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Party Impunity, Political Violence and the Sustenance of Nigeria's Democracy: the Case of Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This paper, Party Impunity, Political Violence and the Sustenance to Nigeria's Democracy; The Case of Ebonyi State Nigeria, focuses to establish the causes of violence in our polity. The study adopted elite theory as a theoretical framework of analysis. The study established that; Greed, Struggle for power, and Godfatherism gave rise to the level of impunity and political violence experienced in our democratic system. The implications of the study is that so long as the above factors are noticed in our polity, the candidates who will always emerge as the party standard bearers must be candidates who cannot stand on their own to contest elections (godson), secondly is that political upheavals, violence and insurgency will continue to be on the increase. Recommendations were suggested to include that the government should enthrone good governance across the levels of governance; that policies and programmes of the government meant to address the problems of the people should not be politicized and less emphasis should be placed on money for those seeking political office, rather emphasis should be on the credibility of the candidates seeking political office.

Keywords: Democracy, Political violence, Party impunity, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Political impunity, violence and insurgence in Nigeria democracy became prominent because of ethnocentrism, party and political interest which have become a modern day parlance in public governance and in Nigeria democracy, Godfather which is a famous concept in the teachings and religion of the Roman Catholic Church may have found it's root in the political sphere of the Nigerian politics arising from the inability of most contestants in an election to stand on their own and contest elections (Owne and Ibeogu 2014)[1]. In the political setting today, both concepts (ethnocentrism, political interest and godfatherism) though parochial, are ideologies championed on the belief that certain individuals possess considerable means to unilaterally determine who gets a party ticket to run for election, who wins in the electoral contest and who is to be appointed to occupy juicy positions in government. When these happen, it gives rise to political upheavals, violence and insurgence in our democratic system, the PDP Primaries in Ebonyi State 2014 as a case at hand[2].

Therefore, to avert violence, security is encouraged, Security ensures peace of mind and the possibility to sleep relaxed. Security implies stability and continuity of existence of the human life in the society. Since society is paramount in everyday life, insecurity and violence which have become a topical issue in today's Nigeria democratic exercise implies the inability to cope with shock or misfortune, therefore, increase in violence and insecurity results in pervasive anxiety and fear and so becomes detrimental to the sustenance and survival of the nations fledgling democracy [2].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Duru, E (2008)[3] in a study, "The Electoral Process and Democracy in Nigeria" set to establish the best form and method to adopt so as to eschew electoral violence in Nigeria's Political system. The study adopted survey research method. The findings revealed that the best strategy for preventing conflict in our democratic system is by promoting democracy because democracy can ensure that Africans internal disputes are settled by voters casting ballots instead of soldiers wielding guns. To date, elections provide the essential mechanism for the orderly transfer of political power in response to the will of the electorate, but indeed, the Nigerian electoral process since independence has gained an unenviable reputation for fraudulent practices.

Furthermore, the study reiterated that the soul of the electoral system is the ballot system. In an ideal situation, which hardly operates in Nigeria and most developing countries, because of the intervention of many factors including ignorance of their rights and responsibilities under a democratic system, what happens is that the politicians conscious of the value of the spoils of office, adopt various means to ensure that they capture power. They buy votes, rig peoples will to choose leaders capable of leading the state towards development and sustainable democracy.

The study recommended that the will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government. This will, shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be made universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedure. It went further to recommend that the electoral process be situated within the context of democratic system since democracy gives freedom to individuals and groups of people to associate, express and carry out projects in response to their own individual or collective requirements and inclination.

In another study by Obasi, J.C (2009)[4]. "The Legacy of Election Fraud, Godfatherism and the Struggle for the Soul of Anambra State" The study which adopted descriptive research design, focused to establish the philosophy behind electoral fraud in Anambra State in particular and Nigeria at large. It finds that too many evils and debasing electoral practices have too long been tolerated in this country and that they have remained unchecked, threatened national unity, peace and stability. The study

recommended for hard work, honesty, fairness, and just means to success. That without enthroning justice and fairness, and curbing the “end justifies the means” mentality in our electoral process, the stealing of the people’s mandates and the imposition of inept and corrupt candidates on the people would continue to be our night mare, hence the upsurge in political killings, wanton destructions of property and political insecurity in the entire land

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the elite theory as a theoretical framework of analysis. The classical elite theory was propounded by Vilfrado Pareto (1848-1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941). Elite theory developed in part as a reaction to Marxism as an ideology rather than an objective analysis of social systems. According to elite theory, men can never be liberated from the subjugation of an elite structure. Elite theory argues that all societies are divided into two main groups, the ruling minority and the majority that are ruled. This situation according to theorists is inevitable. When this revolution occurs, it results to violence and insurgency.

Public policies for instance, “good governance” policies of every regime, are made by few persons in government. This goes to support the postulation by Pareto and Mosca that, two main groups exist in the society, the ruling minority and the majority that are ruled. The elite theory regards public policy “good governance” as the values and preferences of the governing elite. In other words, public policy “good governance” is the product of the elites reflecting their values and serving their ends (Ibeogu, 2014)[2]. The political and economic elites wield powers, wealth, and influence government policies in their favour. The “good governance” (bad governance) of the previous and present democratic government, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa/Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (1960-1966) Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983) Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015) was and is also characterized by the struggle for who get what, when and how of the proceeds of governance. Orchestrated by the politicization of government policies and programmes by the elites who influences the outcome, have often given rise to the renewed. Insecurity, insurgency and political violence in our democracy.

INSURGENCY AND P.D.P AT A CROSSROAD (EBONYI STATE IN FOCUS)

“Injustice anywhere, is injustice everywhere”. Recall that the leadership in Ebonyi State under the watchful eyes of Chief Martin Nwanchor Elechi swore to ensure equity and fairness in the governance of Ebonyi State. His insistence that power must rotate among the senatorial zones of the state (Ebonyi North, Ebonyi Central, and Ebonyi South) and Ebonyi North and Central having taken their share, he quickly pronounced the unanimous adoption of Professor Onyebuchi Chukwu as the P.D.P flag bearer for the state on 3/10/2014 without the P.D.P congress conducted, this singular statement heightened tension in Ebonyi State, especially with those jostling for the governorship position under the platform of P.D.P. unfortunately, when the primaries was conducted, the deputy governor, Engr. Dave Umahi emerged as the P.D.P flag bearer. This act led to the polarization of P.D.P in Ebonyi State as the governor was not in support of the candidature of Engr. Dave Umahi[5]

As a result of the division in P.D.P in Ebonyi State, the loyalist of the governor, which includes some commissioners, special advisers, chairmen and members of boards and commission, local government caretaker committee chairmen and coordinators of the development areas (development centres) decided to throw their weight behind the flag bearer of the Labour Party (L.P) Architect Edward Nkwegu who was seen as a possible candidate and party which should be voted for to ensure that Engr. Dave Umahi of P.D.P, do not emerge as the possible successor of Chief Martin Elechi, come May 29th 2015.

Since then, there were renewed incidence of violence leading to loss of lives and snatching of permanent voters card (P.V.C's) in some places or local governments in Ebonyi State, such local government includes, Ikwo L.G.A, Izzi L.G.A etc, lives were also lost in Ikwo L.G.A, worrisome according to Mrs. Josephine Nwite is the spate of lives lost in Afikpo South L.G.A during the Labour Party rally in January 2015, and number of cars and houses burnt down across Ebonyi State by P.D.P faithful because of the rival political party, the Labour party and the candidature of Edward Nkwegu.

There were also renewed plots and allegations by the P.D.P loyalists in the state House Assembly against the government of Chief Martin Elechi, he was being accused of corrupt acts, embezzlement of public fund, lack of due process in award of contract, all in a bid to frustrate his government because the P.D.P faithful are of the opinion that he was in support of Labour Party taking over power from him (Ibeogu, 2014)[2], thereby fingered and accused him of anti-party activities.

WANTON DESTRUCTION OF LIVES AND PROPERTIES: THE CASE OF EBONYI STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY VS EXECUTIVE ARM OF EBONYI STATE

Sequel to the emergence of the then deputy governor of Ebonyi state as the P.D.P flag bearer for the gubernatorial race come April 11th 2015 Governorship, the P.D.P was polarized, the loyalist of the deputy governor (Engr. Dave Umahi) remained as P.D.P members, while the loyalists of the governor (Chief Martin Elechi) defected to the Labour Party as an alternative choice of political party to ensure that the deputy governor and P.D.P standard bearer did not succeed his boss. Since then, all manner of political impunities, crisis and violence assumed a very high scale in Ebonyi State, such that the governor (Chief Martin Elechi) was threatened with impeachment by the Legislature. The Legislature (House of Assembly) accused the governor and others close to him of economic and financial irregularities. Others are the manner in which appointment were done by the governor without due processes and formal ratification by the legislature. The house therefore, affirmed that in a bid to cow them from performing their constitutional duties, that may be the reason why section of the House of Assembly was set ablaze (Accounts Department) on Tuesday 24th February 2015 at about 1.47 a.m. and the executive arm was being pointed accusing finger for master minding the act [6].

The House of Assembly after it's sitting and deliberation that faithful morning, resolved as follows: that Comrade Chinedu Ogah (P.D.P Youth Leader, Ebonyi State), Dr. Ben Igwenyi (Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice), Hon Celestine Nwali (Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Matters), Barrister Chibueze Agbo (Commissioner for Education), Dr. Ifeanyi Ikeh (Commissioner for Commerce and Industry, and Supervising Commissioner for information) be arrested and charged for

arson. It was credited to them by the House of Assembly, that prior to that inferno, they made a statement that “Ebonyi State House of Assembly will soon stop to exist”.

Furthermore, prior to the incident at the state assembly on 24th Feb. 2015, one of the aide attached to governor Martin Elechi, narrowly escaped death on Friday night 20th Feb. 2015 when he went to have his hair cut at his usual place in Abakaliki. It was gathered that after having his hair cut, the aide entered his official car he came with, when the hoodlums fired a shot which penetrated through the door of the car but did not hit the aide. It was gathered that the hoodlums (assassins) thinking that the bullet which was aimed at the aides chest got their target, took to their heels. However, an eye witness account, reported that, “the boys came in their motorcycle and right here in front of the saloon [7].



EBONYI HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY COMPLEX AFTER THE FIRE OUTBREAK ON TUESDAY 24TH FEB. 2015

POLITICS OF ACRIMONY AND BITTERNESS: THE EBONYI SOUTH SENATORIAL ZONE EXPERIENCE

The former special adviser to Governor Martin Elechi (Ebonyi State, Nigeria) on Solid Mineral Development, Petroleum Product, Pricing and Distribution, Mr. Chidi Ejem and currently, P.D.P House of Assembly candidate for Afikpo South West State Constituency is presently cooling off in the police cell at Zone Six(6) Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. He was arrested along thirty-six others for killing a thirty-six (36yr) old man, Udu Emeagha of Amaigbo, Etiti Edda, Afikpo South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State during attack on Labour Party Supporters in the area. The team that killed Udu Emeagha was led by Mr. Emmanuel Innocent, according to police report. They besieged the house of the deceased and attacked him, beating him to comma, though later gave up shortly after. When police operatives rounded (arrested) Mr. Emmanuel Innocent and others, these exhibits were recovered from them, three cutlasses with blood stains, a single barrel gun and some expended cartridges. It was also reported, that Mr. Chidi Ejem, was fingered to have masterminded the attack of labour party supporters on the eve of their rally in Edda, where canopies, tents, chairs were destroyed and one person shot.

In a related matter, the coordinator of Ezeukwa Development Centre, Onicha local Government Area of Ebonyi State, Nigeria, was attacked by Political thugs of the P.D.P, when they organized a rally in support of Labour Party. The rally took place on

Thursday 5th March 2015. The thugs stormed Onuafor Ezeukwa, the venue of the rally. The hoodlums, who were armed with cutlasses, rods, bottles, woods and other dangerous weapons, damaged over one thousand plastic chairs, after destroying five canopies and sound systems meant to be used for the rally [8].



THE SLAIN BODY OF LATE MR. UDU EMEGHA OF AMAIGBO ETITI EDDA< EBONYI STATE

INTIMIDATION AND POLITICAL ASSAULTS; A CASE OF PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND LABOUR PARTY IN EBONYI NORTH ZONE, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA.

One person was been critically wounded, while many others sustained various degrees of injuries as political thugs numbering over two hundred who are on the suspected sponsorship of the ruling political party in Ebonyi State attacked members of Labour Party (LP) in Effium Community, Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. According to report, it was gathered that Labour Party Supporters were besieged at Ekpitom Village when they went to mobilize members of the party for ward rallies held in the area on Tuesday 17th March 2015. Narrating his ordeal in his hospital bed, Elechi Omeligwe, the victim reported that he had along with other members of the party travelled to the village in convoy of other members of his party for a ward rally during which members of the P.D.P who are alleged supporters of Honourable Frank Onwe, a candidate of P.D.P for Ohaukwu North Constituency attacked them with dangerous weapons which include cutlasses, gun, sticks and stones. He said the political thugs, who mounted road blocs with heavy woods to prevent movement of their vehicles also shot sporadically into the air to scare members of the party, but when refused to yield to intimidation, the hoodlums pounced on him and inflicted machete cuts on his body.

ALL PROGRESSIVE CONGRESS (APC) AND PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP): THE BATTLE FOR SUPREMACY IN RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

The Executive Governor of Rivers State and a staunch member of the All Progressive Congress (APC) Rt Hon Rotimi Chibuike Amechi narrowly escaped death shortly after the party's rally in Rumuolumeni Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of River State on 26/3/2015 on his route back to Port Harcourt, the state capital. Recall that one of the reasons why the governor defected to A.P.C was his insistence that Hon Nyesom Ezebundu Wike will not suicide him as the governor of the state. Upon defecting to A.P.C the subsequent emergence of Hon Nyesom Wike as the governorship standard bearer for P.D.P in River State, the governor and his party A.P.C went for rally at Rumuolumeni, Obio/Akpor L.G.A, the home of the P.D.P gubernatorial candidate, on Thursday 26/3/2015. It was alleged that the convoy of the governor was attacked, with

the governor as the main target, but the governor narrowly escaped death as he was not hurt but other persons sustained varying degree of injuries. In a reaction, the commissioner for Information and Communication in the state, Hon Mrs. Ibim Semenitari stated that the attack was targeted on the governor, his supporters, and all A.P.C loyalists with the belief to annihilate them[9].

ENUGU STATE AND THE FATE OF ELECTORATES ON SATURDAY 28TH MARCH 2015.

Prior to the presidential and national assembly elections conducted on Saturday 28th March 2015. In Enugu North L.G.A of Enugu State, there was pandemonium as two bombs were detonated at about 8.56 a.m at the W.T.C Primary School Polling Booth by operatives of the Anti Bomb Squad, Enugu Police Command. The advocate reports had earlier indicated that there was a bomb blast, however no casualty was reported as the bomb exploded before the election commenced. The bomb were planted in a Honda Accord Car and parked behind the W.T.C primary school by unknown persons waiting the commencement of voting.

These and many others generated concern in Ebonyi State and in Nigeria, such that political and economic activities have been greatly affected [10].

CONCLUSIONS

Any polity, society, environment or economy threatened with crime, insecurity, insurgency, kidnapping and violence is usually accompanied with tension and anxiety. The elimination of these threats and enemies of man should be the number one programme of the government and incoming administration in Ebonyi State and Nigeria. This will create opportunity for human development and habitable environment for us all. Apart from the governments own role, all hands should be on deck to eliminate the monster, insecurity, insurgency, criminal acts (rape, burglary, theft) kidnapping and violence, and most importantly all should be committed to the growth, development, and transformation of our father land by being honest and eschew politics of acrimony in Ebonyi State and Nigeria politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. The government should provide social infrastructures like roads, schools, hospitals and skill acquisition centres for those who do not have opportunity for formal education;
- II. Economic empowerment- This is most significant to ameliorate the sense of what seems to induce crime;
- III. Campaign promises should be kept and maintained, especially with the provision of job opportunities for the teeming unemployed youths and graduates;
- IV. Policies and programmes of the government meant to address the problems of the people should not be politicized;

- V. Less emphasis should be placed on money for those seeking political office, rather emphasis should be placed on the credibility of the candidates seeking political office;
- VI. The existing sentiments and parochial cleavages such as ethnocentrism and religious bigotry should not be a pre-requisite when it comes to attracting the suitable qualified candidates for public/political office;
- VII. The government should enthrone good governance across the levels of governance;
- VIII. Corrupt act should be mitigated in governance especially when it comes to public affairs, ensuring that those who are found to have flouted any section of the law that have to do with corruption are prosecuted.

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