POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: INTERROGATING PRESS INVOLVEMENT AS VICTIM, VECTOR AND EXTINGUISHER

Chijioke Odii

Department of Mass Communication,
Renaissance University Ugbawka
Enugu State, Nigeria
chijiokeodii@gmail.com

Abstract

Violence is among the topics of topmost global concern. Violence is multifaceted and hydra-headed in contemporary times. It has assumed some worrisome dimensions in countries and continents of the world. No country or continent is free from violence and no country or continent has a monopoly of violence. Political violence is a variant of violence that relates to politics. Many factors are responsible for the increasing political violence in the world, particularly in Nigeria. The press as the fourth estate of the realm has been entangled in politics and political violence in Nigeria. The Nigerian press has, from the colonial era till date, featured prominently as victim, vector and extinguisher of political violence in the country. This article is an attempt to examine how the press has played these tripartite roles in the endemic political violence in Nigeria.

Keywords: Politics, violence, press, victim & Nigeria

Introduction

One of the glaring unfortunate indices of Nigeria's chequered political history is the country's consistent failure to achieve political stability. Political violence is a recurrent decimal in Nigeria's political system. Failed elections with the attendant dashed hopes of good governance are regular triggers for political violence in Nigeria. From the closing stages of the colonial era to the contemporary times, Nigeria has been unable to conduct a truly free and fair election. Many commentators and analysts believe that the June12, 1993 presidential election supposedly won by the late M.K.O Abiola was free and fair, but that election was not without obvious deficiencies and irregularities. While some elections in Nigeria might be considered relatively or marginally free and fair, no such election in Nigeria can be conveniently and conclusively adjudged to be free and fair. Political violence in Nigeria has also been blamed on other factors, in addition to failed elections. The other factors include corruption, ethnicity, bad governance, misinformation, poverty, thuggery and unemployment (Ani, Anyika & Uwizeyimana, 2019).

The endemic political violence in Nigeria has adverse consequences for the lives and properties of Nigerians and for the country's fortunes and reputation on the home front and in the comity of nations. The perennial political violence in Nigeria has often left in its trails wanton destruction of lives and properties. The situation has attracted the attention and anger of many international organizations, bodies and countries. In the build up to the 2020 off course governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States, the United States of America and the United Kingdom announced visa bans on some

Nigerian politicians who allegedly masterminded political violence in recent elections, and their intentions to impose visa bans on any politician who would precipitated political violence before, during and after the gubernatorial elections in Edo and Ondo States. These drastic measures taken by the US and the UK seemed to have resulted in the relative credibility and success of the elections in the two states.

The press has been involved in politics in Nigeria as the *fourth estate of the realm.* The involvement of the press in political violence in Nigeria is not in doubt. It is, therefore, imperative to interrogate the involvement of the press in political violence in Nigeria as victim, vector and extinguisher.

Conceptual Clarifications

The world has been experiencing seemingly unending and mounting turbulent times. This makes violence a disturbing topic in global discourses. Violence is a broad and multi-faceted topic. It is hardly exhaustible in a single article, chapter or book. The world's battle with and against increasingly divergent forms of violence has made violence an interesting and worrisome topic.

The World Health Organization defines violence as the "intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation" (WHO, 2002, p.5). The World Health Organization categorized violence into three. These are

(1) self-directed violence, (2) interpersonal violence and (3) collective violence.

(1) Self-directed violence is divided into suicidal behaviour and self-abuse. The subdivision of suicidal behaviour comprises suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide and complete suicide. Self-abuse includes acts like self-mutilation and excessive self-denials and starvation.

(2) Interpersonal violence can be subdivided into family and intimate partner violence and community violence. The family and intimate partner category refers to the form of violence between family members and intimate partners. This type of violence mostly takes place in the home. This type of violence includes abuse of the elderly, wife battery and child abuse. Community violence, on the other hand, is the form of violence between people who are not related. Such persons may or may not know each other and this type of violence mostly takes place outside the home. This type of violence includes rape/sexual assault and youth violence.

(3) Collective violence: WHO (2002) subdivided collective violence into social, political and economic violence. Each of these forms of collective violence clearly suggests the intentions and motives of the perpetrators of the violence. Examples of collective violence include political violence, war, terrorism, militancy and state violence.

But for clarity and proper conceptualization, it is necessary to zero in on political violence which is the crux of this chapter. Various authorities, scholars and commentators have attempted to

conceptualize political violence. Such attempts are understandably related but somewhat different based on people's involvement in and experience of political violence. Iruonagbe, Imahonopi, and Ahmadu (2013) state that violence becomes political when it is intended to disrupt the immediate and future political process. The authors note that political violence may involve a process of perpetuating an existing government in power and eliminating perceived opponents or it could be a response to frustrating circumstances and an inability of those in government to fulfill the campaign promises to the people.

The foregoing clearly depicts some of the obvious intendments and end products of political violence. But there is more precision in Anifowose's (1982) description of political violence, cited in Iruonagbe, Imahonopi, and Ahmadu (2013, p.12), as the use of threat or physical act carried out by an individual or group of 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; and whose objective or choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effects have political significance which tends to modify the behaviour of others in the existing arrangement of a power structure that has some consequences for the political system.

A common form of political violence in Nigeria is electoral violence. It is common experience in Nigeria in every election season. All the facets of the electoral process in Nigeria are bedeviled by malpractices that breed political violence. The components of the electoral process in which fraudulent practices are perpetrated by Nigerian politicians include the suffrage, registration of voters,

delineation of electoral constituencies, right to contest elections, electoral competition between or among rival political parties, electoral umpire charged with conduct and supervision of elections, selection of candidates, voting method, conduct of elections, determination of results, trial and determination of electoral disputes, electoral malpractices and their consequences (Nwabueze, 1993; Adagba, 2007; Ezirim & Mba, 2013).

Every form of violence has its aims and objectives which distinguish it from other forms of violence. According to National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (2014, p.7):

> Electoral violence can be distinguished from other types of political violence by its goal – to influence electoral conduct of voters, contestants, officials and other actors and/or to affect the electoral outcome. It can take place during any part of the electoral cycle. Electoral violence involves any use of force with the intent to cause harm or the threat to use force to harm persons or property involved in the electoral process

Electoral violence has also been described as a sub-category of political violence the aim of which is to influence upcoming elections or to challenge the results of recently concluded elections (Goldsmith, 2015; Hoglund, 2009; Laakso, 2007; Demarest & Langer, 2019).

Timothy Sisk's definition of electoral-related violence, cited in Verjee, Kwaja and Onubogu (2018), as acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arise in the context of electoral competition vividly

captures the various angles of electoral violence in Nigeria. As Sisk explains, when perpetrated to affect an electoral process, violence may be employed to influence the process of elections – such as efforts to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll – and to influence the outcome; the determining of winners in competitive races for political office.

Electoral violence accounts for most of the cases of political violence that have been witnessed in Nigeria from the colonial period (Ani & Uwizeyimana, 2022). The use of armed thugs to steal votes, vandalize properties, frighten, maim and assassinate political opponents and their supporters is a notorious practice in Nigerian politics (Anyika & Ani, 2022). The trend is that many Nigerian politicians parade and brag about their thugs in whom they seem to repose more confidence than the official security personnel assigned to guard them.

Overview of Relationship between Mass Media and Politics

The mass media and politics are related in many ways. Politics permeates every facet of human life and activity. This explains why Aristotle in his *Politics* described man as a political animal. Numerous political leaders across the globe have acknowledged the relevance of the mass media in politics and in the survival of the human society. In his letter to Edward Carrighton in 1787, the then President of the United States of America, Thomas Jefferson, stated: "were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." Jefferson's assertion underscores the perceived indispensability of the mass media in

politics and in society at large. The mass media played major role in the fall of President Zuma of South Africa (**Maseng, Koosentse & Ani 2018**). Coxall, Robins and Leach (2003, p.156) observe, in this direction, that "the communication of political information is an important process in the political system, and the mass media play a central role in this activity;" noting that "the mass media provide most of the electorate with a framework for understanding past, present and future events." The mass media play crucial roles in every society, notwithstanding the level of development and style of leadership of that society. Harold Lasswell (1969) identified three functions performed by the mass media these three key functions are surveillance of the world to report on-going events, interpretation of the meaning of events, and socialization of individuals into their cultural settings.   Olayiwola (1991, p.33) added that "another attribute of the media is the deliberate manipulation of the political process." This is indicative of the perceived influence of the mass media on political systems and processes

In contemporary politics and media practice, mass media and politics have mutually beneficial and disruptive relationships. It is believed in many quarters that media and politics are now so intertwined that they are hardly separable. This growing relationship and interplay of politics and mass media is captured in McNair's (2002) claim that to a greater extent now than ever before, the media are politics and politics is the media. In the same vein, Gjylije (2014) avers that Political communication in modern societies cannot be achieved entirely and successfully in the absence of the active role of the mass media. Gjylije believes that politics needs media to convey its messages and daily activities to the public and the media becomes

part of the political communication as the sender of the message, the intermediary as well as the 'shaper' of public opinion on the political realm.

The aim of political parties around the world is to control political power. They try to market their ideologies, manifestoes, candidates, activities and programmes to the electorate through effective persuasive communication. Mohl (2010) observes in this direction that politicians and parties, the government and the opposition communicate publicly every day with one another with the aid of instrumentalize the media, to apply their programs, interests and power goals. Such goals cannot be achieved without proper integration of the media in the process. Consequently, Balle (2011, p. 63) argues that considered as an art and practice of the government, politics is inseparably an action and conviction; an act on the course of events to influence the life of citizens; and at the same time, an attempt to convince every citizen with the purpose of substantiating the decision taken and achieve their highest possible efficiency. In this respect, communication is necessary for politics.

The close relationship between mass media and politics throws up a resultant relationship between party politics and media politics. This presupposes that politics is no longer played only in and among political parties but also in and through the mass media. Attempts have been made by writers and commentators to relate media politics to party politics, and to also differentiate one from the other. Zaller (1999) explains that the major characteristic of party politics is that politicians compete as members of organized teams. The writer further states that the defining feature of media politics is that

politicians seek to gain office, and to conduct politics while in office, through communication to the citizens via the mass media.

In a nutshell, the mass media are involved in political activities and maneuvers and politics is involved in mass media practices, malpractices and manipulations. But Fuga (2014) observes that it is unknown whether it is politics that uses and subjugates the media or it is the media industry that uses and consumes politicians. Fuga (2014), however, concludes that there is a more mutual process of interests that are rationalized in an instrumental manner rather than the domination of one actor versus another.

The story of the relationship between the mass media and politics is not different in Nigeria. In fact, politics is at the foundation of Nigerian journalism. Politics is also the propeller and, unfortunately, the problem of Nigerian journalism. Oso (2012, p.10) writes that there has been a lot of emphasis on the role of the press in Nigerian politics from the colonial days when politics and journalism were more or less fused together, noting that it has been difficult to separate them. The relationship between mass media and politics in Nigeria is deep and fundamental. Golding and Elliot (1979 p.31) paint a vivid verbal picture of the relationship between the mass media and politics in Nigeria and their seeming inseparability:

> Nigerian journalism was thus created by anti-colonial protests, baptized in the waters of nationalist propaganda, and matured in party politics. The separation of politics and journalism has remained incomplete and the dual allegiances of journalists to professional and political goals have created conflicts

whose resolution in daily practice underpins much of contemporary Nigerian journalism.

The mass media and politics in Nigeria have a long and far-reaching relationship. They have featured prominently in each other's successes and failures. There is no end in sight to the double-edged relationship between the mass media and politics in Nigeria.

Historical Perspectives of Political Violence in Nigeria

In the pre-colonial era, the various ethnic nationalities that constitute the present day Nigeria existed as separate geographical, cultural and political entities. With the advent of colonialism, efforts were made by the British colonial masters to fuse the disparate entities to form a united entity majorly for administrative convenience. This lopsided arrangement birthed the much-storied amalgamation of the northern and the southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914 by the then Governor-General of Nigeria, Lord Fredrick Lugard. Nigeria began to exist as one political entity with all the inherent disparities, inequities, inequalities and peculiarities of the constituting units rearing their centrifugal heads. The 1914 amalgamation of the northern and the southern protectorates to form what is today known as Nigeria can be perceived as the foundation of the rancorous political relationships among the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. This is because the constituting units were unequally yoked without proper consideration of their differences and peculiarities. The hasty marriage of the hitherto politically divergent entities created a charged atmosphere for suffocating scramble for political

breath and survival of not the fittest, as it were, but the most loyal stooge.

A new angle was added to Nigeria's political development when the Clifford Constitution of 1922 introduced the elective principle into the Nigerian politics which made provision for voting only in Lagos and Calabar. Notwithstanding the restrictiveness of the principle, elections were devoid of violence. However, many writers, analysts and commentators trace the origin of electoral violence in Nigerian politics to the manipulation of elections along ethnic lines by the colonial masters (Abah & Nwokwu, 2015; Nnoli, 1980). "Colonial manipulations of elections led to the poisoning of relations between the north and the south with the resultant effect of a consequent increase in social distance between members of their populations" (Nnoli, 1980, cited in Abah & Nwokwu, 2015, p.36).

As the nascent Nigeria attempted to brace up to the challenge of the hollow togetherness and political oneness foisted on the composing units by the 1914 amalgamation and the new political culture of elective principle introduce by the Clifford Constitution of 1922, the Richards Constitution of 1946 appeared to make matters worse by splitting the country into north, south and west, engendering fierce struggle for power among the three entities that were just beginning to co-exist as one political entity. The unfortunate inconsistencies in later colonial constitutions, most of which were designed and implemented without proper local consultations and contributions, set the stage for political unrest and violence in Nigeria.

The ethnic colorations and dimensions of political violence in Nigeria became apparent in 1952 when Nnamdi Azikiwe was

defeated in the Western Regional House of Assembly and he swiftly returned to the East and displaced Chief Eyo Ita to become the Premier of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun, later known as the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). There were also cases of electoral violence with ethnic slants in the 1959 general elections resulting in huge loss of lives and destruction of properties. Citing Osaghe (1998), Abah and Nwokwu (2015, p.36) note:

> However, scholars are in agreement that the real political violence emerged in 1964 federal elections. Nigeria at independence in 1960 opted for parliamentary system of government similar to that of the British political system. Incidentally, the first post independence elections organized by the Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa/President, Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1964 and 1965 were alleged to be characterized by widespread complaints of fraud, violence and intimidation.

The regional elections of 1964 and 1965 were marred by massive rigging and widespread violence that claimed over 200 lives (Anifowose, 1983; HRW, 2007). The sad developments prompted the military to intervene in Nigerian politics and hold sway for the initial period between 1966 and 1979. The first military intervention in politics in Nigeria took place in January 1966. The coup was led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu ostensibly to stop the looming anarchy in the country.

The military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo handed over power in 1979 to civilian administration led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Unfortunately, the Shagari-led could not demonstrate sufficient capacity to govern the country. Ihonvbere (1991, p.25) captures Shagari government's lapses and the resultant return of military to politics in Nigeria:

> The civilian administration was plagued with political intolerance, election malpractices, massive corruption, general mismanagement, the neglect of the basic needs of the majority, violence, the erosion of the autonomy of the judiciary, and general economic decay and dislocation. Inflation, prostitution, unemployment, hunger, and destitution reached unparalleled levels as politicians reveled in squander and opulence. This was enough excuse for the military to strike again on New Year's Eve of 1983.

All the elections conducted since the return of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999 have been characterized by widespread fraud, irregularities, manipulations and violence. The 19999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections were all marred by violence and malpractices.

Causes and Curses of Political Violence in Nigeria

Many factors are responsible for the endemic political violence in Nigeria. Politics is perceived as the quickest means of amassing wealth in Nigeria, through corrupt practices. The key intention of most politicians aspiring to occupy public offices in Nigeria is to get opportunities to loot the treasuries of the states, local government

areas, ministries, and the country. This inordinate quest for wealth acquisition and power among Nigerian politicians' casts politics as a do-or-die affair in Nigeria.   With this unfortunate political trend, Nigerian politicians exhibit the propensity to kill, maim opponents and the electorate and vandalize public and private properties, especially in the build-up to, during and after elections. This results in unpopular candidates occupying public office by hook or by crook to the detriment of the country.

The money politics in Nigeria equally contributes to political violence in the country. Some Nigerian "money bags" either wangle political positions for themselves or buy political positions for their underwhelming political stooges. In the former case, they loot the public treasuries with impunity and in the latter case, they impose themselves as godfathers. Godfatherism is a factor that has contributed immensely to political violence in Nigeria. In some cases, violence results from the conflicts between godfathers and their godsons.

Ethnicity and tribalism are also to blame for political violence in Nigeria. From the colonial times till date, many cases of political violence in Nigeria resulted from the activities and actions of members of the ethnic nationalities or tribes who felt that candidates of their extractions were rigged out of elections or that their tribes or ethnic groups are marginalized in the national politics and resource allocation. Ethnicity and tribalism in Nigerian politics is responsible for the uneven development and distribution of amenities in the country. Many Nigerian politicians are, at best, ethnic, tribal and

religious bigots. The occupation of public offices by such bigots causes and fuels political violence in the country.

Electorate malpractices and irregularities also cause political violence in Nigeria. Elections in Nigeria since the colonial period lacked transparency, fairness and freeness which are the essential ingredients of democratic electoral process. Elections in the country had, rather, been characterized by:

(i)   Manipulation of the decisions and activities at the various levels of the electoral process by the governments and politicians;
(ii) Corruption of officials and electorate;
(iii) Violence during campaigns, polling and collation;
(iv) Rigging through the stuffing, snatching and destruction of ballot boxes and falsification of results, and
(v)   Ineffective electoral dispute resolution mechanisms (Iruonagbe, Imahonopi, & Ahmadu, 2013)

There are many factors that are responsible for electoral violence in Nigeria. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (2014) rightly states that the underlying causes of electoral violence, and in fact, political violence, are often rooted in social, political and economic deficiencies including but not limited to: a lack of information; polarization and divergent preferences; cultural, religious, tribal and ethnic clefts; scarcity of resources and ongoing dispute over resources; large-scale inequalities; history of civil conflict or war; and weak security and rule of law institutions. This is a vivid depiction of the situation in Nigeria.

Similarly, Verjee, Kwaja and Onubogu (2018, p.1) opine that "social and economic inequalities, ethnic and religious divisions, and structural weaknesses, such as corruption and weak state capacity, remain prevalent across Nigeria and contribute to the risk of electoral violence." The authors further state that "other important factors contributing to electoral violence have evolved since 2015, including changing forms of insecurity and prominence of disputes within, rather than between, the political parties." These factors have continued to cause violence in the political processes in Nigeria. They occur in different forms and at the different stages of the electoral processes.

The various forms of electoral violence that have characterized elections in Nigeria for decades take place at three stages namely, pre-election stage, election stage and post-election stage. In the build-up to virtually every election in Nigeria, violence is visited on the electorate and opponents. Such violence activities are usually carried out by unpopular candidates or candidates who have lost their credibility and feel that violence is the only means available to them for winning such elections. The pre-election violence is often a prelude to and a gauge of the magnitude of the anticipated much heavier violence during and in the aftermath of the elections. Ugiagbe (2009) states that these three stages of electoral violence in Nigeria have the physical and the psychological dimensions and range from acts of assault, arson, ballot box snatching and stuffing to kidnapping and assassinations.

Political violence in any political system has innumerable adverse consequences. It results in destruction of lives and properties,

disaffection, ethic rivalry, mediocrity in leadership, among others. The underdevelopment in many countries of the world is caused by political instability resulting from political violence.

> Electoral violence subverts basic standards for democratic elections. Violence against candidates, activists, journalists, voters, election officials and observers can reduce voters' choice and suppress the vote. Violence can be used to intimidate individuals and communities to vote against their will for a candidate. Assassination of a candidate can even change electoral outcomes (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2014, p.6).

No meaningful progress can be achieved in a political environment that is bedeviled by political violence. This is, indeed, the bane of national development in Nigeria. National development in Nigeria has suffered serious setbacks orchestrated by political violence and the attendant political instability.

Press and Political Violence in Nigeria: Victim, Vector or Extinguisher?

The press is popularly referred to as the "fourth estate of the realm." This nickname presupposes that the press is the fourth organ of government, after the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) provides 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 (Chapter 2) and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people." This provision

indicates the constitutional recognition of the relevance of the press in the Nigerian political system.

The mass media play big roles in every society. Such roles include information dissemination, surveillance and correlation of the environment, status conferral and watchdog role. The press particularly plays important roles in politics. Olayiwola (1991) writes the press has always been involved in politics, formation of public opinion, perception of images of candidates vying for political offices, the definition of social reality and social norms, the education, information, enlightenment and entertainment of the public and also in the presentation and clarification of issues, values, goals and changes in culture and society, the world over.

The press exerts both negative and positive influences on political systems. In other words, the Nigerian press, just like the press in other countries, can cause, fuel and/or quell political violence and instability. The way and manner the press reports political events, actions and activities can trigger political tension and unrest. The assertion that "some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions have some kinds of effects" (Berelson, 1948) holds sway in any analysis of political reporting in Nigeria. The agenda set by the mass media on any political event or issue, to a large extent, determine the people's perception and reaction to that event or issue. Some political crises in Nigeria had been partly blamed on biased media coverage, reportage or innuendos. Meadow (2009, p.237) explains that:

The media play two crucial roles with respect to election violence. First, they provide evidence-or at least the external implication-that an election is illegitimate or being contested domestically, regardless of the fairness of the election or its certification by independent election commissions and election monitoring organizations. Interpretative frames may imply that the election has not been-free and fair‖ and has been rigged through voter intimidation or vote-counting fraud. Second, by showing compatriots being hurt or killed, the media serve to inform the domestic audience of the risks and dangers of participating in or protesting the election. While graphic images of violence may incite further protests, such protests more often dissipate in response to the risks, especially when the media also cover suppression of protests (like those in Tiananmen Square or more recently in Iran) and officials use the media to threaten violence against protesters.

The press in Nigeria developed along political and ethnic lines. The Nigerian press has been neck-deep in the country's politics. Most media outfits in Nigeria from the colonial periods till date are founded, owned and controlled by career politicians. The idiosyncrasies of such politicians determine and colour the editorial policies of their media organizations. The media organizations in Nigeria are often drawn into political battles, overtly or covertly, through the political influences of their owners. The pattern of media ownership in Nigeria, which is currently dominated by private ownership, makes the mass media to be irresistibly involved in

politics. By this trend, the aphorism that "he who pays the piper calls the tune" holds sway.

It should also be noted that the government-owned media in Nigeria are at best the political tools of the government in power. All government-owned media in Nigeria, whether at the federal or state level are merely used to propagate party ideology and manifestoes and to attempt to perpetuate the ruling party in power by singing the unwarranted and unjustifiable praises of such party or its candidates, without freedom to criticize the government no matter how constructive.

The foregoing indicates that the Nigerian press has played important parts in politics in the country from the colonial era but not without obvious daunting challenges. Olayiwola (1991) further explains that during the period of nationalism, the Nigerian press served as political recruiters and mobilizers. The party papers served as vehicles for changing political consciousness, and through them the ideas of nationalism were propagated. The press generally recruited people to political movements and they contributed to party organization. The press also encouraged the penetration of political activities into the then provinces.

The Nigerian press has acted as the vector or cause of political violence in Nigeria through its biased political reporting and ethno-religious leanings. It has been noted that the Nigerian press developed along political party and ethnic lines. The press in Nigeria has failed to extricate itself from the vice grip of ethnicity and political control. "The mass media sometimes instigate conflict through biased reporting, deliberate distortions, criminal partisanship

and unprofessionalism compounded by influences of tribalism" (Iruonagbe, Imahonopi, & Ahmadu, 2013, p.13).

These political and ethnic biases in mass media reporting is mostly noticed in Nigeria in the build-up to, during and immediately after national elections. "Electoral violence reporting is particularly sensitive to political biases in the news media" in Nigeria (Demarest & Langer (2019, p.85).

The ethnic and tribal connections of the press also encourage political violence along ethnic and tribal lines in Nigeria. Adebanwi, (2016), cited in Demarest and Langer (2019, p.86) regrets that "the Nigerian press renders itself totally captive to ethno-regional and ethno-religious passions and calculations." This has, in fact, triggered and fueled political violence in Nigeria. Ojo (2013) concludes that "the mass media are no doubt a political resource. In a plural and deeply divided society like Nigeria, its role is even more imperative in achieving national cohesion, integration, and stability. The nag, however, in Nigeria is that the mass media – both publicly and privately owned – are more or less ethnic jingoists."

The press has also been a victim of political violence in Nigeria. Whether a media organization is involved in politics or remains neutral, its reports on political activities and events are continuously scrutinized by political parties and their supporters. The press and journalists in Nigeria do not only suffer politically motivated attacks because they are involved in politics, they also suffer such attacks for their refusal to break their political neutrality, which is professional and ethical, to become partisan. In Nigeria, media organizations owned by politicians are part of the political weapons of their

proprietors for winning elections and exerting political influence. Journalists in such private media organizations do not enjoy the freedom to write unbiased political stories.

Beyond the challenges of the private media organizations in Nigeria, the publicly owned media in Nigeria are not completely free from unhealthy political control and interferences. The public media organizations in Nigeria are the mouthpiece of the government in power. No journalist in such public media organizations can openly criticize the government, no matter how constructive the criticism maybe, without huge penalties. It is, in fact, the government in power that appoints and changes the leadership of the public media organizations at will. The directors, managing directors and other key leaders of the public media organizations are appointed by the government. Some of such appointments are given to political cohorts who are not even journalists. The influence of government on public media organizations in Nigeria is overwhelming, distorting and destabilizing. With such overwhelming influence, the government uses public media organizations to attack perceived or suspected enemies of government, thereby engendering and heightening political violence and instability.

According to Abati (2006), cited in Iruonagbe, Imahonopi, and Ahmadu (2013, p.13):

> In the emergent power equations and in the face of the gross violation of national interest by successive governments, the media is drawn into a competition for power. Suppressing, gagging and intimidating the media and the rest of the civil society have proven to be a necessary condition for the achievement of this

agenda. Restrictive laws and anti-media mechanisms
have proven to be most convenient, the general purpose
of which has been direct assault on press freedom.

Journalists have always been easy targets of political violence in
Nigeria. They have suffered as victims of political violence in the
country for what they or their media organizations did or failed or
refused to do. The journalists in Nigeria appear to be the endangered
species.   Politicians in the country are generally uneasy in the
presence of journalists. There have been numerous cases of beating,
maiming, kidnapping, imprisonment and dismissal of journalists as a
result of political violence in Nigeria. There have also been cases of
destruction of media houses and equipment as a result of political
violence.

The case of Jones Abiri easily comes to mind. Abiri is the publisher
of *Weekly Source* – a local tabloid circulated in Yenagoa, Bayelsa
State. Officials of the Department for Security Service (DSS)
arrested Abiri in July 2016 and detained him for over two years
without any charge, after he published an article on 10 July 2016
about oil blocks and politics in Nigeria. He was released on 15
August 2018, after a Magistrate Court struck out the charges leveled
against him. But eight months after his release, the DSS re-arrested
and charged him with cybercrime, terrorism, petroleum production
and sabotage (Amnesty International, 2019)

Journalists were variously attacked and assaulted during the November 2019
Governorship and National Assembly elections in Kogi and Bayelsa States. During
the election in Kogi State, a reporter with *The Cable* online newspaper,
Chinedu Asadu, reported that police officers seized his cell phone for

15 minutes for attempting to take photos of a politician giving money to women waiting to cast their votes. Asadu claimed that he left the polling place after collecting his phone because another police officer made threatening comments, and he feared the officer would harm him (Amnesty International, 2019).

Similarly, Committee to Protect Journalists (2019) reported that during the November 2019 elections in Bayelsa State, four unidentified individuals wielding canes and bottles intercepted Adejumor Kabir, a reporter with the *Premium Times* newspaper, while he was traveling to the main office of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission. The attackers forced Kabir's driver to leave, and drove Kabir to an isolated area in Opolo, in Yenagoa, the state capital, where they interrogated him for two hours. After questioning and accusing him of manipulating election results, they released him.

Journalists were equally attacked during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Committee to Protect journalists reports that Nonso Isiguzo, a news editor with the privately owned Nigeria Info radio station, he was traveling on election day between polling stations to cover the March 9 gubernatorial and state assembly elections in the Ahoada West local government area in Rivers State when armed men, some wearing camouflage uniforms, stopped their Nigeria Info-branded car, told Isiguzo and his driver, Sunday Isiitu, to get out, and took their car keys. Shortly afterwards, a second car carrying five others whom Isiguzo identified as journalists with accredited press tags was also stopped at the same point on the road. The men released Isiguzo, Isiitu, and the other journalists after holding them on the side of the road for

two hours**.** After that experience, Isiguzo did not continue reporting the elections in the area.

Political violence has even claimed the lives of many journalists in Nigeria. **Rhodes** (2009) writes that Bayo Ohu, assistant news editor and political reporter for the Lagos, Nigeria-based *The Guardian* murdered on Sunday, September 20, 2009. According to eyewitnesses and local reports, five gunmen and one female ringleader shot Ohu repeatedly in his doorway while his **Rhodes** states that, according to local reports, Ohu's assassination may have been linked to his reporting on a rerun of council elections in Ekiti State.

Conclusion

The press has featured prominently in political violence in Nigeria as victim, victor and extinguisher. The way and manner the press reports political issues and events in some cases trigger and fuel political violence. The press can cause or escalate political violence through lopsided reports and sensationalism. The press in Nigeria has been the victim of political violence on numerous occasions across the years. This has manifested in the harassment of journalists, imprisonment of journalists, murdering of journalists, burning of media houses and destruction of media equipment, among other ways. It is worthy of note that the Nigerian press has quelled political violence in the country on a number of occasions through balanced reporting on political issues. The ability of the mainstream media to deescalate or quell political violence, however, appears to be fast diminishing with the increasing ubiquity, intrusiveness and seeming intractability of the social media.

References

Abah, E.O. and Nwokwu, P.M (2015). Political violence and the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. *IOSR journal of humanities and social sciences, Vol.20, Issue 11, pp. 33-44*

Abati, R (2006). "A Tough Moment for the Media" Nigeria Village Square. October.

Adagba, O. (2007). "The Democratic Process in Nigeria: The Significance of Mass Participation
in Electoral Process". *The Electoral Journal,* 1(1):42-65

Alemika, E. (2004).. "Elections as Organized Crime: Nigerian Experience." Paper Presented at the Centre for African Studies Seminar, University of Cape Town, May 12.

Ani K. J. Anyika, V. O. & Uwizeyimana D. E. (2019), "The Political Elite, Church and Corruption in Nigerian Environment", *Journal of Reviews on Global Economics,* 8, 1598-1603

Ani K. J. & Uwizeyimana D. E. (2022) Introducing Elections and Electoral Violence in Africa in Kelechi Johnmary Ani & Victor Ojakorotu (2022) *Elections and Electoral Violence in Nigeria,* Palgrave Macmillan: London, pp.1-10

Anyika, O. V. & Ani, K. J. (2022) Historical Review of Electoral Violence in Nigeria in Kelechi Johnmary Ani & Victor Ojakorotu (2022) *Elections and Electoral Violence in Nigeria,* Palgrave Macmillan: London, pp. 21-34

Anifowose, R. (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba Experience.* Enugu: Nok Publishers.

Berelson, B. (1948). 'Communication and Public Opinion,' in W. Schramm (ed.), *Communication*

in Modern Society. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

Balcells, L. (2015). Political violence: An institutional approach. In J. Gandhi and R. Ruiz (eds), *Routledge handbook on political institutions.*

Balle, Francis *Mediat dhe shoqëritë*, Botimi i 15, Botimet Papirus, Tiranë 2011

Besley, T. and Persson, T. (2010). The Logic of political violence.

Bosi, L and Malthaner, S. (2015). Political violence. In: D.D. Porta and M. Diani (eds). *Oxford handbook of social movements.*

Cohen, J.A. (2006). Necessity, political violence and terrorism. *Stetson law review,* Vol.35

Committee to Protect Journalists (2019). Nigerian journalists attacked and threatened while

covering Bayelsa and Kogi state elections. https://cpj.org/2019/11/nigerian-journalists-attacked-and-threatened-while/

Committee to Protect Journalists (2019). Journalists in Nigeria detained, harassed, and assaulted while covering state elections. https://cpj.org/2019/03/journalists-in-nigeria-detained-harassed-and-assau/

Coxall, B. and Robins, L. (2003). The mass media and politics. In: *Contemporary British   politics*. London: Palgrave.

Ezirim, G.E. and Mba, P.O. (2013). Electoral process and political violence in Africa: A preview of the 2015 elections in Nigeria. *International journal of research in arts and social sciences, vol.6, pp.280-295*

Fuga, Artan *Komunikimi në shoqërinë masive* Botimet Papirus, Tiranë 2014

Golding, P. and Elliot, P. (1979). *Making the News.* London: Longman.

Human Rights Watch (2007). *Election or Selection? Human Right Abuse and Threat to Free and Fair Elections in Nigeria,* retrieved from http://www.hrw.org/en/reports.

Iruonagbe, T.C., Imhonopi, D. and Ahmadu, F.O. (2013). A conceptual review of mass media   and political violence in Nigeria between 1999 and 2013. *New Media and Mass Communication* Vol.20, pp.12-20

Maseng, J. O., Koosentse, C. T. and Ani, K. J. (2018), An Evaluation of Media's Role in De-popularizing and Influencing Political Attitudes towards Jacob Zuma: Collating Events Leading to His Removal, *Gender and Behaviour,* 16(2): 11604-11622

Meadow, R.G. (2009). Political violence and media. *Marquette law review*, Vol.93(1), pp. 231

Mohl, Stephan *Gazetaria* K & B, Tiranë 2010 6. McNair, Brian *Journalism and democracy, an evaluation of the political public sphere*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2002, ISBN 0–415–21280–4

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (2014). NDI Guidance Document for the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM). Retrieved from https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Monitoring-and-Mitigating-Electoral-Conflict.pdf

Nnoli, O. (1980). *Ethnic Politics i\n Nigeria.* Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.

Nwolise, O. B. C. (2007). Electoral Violence and Nigeria's 2007 Elections, *Journal of African Elections, 6(2).*

Olayiwola, R.O. (1991). Political communications: Press and politics in Nigeria's second republic. *African media review*, Vol. 5 No.2, pp.31-45

Osaghae, E. E. (1998). *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence.* London: C. Hurst and Co. (Publishers) Ltd.

Oso, L. (2012). Press and Politics in Nigeria: On whose side? Inaugural lecture at the University of Lagos

Rexha, G. (2014). "The role of media in political communication: The case of Kosovo." Paper presented at UBT International Conference, 30, retrieved from **Https://knowledgecentreubt. uni.net/conference/2014/all-events/30**

Robert G. Meadow, *Political Violence and the Media*, 93 Marq. L. Rev. 231 (2009). Available at: **http://scholarship.law. marquette.edu/mulr/vol93/iss1/14**

Rhodes, T (2009). Journalist killed on a Sunday morning at home in Nigeria. https://www.refworld.org/docid/4b25fc043c.html

Sousa, C.A. (2013). Political violence, collective functioning and health: A review of the literature. *Medcoflsurviv*. 29(3), pp.169-197

Ugiagbe, T.B. (2009). "Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Implications for Security, Peace and Development." *Peace and Conflict Monitor.* http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_ article=697

WHO (2002). World report on violence and health. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2002. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream /handle/10665/42495/9241545615_eng.pdf?sequence=1

Zaller, J. (1999). A theory of media politics: How the interests of politicians, journalists and citizens shape the news. Retrieved from www.uky.edu/AS/polisci/peffheyllpdf/zallertheoryof mediapolitics(10-99).pdf