federation representatives of ethnic affiliations and regional power blocks. The 1964-65 general elections were bitterly contested by regionally dominant parties like the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), AG and NCNC with so much at stake in the young independent country. The reins of power were interpreted as access to the state and resources that without adequate representation especially by controlling the centre, everything would be lost (Sklar, 1963). The NPC, a northern political party had dominated national politics and the election was an opportunity to consolidate its grip on power for northern political elites. Other regions also sought to access the central government and possibly control it (Jinadu, 2011). The NPC sought to make inroads into other regions while AG and NCNC sought to maintain a hold on their regions. At the end of the election following disappointment with the results especially by AG supporters with the in-road of NCNC, violence broke out to a near collapse of public order. The degree of violence was unprecedented paving way for arson; looting, killing and wanton destruction of properties. The near collapse of public order in the west has been partly blamed for the collapse of the First Republic (Omotola, 2009).

The Second Republic elections in 1983 also witnessed violence following the massive rigging that trailed the election thereby altering results in favour of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). The NPN hoped desperately to consolidate its control of the federal government and also extend its control of states it failed to win in 1979. The contestation between NPN and UPN especially in Western Nigeria’s Ondo State resulted in widespread violence as was witnessed in other parts of the country. The collapse of the Second Republic is also blamed on the electoral violence of 1983.

The 1993 elections were a clean break from this history of electoral violence as have been adjudged to be the most peaceful, transparent, free and fair ever conducted in Nigeria (Omoruyi, 2001). The 1999 elections also were conducted peacefully especially because of the expectation of the political class and the fear that the military might not handover should things go wrong. But the 2003 and 2007 elections witnessed violence especially during the campaigns as a built up to the elections. Several assassinations and attempted assassinations as well as murder and arson, disruption of campaigns and fighting occurred in different parts of the country (Ogundiya & Baba, 2003). The declaration by then President Obasanjo that the 2007 elections were a “do or die” affair heightened the state and gave vent to the escalation of violence during the campaign period. Instrumental to the may hem were youth militia gangs in the employ of politicians. The situation in Kwande Local Government Council elections illustrates the blatant use of youth militia in prosecuting elections. The Kwande Local Government Council elections in Benue State of Nigeria were conducted in 2004 against the background of a PDP dominant state having control of 22 of the 23 Local Government Councils. Kwande Local Government Council is typically dominated by ANPP and hence it is the party’s stronghold. The local government are has voted opposition in previous elections. This suggests that the area is inclined to challenging the status quo. The desperate desire of PDP to control the Local Government could not allow the party to concede defeat to ANPP. Thus on sensing an apparent defeat, the party directed the state election body (Benue Independent Election Commission, BSIEC) to declare that election did not hold in the area even after security agencies accepted that elections held and duly informed government. The electoral heeded to the instructions of the government and therefore did not announce the results. Frustrated beyond control, the ANPP youth militia began to attack PDP supporters and their properties, an attack that the PDP militia responded with ferocity (Lyam, 2006). This development was confirmed in an interview on 16th August, 2012 by Adzua Orkuma and Aondongu Hile both of whom were in the area during the crisis that ensued. The Senate (First Arm
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of Nigeria’s National Assembly appointed a committee to visit the area on a fact finding mission following protracted post election violence in the area. The Committee in its report established that militia groups on both side were armed with sophisticated weapons procured by politicians. The destruction visited on the local government area was such that only sophisticated weapons were capable of (Senate, 2004).

The people of Kwande local government area feel targeted by the ruling party and used unemployed youth in the area to wreck havoc on the very people it sought desperately to rule. Most of the militia members were those who had become literally incontrollable by their parents but were quickly accepted and recruited by politicians who armed and maintained them for the purpose of militia functionality at elections. Focus group discussions affirmed this wide spread belief as noted by a participant that “we are incapable of disciplining our children and wards because of the strong interference by politicians who quickly embrace those who are denounced by their parents and guardians. Armed and maintained by their sponsors, they return with money and arms to torment the villagers and the entire community” (FGDs held at Adikpo on 17th August, 2012)

It is in the same mode but on a wider scale that the 2011 post election violence occurred after the Presidential election in Nigeria. This violence left over 1000 dead and over 74,000 displaced (UNDP, 2011:6). This post election violence occurred against the background of the management structure of Nigeria’s ethnic pluralism. The PDP, the ruling party had accepted in principle the notion of zoning of key government and elected positions including the presidency. The South West had the first shot from 1999-2007 and the North took over with President Umaru Yar’Adua who died in his third year in office. The Vice President Goodluck Jonathan an Ijaw from the South-South completed the tenure and sought and contested and won the presidency against the wishes of Northern politicians who believed that the zoning formula should have been adhered to so that the North could field a candidate to complete the cycle of tenure in 2015. The North and the generality of the northern political establishment rooted for Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) with General Muhammadu Buhari as its candidate who was very popular in the north was favoured to win. Unfortunately, the results favoured Jonathan even in some states of the north as Kaduna and Jigawa. The 2011 post election violence was widespread in the North but it was not spontaneous, it was systematically planned and orchestrated in response to the inherent notion that the announcement was the end of the process as the judiciary held no promise for the people. One fact stands out about contemporary Nigerian electoral violence; that the violence is operated by a well armed youth militia throughout the election cycle to influence election outcomes and a show of frustration with the incapacities of state institutions. Following the emergence of the Islamic sect Boko Haram onto the political scene with systematic armed attack on state security institutions by its members who are armed to be used during elections in Borno State in June 1999, governors of the 19 northern states announced their official resolve to discard all militant groups in their states that were formed and used for political purposes (Umoru & Odenyi, 2011). Boko Haram is one of the most armed groups in contemporary Nigeria.

CONCLUSIONS

Electoral violence in Africa is endemic, entrenched and institutionalised. It is so manifest due to state inducement and sponsorship. The perception of the state as a source of livelihood for groups (ethnic) and individuals who seek to control state power is the major driving force for electoral violence. Elections in Africa as a winner takes all process and the underdevelopment state in Africa leave many without opportunities to reproduce. Ethnic cleavages occupy central consideration in the quest for power and politicians invoke ethnic sentiments to amplify decades of grievances that have been allowed to simmer. African political elite are yet to accept political competition to allow elections to regulate the process. Electoral violence has thus become a veritable mechanism and strategy of perpetuating self rule on the wings of ethnic chauvinism. With weak state and democratic institutions, politicians leverage their fraudulently amassed wealth to
arm youth militias to prosecute elections and the weak economic base has created an army of unemployed youth as ready recruits. In addition to sustained efforts at strengthening state institutions, rural entrepreneurial programmes and projects are capable of opportunities for youth employment and wealth creation which may reduce the existing pool of available youth for recruitment as militia.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

From this paper the following recommendations are made:

- In order to check the use of unemployed youths for militia purposes, an efficient and effective youth education scheme that includes sensitisation through advocacy measures should be empower them with adequate knowledge on the dangers of militia activities to themselves and society.

- Youth milita need to ask themselves this pertinent question: why do the political leadership recruit militia from among other people’s children, but their own children, who incidentally are the sole beneficiaries in the long run of militias’ activities? And again, why do they do keep plum jobs and positions for their own children. Why are they out of school, whereas their sponsors’ children are doing well in their various academic institutions within and outside Nigeria?

- it is also useful to observe that the sponsors family member most often are very far away from the turbulent area of political contestation, whereas as the majority of the poor masses from which the militias are drawn are the victims.

- Armed with knowledge, this should be complemented by technical skills for employment which can be generated through small to medium scale enterprises since, being gainfully engaged, the chances to abandon such meaningful lives for precarious ventures like militia activities is likely to curtailed.

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