

Chronology of Electoral Violence in Nigeria from 1960-2015

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Abstract

Journalism as the fourth estate of the realm in the society plays crucial roles in the development of a nation through its numerous functions of information dissemination, education, entertainment and enlightenment of the masses on issues, events and trends within the environment. This unique impact of journalism encompasses all strata of the society such as economic, political, social and cultural systems. To this end, this study investigates press coverage of electoral violence in Nigeria during electioneering process vis-à-vis press role in forestalling negative conducts such as rigging, manipulations and electoral or political violence considered to be a norm in most African countries. The study adopts the Punch and the Nation newspapers as the sole press going by their active participation before, during and after the election in 2012. Going further, the study employs the instrument of Social Responsibility Theory of the Press.

Keywords: Election, Democracy, Bribery, Corruption, Government, Policies, Reform, Violence, Journalism and Security

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1.1 Introduction

The press as a potent tool and vehicle of social engineering has always been at the forefront of political, economic and cultural liberation of a democratic setting worldwide. With Abraham's Lincoln definition of democracy as government of the people by the people and for the people, it becomes an imperative task for the press to meaningfully engage in its functions of informing, educating and enlightening the citizens as well as ensuring that the people's positions are highly entrenched in the democratic settings. As a public mouthpiece, the battle for Nigeria independence was fought extensively on the pages of newspapers such as the Lagos Daily News, the Daily Service, The West African Pilot and the Comet owned by some prominent Nigerians. These newspapers in a formidable accord and strong bond tie carried on their pages powerful and commanding editorials, features, articles and other journalistic approaches aimed at ensuring the nation's sovereignty and freedom.

Through the bossy anti-colonial articles carried on the pages of these newspapers, the people became politically oriented thus realizing the urgent need for a democratic sovereignty propagated by the press. According to Umechukwu [1997], 'Notable among the papers were the Eastern Sentinel, The Eastern Nigerian Guardian and the Nigerian Guardian. These newspapers create political awareness among the people of Nigeria. The West African Pilot specifically had as its motto: "Show the Light and the people will find the way".'

Election as it were is the process of choosing who will pilot the affairs of a given state. That is, through elections, the people determine who govern them. In recent times, election in Nigeria has become a grave abuse by leaders who now see the process as a child of do or die. They often employ all manners of irregularities and at some levels violence just in their bid to get to power. Election credibility in Nigeria has always assumed a thing of doubt even before 1959 general elections. Smith [2005] stated that the 1959 general elections were rigged and that the coalitions were formed even before the federal elections result were known. This is a sharp testimony to the fact that electioneering process in Nigeria has always assumed every form of irregularities.

The role of the press in this instance is to get the people highly informed, educated and enlightened to understand their rights and how they are expected to be on the watch out for credible elections. This role of the press is confirmed by the statement of Abraham Lincoln as quoted by Krinsky [1992] that 'let the people know the facts and the country will be safe'. In Nigeria, election has put on the coloration of electoral vices which in essence promote the nation's politics as a do or die affair before the comity of nations. According to a White paper released by the International Foundation for Electoral System [IFES] in 2002, electoral violence is defined as 'any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay or to otherwise influence an electoral process'. It is undoubtedly true that electoral manipulations perpetrated before, during and after elections in Nigeria have to a large extent contributed to the high spate of electoral violence in the country, an act capable of jeopardizing the corporate existence and unity of the country. It has become the norms that elections in Nigeria are associated with tensions between groups and the eventual escalation to violence. This glaring fact is evident in the uncompromising attitudes of our leaders who often refer to politics as a game of do or die as widely portrayed in the 2007 general elections. Prior to the elections, the then President of the country, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo at the Abeokuta Declaration of February 10, 2007 stated in his words 'I will campaign. This coming election is a do or die affair

for me and the PDP. This coming election is a matter of life and death for the PDP and Nigeria [The Nigeria Tribune 11, February 2007, pg-2]. It is safe to state that politics in the Nigerian context means getting to power at all cost not minding what and who are at the receiving end thus providing no room for meaningful, purposeful and visionary opposition as witnessed in the nature of the nation's politics right from her birth on October 1st, 1960. The report of the Electoral Reform Committee [2008; Vol. 1:19] stated that "the politicians in Nigeria have over the years become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power; more reckless and greedier in their use and abuse of power; and more intolerant of opposition, criticism and effort at replacing them". This desperado nature of the nation's politicians cannot be separated from the incessant assassinations of opposition or any one considered as stumbling block. How can the press curtain the excesses of electoral violence through adequate and accurate reportage? This questions and many more form the basis of this study.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Electoral violence could be traced back to the 1962 Western Region Crises and since then, it has become an endless trait in the nation's political system. However, through public enlightenment and continuous education and sensitization of the masses, the ugly trend that has remained a hard nut to crack can become a forgotten story in the nearest future. To effectively actualize this, the press must rise up judiciously and actively to its responsibility of information dissemination, massive enlightenment and sensitization as well as the aggressive education of the masses on the need to abide by the tenets of democracy. It is in the light of these onerous tasks that this study seeks to understudy the level of attention granted to the coverage of electoral violence by the press as well unraveling the various factors necessitating against thorough reportage of electoral violence on the pages of newspapers [Punch and the Nation] and other forms of the media.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the level of attention granted to stories on electoral violence
2. To find out if stories on electoral violence are reported by the two newspapers without fear or favour.
3. To find out if the newspapers give equal coverage to stories on electoral violence in the country.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Since the role of the press cannot be overstressed in the sustainability drive of a democratic setting, the study is expected to be of huge significant to politicians, electorates, stakeholders and the media.

Literature Review

The media as an agent of information dissemination plays a crucial role in the sustainability drive of a nation's democratic arrangement. This is due to the fact that information is key to the corporate existence and unity of a nation. Just as the media in other parts of the world have numerous functions and responsibilities to perform, the Nigeria media cannot be an exception from these tasks. However, it is an established fact that the media operate in line with the democratic practices obtainable in the country of operation. Many communication scholars and experts had postulated different functions of the press based on their different perceptions paraded by these scholars and experts about the press. According to Daramola [2005], "the libertarian theorists are aware of the power of the mass media when they put forward six major functions that are now associated with the media. According to the Libertarian theorists, the six functions include: public enlightenment, servicing the economy, servicing the political system, safeguarding good liberties, profit making and providing entertainment". Despite the encyclopedic and detailed functions of the Libertarian theorists, some scholars had different views about the functions of the press. One of such scholars is Harold Lasswell [1948] who opined that the media perform the following functions: surveillance of the environment, correlation [interpretation/explanation] and transmission of social heritage [socialization]. Corroborating the functions put forward by Harold Lasswell, George [2000] posited that "the surveillance function includes alerting the audience to goodies and dangers in their environment. For instance, during coups people rely on radio for directives from government of the day. The weather forecast in advanced countries, help not only to learn where hurricanes and tornados are expected but also to plan their day". Inferring from the explanations of George, electoral violence remains a very strong danger in the environment and the press must rise up to the responsibility of playing the huge surveillance role in educating, enlightening and informing the people on the grave implications of electoral violence. In like manner, Okon [2001] dwelt further on the functions of the press to include "the role of the media in this regard would be regarded as that of major carrier of culture. Here the press serve to promote or influence attitudes, to motivate, to foster the spread of behavior patterns and to act as a form of creative expression. On his part, Peterson cited by George [2000] clearly stipulates the following as the chief functions of the media:

*Serving the political system by providing information, discussion and debate on political affairs.

* Enlightening the public as to make it self government.

* Safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as watchdog against the government

*Servicing the economy, primarily by bringing together buyers and sellers of goods and services through the medium of advertising.

* Providing entertainment

*Maintaining its own financial self-sufficiency so as to be free from the pressure of special interest.

The different functions postulated by the different scholars have something in common and that is the chief responsibility of the press to inform, educate and enlighten the people especially on issues going on within the confine of their environment. The various functions have further allotted to the press the role of ensuring that the people are well carried along in the electoral happenings of their environment.

Western Region Election of 1964

The first case of electoral violence on a large scale occurred during the conduct of the Western region election in 1964/1965. This particular election was a follow up to the Federal Parliament election which was labeled a monumental fraud in some quarters. After the election at the federal level which was marred with irregularities, attention was shifted to the Western Region election of 1965. The election which was keenly contested by Akintola's NNDP and Adegbenro's AG both had national backings of NNA and UPGA respectively. The election was not spared of the electoral manipulations and malpractices recorded in the November 1964 federal parliamentary election. Some of the electoral manipulations perpetrated included snatching and burning of ballot boxes, smuggling of ballot papers as well as illegal counting of votes. After the election and counting of votes, Akintola was declared Premier of the Western Region having seen his party won 88 seats out of the available 98 seats. In a swift response, Alhaki D.S Adegbenro called for an emergency meeting in the house of jailed Obafemi Awolowo where he declared himself the newly elected Premier of Western region stating that his party won 68 out of the 98 seats. This action led to a major riot which saw over 1000 people dead while over 5000 houses were razed down by fire. The violence was codenamed "OPERATION WET E".

General Election of 1983

With the successful conduct of the election that ushered in another civilian administration in 1979, Nigerians were again in the spirit of democratic arrangement to participate in the 1983 general elections. Some of the glaring irregularities that marred the 1979 elections were nursed into the 1983 general elections. The history making election was the supposed conduct of elections under the watchful eyes of a civilian government but this history was soon cut short. Again, the 1983 witnessed numerous cases of election manipulations and after the election, the NPN recorded landslide victory in the different categories but this was not aptly so in the governorship category as violence again broke out in Ondo and Oyo states respectively which brought about wanton destruction of lives and property.

2011 General Elections

Though the 2011 general elections have been applauded by observers and comity of nations as very fair and credible. However, a sad story that came up was the chaos and upheavals that erupted after the election following the victory of President Goodluck Jonathan. Some northern citizens alleged irregularities which again sparked off riot that led to the death of about 10 National Youth Service Corp members and over 800 people.

Ondo State 2012 Gubernatorial Election

All eyes were on the Ondo State 2012 gubernatorial election being a major election to be held after the bloodshed that characterized the 2011 presidential election in some northern states of the country. It was business as usual as political parties sought recognitions and victory at all cost. This thirst for victory and as usual the urge to heat up the polity witnessed rounds of violence and even killings. The body language of the key players was a witness to the desperate and odd manner of politicians in the country. The then Director of Publicity of one of the political parties in Ondo State, the Action Congress of Nigeria [ACN], Idowu Ajanaku stated that "ACN is a peaceful party but we are not weaklings. Therefore in the light of this, our members are battle ready to defend themselves in the face of bias by the security agents in the state. [Punch, Friday September 28, 2012]. Disturbed by the heat up of the polity, the then president, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan during a rally in Akure, the Ondo State capital warned politicians against promoting electoral violence in the state. In like manners, the Inspector General of Police, General Officer Commanding Division 2, Nigerian Army, Major General Mohammed Bubakar warned trouble makers to stay away from the state. [Punch Friday, October 19, 2012].

Inferring from the above, one would unarguably agree that the 2012 gubernatorial election in Ondo State was still a child of violence. Below are the reported cases of violence in the State though not the comprehensive list.

*In April 2012, the home of the state chairman of CPC attacked at Alagbaka quarters in Akure [Punch, 2012]

* A CN governorship candidate convoy was attacked at Okeluse in Ose Local Government Area during a

familiarization tour [The Nation, 2012]

* Clash between ACN and LP supporters at a ward meeting of the ACN leaves some people injured with some vehicles destroyed [Punch, 2012]

* PDP hails soldiers over the arrest of LP thugs with arms in Okitipupa [The Nation, 2012]

* Four persons who unleashed terror on LP and its supporters were remanded in prison over electoral violence [Punch, 2012]

* PDP and LP trade words over electoral violence which occurred on Saturday September 15th, 2012. [Punch, 2012]

* The campaign of ACN turned bloody as supporters of LP and ACN clashed in Okitipupa [The Nation, 2012]

* Fears as violence marred Ondo political campaign [Punch, 2012]

* Mimiko campaign organization [MCO] blames ACN for LP supporter's death, Mr. Adeniyi Oyen [Punch, 2012]

* Gunmen attacked Mimiko's aide, Rep, taskforce boss [Punch, 2012]

* PDP and LP trade words over Ondo violence [Punch, 2012]

* PDP and LP trade words over Ondo fracas on the death of supporters [Punch, 2012]

* PDP accuses Police of bias in Irele violence [Punch, 2012]

* ACN accuses LP of vandalizing secretariat, theft [Punch, 2012].

The above stories reported by the two newspapers used as study are just the few of the violence recorded during the electioneering process in 2012.

Challenges of the Press in Reporting Electoral Violence

The press in Nigeria is faced with too many challenges which in furtherance have affected the neutrality agenda of the press. Over times, the press has been caged to become the mouthpiece of highly placed personality in the Nigeria society as against being the mouthpiece of the people. From research and studies, it is safe to conclude that the Nigerian press is basically an extension of individuals' interest and ambitions. This fact played out in the electioneering reportage at the 2012 Ondo State gubernatorial elections where some media outfits were purely used to advance the course of the owners thus denying the people the right information that can assist the people in making the right choice. As stated above, there are too many numerous problems bedeviling the Nigerian press. Chief among them is ownership problem; others include poor remuneration, government attempted gagging techniques etcetera.

***Ownership Factor:** Ordinarily, the Nigerian press should not be entangled with the issue of fair and unbiased reportage going by the provision of section 22 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended. This section states that "the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people". The above provision of the constitution undoubtedly expects the media to serve as the public mouthpiece but the contrary has been the most romanced scenario in the country. As a matter of fact, some of the country's leaders believed that the media remain one of the strongest tools to defend the government. In the words of one-time military administrator of the defunct Bendel State [Now Edo and Delta], Dr. Samuel Ogbemudia "no government set up a newspaper to criticize itself" adequately portrayed the myopic view and the desperate nature of our leaders to cling to power at all cost irrespective of the damages caused to institutions meant to strengthen democracy or government as the case applies. It is pertinent to state that most individuals are now setting up media houses to pursue their personal ambitions and interests. According to Marvin Kaib [1992] "a free and unfettered press is the best underpinning of a society free to be liberal or conservative". He went further to state that "the press should neither be adversarial nor friendly, though if I had to choose one over the other, I would prefer adversarial". The press should go about its business of information dissemination without any fear or favour but in the Nigerian context, there is a clear-cut deviation from this view of Marvin. The clear cases of biased reporting were recorded in the 2012 gubernatorial elections in Ondo state especially by The Nation Newspaper, Adaba 88.7 fm, OSRC and Orange fm which are all owned by interested parties in the election. While the Nation Newspaper and Adaba Fm owned by Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the ACN were readily used by ACN, OSRC and Orange Fm state owned media outfits were constantly used by the LP being the party in power. These mentioned media outfits were fully on ground to dance to the tunes of the owners. For instance, Adaba Fm refused to announce the result of the election hours after the official announcement by the authority in charge simply because the interest of its proprietor has been defeated. On the other hand, OSRC and Orange Fm made the announcement a jingo. Another clear case of biased reporting was the arrest and detainment of four members of the ACN on the account of electoral violence but the Nation newspaper labelled the four suspects LP members until the Punch, a neutral media outfit made the clarification clear establishing the fact that the four arrested people were members of the ACN. Again, the Nation newspaper reported that the ACN had won eight [8] local government areas as against the two that were actually won. [The Nation, Sunday October 21, 2012]. Still on the Nation newspaper, it reported that two chieftains of the LP, Mr.

Niran Sule and Mr. Tunde Ojomo were arrested with six AK 47 rifles, a report that was dismissed by the Police and later reported correctly by the Punch on Sunday 21st, October, 2012. Other factors affecting the press include bribery and corruption, strict government policies etcetera.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A study of the Punch and the Nation roles of the press in the fight against electoral violence form the major sampling of the effect of the media in the fight against electoral violence. The data gathered were presented to ascertain the level of impact of the press before and during the poll in their bid to fighting electoral violence through its coverage of the deadly and political disease ravaging the country.

Table 1 showing the level of publication or coverage by the two newspapers

S/N	LC	PUNCH	THE NATION	TOTAL
1.	Equal	-	-	-
2.	Unequal	17	20	37
	Total	17	20	37

Source: Content Analysis 2013

On the level of coverage, 37 issues were reported. Of these 37 issues, Punch newspaper reported 17 amounting to 46% while the Nation newspaper reported 20 issues which amounted to 54% of the total number of issues.

Table 2 showing the position of the two newspapers in the reportage of electoral violence.

S/N	PC	PUNCH	THE NATION	TOTAL
1.	Biased	-	10	-
2.	Unbiased	17	10	27
	Total	17	20	37

Source: Content Analysis 2013

From the above statistics, the Punch reported 17 issues which were clearly unbiased representing about 63% while The Nation newspaper reported 10 unbiased issues representing 37%. On biased issues, the nation newspaper reported 10 issues out of the total 20 issues it reported which amounts to 50%.

Table 3 showing the level of attention granted to reportage of electoral violence by the two newspapers.

S/N	SP	PUNCH	THE NATION	TOTAL
1.	Front Page	-	-	-
2.	Back Page	-	-	---
3.	Centre Spread	5	6	11
4.	Inside Page	12	14	26
	Total	17	20	37

Source: Content Analysis 2013

The front and back pages got no attention of electoral violence by the two newspapers. However, the inside page of the two newspapers had 26 stories amounting to 70% while the centre spread recorded 11 issues representing 30%.

Conclusion

Journalism as a fourth estate of the realm entails high degree of public trust because it is seen as a social conscience of any nation. To earn and uphold this public trust, it is morally justifiable for every journalist and media outfits to observe to the highest professional and ethical standard by engaging in fact-based reportage. In other words, truth of fact is the cornerstone of journalism which should be strictly as well as professionally adhered to in the reportage of politics and other matters that are within the ambits of the functions of the press.

Streamlining the functions of the press to the research topic which is the role of the press in the fight against electoral violence in Nigeria, the press ought to make use of the enumerated functions of the press as postulated by Uyo [1987]. According to Uyo, the functions of the press are coined as PENIISE which translate to persuasion, education, news, information, interpretation, selling and entertainment. The press should be more clinical and focused on giving the people the right information. There are several other cases of political violence that were not reported but hardly was there any political rally that was not reported by the two newspapers which implies that monetary reward may soon overpower the chief functions of the media. For instance, there were about five [5] cases of electoral violence in Irele in Ondo South, only one of such cases was reported by the Punch newspaper. Also, in Okitipupa, about seven cases of political violence were recorded but the two

newspapers only reported two of those cases.

Recommendations

Dwelling on the results obtained from the findings and some other unpublished stories of electoral violence as well as provocative and inciting statements uttered by some leaders or politicians before, during and after elections, the following recommendations have been drawn up by this study:

1. National Broadcasting Commission [NBC] and other regulatory bodies of the media should put in place stringent policies aimed at checkmating biased reporting before, during and after elections. To achieve this, the NBC and other regulatory bodies should ensure that all reports of the media are meant to undergo scrutiny after before, during and after elections. In cases where media houses erred, punishments should be meted out on such defaulting media houses.
2. Media houses should have correspondents in all local government areas of the country to enable them have unfettered access to information on electoral violence and other necessary and vital information needed by the people.
3. Also, partnership with freelancers should be welcomed by the press. Most times, accurate information come from people outside the media house since they are always at the center of the whole thing.

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