

# Political Parties, Identities and Violent Conflict in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Violent conflict in Nigeria and the rest of Africa have produced a diverging set of analytical explanation. As a contribution to the various literature and narratives, this study reflects on the complex nature of politics in Nigeria and explores the linkage between party politics, the politicisation, manipulation and mobilisation of identities and violent conflict in Nigeria. The findings reveal that the politicisation, manipulation and mobilisation of identities by political parties and actors in their struggle for power triggers and incentives violent conflict. Finally, the study recommends the strengthening of political parties in Nigeria into programmatic and issue based types, better governance, equality and justice, improved law and order, issue based campaigns and sanctions on political parties and individuals who preach hate, division and instigate violence.

**Keywords:** political parties, identities, violent conflict.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*We fight and sometimes shed blood to achieve and retain political power, because for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for long been the gateway to the economic kingdom (Olusegun Obasanjo 2002)*

Violent conflict is one of Nigeria's major problem. Nigeria's experiences, post-independence as well as post-civil war have been violent and problematic. The recurrence of violence and conflict across the country in a multiparty democratic dispensation calls for a critical analysis of the role of party politics. Since independence, Nigeria has been a battle ground of inter and intra party power struggle, competition and contestation among divided groups (Falola, 1998). Nigeria's first, second, and third republics were truncated due partly to uncontrollable violence from party politics. Contemporary events also show how party politics and the manipulation of identities in the struggle for political power shape national and subnational events. Historically, the Nigerian State has not been an ethnically neutral actor or a mere platform for political competition, but a key actor of and participant in ethno-political power struggles. A flashback at history suggests that the politics of Nigeria's formative years continues to be the ingredient from which her present situation is shaped. The north-south power struggle, identity and personality politics, inter and intra party power tussle have historically contributed to some cases of violent conflict and the incentive for these battles (state power, jobs, appointments, contracts and oil rents) have not diminished. This study explores the nexus between party politics, identities and violent conflict in Nigeria. Its findings reveal that the politicisation, manipulation, mobilisation and counter mobilisation of identities by political parties and actors for popular support breed violence and conflict.

## 2. METHOD

This study is conducted as a historical narrative. Historical studies or narratives take advantage of time and compare an issue or issues in a country or compare a country to itself at an earlier time (Geddes 2003, Coppedge 2012). Data for this study was collected largely through a combination of literature review, desk-based research and published reports on violent conflict in Nigeria. Secondary data sources from academic journals, articles, textbooks, reports and newspapers/ television (BBC and Channels television) were also relied on in carrying out this study.

## 3. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The analysis of the role of political parties in violence requires a clarification of the major concepts involved. Political parties, identities and violent conflict are the main concepts in this study. In this section, I discuss the concepts as a foundation for the study.

### 3.1 Political parties

The study of political parties has two major facets. One involves their characteristics as discrete entities – for example, their various social bases, histories, goals and appeals, formal organisation and actual power structures. The other involves the competitive interaction patterns among parties and party units or as Duverger (1954) puts it, the forms and mode of their existence. While those who study politics agree on the importance of political parties, there is often no disagreement on a precise definition. For some, political parties are group of elites that compete against one another for political power. For Marxists, political parties are a manifestation of conflict and struggle between different classes (Ako-Nai 2008). White and Shea (2000) define political parties according

to their models- programmatic or responsible party models. Using their manner of organization, Duverger (1954) categorise political parties as; mass parties, cadre parties and devotee parties. Downs (1957) defines a political party as a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election. While Sartori (1976) views political parties as any political group identified by an official label that is present at elections, and is capable of placing through election, candidate for public office. For Sartori, parties are the central intermediate and intermediary structure between society and government. They can aggregate social cleavages, aggravate social divisions, translate social cleavages into political cleavages or block the politicization of social cleavages.

### **3.2 Identities: ethnicity, religion and regions**

Nigerians carry multiple identities with which they give meaning to themselves and draw diversity lines with others. Such differentiations include ethnicity, religion, region, indigene and non-indigene etc. According to Osaghae and Suberu (2005), diversity does not necessarily result to conflict, so it is necessary to examine how identity formation and mobilisation processes work, which identities are politically salient, how they become salient and have incentivise violent conflict in Nigeria. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) define identity as any group attribute that provides recognition or definition, reference, affinity, coherence and meaning for individual members of a group, acting individually or collectively. The identities I consider here are those that are most commonly assumed by political actors and citizens for political purposes and are implicated in the day-to-day competition over resources, political power and privileges as well as contestation over citizenship in Nigeria. The relative size, form and formation of Nigeria's identities and how this relates with politics will help us in understanding the identity dynamics of violent conflict in Nigeria.

#### **Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is a prominent academic field of research. Lonsdale (1994), Chabal and Daloz (1999) see it as a universal human attribute. Ethnic groups are commonly defined by external makers as language, region of origin, culture, tradition and heritage (Posner 2007). Ethnicity is generally regarded as the most basic and politically salient identity in Nigeria. This claim is supported by the fact that both in competitive and non-competitive settings, Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of their ethnic affinities than any other identity (Osaghae and Suberu 2005). According to Lewis and Bratton (2000), ethnicity is demonstrably the most conspicuous group identity in Nigeria. In their study, they find that 48.2 percent of Nigerians chose to identify or label themselves with an ethnic (including linguistic and local-regional) identity. In other words, a good number of Nigerians see themselves as members of ethnic, regional or religious group. Salient as ethnicity is, the number of ethnic groups in Nigeria is not clearly known. Odetola (1978) counts ethnic groups in Nigeria at 250 while Otite (1990) estimates 374. However, the ethnic majority who have significantly shaped politics and the polity are the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and the Ibo. In the minority are the Efiks, Ijaws, Itsekiri, Igala, Idoma, Tiv, Jukun, Birom etc. The struggle for political power and natural resources have historically been framed along these ethnic lines and contemporary Nigeria (institutions and political parties) is not yet insulated from the powerful influence of ethnicity.

#### **Religion**

African societies are commonly depicted as very religious, which is evident among other things in the vast number of various Christian, Muslim and other faith based groups that exist in most African countries including Nigeria. Religious identity is socially constructed, but nonetheless real and a very salient (Laakso and Olukoshi 1996). In Nigeria, the Northern region of the country (Hausa-Fulani) is predominantly Muslim. The Yoruba in the southwest are comprised of both Muslims and Christians, and the Ibo in the southeast are predominantly Christians. This configuration may not be as problematic if not for politics and the struggle for power and resources. Under worsening economic conditions and intense political competition, religion becomes an instrument of mobilization and the creation of constituencies by political parties, actors and interest groups. According to Toyin Falola (cited in Kukah 1993), no one can aspire to, or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious. The Nigerian political class have a way of exploiting the tool of religion to achieve its political ambitions, and cover up problems arising from the failure of leadership with religious sentiments.

#### **Regions**

Regional cleavages and identities evolved from the structures created by the colonialist in the process of state formation in Nigeria. The most fundamental is the North and South divide- the initial structure of the colonial state after the 1914 amalgamation. The other cleavages (North, East and West) emerged in 1946 with the introduction of a three region structure. A fourth region, Mid-West was created in 1963. The ethnic majority-minority cleavage basis of politics took root within these structures and political parties operated and dominated within them as well. The emergent elite were regionalized from inception, and especially after 1946 when the political space was opened to more Nigerian participation. The majority elite segment deployed strategies of ethnic mobilization and exclusionary politics to gain power and establish hegemonic control over the regions. With the meaning of regionalism reduced to North for Northerners, East for Easterners and West for those from

Western Nigeria, a discriminatory and segregative process in the struggle for power was entrenched. This did not only broaden the fault lines but also the indigene and non-indigene distinction. Although the former regions have been abrogated, they remain crucial and critical political cleavages and provide basis for fierce struggle for power and exclusionary politics. In contemporary Nigeria, the category of regionalism that is dominant is the one that focus on the six geo-political zones which the country was divided into in 1996 for the purpose of sharing and rotation of power. They are; Northeast, Northwest, North central, Southwest, South East and South South (Agbaje 1998). To a large extent the geo-political zones reinforce the old regional cleavages and form the basis for power struggles and have not change much in terms of how they influence political competition.

### **3.3 Violent conflict**

The literature on conflict points to various situations that make violent conflict more likely. Esteban and Ray (1999), Bates (2000), Huntington (1996), Moynihan (1993) and Horowitz (1985) theorised that ethnic fragmentation and the dominance of ethnic minority over a majority can cause conflict. Horowitz (1985) is of the view that competitive elections and the ethnicization of the electorate in a multi-ethnic society create conflict. The democratic peace theory (Rummel 1997) is of the view that the more democratic a country, the less likely it is to experience violent conflict. Another argument relates the outbreak of violent conflict to the neo patrimonial character of the state (Clapham 1985). Lindemann (2008) points to exclusionary elite politics and bargain. Murshed and Tadjoeeddin (2009) view is that elite competition over valuable natural resources rents and relative deprivation and the grievance it produces fuels violent conflict. Gurr (1970) model holds that relative deprivation can lead to violence. Stewart (2010) opines that horizontal inequality across ethnic, religious and other cultural characteristics can lead to conflict and violence. Mehler (2007) writes that violence as a tool for politics depends on factors like social cleavages and the legitimacy and efficiency of the electoral process. Arson (2012) points to state weakness interacting with some form of political exclusion as fundamental structural underpinning of conflicts. The 2014 International Crisis Group report (Curbing violence in Nigeria II: the Boko Haram Insurgency links violent conflict in Nigeria to politics, political violence, bad governance and poverty. Furthermore, it includes the declining human development resources and the growing alienation and radicalisation as root causes of the violent conflict.

### **3.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is anchored on a few theoretical premises like Lindemann (2008), exclusionary elite bargains theory which hypothesise that the systematic exclusion of key elites from rent-sharing arrangements produces a platform for mobilisation of their loyal constituencies towards violence. As a political party establishes a narrow political coalition or breaks informal rules of the game (like the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) North –South power sharing agreement) and give certain ethno-regional elites disproportionate and exclusive access to state structures (job and appointments) and state resources (oil rents) this alienates the excluded leader(s) who have an incentive to mobilize violently against the state. While the above theoretical view provide some understanding into violent conflict in Nigeria, I draw also from Luckham et al (2006) concept of politicised identities- how identities become politicised. They argue that, in most multi-ethnic societies, elites construct their own power base around core loyalist ethnic or other identity constituencies and these identity divisions are exploited as a means of mobilisation for popular support. However, the political relevance of identities are much more significant when they form a basis for collective action in the pursuit of political goals and can result to violent conflict when they combine with a particular set of context like social exclusion, political blockades and ideologies or beliefs which legitimise collective action (ibid). According to Wimmer et al (2009) political elites in their quest for legitimacy to control state power tend to favour ethnics when finding allies and distributing public goods. Under this condition, politics will then centre on which ethnic group controls government and the struggle over state power will then pit ethnically defined actors against each other. And when these actors turn to their ethnic constituencies to mobilize support, counter mobilisation by those who fear domination may result to clashes that normally breed violence.

## **4. BRIEF HISTORY OF POLITICS AND VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA**

The study of contemporary violence and conflict in modern Nigeria will not be adequately grounded without contemplating briefly Nigeria's political and violent conflict history. Nigeria is one of the largest countries in Africa with an estimated population of over 150 million, 400 languages and about 250 ethnic groups (Abia 2000). The country before independence was divided between the Muslim north and the Christian south and remained separate until Lord Lugard and his men amalgamated it in 1914. The 1914 amalgamation carved the country into three regions; the North, West and Eastern provinces. In 1951 the first elections were held in the regions. The results were victory for the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) in the north; the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in the east; and the Action Group (AG) in the west. The political parties represented the three major ethnic groups and remained dominant until the collapse of the first republic in 1966. The rivalries

which developed among these political parties and major ethnic groups resulted in the destabilisation of the country which scholars like Nnoli (1978) have argued Nigeria couldn't recover from.

Prior to independence in the 1950s strong disagreement and antagonism developed between the southern and northern politicians in the course of the struggle for independence. As Nnoli (1980, p.236) puts it, the Southern leaders had attacked their Northern counterparts accusing them of colluding with the British to perpetuate colonial rule. In response, the Northerners accused the Southerners of being motivated merely by partisan desire to outdo each other rather than by any genuine intention for the good of the country. In 1956, the AG and NCNC had negotiated an alliance to press the issue of self-government. In the event of failure, they planned to summon a constituent assembly of Southern Nigerians, draft a constitution, and declare the independence of Southern Nigeria. This position didn't go down well with the northern delegates whose position resulted to insults and abuses from supporters of the southern politicians in Lagos. Their newspapers subjected the northerners to vitriolic criticism, and ridicule. Consequently, they adopted an eight point program which, in effect would have meant Northern secession. This action in turn, led to harsher criticisms by the NCNC, AG and their newspapers. The Northern People Congress (NPC) leaders were not only vilified as imperialist stooges who had no minds of their own, they were also accused of being unrepresentative of their people. The Southern leaders' strong belief in independence caused them to send their party delegations to Northern cities to campaign for self-government. Trouble broke out in Kano (Sabo Gari) the area outside the walls occupied by native foreigners (mostly Southerners). What started in Lagos as mere party politics or political disagreement degenerated and turned violent. The NPC have mobilised their supporters in retaliation, leading to loss of lives and properties, the first major violence in pre-independence Nigeria.

In 1959 elections were held that ushered in the governments which led Nigeria into independence. The results showed the continuation of regional dominance by the three major parties in their respective regions. It took a coalition between the NPC and NCNC to form a national government. According Nwankwo (1984), the regions constituted the political base for the contenders of power at the federal level, and tribal and religious sentiments were used by these politicians to whip up support for their equally regionally and ethnically based political parties. In May 1962, the party in government in the Western region (AG) split and a bitter infighting developed among the two factions which led to the declaration of a state of emergency. The NPC and NCNC coalition led government appointed Chief Akintola who was forced to step down by opponents in Action Group (AG).

Akintola formed a new party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) which formed a coalition with the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) in the following election. The 1964 elections were criticized for fraud and vote rigging. The heat in the polity was transported to the 1965 regional elections which significantly changed the Nigerian political landscape. Luckham (1971) describe the campaign as the most violent in Nigerian politics. Again the outcome was rejected by the Action Group (AG) with widespread rioting, looting, killing and destruction of properties from October to January 1966. This set the stage for the first military coup in Nigeria in January 1966. Capturing the events of the 1966 military coup, Nwankwo (1984) writes that among the factors responsible for the collapse of the democratic regime was regionalism and the struggle for dominance by the political parties. For Nwankwo, it was not the constitution that failed but the violent rivalry for power among politicians and political parties who operated it. In his contribution, Elaigwu (1988) writes that politics was drastically transformed from a game into a battle and the political stadium was grossly polluted.

On January 15 1966 a coup that signal a new era in Nigeria's political history sparked further divisions among Nigerians. Majority of the coup planners were Ibos and victims virtually all non-Ibo, even though the Ibo political leaders were also involved in the First Republic as any other ethnic group. General Ironsi himself an Ibo took over power and made matters more difficult with his unitary policies. The anger of Westerners and more seriously Northerners turned to the Ibo population leading to wide spread violence and destruction of properties. In July 1966, Yakubu Gowon led a successful counter-coup against the military leadership. Ironsi and a number of his Ibo officers were killed and hostility towards the Ibo spread and degenerated to mass killings (Oyediran 1979). The Ibo led by Odumegwu Ojukwu after the failed Aburi accord, decided to opt out of the Nigerian union in protest and declared the Eastern Region the Republic of Biafra. This plunged the country into a bitter and bloody three-year civil war (1967-1970). The war was devastating, with over three million people killed and properties worth millions of dollars destroyed. General Gowon fought through and kept Nigeria one but failed to return it to civilian rule. By 1975 General Gowon was replace by Murtala Mohammed as head of state in a coup. Mohammed responded quickly to the criticisms of the Gowon regime, by fixing a date for the return of the country into civilian rule and appointed a committee with the responsibility of drafting a constitution. General Mohammed's vision was short-lived because of his assassination in February 1976. General Olusegun Obasanjo took over as head of state, maintaining the initiatives of his predecessor.

In the run up to the 1979 elections, political parties were made to meet certain conditions to ensure that politics didn't devolve into competition for power along regional lines, since that was the breeding ground for



the post-independence violence. Political parties had to demonstrate their national presence (Beckett 1987). However, despite all efforts, three major political parties emerged from the 1979 elections with voting profile and pattern echoing closely those of the early 1960s. President Shehu Shagari who won the presidential election completed his first tenure in office but the 1983 elections marked by rigging, violence and intimidation led to the overthrow of the president Shehu Shagari's regime in 1984.

From 1984 to 1999 without forgetting the Ernest Shonekon Interim National Government(ING), Nigeria was ruled by military heads of states who promised to return the country to civilian rule but manipulated the system to remain in power. Strong patron-client networks ensured that there was some form of class unity in pillaging Nigeria. In 1989, forced by increasing instability, criticism, pressure from civil right groups and the international community, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida created two political parties: the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican convention (NRC) to avoid the problems that have accompanied party politics in the previous regimes. Elections were conducted and pronounced by observers as the freest and fairest in Nigeria's history but the acclaimed winner Moshood Abiola was not declared following the annulment of the election by the military junta. The interim national government constituted was illegal paving way for General Sani Abacha led military takeover in November 1993. General Abacha's takeover led to massive protest, but the fierceness of the general was still to be seen. With increased agitations in the Niger Delta over oil resources and environmental degradation, Abacha turned his fierceness to individuals opposed to him. Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni eight, Kudirat Abiola and others were all casualties.

After many years of military dictatorship, civil rule was re-installed on 29 May 1999. The return of multiparty democracy presented both negative and positive opportunities. For some, it was an opportunity for national cohesion and development while others saw it as an avenue to express their grievances. Democratic governance created new areas of conflict through the competition for political spoils (IDMC 2006). According to IDMC (2006), over fourteen thousand people have been killed and thousand displaced since military rule ended in 1999. The Human Rights Watch (2008) also record that more than eleven thousand Nigerians lost their lives in clashes along political, ethnic, religious and other lines between the handover of power to the Obasanjo government and the end of 2006. The report stated that the devastation occurred in over four hundred and eighty one separate incidents that varied considerably in character and scale. Since 1999, Nigeria has witnessed hundreds of clashes and violence, though some are not overtly political in nature. But in some cases as I will try to show in the next section, it is widely believed that ethnic and religious violence resulted at least partly from the effort of politicians and other elites to manipulate inter-communal and religious tensions for their own political gain (Human Rights Watch 2007).

## **5. POLITICAL PARTIES AND VIOLENT CONFLICT IN NIGERIA**

Party politics and the politicisation, manipulation and mobilisation of identities have been a source of violent political, ethnic, religious and communal conflicts in Nigeria (Alemika, 2011). Power struggle in the 1954, 64-65, and 83, 1999,2003,2007,2011 and 2015 elections have in various ways contributed to one form of violent conflict or another. In this section, I show how the political manipulation of identities have pitched Nigerians against each other and aided the spread violence.

### **Boko Haram-a political weapon**

The North East of Nigeria is today one of the most violent prone with rampaging attacks from Boko Haram. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (16<sup>TH</sup> August 2014) reported that Boko Haram killed over four thousand people in 2014 alone, including hostage taking of school girls. Boko Haram became prominent but not as violent under the then All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) Governor of Bronu State Ali Modu Sheriff. According to the International Crisis Group 2014, it grew out of a group of radical Islamic youths. Their leader Muhammed Yusuf was critical of government, always political and always wanting an Islamic government, but not violent. While already popular, Yusuf rose to much greater prominence when he reportedly formed political alliance with Ali Modu Sheriff.

In 1999, Sheriff had contested and won the Bornu North senatorial seat and helped Mala Kachalla to become governor on the ticket of the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) that controlled Bornu State. Sheriff and Kachalla fell out when Kachalla backed out of an agreement to give way to Sheriff after one term in office. The struggle between these two it is widely believe made Sheriff to cut a deal with Yusuf, whose large youth following was a very significant electoral block. Yusuf allegedly help Sheriff who promised to give his group some senior government appointment. Sheriff won the elections and to fulfil his promise, appointed Buji Foi, known locally as Yusuf's discipline the commissioner for religious affairs a link that provided the group with state government funds. These funds gave the sect financial strength to buy arms (Int. Crisis Group 2014). The partnership didn't last long as cracks appeared in the Sheriff-Yusuf alliance when some terms of the alliance (implementation of Sharia) were not met. Yusuf turned his criticism to the Sheriff led government and Buji Foi resigned his appointment as commissioner in protest. The fall-out of the two (Sheriff and Yusuf) forced governor Sheriff to declared wanted and order the arrest of Buji Foi and Yusuf who were extra-judicially executed in

police custody. The group went on rampage in open confrontation with security forces alleging that Sheriff ordered the killing of Yusuf, Buji Foi and Baba Fugu to cover up his involvement with Boko Haram. The International Crisis Group reports that over eight hundred person lost their live in the crackdown. According to the International Crisis Group Report, a former State Security Service (SSS) officer was reported to have said that after politics and politicians created the monster (Boko Haram), they lost control of it.

Meanwhile, with the persistent violence, controversy over political link with the sect has been on the rise. Names like Senator Ali Ndume from Bornu state, Senator Ahmed Zana and Ali Modu Sheriff have all been interrogated by the State Security Service (SSS). According to the International Crisis Group Report (2014), the local population believes that politicians and power tussle have played a major role in the crisis. The report also state that youths helping the security forces combat Boko Haram (Civilian Joint Task Force CJTF) did vent its rage on the political establishment, storming the private residence of the Bornu state ANPP chairman, Alhaji Mala Othman, on July 1 2013 setting it ablaze for allegedly sponsoring Boko Haram. Hundreds of youths it also reported, tried unsuccessfully to burn Sheriff's private residence. Their claim is that both Sheriff and Othman supported Boko Haram and had fuelled the crisis. Boko Haram has since expanded its operation beyond the core area of Bornu state with more sophisticated tactics. The initial attacks in 2010 were predominantly shootings, but improvised explosive devices (IEDS) began to be used, especially in the run up to the 2011 elections (ICGR 2014). After the elections, the sect has become more violent turning to vehicle-borne improvised devices (IEDS) and suicide bombers to wreck many parts of the North including the capital Abuja.

#### **Party politics, identity-North-South power struggle and violence**

Insurgencies are distinguished as being driven by ideology, but in Nigeria, the narrative is mixed. While the struggle to establish an Islamic state in the North by Boko Haram isn't in doubt, the escalation of bombings, mass murder and abductions since after the 2011 general elections till date have been said to be politically motivated and this from top security functionaries of government in the likes of late General Owoye Azazi, the former National Security Adviser and Marylyn Ogar, the spokesperson of the Department of State Service (DSS) (Vanguard November 10, 2012, Channels TV, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2014).

Writing on the rise of political Boko Haram in Daily Independent News Paper of 16 August 2014, analyst like Deji Adeyanju argued that, the emergence of Goodluck Jonathan as president from the South after the demise of his boss a northerner changed the dynamics of national politics, security discuss and motivation of the insurgents. Before the 2011 General Elections, the campaign to stop Jonathan was driven by ethnic, religious and regional sentiments. This was however occasioned by the fact that the North felt it was their turn to complete an eight year term in the presidency as factored by the PDP North-South power sharing arrangement. Fierce opposition and internal disagreement over Jonathan candidacy in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for the 2011 general elections led to very provocative statements by individuals like Atiku Abubakar and groups like the Northern Elders Forum. As the agitation was growing towards the elections, bombings and attacks by Boko Haram was on the increase and many analysts believe that the political tension in the country gave some disgruntled Northern elements an incentive to use or collaborate with the insurgents to make a political point. Reiterating this argument, the former National Security Adviser (NSA) late General Owoye Azazi who had also served as Chief of Army Staff and the Chief of Defence Staff while speaking on the challenges of insecurity in Nigeria in a South-South Economic Summit hosted in Asaba, Delta State in April 2012 claimed that it was the internal workings of the PDP that incentivize the increased violence. He had blamed PDP power play, intra party competition and the jettisoning of the PDP zoning arrangement for the heightened attacks by Boko Haram, which took a new dimension since President Goodluck Jonathan was elected president (Vanguard, Nov. 10, 2012). The former army chief and national security adviser (NSA) said the decision of the PDP to exclude certain persons from taking part in the election, contrary to the provision of the constitution had contributed to violent mobilisation. The heightened violence Deji also argues may not be unconnected with the plan of the North to stop President Jonathan considering the factors at stake. One of which is the oil rig Licenses which are majorly in the hands of the northerners and are due for renewal in 2016. With these dynamics, the battle for state power can be fought as an all-out battle, even if it means shedding the blood of innocent Nigerians.

Lending his voice to this narrative, the National Chairman of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Chief Victor Umeh also argued that prominent politicians who threatened to make Nigeria ungovernable for President Goodluck Jonathan after the 2011 presidential elections are behind the violent activities of the Boko Haram sect. Umeh who spoke on May 27, 2014 in Enugu, South East Nigeria said disgruntled politicians with inordinate ambitions are behind the current level of insecurity in the country. Furthermore, he argued that threat has become a reality and the country is destabilized. For him, as people try to associate Boko Haram with religious bigots, he has always seen it differently that the spate of terrorism being experienced in Nigeria is the handiwork of disgruntled politicians (Punch May 28, 2014). Politicians of Northern extraction like Adamu Ciroma, Lawal Kaita, Yahaya Kwande, Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar have while pushing for power to return to the Northern region made statements which may have contributed towards creating an environment conducive or indifferent to violence (Vanguard, June 16, 2011 and Punch, August 9,

2014).

Again, speaking about political parties possible culpability in the violence in Nigeria on Channels Television Breakfast Programme (Sunrise Daily) on Thursday 15 August 2014, Ms Marylin Ogar the spokesperson of the Department of State Security (DSS) Nigeria's equivalent of US Secret Service wondered why there was no bomb blast after the Osun governorship election conducted on August 9 2014 which was won by the opposition All Progressive Congress (APC). Although Ms Ogar did not specifically accuse the opposition APC of complacency in the bombings and insecurity, she wondered why there were bomb blasts in states where other parties apart from the APC won elections. Ms Ogar noted that they was no bombing when the APC won in Edo and Osun state elections. She said 'we had provided security for Edo and at end of that elections, permit me to say, there was no bomb blast'. Explaining further, she said 'we moved to Ondo and the Labour Party won in Ondo, there was bomb blast. We moved to Anambra, APGA won in Anambra and there was a bomb blast'. We moved to Ekiti and PDP won in Ekiti, there was a bomb blast and thank God we are able to deploy appropriately in Osun, the results came out, the APC have won and thank God there was no bomb blast' (Channels TV, 15 August 2014). Asked if she was insinuating that the opposition party was responsible for the bombings, the DSS spokesperson noted that 'we should thank God that since after the Osun elections, there has been no bombings' warning that 'it doesn't mean that there should be a bomb blast after I leave the studio' (ibid).

In the same vein, an Australian national specialized in hostage situation Stephen Davis who has worked for two Nigerian presidents had also argued that the only way to stop Boko Haram is to cut off their funding, which according to him is mainly gotten from bank raids and Nigerian politicians. Politicians who take advantage of the activities of the sect to destabilise the country and make cheap political gains. He argued that, identifying the politicians makes it easier in some ways as they can be arrested, but the onus of proof is high and many are in opposition. And if the former president had moved against them, he would have been accused of trying to rig the 2015 elections (Naijezie.com, August 28 2014).

It is important to mention here, that the North- South power struggle, identity and personality politics, inter and intra-party power tussles have historically served as catalyst to violent conflict in Nigeria. The age long decades of power struggles and contestations have endured and the configuration of political forces and the fractional and factional struggle for power and resources have remained. The lack of internal political cohesion which began after independence continues and the struggle for power remain bitterly, lawlessly and violently contested as factions with no regards for the rules of the game engage in the use of private armies and thugs (Ake 1988; Collier 2010).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Violent conflict is multi-causal. Although, identity differences represent a potent source of violent conflict, the trigger in Nigeria boils down to competition for power, since political power is the route to accessing resources, entitlements and opportunities. Political factors (Party politics and the politicisation, manipulation and mobilisation of identities in a divided and highly competitive polity with weak institutions) incentivise violent conflict. In this study, I have presented the dynamics of politics, identity as triggers of violent conflict in Nigeria. I aimed to contribute to the various narratives towards understanding of the effect of the politicization, manipulation and mobilization of identities on violent conflict in Nigeria. The findings suggest that the patronage, prebendal and clientelistic orientation of politics and governance incentives identity mobilization for popular support which often times degenerates to violent conflict. Nigeria's historical and political roots seem to be the breeding ground that has nurtured this pattern. However, the consolidation of democracy and democratic institutions, the fight against poverty, youth unemployment and radicalisation, as well as the strengthening of political parties into programmatic models, better governance, equality, justice and a strong legal system will discourage political entrepreneurs and patrons and unify Nigerians for sustainable national peace.

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