Mass Media
And
Society

A MULTI-PERSPECTIVE APPROACH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION A: OVERVIEW OF MASS MEDIA IN NIGERIA

SECTION B: ADVERTISING IN NIGERIA

SECTION E: MASS MEDIA AND PUBLIC HEALTH IN NIGERIA

CENGAGE
Learning·   www.cengageasia.com   Policy

SECTION F: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN NIGER

SECTION G : MASS MEDIA AND NATIONAL ISSUES

POLITICAL VIOLENCE, NATIONAL SECURITY AND THE MASS MEDIA

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Introduction

Since Nigeria became an independent country on October 1, 1960, conducting a violence- free election remains a goal yet to be attained. From the first federal election after independence in 1964 to that of 1983 and 2003, electioneering in Nigeria has been characterized by thuggery and political violence (Popoola, 2004, p. 187). So brutal is Nigerian political contest that electoral process, at any level of governance, is always scary and laden with human and material loss, with grave consequence on the nation's security. In effect, violence has assumed a commanding feature of politics in Nigeria.

The spate of political violence when juxtaposed with the need for security as a precondition for development, therefore, remains paradoxical. This is more disturbing given Nigerian diverse ethno-religious orientations that have become critical factors in political process and governance as well as the threat that political violence poses at all times to the national security upon which any other form of development, political, social, economic etc is anchored.

There is no doubt that the wish of any entity, natural or artificial (corporate organization), is to reside in an environment where adequate security is guaranteed. This perhaps informs why

all nations of the world place high premium on national security and accords it a pride of place in their statutes and budgets. In line with the global practice, the compelling need for security underscores the inclusion in the Chapter 2 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 14 (1b) of the constitution explicitly states that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government". In furtherance of this, Section 15 (3a & b) equally avers that for the purpose of promoting national integration, it shall be the duty of the state to:
- Provide adequate facilities for and encourage free mobility of people, goods and service throughout the federation;
- secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the federation;
- encourage inter-marriage among persons from different places of origin, or of different religious (sic), ethnic or linguistic association or ties; and
- Promote or encourage the formation of association that cut across ethnic, linguistic, religious or other sectional barriers.

In a similar vein, Section 33 of the same constitution provides inter alia that "every person has a right to life, and no one shall be deprived intentionally of his life, save in execution of the sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence of which he has been found guilty in Nigeria". And on the right to dignity of human person which violence of any type violates, Section 34(1) says: Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person and accordingly-

(a)   no person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment;
(b)   no person shall be held in slavery or servitude; and
(c)   no person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.

Without much explication it could be deduced that the intention of the government, as alluded to by the constitution, is to respect the dignity of the entire citizenry and guarantee freedom for the citizens to pursue their lives ambitions without let or hindrance. However, occasional threats to mobility, secured residence as well as other national integration clauses have characterized the nation's polity since 1960 due to incessant politically-motivated violence.

Having deployed all tactics to wrestle the sovereignty over lands, lives and properties from the imperial colonialists, seen as interfering with the fundamental rights of the people of Nigeria, it was not long for the nation to witness a worse form of imperialism from among the nationalists and political gladiators who believed that plundering the nation should be the lots of those in government and employ all tactics, predominantly violence, to acquire political power. This violent domination of the political landscape and the illegal appropriation of national common wealth to themselves make the political elite to become monstrous in their culture of contest, with ravaging effects on the national security.

In addition to their egocentrism and unbridled kleptomaniac tendency, the elite capitalized on octopodial ignorance of the masses which makes them vulnerable to the instigation in their bid to use them to achieve their ambition, particularly through the son of the soil sentiments. The recurrence of violence in the polity has thus given it a colouration of being a necessary feature of the nation's politics, making political transitions to occur always under ominous atmosphere, and thus far none could be exonerated as a violence-free one, almost five decade after assuming nationhood.

Beyond the threat it poses, political violence was the precipitant of the militarization of the nation's polity in a number of times. The 1966 and 1983 coup d'etats as well as General Sani Abacha's demolition of democratic structure in 1993, leading to the still born of Third Republic, bore testimonies to havocs wrecked on the nation's march to egalitarianism by political violence.

The deleterious consequences of violence affect virtually all sphere of the national life and task not only the security institutions, but the entire superstructure of the nation, thus commanding the supports of all. The intention of this paper is, therefore, not only to x-ray the implications of political violence on national security, but explicates the constitutional and ethical responsibility of the media in the creation of violence-free political sphere that will guarantee the security of the nation and provide an atmosphere for varying degree of development.

Conceptual Clarifications

Although the concepts associated with this study are not nebulous, it will however offer easy comprehension of the work if they are contextualized, particularly given the complexity of each of the concepts when viewed from macro analytical prism.

Political Violence

Political violence entails whimsical subjugation of the political interest of a person or group by another person or group with the aim of suppressing the person's or group's political viewpoints. It includes the use of physical force, threats, intimidation as well as infliction of injury- physical, moral or psychological on a person or group in the quest for hegemonic control of the instruments and institutions of state power. Political violence seeks to engender political advantage toward gaining political hegemony or control which in turn secures advantage for the hegemonic group in primitive accumulation as a class or as a segment of a class (Olurode, 2003, p. 39).

According to Anifowose (1994, p. 4) "political violence is the use of threat or physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals, and/ or property, with the intent to cause injury or death to a person and / or damage or destruction of property; and whose

objectives, choice of target or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effects have political significance…". In effect, the psychological harm, deprivations, mal-development and of course injury are linked to power struggle between and among contending political groups.

National Security

National security is a broad concept which deals with the responsibility of the state to preserve the safety of its citizens at home and abroad, and the preservation of the integrity of the borders and assets of the country, including the physical assets such as infrastructure and the economy, and the intangible assets, such as national prestige and the political ability to project power and authority (Temlong, 2003, p. 17). The concept national security, like other social science concepts, is subject to various interpretations. However, for the purpose of this study it is construed as protection of national interest as codified in Chapter 2 (Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy) to include political, economic, social education, foreign policy and environmental objective among others.

National security, therefore, "is everybody's business and the responsibility of every citizen… (Momoh, 2006, p. 10). Hence, national security implies the absence of threat to lives, properties as well as socio-political and economic wellbeing of the entire citizenry.

Mass Media

Mass media are the communication channels that facilitate simultaneous diffusion of information, idea, facts, data, etc to a mass audience that are situated in far flung locations. The mass media as the mirror of our societal events connect us with the happenings and interpret them for better comprehension. By producing and transmitting public messages to large, scattered and heterogeneous audience, the mass media assume the role of story

telling that helps in the construction of social reality by the people.

"Media are more than simple mechanisms for disseminating information: they are complex organization and an important social institution of society" (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 308). Therefore, the role the media play or refuse to play in political violence will have implications (good or bad) for the nation's security at micro and macro level.

Historicity of Political Violence in Nigeria

Sequel to the ouster of the imperialistic colonial regime that plundered the nation for decades, Nigerians have no common enemy to confront politically, and hence the efforts used in the decolonization project became fragmented into sectional self-protective instinct. It is most likely that the recoil into nationality solidarity, rather than allegiance to national cause that sow the seed of bitter violence that now characterized our polity till date.

From the eve of the independence, the struggle for power has became a war of sort among the contending parties using all forms of sentiment that can precipitate anger among the citizens. "From the 1950's, election in Nigeria approximated a war that was waged to determine who got what, when and how. All weapon were available for these combatants to use-religion, ethnic sentiments, outright bribery, the power of incumbency, corruption, the abuse of electoral processes, etc" (Oyediran, 1997, p. 8).

At independence in 1960, the nation was in a fragile state occasioned by the ruthlessness with which the political elite jostle for the power to rule the nation. Henceforth, the nation's political landscape was littered with violence of varying dimension- from the West to East, North to South; no region seemed to be immune against political violence.

Political violence entered the alarming realm in 1964 and 1965, the period Nigerians conducted the first transitional elections at federal and regional levels respectively. The elections were

marred by widespread rigging, which elicited disagreement on the parts of the electorate who in their bid to demonstrate their disenchantments for the brazen use of state power to perpetrate selfish ambitions, took to street, destroying properties, maiming and killing the anti-people's agents, real or imaged. The Operation Wet e in Ibadan, the political capital of the then Western Region, that eternally gave the region the unsavoury epithet of Wild Wild West , led to loss of many lives and properties through arson and remained a dark spot in the nation's political psyche till date. It was equally on record that the first set of military adventurers struck to prevent the looming catastrophe that political violence was courting.

It takes another thirteen years for the nation to be demilitarized and returned to the part of civility through Muritala/ Obasanjo regime's transition, giving. the nation the Second Republic. Unfortunately however, the political actors, an admixture of the remnants of the First Republic and few new breeds, could not demonstrate that they have learnt from their pasts. The 1983 transition elections, conducted by the ruling National Party of Nigeria, NPN, like the one conducted by its precursor in the First Republic, the Northern Peoples Congress, NPC, was, according to oppositions to the ruling party, more than rigged as the ruling party was hell bent on securing spurious victory, even in its unpopular terrains. The party's (NPN) disdain for people's wishes and the arrogance by which people's mandate were stolen in the broad day light and the coinage of a nauseating euphemism- Land Slide victory- precipitated another orgy of violence, particularly in Ondo State, where destruction of lives and properties took a new dimension by the voodooist strategy employed.

Sensing the possible osmotic effect of the Ondo State violence, the NPN caved in and returned the mandate to the rightful owner, then octogenarian Adekunle Ajasin. But the incalculable damage that had happened in the pre, during and post-election periods had angered the men in khaki, who arrogated high sense of

patriotism to themselves, having fought a civil war precipitated by the politicians' actions and inactions in the past. This led to the ouster of the Shagari-led Second Republic via a bloodless coup at the dawn of 1984.

Nigerians were to witness the most uncivilized periods in the years that follows: The high handedness of the Buhari/Idiagban; the tortuous and convoluted political rigmarole of the maradonaic Babangida and the bestial rein of the power-loving bespectacled Abacha. The Babangida-managed still born Third Republic did not only cost the nation fortune, but souls that could have assisted the nation out of the wood. The annulment of the 1993 election, acclaimed to be the best in the annals of the nation's political life almost rendered the nation prostrate. The Abacha's self succession project, like the previous transition before it, confirmed the absence of patriotism on the part of the nation political elite. The adaptation of Abacha as the sole presidential candidate by the five political parties finely described as the Five Fingers of Leprous Hand by Late Bola Ige, former governor of old Oyo State and Attorney General and Minister of justice, will forever remain the darkest point in Nigeria's life.

When Abacha expired in June 1998, the new government, under General Abdulsalam Abubakar, hurriedly returned the nation to democracy. It is however to the credit of the military that political violence is always minimized whenever they are charged with conduction of election. The level of political violence in 2003, which almost confirmed that every year ending with 3 is jinxed in Nigeria, was the most disturbing, especially given the calibre of the victims, such as Chief Bola Ige, the serving Chief Legal Officer of the nation, parties big wigs, referred contestants and serving members of parliament at state and national level, whose killings were yet to be unraveled till date.

The 2007 transitional elections anchored on the platform of Do or Die by the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) that has amass victories at federal and state levels, legitimately and

otherwise was a brutal war among the politicians, particularly of the ruling party genre, who see their victories as fait accompli even before the actual contests. The under listed are notable cases of political killings in the prelude to the just elections:

- July 27, 2006, Funsho William, Lagos State PDP gubernatorial hopeful killed at his home.
- August 14, 2006, Ayo Daramola, Ekiti State stabbed and shot to death at his residence.
- November, 2006, several politically motivated bomb attacks rocked PDP strongholds of Bayelsa, Delta and Edo States killing several people.
- December 8, 2006, Timothy Ageba Utta, former council chairman and PDP House of Assembly candidate killed in Benue State
- February 3, 2007, Lawson Onokpasa, a chieftain of PDP in Delta State shot to death. "Many other politicians and political candidates were subjected to violent attacks and attempted killings, but managed to escape...Political violence is used by most parties to the elections as a means to retain or acquire political power or support" (Amnesty International, 2007).

The post-election violence in the states of Osun, Edo, Ondo and Anambra are only suppressed as people are crying that their mandates have been stolen using the Federal Mighty Power, a phrase in the nation's political lexicon symbolizing the power of incumbency in capturing rather than winning at the polls. This ugly incident necessitates spirit of sportsmanship by the nation's political actors to prevent the nation from another intervention by the "Corrective Regime".

The level of violence that greeted the release of the results for the gubernatorial and house of assembly elections in the South West states of Ondo and Osun was a pointer to the fragility of our competing spirit in civilized elections. The orgy of violence, which led to the loss of over eight lives, burning of over fourty houses and

vehicles, also resulted in arrest of over 130 persons by the police (The Punch, April, 2007, p. 11). Even after the spurious victories, as much nullification by electoral tribunals as shown, intra-party settlements are not always without some dose of life-claiming violence.

Political Violence and National Security: Implication for Development

For any nation, security remains a sine qua non in political, social and economic development, for no development-oriented activity-studying, research, production, politics, etc can be comprehended in an atmosphere of violence. National security, therefore is incomprehensible where human rights are suppressed, government is not accountable, constitution is brazenly violated and of course under the atmosphere of impunity.

It is a known fact that the nation has suffered tremendously from the ripple effects of political violence. Aside from it being the harbinger of the militarization of Nigerian polity, it has resulted in the damage to the nation's image as a nation and gave it a pariah status which we it is just getting over in the recent times.

"National security is not only about physical survival of the state, its sovereignty, territorial integrity, protection of its core values and national interest, but also, advancement of quality of life of the citizens…the economic and social well being of the citizens and the ability of the state to act in relation to others in international system" (Temlong, 2003, p. 17). Fayeye (2006, p. 115), for example posits that "economic growth, development of human capital and physical quality of life cannot be enhanced in conflict and violence-prone zone".

It follows, therefore, that aside from the internal benefit, national security remains a factor that determines a nation's capability to attract comradeship in the comity of nations, thus guaranteeing the benefit of shared relationship. Lofty as this seems,

the preponderance of political violence in as a result of do or die spirits of the contestants can block the chance. This forms the kernel of the submission of the Citizen's Forum for Constitutional Reform memorandum submitted to the Presidential Committee on National Security in 2002:

> Politicians in the current civil dispensation have displayed less than consociational spirit in which dialogue, negotiation and consensus will be the hallmark of politics. There is a sense in which current conflict can be seen as a reaction to perceived or real loss of power by an elite stratum. What is happening is a contest over raw political power: who lost power, who won power and who wants power back (CFCR, 2002).

Violence also engender popular frustration over government's failure to deliver basic services continues. The endorsement and patronage of vigilante and tribal group in Nigeria by some government officials have also led to so much violence (Sambo, 2006, p. 375). Much of the violence is said to be rooted in poverty and unemployment. In their quest for power, many politicians leverage of the high level ignorance, illiteracy, poverty and unemployment caused by prebendal politics the nation has been playing since the demise of colonization. This has resulted in cronyism and nepotistic plundering of national resources by any opportunist in power, thus building entrenched hegemonic culture. While hegemonic culture is not peculiar to Nigerian political-economy, the weak base upon which it is predicated and the bitter contest it entrenches make Nigerian case seems irredeemable, as Mbachu (2007) avers that:

Political thuggery and political violence are part and parcel of the contest of wills between rival political parties…what makes Nigerian situation unfortunate lies in the manner in which traditional African values are slaughtered on the alter of personal aggrandizement and community weaknesses.

The rate at which organized violence is threatening the nation's security is alarming to say the least. The emergence of ethnic militias as well as the activities of hostage takers in the Niger Delta region is obvious manifestations of these ugly trends. "The large number of firearms available in Nigeria and the creation of armed gangs enabled the politicians to instigate political violence at local and state levels" (Amnesty International, 2007).

Of much concern is the in ability of the state to stem the spate of violence. Political violence takes place in atmosphere of impunity such that almost everybody now believes that those who are supposed to protect the citizens from harms of the criminals are the one perpetrating the crime. This submission of Amnesty International aptly captures the context of impunity that is the hallmark of political violence in Nigeria:

> One manifestation of the inadequacies of the Nigeria criminal justice system is the failure to carry out inquiries in the cases of politically motivated killings, as provided for in coroners' laws, and the failure of the police to uphold the decisions of the coroner…

The same organization posits further that "allowing those who commit abuses to get away with it help perpetrate the cycle of violence". This is but a truism. Nigeria is riddled with a lot of unresolved case of politically induced crimes that one would be right to lost faith in the system. "Most politically motivated violence and killings committed in 1999 and 2003 elections were

not investigated or punished, and this situation has contributed to the climate of impunity which prevails in Nigeria" (Amnesty International, 2007).

The fear now is that the state is seen as incapable of maintaining security of lives and properties, hence people recurse to self-help mechanism, which popularized the ethnic militia movements. The magnitude and frequency of conflicts (and violence) in the country underscore the failure of government institutions saddled with the responsibility of conflict prevention and management- the police force, security and intelligence agency and the military (CFCR, 2002). Therefore all hands must be on deck to prevent retrogression imminent in politically motivated threat to the national security.

Mediating the Threat Through the Media

National security is a responsibility of everybody within a polity, for the breakdown of order as seen in political violence is an ill wind that blows nobody any good. It is for this reason that all socializing institution, particularly the pervasive mass media should take up roles in diffusing tensions be they social, ethnic, religious and political. The power of the media is taking from the fact that information is power and the sum of an individual is what he or she knows. As purveyors of information, the media should be mindful of tone and style they use in given attention to the violence acts. Any form of reporting and attention that glamourizes the action or the perpetrators of violence crimes will definitely has osmotic effect on potential criminals. Such media attention does not only fuel conflicts but sustain the morale of those who engage in violent confrontation (M'Bayo, 2003, p. 23).

It has come to the knowledge of all that the mass media are veritable platforms for attracting the attention of the masses on a number of issues, thus a recourse is always made to them by the political actors in the course of their politicking and hegemonic

build-up, even in violence. The media are so revered that politicians will stoop to anything to have a good command of their supports. However, ethical conduct should be yard stick of the news industry in dealing with the violent political actors and gladiators, if they (the media) will not end up in creating more violence. The power and position of the media in balancing their acts has been aptly captured by Mogekwu (2005, p. 30):

> The media have long been characterized as a social force used either to the benefit or detriment of the society within which they operate. When used to promote justice, moral unity and harmony in society, they can act as facilitators of peace in time of crisis. However, they can also be used as instigators of conflict and destructive purposes.

As the nation is advancing to become an important force in the international fora, particularly with her leadership role in Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). Nigeria should demonstrate her potential by showcasing the necessary leadership model which must be well communicated through the instrumentality of the media. Therefore, the media should always be ready to champion the cause of holding the government accountable, particularly as it affects protection of human rights and in the areas of government capacity to curtail if not stop violence.

A successful transfer of power means more than just keeping the country from falling apart…it means that voters must be protected from intimidation and violence aimed at silencing their voices (Takirambudde, 2003). Therefore, all series of anti-democratic behaviours manifested during the elections must be investigated and documented by the media. The power of the media to investigate matters of national importance should be brought to

bear in helping to prevent the culture of impunity the political violence has assumed in Nigeria. The media, working in tandem with the security agent, particularly the police, afford synergistic advantage in tackling the menace of political violence.

Although Section 214(1) of the 1999 constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria confers on the Nigerian Police Force the role of internal security, symbiotic working relations with the media will assist a lot. "The police require facts to be able to curb and solve crime... the press on the other hand, employing method of investigative journalism has to check and authenticate information before disseminating it to the public" (The Guardian, Sept 10, 2006, p. 9). This (fact) simply depicts the convergence of the police and the media.

The media occupy the vantage position to illuminate the grey areas of our national life that have potentials for security threat, resulting from avoidable but incessant violence. Such areas include devolution of power, ethnic minority rights, human rights abuse, state neutrality in electoral process, the need for truly independent electoral body as well as education of the masses. By giving civic education to the public on the essence of national security and factors that threaten it, and calling the attention of the other branches of government to issues that promote national security, the media will be placing the nation in a better stead in the pursuit of a violence free political process.

In effect, the media operating under libertarian perspective as we have in Nigeria today are to take up the gauntlets, using their agenda setting power, to fight to a stand still any attempt by political actors and their overzealous supporters that is inimical to the security of the nation as a whole, by either giving anticipatory warnings on impending violence or a good post mortem of political violence acts that can bring the culprits to book, thus serving as deterrent to others.

Conclusion

One fundamental responsibility of the government of any nation is security of lives and properties. This was codified in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, the spate of political violence and it gloomy prognosis, reinforced by culture of impunity is pointing to seeming weakness of the government, as seen in the inability of its security and law enforcement agencies to curb political violence.

From the first Nigerian-organized election in 1964 to the 2007 first civilian-to-civilian transitional elections, political violence manifests as a cardinal feature of our political process. Despite the number and calibre of lives and properties the nation had lost to political violence, the end seems not to be in sight. Most disheartening is the politics of brinkmanship that has remained the love of the political actors, which is the greatest catalyst to violent politicking.

Another cause for concern is the inability of the nation's security apparatus to achieve any landmark in unraveling the act despite the huge funds usually voted for the same, and as nation has even lost several souls including serving elected and appointed government officials at every stratum of governance. This has resulted to attributing political violence, especially those resulting in killings of political gladiators, to government as the instigator. In the face of all this, government keeps assuring all and sundry of the security of their lives and properties as well as calling for direct foreign investments even when the nation is insecure.

As the Fourth Estate of the realm, standing apart from the other Estates (Executive, Legislature and Judiciary), the mass media have much roles to play. These require more training on ethics as well as investigative journalism. As an institution wielding the power to make or mar, the media needs to be ethically challenged in the conduct of its socially responsible duty to the society. Efforts should be made to follow cases of political violence,

particularly those resulting into deaths, to logical conclusions, thus discouraging the act which the current impunity atmosphere has encouraged. The inclusion of Freedom of Information in our statutes, which has been fervently pursued, will go along way in making the media the oxygen of our democracy, giving it more lives than deaths.

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