Politics, Poverty and Violent Conflicts: Exploring Their Complex Nexus in Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper explores the nexus of politics, poverty and violent conflicts with a particular focus on the Nigerian fourth republic. Anchored on the frustration-aggression theory, the paper argues that profligacy of political office holders impoverishes the masses which have direct or indirect link with violent conflict. The paper posits that to reduce poverty index and its implications on violent conflict, political office holders should be re-orientated towards selfless service and that culture of peace should be built among the citizenry.
Keywords: Politics, Poverty, Violent Conflict, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Politics is the means through which people attain positions of authority with the ultimate goal of allocating resources. If political office holders allocate resources dispassionately, it will alleviate poverty and culminate into holistic development. Conversely, if political office holders use the authority conferred on them to allocate resources disproportionately to their selfish interest, development will be retarded, the masses become oppressed and it may lead to frustration and aggression that can ignite violent conflict directly or indirectly. This can better be understood when one extrapolate from the work of Ibeanu (2008) that affluence can be used to eliminate affliction which will invariably result into political development. In the same vein, affluence can as well be used to perpetuate oppression which he interpreted as political oppression. He also argues that affliction could be used to eliminate affluence which he tagged as political rebellion. Ibeanu concluded that the first is the desirable, the second is the most prevalent and the third becomes inevitable because of the second. This lends credence to the quotation credited to Adegbite (2009:33) that:

> In human history, no nation ever prospers with perverse values. In fact, no nation can prosper where personal will supplants the general will. Where established procedure are observed in the breach, where governance is for self-enrichment rather than public service. Where there exists a yawning gap between leadership and stewardship… virtuous societies are built by leadership who are accountable to the led are driven by the altruism desire to improve the lot of the highest number of the people.

The title of our discourse therefore, suggests two issues; namely, how has politics contributed to entrenchment and institutionalization of poverty focusing on the Nigeria's fourth republic? The second issue is how poverty has fuelled violent conflict directly or indirectly. For analytical purposes this discourse is segmented into the following sections: the introduction; conceptualization of the key concepts; and theoretical framework. The next section discusses the interface between politics, poverty and violent conflict in general. This is followed by exploring the nexus between politics, poverty and violent conflict in Nigeria with a particular focus on the fourth republic. The concluding section proffers some recommendations that could mitigate the use of politics to spread poverty with attendant violent implications.

2. Conceptual Explications
2.1 Politics

Politics is an omnibus term that does not lend itself to a universally acceptable definition. Suffice to say that there are as many definitions as there are commentators on the concept. To Lasswell (1936) politics simply denotes "who gets what and how?. Dahl (1976:3) sees it as "any persistent pattern of human relationships that involve, to a significant extent, control, influence, power or authority". Easton (1965:57) defines politics as the "authoritative allocation of values". From the various definitions above it can be gleaned that politics denotes the struggle and the process of acquiring political power with the aim of allocating resources. Scholars like Appadorai (1974), views the concept from the perspective of state organization. Still Hariss (1979) sees the concept from the angle of conflict management. The above definitions are positive connotations of politics. However, some political commentators have also viewed the concept from a pejorative sense. Thus, Alexandra Bierce sees politics as strife of interest, masquerading as a contest of principles, the conduct of public affairs for private advantage (Pius 1986). It also connotes "unseemingly machinations of the ambitious and self-serving to gain advantage over others" (Bibby and Schaffner 2008:15). However, the definition of politics that will guide

the thought in this discussion is the one that relates politics to a selfish struggle for personal gain at the expense of others or of the society (Coulter 1997).

2.2 Poverty

Poverty is also another concept that has generated much controversy as opinions are divided as to what the concept connotes. Generally, poverty simply means a state in which an individual or group of people lacks basic things in life. Poverty according to Bjorn (2002) can be classified into: absolute, relative, administrative, consensual and contextual. Absolute poverty is a state of deprivation in which people lack access to basic needs which include food, safe water, sanitation, health, shelter, education, and information due to meager income. Relative poverty is viewing poverty from a comparative point of view. Poverty is not seen here as absolute but relative. Imagine a hypothetical world of three countries. A is poor; B is poorer, while C is the poorest based on some established standards. Administrative poverty according to him includes all those who are eligible for state welfare because they are either temporarily unemployed and/or unable to earn an income. The third category of poverty he identified is what he called consensual. This type of poverty depends on the perceptions of what the public deems to be below basic sustenance. The last typology which is consensual is based on the comparison of poverty to the socio-cultural and economic levels of a particular society. The importance of this definition is seen in the sense that it helps to contrast the poor and non-poor in a given society. The World Bank views poverty phenomenon as multidimensional and a situation in which people are unable to fulfill their basic human needs as well as lack of control over resources, lack education and skills, poor health, malnutrition, lack of shelter, poor access to water and sanitation, vulnerability to shocks, violence and crime and lack of political freedom and voice (Draman 2003). In the same vein, the United Nations (cited in Ucha 2010:46) contends that:

> Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go; not having a land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal of fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.

The last two definitions of poverty encapsulate violence as one of the outcome or attributes associated with poverty.

2.3 Conflict

It is necessary to examine conflict as a concept before addressing violence. According to Coser (1968) (cited in Otite (2001):

> Social conflict may be defined as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals. Such conflicts may take place between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities. Intergroup as well as intragroup conflicts are perennial features of social life.

To Galtung (1996), conflict could be viewed as a triangle with structure, attitudes, and behavior as its vertices. Structure simply means conflict situation, while the parties with incompatible interests, values or goals constitute the vertices. Conflict is also defined as "a conflictive situation in which two or more social entities or parties (however defined or structured) perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals (Jacoby 2008:9). A crucial component of conflict is incompatibility. The import of this is that, parties in conflict often think that the realization of one or more of their goals is being or will be thwarted by their rival. The scope of conflict is demarcated by the number of goals that each actor perceives to have been thwarted. If others join in the conflictive situation or the values of the goals in dispute increases, then the conflict will escalate and it domain will be extended (Jacoby 2008). The escalation and extension in the domain of conflict by aforementioned factors and many others will make conflict to snowball to violence.

2.4 Violence

Violence and warfare are consequences "not of intent per se, but an unwelcome result of pursuing goals that are incompatible with others (Groom 1988:105, 108). Thus, when conflict is destructive it becomes violent conflict. Violence can also be in form of riot, mass protest, clashes, looting. Violence may involve thousands of people in form of demonstrations, riots or individual isolated incidents, involving a few individuals (Anifowose 2011). Extrapolating from the work of Anifowose (2011:4) on political violence, our working definition of violence goes thus; violence is is the use or threat of physical act carried out by any individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals and /or property, with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction to property. The objective may or may not be political. It may be to dissipate bottled up anger caused by frustration and deprivation or for monetary gain which could be through looting or other means.

3. Theoretical framework

This study adopts the frustration-aggression theory as an explanatory tool for analyzing the relationship among politics, poverty and violent conflict in Nigeria's fourth republic.

Frustration-aggression theory is traceable to the work of John Dollard and his research associates which was developed in 1939 (Anifowose 2011). However, Berkowitz (1962) and Yates (1962) expanded and modified the theory. The kernel of this theory hinges on the fact that unfulfilled needs trigger violent behavior (Anifowose 2011).

Faleti (2005), points out that, in an attempt to explain aggression, scholars often refer to the difference between what people feel, they want or deserve to what they actually get. This is what Feierabends (1969:256-257) refers to as 'want-get-ratio' and differences between 'expected need and satisfaction' and 'actual need satisfaction' (Davies 1962:6). Where there is a discrepancy between expectation and attainment, the tendency of people to confront those they hold responsible for frustrating their ambitions is always very high. This situation formed the central argument of Gurr (1970:34) in relative deprivation thesis that 'the greater the discrepancy, however marginal, between what is sought and seem attainable, the greater will be the chances that anger and violence will result'. In summary, Frustration-Aggression theory posits that in a situation where the legitimate desires of an individual is denied either directly or by the indirect consequence of the way the society is structured, this may generate feeling of disappointment and may find expression through violence often directed at those he holds responsible or people who are directly or indirectly related to them (Faleti 2005).

The above analysis aptly captures the situation in the Niger Delta where youths direct their aggression at the federal government agencies and oil companies in the region they hold responsible for their plight. Looking at the country in general, the co-existence of the political office holders and their acolytes with their stupendous riches vis-à-vis the masses living in a poverty stricken condition cannot but result in aggression, hence the prevalence of violence in the land.

4. Politics, Poverty and Violent Conflict: A Linkage

It is striking that there seems to be little information on the relationship between politics and poverty. As stated before, politics is the authoritative allocation of values; values here include resources. The relationship between politics and poverty is seen in the way political leadership use the authority conferred on them by the virtue of their offices to allocate resources either judiciously for the betterment of the people or selfishly to enrich themselves at the expense of the masses. Fagbadebo (2007:028) avers that: "State control of the limited resources provide the leeway for officers, political and bureaucratic, to manipulate government spending to advance their personal futures."

In the same vein, according to Ayittey (2006) cited in Fagbadebo (2007:29), the African state:

> Has evolved into a predatory monger or a gangster state that uses a convoluted system of regulations and controls to pillage and rub the reproductive class- the peasantry. It is common knowledge that heads of state, ministers, and highly placed African government officials raid the African treasury, misuse their positions in government to extort Commissions on Foreign Loan Contracts, skim foreign aid, inflate contracts to cronies for kickbacks and deposit the loot in overseas banks. The very people who are supposed to defend and protect the peasants' interests are themselves engaged in institutionalized looting.

Little wonder, that Sklar ,et. al (2006) concludes that while individuals who controlled major state positions live in fabulous wealth, 70% of Nigerians groan in abject poverty. Form the above; one can see the relationship between politics and poverty. In the next section, attention would be focused on the relationship between poverty and the violent conflict. According to Goodhand (2001) while there is some agreement in the literature that conflict causes poverty, the idea that poverty causes conflict is more contentious. Similarly, Justino (2006) posit that no consensus has been established as regard whether poverty causes or escalates violent conflict. Draman (2003) argues that, research on how conflict causes poverty has already received much attention. Unfortunately, how poverty causes conflict has not received enough attention.

Sampson et al (1997) argued that pervasive poverty alone is not a sufficient condition to create a major conflict, or even to cause an individual to commit an act of violence. Goldstone et al (2002) contend that the condition of poverty may not be sufficient in itself to cause widespread conflict, but that, poverty, more than any factor, contributes to feelings of alienation, exploitation, and dependency and these feelings in turn contribute to a breakdown of social cohesion and to violent conflict.

In addition, Stewart and Fitzgerald (2001) and Stewart et al (1991 cited in Draman 2003, have argued that conflict have direct and indirect effect on poverty and not vice versa. Gurr et al (2000) contends that conflict is more prevalent in countries that are rich than the very poorest countries because rich countries have more surplus for fighting wars or have more to fight over then the poorest countries.

However our position in this paper is that poverty is a very critical factor in the origin of many violent conflicts

especially in Africa. Cramer (2009) seems to support this position as he argues that violent conflict generally is concentrated in poorer countries and that poverty and violence are linked. Stewart (2002) also observes that eight out of ten of the world's poorest countries are suffering from or have recently suffered from large scale violent conflict and the least developed countries from studies have experienced large scale collective violence within the past decade.

Cramer (2009) postulates that poverty may lead to bitterness and rage which in turn may cause poor people to protest. Protest may provoke repression and tensions may degenerate into open armed conflict, completing the causal mechanisms of a "frustration-aggression nexus" (Gurr 1970). In concluding this section, it will be good to wrap it up with the submission of Draman (2003) that a close look at some of the hot spots in Africa will reveal that there is a very high correlation between poverty and conflict. And that poverty may result into conflict because poverty has no cost, especially where there are incentives to engage in conflict. Because opportunity cost of violence is low for the poor, the tendency is high for them to be involved in it.

5. Politics, Poverty and Violent Conflict in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The fourth republic is very germane in analyzing the relationship between politics, poverty and violent conflicts in Nigeria. Studies have revealed that the rate of poverty has increased in the fourth republic. In 1999, it was observed that poverty level in Nigeria was 45%. However, it increased to 76% in 2012 as a result of mismanagement of the country's resources through corruption (Egharevba and Chiazor 2012). The money made from oil from 1999 to 2011 was more than all that was made from 1960-1999 (Save Nigeria Group 2012), but squandered by Nigerian leaders with nothing to show for it as it has not brought about improvement in the standards of living of the people (Egharevba and Chiazor 2012).

Suffice to say that the practice of using public office for private gains has grown worse since the inception of civilian regime in the fourth republic. Nigeria commands significant wealth as far as human and material resources are concerned. In fact, Nigeria is the 7th largest oil and gas producer in the world, the 6th largest exporter of oil with no corresponding human development and Social transformation to match the resource profile. Little wonder the country is described as a rich country with poor people, (Egharevba and Chiazor 2012). According to the National Bureau of Statistics, (2012) and the Punch (2012:19), more than two-thirds of the Nigerian Population lives each on less than $1 per day. The implication of this is that 112.5 million Nigerians out of the estimated 103 million are living in poverty.

Poverty in Nigeria can be attributed to leadership corruption and mismanagement. For example, Robinson (2004) noted that in 2003, Nigerian government exported 20 billion (US dollars) worth of oil but its people still scrape on an average of just a dollar per day. This is because oil money has often been wasted in kickbacks and bribes. The country's economy has been left struggling with years of mismanagement while government's income is generated mostly from natural resource endowment. Ucha (2010) observed that instead of using such income for developmental purposes, it is circulated among the political office holders and their families, leaving the rest of the people to wallow in poverty. Their attitudinal disposition shows that they are not interested in the affairs of and wellbeing of the people who elected them into offices as they mismanage and embezzle funds. This is in line with the argument of Fagbadebo (2007) that government officials took advantage of the state machinery to manipulate for their personal use, the collective wealth.

Almost all the political office holders at local, state and federal levels seems to be involved in diverting public funds for private uses. Allowances are increased astronomically while the political office holders are basking in stupendous wealth, the masses are wallowing in abject poverty. In fact, the cost of governance is extremely high in Nigeria. However, Chris (2011) observes that the high cost of governance is very much pronounced with the federal executive and the legislature. Nigeria spends more than three trillion naira in oiling the machinery of governance every year. For example, in 2011 budget proposal while N 4.2 trillion was budgeted for that year, more than N3.2 trillion was earmarked for recurrent expenditure, statutory transfers and debt servicing. That leaves less than one trillion naira for capital expenditure. From estimation political profligacy costs the Federal government 70 percent of its yearly expenditure, leaving just a paltry 10 percent to fund capital projects. This explains why the country is not developing in spite of huge revenue accruing from the oil wealth annually.

The National Assembly in particular, appears to be a drain on the national treasury. It was alleged that one of the honorable members of the House of Representatives (2003-2007) (who was then former Deputy Minority leader of the house) protested the waste of national resources by the political office holders. He said that Nigeria cannot just continue with this profligacy if it aspires for development, (Oluokun and Desmond 2011).

The lawmakers' penchant for increasing their allocation was a source of constant friction between the legislative and the executive arm of government under former President Olusegun Obasanjo. The late UmaruYar' Adua, who succeeded Obasanjo allowed the lawmakers to have their way. The matter seems to have gone worst under President Goodluck Jonathan. For instance, the Governor of Central Bank once said that the amount allocated for the consumption of the less than500 lawmakers in the 2010 budget was 25 percent of the nation's total budget.

That while the total federal government overhead is over 500 billion naira and the overhead of the National Assembly is 136.2 billion naira. He concluded that this is exactly 25.1 percent of the total government overhead. In fact, while an American Senator earns about $174,000 a year, his Nigerian Counterparts takes home an estimated $ 1.7 million (Oluokun and Desmond 2011). Little wonder that Itse Sagay said Nigerian Senators are the highest paid in the world, earning even more than President Barack Obama of the United States (U.S). This because Obama earns $400,000 per annum, his counterpart in Britain, the British Prime Minister, earns 190,000 Pounds Sterling (chris 2011).

At the level of the executive, the President creates jobs contrary to the consideration of need of prudence just for sheer political expediency. Apart from full cabinet ministers, there are other retinues of aids like Junior Ministers (Ministers of State and Advisers (Chris, 2011), whose maintenance costs the country a large sum of money. In addition, it was observed that 1.7 billion naira was earmarked in 2010 budget for unexplained journey for Presidency Staff. Similarly, in the 2011, the Government also allocated a whooping sum of 1.03 billion naira for miscellaneous expenses; 313 million naira was allocated from the said amount for refreshments in the presidential villa. Another 383 million naira was budgeted for welfare package. It is also noticed that the Presidency seems to have perfected the mastery of allocating funds to certain project repeatedly in what appears padding of allocation to the office. N1.9 million was approved in 2010 for the purchase of canteen and kitchen equipments for the state house. About a year after, the presidency found another reason to spend N489 million for the same items in 2010 budget, N2.3billion was the budget for maintenance activities, in 2011 budget the budget for the same grew to N2.9 billion (Oluokun and Desmond 2011) to mention just a few.

The implication of the above scenario is the pauperization of the masses. This is because money embezzled or mismanaged cannot be ploughed back to developmental activities that will alleviate poverty in the land. One of the fallouts of the above is violence. Jega (2004), Adamu, (2005), Ibrahim (2008) suggest that there are evidences pointing to the fact frequent ethno religious conflict have a strong relationship with the level of poverty in the country.

In terms of absolute poverty in the six geo-political zones in Nigeria, the North-east appeared to have been the worst hit since 1985, with the highest incidence of poverty oscillating between 54.9%-72.2% followed by the North-central. The North-east seems to be the state with the highest rate of unemployment in the federation that is Yobe state at 60.6% as at the end of 2011. The zone equally has the highest number of internally displaced persons totaling 11,360 in the first quarter of 2012; and in 2010-2011, with the third highest number of forced displacement of internally displaced persons. North-west with 31% or 116, 207 and North central with the highest 42.4%or 162,281out of 377,701 due to identity based conflicts such as ethno-religious and political conflicts and violent clashes between the religious militia/armed group (Boko Haram) and government forces (Ladan 2012). The above suggest a strong relationship between poverty and violent conflict. We shall sum up this section with a quotation from Schori (1996:59) that "poverty is a greater threat to peace than traditional threats like ballistic missiles and nuclear warheads".

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Attempt has been made in this paper to show the relationships between politics, poverty and violent conflict in Nigeria with a particular focus on the fourth republic. From this study, it appears that politics has been an easy avenue to amass wealth in Nigeria. This is because political office holders and appointees use their political offices to milk the country dry through corruption. Political corruption has led to impoverishment of the masses. Suffice to say that politics in Nigeria instead of being an instrument of allocation of resources for the betterment of the people has been a means of self enrichment and perpetration of poverty to the common citizens. Hence the aphorism "rich country poor people". The implication of this is the prevalence of violence in the country most especially in areas where poverty is acute. This is because those that are financially rootless tend to become ruthless especially when they don't have hope that things will change for better in the near future. They often become easy prey in the hands of political demagogues who hire them for pittance to foment trouble for their selfish political gains.

From this backdrop, the paper recommends among others the following: there is need for enlightment programmes geared towards orientating our political office holders towards imbibing the culture of selfless service. They should see political power as a trust to be used for the interests of people they represent rather than for selfish purposes.

There is need to expunge immunity clause from our constitution as it shields political office holders from being tried like ordinary citizens even after allegations of corruption are established against them.

The idea of treating people that are found guilty of corruption with kid gloves should be discouraged. In other words, act of corruption should carry capital punishment to serve as deterrence to others.

There is need to overhaul our electoral process to pave the way for the emergence of selfless candidates that will judiciously use the country's resources for the betterment of the people.

There is need to build the culture of peace that will diffuse culture of violence imbibed as a result of frustration generated by poverty.

Government should establish free vocational study centers to engage the army of unemployed youths in the country.

If the above is done poverty will be drastically reduced from our land which will lead to a reduction in violent conflict.

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