Perverse Electoral Politics and Securitized Youths: Implications for Peace and Security in Nigeria

Olayide I. OLADEJI

Department of Political Science
Faculty of the Social Sciences
Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti
Ekiti State, Nigeria.
Cell: +2348070709393
E-mail: oladeji.olayide@eksu.edu.ng

&

Samuel Babatola AYITI
Department of Political Science
Faculty of the Social Sciences
Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti
Ekiti State, Nigeria.
Cell: +2348035210230
E-mail: ayitibabatola@gmail.com

Abstract

Elections anywhere are moments of uncertainties because of multiplicity of actors who struggle for political relevance and control of the government. In Nigeria, electoral politics and elections are often laced with fractious violence, which often compromises the integrity of elections. The return to democracy in 1999 has multiplied rather than diminished the incidences of electoral violence in Nigeria. While the contemporary violence has been seen as a rupture from the past, what is, however, regularly overlooked in the literature is the involvement of 'securitized youths' in the reproduction and acceleration of complex electoral violence(s) in post-1999 elections in Nigeria. Relaying on secondary data and the theory of securitization, this paper explores how the perverse electoral politics in Nigeria produces 'securitized youths' and constrains peace and security in the country. The paper argues that the very trajectory of perverse electoral politics in Nigeria facilitates the development of securitized youths, which are being used and shielded by political elites as private bodyguards and political thugs. The paper shows that the securitization not only turns political thuggery into a 'big business', but also weakens the capacity of state to enforce its laws and

protect citizens and properties. The paper concludes by making some recommendations on how to reverse perverse electoral politics for peace and security in Nigeria.

***Key Words**: Perverse Electoral Politics, Securitized Youths, Violence, Peace, and Security.*

Introduction

Nigeria is a post-military democracy. The country returned to democracy in 1999 after almost two decades of military rule. The current democratic dispensation is the longest since Nigeria's independence in 1960. Indeed, Nigeria's democratic experience/practice in the Fourth Republic has been unbroken for two decades with six successive multiparty elections and peaceful transfer of power from a defeated ruling political class/party to the opposition[1]. Despite this feat, the democratic process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been fledgling and is remarkably constrained by serious flaws (Oladeji, 2019: 6). Consequently, Omotola (2013) contends that Nigeria's democratic experience in the Fourth Republic is 'trapped in transition'. He argues that this is due basically to the failure of the democratic process to improve its democratic qualities in the procedure, content, and results (p. 171). A critical aspect of the flawed and trapped democratic process in Nigeria since 1999 has a lot to do with perverse elections.

An election is an integral part of democracy in that it gives citizens (usually adults) opportunity to participate in the political process by selecting those who govern the state. Indeed, there exists a synergy between election and democracy since it is almost impracticable to have democracy without free,

[1]The People's Democratic Party (PDP) lost its political dominance and grip on power of 16 years, when its presidential candidate and the incumbent president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, lost and conceded defeat to the candidate of the main opposition party, the All Progressives Party (APC), General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd). Apparently, this was the first time an incumbent and ruling party would loss and concede defeat in an election in the history of Nigeria.

fair and credible elections through which adult citizens freely select those who will represent people's interests in government. Indeed, elections present legitimate and peaceful means by which political power is won and/or transferred in a state. However, by its very nature, electoral process is paradoxically conflictual due to multiplicity of actors and complexity of interests competing for political relevance and control of government. This may be what Adam Przeworski had in mind when he contended that "democracy is a form of institutionalization of continual conflicts and of uncertainty of subjecting all interests to uncertainty" (Przeworski, 1986: 583). That is, the electoral process promotes uncertainties and/or conflicts in its attempt to ensure competitiveness among divergent ideological political interests over the control of state power. It must be stated, however, that the sort of conflict generated by electoral politics is not, under normal condition, disruptive, but one that creates a healthy rivalry among political parties or contenders to present their political programmes to the electorates with a view to forming government.

But the Nigerian electoral experience, in the Fourth Republic, has often negated this 'peaceful conflict' by promoting fractious and fractionating violence along party, religion, and ethnic fault lines. In fact, as we will demonstrate later, the return to democracy in 1999 has multiplied rather than diminished incidences of electoral/political violence in Nigeria. Put in another way, the Nigerian electoral process, instead of being an alternative to violence and agent of peaceful power transfer, has continued to be primary conflict generator, no thanks to the do-or-die posture of most political elites in electoral contests. For example, because of unbridled quest for power, political assassination has dominated the political scene in Nigeria since 1999. Some cases of political assassination include: the gruesome murder of Chief Bola Ige, a serving Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation, in his bedroom on December 23, 2001, the killing of Harry Marshall, who was a former National Vice-Chairman (South-South) of the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), in Abuja in 2003 during the presidential

elections, Chief Aminasori Alfred Dikibo, a National Vice-Chairman (South-South) of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), was assassinated in Delta State in February 2004, while Chief Funso Williams, an influential politician and PDP gubernatorial aspirant in Lagos, was found dead, apparently strangled and stabbed, at his home in Ikoyi, Lagos. The sad irony of the matter is that the killers are mostly unknown and always get away with their heinous crime.

Thus, virtually all the post-military elections in the country have been marred by electoral violence of varying degrees, intensities and durations. Indeed, when an electoral process becomes conflictive or violent, its function as an umpire for social decision-making is perverse. Where this happens, the electoral process disrupts rather than safeguards societal peace and security. Taken together, 'peace and security' could mean a synergy, a kind of complementary state of affair, where in violence and conflict do not pervade a society or state. Following Johan Galtung's classificatory scheme, the term 'peace' could denote the absence of hostility or violent disturbances (negative peace) and the presence of conditions – political equality and socioeconomic justice – for the maintenance of this (positive peace) (Galtung, 1996). That is, for a harmonious and tranquil society to be achieved, Galtung believes that members of the society must have opportunity to achieve their potentials without hindrance. In other words, certain structural and cultural conditions must be fulfilled in order to create a peaceful society. Similarly, the term 'security' could be taken to mean "the situation that exists as a result of the establishment of measures for the protection of persons, information and property against hostile persons, influences and actions" (Akin, 2008 cited in Oladeji, 2016: 362). That is, security presupposes the existence of conditions within which people could go about their normal daily activities without fear or threat to their lives and properties (Oladeji, 2016).

However, and as we will demonstrate later in the case of Nigeria, when an electoral process is perverse, it does not only inhibit people's political and

civic rights to elect their representatives in government freely, but also it creates conditions for electoral/political violence. That is, perverse electoral politics not only compromises both the negative and positive peace of a society, but it also disrupts the security of such society. For example, it is a public knowledge in Nigeria that electoral politics and elections are often laced with fractious violence, which often compromises the integrity of elections. In fact, the return to democracy in 1999 has multiplied rather than diminished the incidences of electoral violence in Nigeria. Consequently, the issue of electoral violence has continuously dominated academic discourse on democracy and national security in Nigeria since 1999. However, while the contemporary electoral violence has been seen as a rupture from the past, what is regularly overlooked in the literature has been the involvement of 'securitized youths' in the reproduction and acceleration of complex electoral violence(s) in post-1999 elections in Nigeria. That is, most of the literature on the connection between electoral violence, peace, and security have tended to ignore the implications of the agency of a group of the Nigerian youths (political thugs) recruited and secured against the law by politicians to perpetrate electoral/political violence for peace and security in Nigeria.

To fill the identified gap in the literature, this paper adopted the theory of securitization to explore how the perverse Nigerian electoral politics produces 'securitized youths' and further constrains peace and security in the country. Consequently, the paper sought answers to the following questions: What is the nature of perverse electoral politics in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019? What are the factors causing electoral violence in Nigeria? What is the level of youths' involvement in electoral violence in Nigeria? In what ways are the violent youths being securitized by political elites/citizens? What are the implications of the securitization for peace and security in Nigeria?

Perverse Electoral Politics in Nigeria

As noted earlier in this paper, Nigeria is a post-authoritarian democracy still struggling to find its footing (Ani & Osisioma, 2014). Consequently, democracy, especially electoral politics, since 1999 when Nigeria returned to a democratic order, has mostly been subject of pessimism and uncertainty. Election as an element of democracy ensures that leaders have credible and accepted mandates to govern. Elections give voice to the public by facilitating communication between the government and the governed (Höglund, 2006). Put in another way, democracy retains its meaning, essence, substance, and relevance only when people, despite ideological and/or identity affiliations, are accorded equal opportunity to shape and reshape the issues of governing their own affairs. Given the premium it places on popular participation, electoral politics offers the widest and best avenue for this opportunity. To do this successfully, electoral politics must exude integrity measured in terms of adherence to electoral laws, openness, transparency, accountability, competition, and participation. Thus, while election may not always guarantee democracy, it nonetheless advances the overall objectives of democratic society. For instance, transparent, free, fair and credible elections are capable of discouraging bad governance since it gives the citizens opportunity to hold leaders accountable.

However, when the electoral process is perceived as unfair, unresponsive or corrupt, its legitimatizing role is compromised and stakeholders may be motivated to go outside of the established norms to achieve their objectives (Fischer, 2002). In order words, a perverted electoral process may serve to engender electoral violence (Laakso, 2007). Indeed, unbridled lust for political power, which a Political Scientist, Femi Omotoso, refers to as 'politics of power and power of politics' (Omotoso, 2019) may not only pervert electoral process but also make it combustible particularly in a multinational divided state like Nigeria. For example, the political processes of post-independence Nigeria are habitually characterized by struggle for ethnic appropriation, consolidation and hegemonic control of the state

(Araoye, 2012: 12). Consequently, elections in the country are mostly contested and/or won based on primordial ethno-regional affiliations. The resultant effect of this is that electoral contests are reduced to ethno-regional 'wars'. In fact, this could be blamed for the collapse of the initial republics – First, Second and Third Republic (see Omotoso, 2019) – and could account for the perverted nature of democratic and electoral processes in the Fourth Republic.

Another perverted issue in electoral politics in Nigeria, itself a corollary of ethno-regional politics, is the ostracising of certain citizens from political contests by labelling them non-indigenes in their places of residence. Indeed, this has been at the heart of much of the electoral cum democratic deficits in Nigeria, especially at the state and local government levels. Indigeneity thus becomes a powerful exclusionary political tool in the hands of the so-called 'indigenous elites' in their normless and seemingly endless struggles for power, recognition, and resources (Oladeji, 2012). This has pitched indigenes against non-indigenes and has often led to retaliatory 'wars' of attrition in virtually all states and local governments in Nigeria for control of political power to the extent of it being described as "a recurrent Nigerian tragedy" (Higazi, 2011). Thus, the 'politics of difference' underpins perverse electoral process and 'festering political conflicts threatening to tear Nigeria into pieces' (Oladeji, 2012: 75). While this is widespread in Nigeria, the situation is Jos seems unique. With the creation of Jos North Local Government in 1991, there have been constant violent conflicts between the so-called indigenes of Jos – Afizere, Anaguta and Berom – and the non-indigenes, especially the Jasawa (Hausa/Fulani) group over the political control of the local government. This has led to killings of many people and destructions of properties worth billions of Naira (Oladeji, 2012).

Furthermore, the perversion of electoral politics in Nigeria is being done through compromised and often partisan electoral management bodies (Jinadu, 2011; UNDP, 2011). Election management bodies (EMBs) are at the fulcrum of issues related to impartiality, independence, efficiency,

professionalism, and transparency (Lyons, 2005). Where any of these are questioned or compromised, either through a lack of capacity, authority or actual fraudulent activity, a context of suspicion and mistrust can arise that destabilizes confidence, precipitates violence and often characterizes elections in conflict-affected areas (UNDP, 2011). For example, despite a solid constitutional and legal framework, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been accused of failing to stand up for its independence, impartiality, and integrity (Jinadu, 2011). While in some cases electoral victories have been challenged and upturned in courts of competent jurisdiction, some political elites prefer not to take chances and resort to recruiting political thugs either to ensure political victory for them at all cost or to protect their votes from being upturned by INEC officials. Consequently, the real or perceived prevailing lack of independence and inefficiency, in the administration of election process coupled with allegations of biased conduct against INEC, is obviously making elections in Nigeria susceptible to deficiencies in credibility and the degeneration into violence.

More so, the judiciary has not only been unable to dispense cases of election rigging quickly, it has most often been seen as bias or corrupt and incapable of dispensing electoral justice! Apparently, a crude politician, as noted above, would think it wise to result to other means, especially violence, of resolving real and/or perceived electoral irregularities rather than wait endlessly for the judiciary to prove her/his case. Similarly, one key contributing factor to election order or disorder is the state itself, particularly its security apparatus. In fragile states like Nigeria, security agents have important roles to play in elections – protection voters, candidates, poll workers, media, observers, vote results, registration data, campaign materials, political rallies, polling stations, counting/collating centres, etc. But where security agents are biased or seen to be partisan or corrupt, there is a higher chance that they will be purveyors of electoral violence rather than protectors of electoral process. Cases of police being used to snatch and

stuff ballot boxes are overwhelming in Nigeria, especially during the 2003 and 2007 general elections (see Ajayi, 2006; Jinadu, 2011). Also, there are several cases of the military being used to intimidate political opponents in favour of incumbents, especially during the Ekiti and Osun gubernatorial elections in 2014 and 2018.

Related to above is the issue of political corruption. Political corruption involves the manipulation of the political process through rigging, vote-buying, ballot stuffing and collusion of electoral officials with politicians to sabotage the electoral process (Omotoso, 2019: 43). Indeed, over the last couple of electoral cycles in Nigeria, the electoral processes have been commercialised or commoditized to an ignoble extent that votes are now being openly sold and bought. For example, the current slogan during electioneering, especially on election day, is what has become popularly known among the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria as '*dibo kio se'be*' – vote and cook soup (Ayiti and Omilusi, 2019:50). This presupposes that a voter can actually sell her/his vote to make some money enough to feed her/his family, at least, for a day or week. This may not be unconnected with the issue of poverty ravaging the country to the extent of its being described as the 'headquarters of poverty' (*Vanguard*, June 25, 2018). Thus, the struggle for power in Nigeria is not about the people and development, but to further accumulation of wealth by the corrupt elites (Omotoso, 2019: 44).

To conclude this section, another major thing in the perversion of electoral politics and/or political process is the issue of political godfatherism. Godfatherism is an informal way of doing politics and it is associated with a series of other problems of the electoral process such as corruption, influence peddling, patronage, nepotism, favouritism, etc. that impact negatively the quality of democracy. For instance, godfatherism hinders the three legitimacy pillars of democracy by provoking a net decline in the levels of trust in/support to state institutions – it damages input legitimacy by reducing the act of voting to a quid pro quo exchange and by barring or limiting access to the administration to those individuals with sufficient social capital to

make their problems/needs heard; it damages throughput legitimacy because it perverts the rules of the game in a non-transparent way to favour the interests of clienteles; and it damages output legitimacy because it leads to irresponsible and unaccountable public spending (De Sousa, 2008). Particularly, political godfathers pervert electoral politics by swinging electoral victory in favour of their anointed godsons often through vote buying and/or political violence being fomented by political thugs recruited, armed and paid by the godfathers. The action and inaction of these godfathers and the crises precipitated by them in States like Abia, Anambra, Edo, Enugu, Oyo, Kwara, Lagos, Borno, Rivers, etc. have nearly destroyed the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria (Omotoso, 2019: 30). In a peculiar case, the then Governor of Anambra state, Chris Ngige, on the order of his erstwhile political godfather, Chris Uba, was kidnapped by armed 'policemen' and forced at gunpoint to resign from office. A similar scenario also played out in Oyo state, where Alhaji Rashidi Ladoja was sacked from office as the Governor of the state by political thugs of his former political godfather Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu. In the two cases, the offence of the political godsons was that they refused to give the godfathers unfettered access to their states treasury.

Electoral Violence and the Youths in Nigeria

Over the post-cold war era in Africa, it has been observed that electoral violence is endemic to the extent that more than half, 55 percent, of states on the content have experienced electoral violence (Burchard, 2015: 50). Indeed, and as argued before, electoral violence has dominated and shaped the processes and outcomes of virtually all elections in Nigeria since 1999. For instance, the desire to be in power or stay in the corridors of power or close to the centre of power in Nigeria has led politicians and the political class to be so ruthless while seeking power (Omotoso, 2019: 65). While there is indeed perverse and unbridled competition for political power among political elites in Nigeria, this always involves the co-optation of the agency of youths to perpetrate electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In

fact, these youths often represent the 'private security' wing of most political or ethnic groups in their quest to dominate the state and its resources by winning elections at all costs.

A dominant narrative on the crisis of electoral politics, especially in transitioning democracies like Nigeria, tends to see electoral violence as being underpinned by unbridled patronage politics (Albert, 2005; Omotola, 2010). The central thesis of patronage politics is the assumption that there exists a relationship between people who seek to gain and retain power – patrons – and those they use to achieve this goal – clients (Alapiki & Ukiwo, 2013). Consequently, patrons buy the support of clients by promising the later rewards and access to political patronage once the former gains political control of the state (Agbiboa, 2018). However, in what ways does patronage politics result in the recruitment and securitization of youths by political/ethnic elites for the purposes of political violence in Nigeria? In providing answer to this question, the first place to start would be an understanding of the emergence and structure of Nigerian state.

There is a lot of literature on the colonial origin of state in Africa and how this results in the distortions and/or disruptions of the traditional societies in the continent and that should not disturb us here. However, it is important to note that the emergence of a modern state in Nigeria resulted in the transfer of resources from traditional societies to a centralised state and thus making the state the major dispenser of patronage. Consequently, the Nigerian state plays a dominant role in the national economy in the face of the underdevelopment of private capitalist enterprise (Animashaun, 2010). In fact, buoyed by the expanded oil revenues of the early 1970s, the state effectively dominated all aspects of the national political economy (Jega, 2000). This made the state not only the biggest spender of resources but also the largest employer of labour. Under this circumstance, access to the state becomes a platform for primitive accumulation. Providing an enlightening view on how the nature and character of Nigerian state constitutes a major

hurdle for democratic and electoral stability, Claude Ake argues that the state is everywhere and its power appears boundless. There is hardly any aspect of life in which the state does not exercise power and control. That makes the capture of state power singularly important (Ake, 1996: 23).

Therefore, the strategic interaction among ethnic groups is characterised by competition for control of the state as the dominant group in the state sets the terms of competition between its rivals (Araoye, 2012). In fact, due to its lack of autonomy or its limited autonomy from competing ethnic groups, the state becomes the core contested terrain, the deadly serious theatre of ethnic conflict over which ethnic groups or coalitions of ethnic groups should control it and its vast resources. The major consequence of this for electoral politics is that elections, instead of fostering peaceful means of power transfer, have resulted in inter/intra ethnic political violence. Indeed, post-military elections in Nigeria have become a hegemonic vehicle for contending ethnic groups. An emergent trend, especially in the Fourth Republic, is the development of militia youth wings of these ethno-regional groups usually arm and finance by *ethno-regional political entrepreneurs* in their endless quest for political power and the neutralization of their 'ethnic/political others'.

For example, there have been emergence and involvement of several ethnic militant groups in electoral/political violence in Nigeria over the post-military period. However, a caveat from the outset! While there is no denying that these militia groups have been vanguards of political violence, it may be difficult to sustain the argument that whenever they engage in electoral violence they do so on behalf of their ethnic groups. In fact, some leaders of the so-called ethnic militias started off as clients (political thugs) recruited by patrons (politicians) to perpetrate electoral violence. For instance, before they established the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the

Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV)[2] and transformed into armed militia leaders, Asari Dokubo and Ateke Tom were hired thugs used by the then Rivers State Governor, Peter Odili, and his political party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), during the 2003 general elections in the state (Ebiede, 2018; HRW, 2007). Though Odili and his party denied[3] using thugs to rig the Rivers' 2003 election, a 2007 Human Rights Watch's report indicated that the 2003 elections in Rivers sowed the seed of violence as they were 'both violent and more brazenly rigged than most other parts of the country' (HRW, 2007: 80). According to Ebiede (2018), "this marked the beginning of the transition of youths who had been involved in electoral violence into armed militants" (p. 140).

However, given the over ethnicization of politics in Nigeria, there are many ethno-regional militia groups scattered all over the country all claiming to be the main defenders of their ethnic/regional groups. Indeed, their formation and funding enjoyed the tacit approval of the various ethnic elites, who usually project these militant groups as 'messiahs' who can always protect and ensure that members of their ethnic group get a fair share of the national resources (Omotoso, 2019: 50). In other words, militias are armed youth wings of given ethnic groups that often started as 'ethnic private security' outfit (vigilante) and transformed into defenders of ethnic interests through violent means (Pratten, 2008). For example, the Odua People's Congress (OPC) could be seen as the 'armed youth' wing of the Yoruba social-cultural group, *Afenifere*. The Ijaw nation has the *Egbesu Boys* and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) as its militant youth wings to act as the defender of the Ijaw interest in Nigeria. In wider context of the Niger Delta, the emergence in 2005 of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)

[2]NDPVF was established by Asari Dokubo while NDV was established by Ateke Tom.

[3]Despite the denial, in an interview granted Human Rights Watch (HRW), Ateke Tom said the then Governor Odili promised cash and jobs in great quantities for himself and his *boys* and that in return, so 'any place Odili sent me, I conquered for him (HRW, 2007: 81).

could be said to spark the proliferation of armed militant groups as 'defenders' of the Niger Delta against perceived and real injustice of federal government and international oil companies (IOCs) in the area (Bøås, 2011). In the north, there existed *Yandaba* armed group and today Myetti Allah Cattle Breeders' Association. Though *Yandaba* was an unorganized group, they were easily mobilized to defend the northern agenda (Yoroms, n.d.: 18). Other important ethno-nationalist groups in Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Ombatse group.

These groups have, often time, been mobilised and used for the purposes of electoral violence. However, the case of the Niger Delta is quite intriguing. In the specific case of the Niger Delta region, where the stake is always very high given the political economy of oil exploration and proliferation of militant groups, there have always been incidences of electoral violence in the region. There were particularly high stakes in the region during the 2015 general elections because the presidential election was between one of the region's sons – the then incumbent president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan – and a Muslim Northerner and ex-military general, Muhammadu Buhari (Ani, 2017). Consequently, there were reports of election-related incidents in connection to the 2015 electoral process in the Niger Delta (Partners for Peace, 2015). Indeed, ex-warlords in the area were prominently visible in the electoral process using their network of ex-fighters, financial resources and influence to mobilize support for candidates. While majority of the ex-militant leaders understandably supported the *homeboy*, Goodluck Jonathan, and his party, the PDP, a handful of them, especially the Africa Ukparasia group, defected to and provided support for the All Progressives Congress (APC) (Ezuikwu, 2015). It should be noted that, apart from ethnic politics, the support PDP enjoyed during the 2015 elections in the Niger Delta from most of the ex-warlords may not be unconnected with the oil industry and waterways patronage schemes, like the pipeline protection contract and the

security of the waterways, they enjoyed from Jonathan's administration (*Pm News*, 2016; Ezuikwu, 2015). Thus, each faction of the ex-militants threw their weight behind candidates and parties of choice through the mobilization and use of armed thugs, which sparked various forms of electoral violence: violent disruption of campaign rallies, clashes and shootings between supporters of candidates, voters' intimidation and above all destruction of election materials (Partners for Peace, 2015).

Apart from ethno-regional youth groups, other youth groups like the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), which Albert (2007) sees as the 'most politicised and violent trade union in Nigeria', have been recruited and used to unleash electoral violence by desperate politicians in Nigeria. In the specific case of Southwest Nigeria, particularly in Lagos and Ibadan, members of the NURTW usually called *agbero*, a euphemism for a gang of hardboiled young street urchins who earn a living through parasitic dependence on the control of passenger transport[4], seem to constitute a reserve army of workers who are capable of relapsing into full-time touting (Okpara, 1988: 331). Consequently, the NURTW is usually perceived as the home of an army of battle-ready *agberos* who do not just collect illegal tolls from transport operators, but who also serve as political thugs for political parties/politicians during election times (Agbiboa, 2018: 221). For instance, the NURTW chairmen, especially in Lagos, usually act as suppliers of thugs from among union members to assist the state governor during his electoral campaign rallies in exchange for large autonomy to levy taxes at motor parks of the state (Fourchard, 2010: 51).

However, this is not peculiar to Lagos alone, similar cases of NURTW members loyal to Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, *the Garrison Commander of Ibadan Politics*, causing various forms of electoral cum political violence were rife, especially because of the split between him and his former godson,

[4]Initially, the term applies to people (young and old male and, at times, female) who make a living by helping drivers get passengers and load their luggage into vehicles at motor parks.

former governor of Oyo State, Alhaji Rashidi Ladoja. For instance, in the run-up to the 2007 elections in the state, the split between Adedibu and Ladoja resulted in numerous clashes among members of the NURTW in the state loyal to the two gladiators to which several lives and properties were lost (Bello, 2015: 11). Furthermore, in the North, particularly in Gombe State, the *Kalare boys*, a group of young touts, used to provide a ready army of political thugs for politicians in exchange for money, weapons, drugs, and alcohol. The boys are used as bodyguards during rallies and as agents of terror to intimidate or assault political opponents (Aniekwe & Agbiboa, 2014: 12).

Indeed, armed gangs, party thugs, ethnic militias, private security guards, vigilante groups and community subalterns became security managers, relatively developed and enhanced in competition with state security apparatus. They became deployed and engaged for both offensive and defensive purposes, either to intimidate their opponents and/or to protect themselves against surprise attacks by other opponents (Yoroms, n.d.: 20). For instance, in one of its editorials, the *Vanguard* addresses the political instrumentality of youths as thugs in the following words:

> Our youths, for a good part of the life of a government, are starved of genuine opportunities; no employment, no education or training. And then come campaign time; the politicians sprinkle slush money and they unleash the beasts; rent a thug. These people are given money and small weapons to intimidate the opposition and ordinary citizens. They create fear and fan terror so that people are prevented from performing their constitutional obligations. (*Vanguard* 2015).

Consequently, the perverse nature of electoral politics in Nigeria increases the need for 'hard guys' (clients) capable of 'delivering votes' for and protecting patrons (politicians), while at the same time enjoys the patrons'

protection – huge financial rewards and protection against the law. That is, the quid pro quo exchange between politicians and armed youths for the purposes of electoral violence results in securitization of these youth gangs. But what does it mean to be securitized? In what ways are the violent youths being used for electoral violence purposes securitised? What are the implications of the securitization for security and peace in Nigeria? In the next section of this paper, we provide answers to these questions by drawing some lessons from the theory of securitization, which has become a new way of thinking and understanding the social construction of threats and security policies (Albert, n.d.).

'Securitised Youths' and Peace and Security in Nigeria

So far, we have been able to prove that the Nigerian electoral experience has been historically, especially in the Fourth Republic, perverse by excessive politicking through patronage system involving political elites (patrons) recruiting and using political thugs (clients) to unleash electoral violence. However, the very trajectory of this perverse electoral politics has resulted in the development of securitized youths. Basically, securitization analyses how, why and by whom a non-security issue became a security issue (Walker & Seegers, 2012: 23). Securitization theory is developed by Barry Buzan (1983), when he argued that security could not only be defined "as the threat, the use, and control of military force, in the hands of states" (Walt, 1991: 212). Thus, securitization theory widens understanding of security by providing framework for examining the way by which something gets removed from the political process and gets into security agenda (Albert, n.d.: 4). Put differently, by securitization, security agendas are chosen, constructed or created (Walker & Seegers, 2012: 23).

The securitization process involves the inter-subjective establishment of an existential threat that requires urgent and immediate attention, as well as extraordinary measures to counter (Buzan, Waever & De Wilde, 1998: 24-5). That is, securitization begins when an actor claims that the existence of an object is threatened. Then the given issue must be perceived as an

existential threat. That is, if it is not addressed, the referent object is destroyed or conquered (Buzan, *et.al.*, 1998: 34). According to Albert (n.d.: 5), the securitizing process involves three things. One, a group must exist that is securitizing a referent object. That is, there must be a group alleging that the other group constitutes a security threat. Two, there must be a group labelled as a security risk. And three, there must be an audience to be convinced that indeed the object of securitization is indeed a security threat (Albert, n.d.: 5). Put together, these three elements are germane to understanding how perverse electoral politics results in the securitization of political thugs in Nigeria.

Drawing on classical elite theory, it is arguable to maintain that the elites – governing elite and non-governing elite (Bottomore, 1993) – would continue to dominate the political process in any state. Put in another way, the forces in every political society will tend to always produce elite domination – a process of *embourgeoisement* (Roberts & Edwards, 1991). Thus and as argued by Albert (n.d.), the main concern should not be the right of the elite to rule but how they use/exercise power (p. 5). Ordinarily, electoral politics should provide ordered and legitimated means through which elites acquire and exercise power in a democratic state. However, and as we have maintained in this paper when electoral process is perverse, this opportunity is lost and what occurred would be jaundiced democratic order. Indeed, since the elites determine what and who threatens the security of the state, then securitization is therefore done by them. For this reason, the citizens tend to fear the state since it is capable of securitizing anybody. While Buzan (1991: 55) points to four ways the state constitute threat to citizens, the one that is relevant to our situation here is those emanating from struggles over control of the state machinery.

Under the condition of perverse electoral politics, where political thugs are used for perpetrating electoral violence, security threats may not only be seen as inability of the state to make the right policies but fundamentally as its inability to enforce laws. Since there exists a quid pro quo relationship

between the elites and the militia youths being used to unleash electoral violence, the youths must be protected against the law. The youths are usually criminal gangs who should be prosecuted and kept behind bars, but they are shielded from being prosecuted or jailed by the political class. Thus, given the overbearing protection being enjoyed by these militant youths from political elites, their influence and power grow and they are dreaded by ordinary citizens (and at times by politicians) within their communities. In fact, there are so many instances of 'grass to grace' among the *street boys* all over Nigeria. The point, therefore, is that the electoral disorder in Nigeria works well to securitize ordinary youths (usually non-elite street urchins – Area Boys). In other words, the militant youths are securitized by both ordinary citizens and the political class since their violent activities might not be limited to election period alone and may have adverse effects on everyone.

It must be pointed out that the politicians often hide behind 'insecurity' and excruciating poverty in the country to recruit youths as private bodyguards and possibly as a vigilante group to supplement the efforts of formal security agents. Thus, these private security guards must be equipped with arms and ammunitions by their patrons. Indeed, politicians often cited the need to provide security for the importation of arms and ammunitions. For example, Alhaji Abdulaziz Yari, the former governor of Zamfara State, justified the importation of some 1,500 illegal arms into the state as necessary to arm the state's vigilante groups to counter the threats of insecurity in the state (Yoroms, n.d.: 23). But, as noted before, beyond providing *security* for their patrons and/or community, the private security guards also serve as instruments to intimidate political opponents as agents of electoral violence. However, these militias and their patrons – politicians – often enjoy tacit acceptance and protection of their conduct by the police and state officials (Agbiboa, 2018). Indeed, while the intricate relationships between the political class and militant youths undermine the capacity of the state, it nonetheless strengthens the lawlessness of these youths. This creates a

predatory pattern of interaction between militias and their local community and destroys the moral certainties of ordinary citizens. This situation has been described as a pre-Leviathan Hobbesian state of war where there is a set of formal rules obeyed by a few people, a set of informal rules followed by most people and a lack of legitimacy attached to both (Brass, 1997).

The implications of the relationship between politicians and the securitized youths for peace and security in Nigeria are many. For instance, the relationships tend to lead to the security structure being incapacitated and weakened to provide public safety and security. As Peters (2007) notes: the patron-client relationships could be responsible for outbreak of violence. In the specific case of Niger Delta, pieces of evidence abound to show that former political thugs were instrumental to formations of armed groups that have been engaging the state in 'oil war' in the region (Nwamaka Okeke-Ogbuafor, Ani & Gray 2019). In fact, Human Rights Watch documents how political sponsorship of armed groups in the Niger Delta sparked the proliferation of militias engaging in oil bunkering, bank robberies, cult wars and kidnappings for ransom (HRW, 2007: 82). For instance, due to unguarded spread of arms and ammunitions into wrong hands, cases of arm robberies and kidnapping have become widespread and common occurrences in Nigeria (Oladeji, 2016). In fact, kidnapping has blossomed into a 'lucrative business' and there is no region or state spare of its spectre today.

Furthermore, the emergence of the dreaded Boko Haram insurgent group in the Northeast could be blamed on the securitization of youths through blind, chaotic and unbridled crave for power by some northern political elites who recruited and used members of the insurgent to gain political power. Indeed, the recruitment could be said to have been enhanced by the widespread of abject poverty and the prevalence of the 'almajiri' system in that region of the country. For example, it has become a public knowledge in Nigeria that getting recruited as insurgent by Boko Hara pays better than serving in the Nigerian military or civil service. Consequently, the insurgent constitutes

one of the major security threats in the country and has earned Nigeria the title of 'terrorist state' (Ani & Osisioma, 2014). In fact, there is no end in sight to the menace of the insurgency as the group still carry out attacks almost daily despite the claim by the federal government to have 'technically defeated the insurgents'.

Moreover, especially in Lagos where the politics of transportation is rife and very lucrative, the patron-client relationship between politicians and touts (*agberos*) often results in intra-labour union wars, particularly among NURTW members over who controls garages (motor parks). In fact, the lucrative economy of motor park underscores the explosion of motor parks and inter/intra union violent conflicts to control these parks. Many ordinary *garage boys* have become *big men* in their own right through *taxes* they extort from public transport drivers. This must-have led Albert (2007: 134) to argue that:

> The huge revenue being collected by NURTW leaders, and the high social mobility this facilitates, explains why every member of the union aspires to become a chairman – whether at a branch, city, state, zonal or national level. This partly explains why the members regularly engage one another in bloody skirmishes. It explains why NURTW members and members of other transport unions kill each other to defend their position in most Nigerian cities.

These unions' conflicts have often resulted in the compromise of peace and security of the society, which could involve wanton destruction of lives and properties of innocent ordinary citizens. Because the unions' chairmen don't *eat alone* as large chunk of the garage largesse go to security agents, local government chairmen and political party officials, especially of the party in government at the state or local government levels, security agents often look away while the bloodbaths last. Demonstrating government's complacency

or lack of capacity to confront most of the threats to national security and their perpetrators, the former National Security Adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan, Sambo Dasuki, while addressing the spate of bomb attacks by Boko Haram, stated that:

> There is a lot we know that they are doing, and there is a lot that could be done to address the problem…But, then I must also be quick to point out that today, even if all the leaders that we know in Boko Haram are arrested, I don't think the problem would end, because there are tentacles. I don't think that people would be satisfied, because the situations that created the problems are not just about religion, poverty or the desire to rule Nigeria...I think it's a combination of everything. Except you address all those things comprehensively, it would not work. It is not enough for us to have a problem in 2009 and you send soldiers to stop the situation, then tomorrow you drive everybody under-ground. You must look at what structures you need to put in place to address the problem holistically (National Mirror, April 28 2012, cited in Albert, n.d.: 22).

The above shows that the political class does not only know the root causes of this problem as well as the people behind it, but they lack the courage to confront them because they are part of the problem. What this suggests is that the youth gangs would continue to constitute major security threats in Nigeria as long as the electoral process is perverse and these youths serve as the instruments of political violence in the hands of the political class. Indeed, this may portend a great danger for the continued existence of Nigeria as a geo-political entity. For example, while there has been genuine demand for inter/intra ethnic equitable distribution of state's resources and

accommodation of dissenting voices/opinions, such as the current agitations for restructuring in Nigeria, "the demands/agitations could be hijacked by greedy and/or opportunistic elite, rebels or warlords and thus turned to separatist agitations, which are sometimes regarded as the most dangerous threat to the state" (Olasupo, Oladeji and Ijeoma, 2016: 274-5). A very good example is the 'oil wars' in the Niger Delta region, where ethno-nationalist militants and warlords highjack the longstanding grievances and redress-seeking agitations over environmental degradation and resource injustices. Thus, if the perverse electoral system and politics is not sufficiently reversed and the attendant political violence reduce to the barest minimum, the future looks bleak for Nigeria as a united geo-political entity.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have engaged with the dynamic relationship between perverse electoral politics and securitized youths and how this compromise peace and security in Nigeria, especially since it returned to democracy in 1999. The paper shows how electoral violence emerges through perverse politicking and unbridled political competition among politicians, who usually engage the services of militant youths. Indeed, prebendalism, which involves the principle that state power could be treated as 'congeries of offices that can be competed for, appropriated and administered for the benefit of individual occupants and their supporters' (Joseph, 1987: 8), intensifies the combustive electoral politics in Nigeria. Furthermore, the huge financial rewards attached to political offices and the winner wins all syndrome gives electoral contests the stamp of a do-or-die affair with everyone in a political contest or in power to employ all means-legal or otherwise-either to acquire or maintain power.

We equally demonstrate that the dialectic of relationship between politicians and militia youths compromise peace and security in the country. That is, this dialectic is incompatible with political stability, the rule of law or democracy because it is constituted as warfare (Ake, 1976 cited in Akinsanya & Ayoade, 2013: 176). A way out of this precarious situation, as suggested

by Albert (n.d.: 22), is good governance, which must be championed by non-violent actions of the civil society groups. Also, there must be socio-political reengineering to convert private interests promoting militancy and political violence into public interests to ensure peaceful electoral politics capable of ensuring legitimacy and good governance. Thus, there is a need for citizens' collective action against perverse political class and their securitised youth gangs. Conclusively, there is need for spirited youth-related programmes like capacity building workshops and skills for entrepreneurial leadership for the youth to take most of them out of the pond of excruciating poverty they are currently trapped and show them other means of becoming wealthy other than engaging in criminality.

References

Agbiboa, D.E. (2018). Patronage Politics and Electoral Violence in Lagos, Nigeria: Understanding the Micro-Level Dynamics. In M.S. Kovacs & J. Bjarnesen (eds.), *Violence in African Elections: Between Democracy and Big Man Politics*, London: Zed Books Ltd.

Ajayi, K. (2006). Security Forces, Electoral Conduct and the 2003 General Elections in Nigeria, *J. Soc. Sci.*, Vol. 13, No 1.

Akinsanya, A. A. and J. A. Ayoade (eds.) (2013) *An Introduction to Political Science in Nigeria*. New York NY: University Press of America.

Alapiki, H. and U. Ukiwo (2013). Anxious Godfathers, Errant Godsons: Neopatrimonialism and Democratisation in Nigeria, *Politeia* 32 (1): 40–58.

Albert, I. O. (2005). Explaining "Godfatherism" in Nigerian Politics, *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie*9 (2): 79–105.

Albert, I. O. (2007). NURTW and the Politics of Motor Parks in Lagos and Ibadan' in L. Fourchard (ed.), *Gouverner les villesd'Afrique. Etat, gouvernement local etacteursprivés*. Paris: Karthala.

Albert, O. (n.d.). The Securitized Elite: A Deconstruction of the "Cabals" in Nigerian Political Economy, *Peace and Conflict Studies*

Programme, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Ani, K. J. (2017) "2015 General Elections and Political Violence in Ebonyi State" in John Tor Tsuwa and Elijah TerdooIkpanor (Eds.) *The 2015 General Elections in Nigeria: Emerging Issues,* Abuja: Donafrique Publishers, pp. 176-193

Ani, K. J. and Osisioma, U. S. (2014), "Politics of Impoverishment in Nigeria from 1967 to Present: Fuel to Terrorism and National Insecurity", *Perspectivas – Portuguese Journal of Political Science and International Relations,* 13:31-43

Aniekwe, C. C. and D. E. Agbiboa (2014). Civic Engagement and its Role in Mitigating Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Implications for the 2015 General Elections. Working Paper, 21 December. Social Science Research Network. Available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2541330 (accessed on 20 August 2019).

Animashaun, K. (2010). Regime Character, Electoral Crisis, and Prospects of Electoral Reform in Nigeria. *Journal of Nigeria Studies.* Vol. 1. No. 1, Fall.

Araoye, A. (2012). Hegemonic Agendas, Intermesticity, and Conflicts in the Post-Colonial State. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 12, no. 1.

Ayiti, S.B. and Omilusi, M. (2019). Election Management and the Challenge of Electoral Corruption in Nigeria's 2015 General Election, *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Reviews,* Vol. 02, Issue: 03 May-June.

Bello, S.K. (2015). Political and Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Mapping, Evolution, and Patterns (June 2006–May 2014). *IFRA-Nigeria Working Papers Series, n°49.*

Bøås, M. (2011). "Mend Me": The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta and the Empowerment of Violence. In C. Obi and S. A. Rustad (eds), *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-violence*. London and New York NY: Zed Books.

Bottomore, T. (1993). *Elites and Society (2nd ed.)*. London: Routledge.

Brass, P. (1997) *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Burchard, S. M. (2015). *Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: Causes and Consequences*. Boulder CO and London: First Forum Press.

Buzan, B, Waever, O & De Wilde, J. (1998), *Security: A new framework for analysis.* Covent Garden: Lynne Rienner.

Buzan, B. (1991). *People, states, and fear: An agenda for international security studies in the postcold war era*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc.

De Souasa, L. (2008). Clientelism and the Quality(ies) of Democracy Public and Policy Aspects, *DISC Working Paper Series 2*.

Ebiede, T.M. (2018). Ex-militants and Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Niger Delta. In M.S. Kovacs & J. Bjarnesen (eds.), *Violence in African Elections: Between Democracy and Big Man Politics*, London: Zed Books Ltd.

Eziukwu, A. (2015). Ex-militants Canvass Support for Jonathan's Re-election, *Premium Times*, 25 February. Available at www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/177483-ex-militants-canvasssupport-for-jonathans-re-election.html (accessed 20 August 2019).

Fischer, F. (2002). Electoral Conflict and Violence: A Strategy for Study and Prevention, *IFES White Paper*, Washington, D.C.: International Foundation for Election Systems.

Fourchard, L. (2010). Lagos, Koolhaas and Partisan Politics in Nigeria, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35 (1): 40–56.

Galtung, J. (1996). Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization. Peace Research Institute in Oslo: Oslo, Norway.

Higazi, A. (2011). *The Jos Crisis: A Nigerian Recurrent Tragedy*: Abuja, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Discussion Paper No. 2, available at www.fes-nigeria.org (accessed on January 12, 2012).

Höglund, K. (2006). Electoral violence in war-ravaged societies: The case of Sri Lanka. Paper prepared for the *Workshop on Power-Sharing and Democratic Governance in Divided Societies*, Centre for the Study of Civil Wars, PRIO, 21–22 August 2006. Available at: http://www.prio.no/files/file48115_hoglund_prioworkshop.pdf (Accessed 20 August 2019).

Human Rights Watch (2007). *Election or 'Selection'?: Human Rights Abuse and Threats to Free and Fair Elections in Nigeria*. New York NY: Human Rights Watch.

Jinadu, L. A. (2011). Nigeria. In Ismaila Madior Fall, Mathias Hounkpe, Adele L. Jinadu & Pascal Kambale eds., *Election Management Bodies in West Africa a comparative study of the contribution of electoral commissions to the strengthening of democracy*. Dakar: Open Society Initiative.

Joseph, R. A. (1987) *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Laakso, L. (2007). Insights into Electoral Violence in Africa. In Matthias Basedau (ed.), *Votes, Money and Violence*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, NAI.

Lyons, T. (2005). *Demilitarizing Politics: Elections on the Uncertain Road to Peace*. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Nwamaka Okeke-Ogbuafor, Ani, Kelechi Johnmary & Tim Gray (2019), "Two Approaches to Conflict Resolution and their Applicability to Ogoniland, Nigeria", *Journal of Global South Studies,* 36(1):164-185

Okpara, E. E. (1988). The Role of Touts in Passenger Transport in Nigeria, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 26 (2): 327–35.

Oladeji, I. O. (2012). Locality, Indigeneity and Citizenship Struggle in Nigeria, *an unpolished MSc Dissertation submitted to the Department of Political Science*, University of Ibadan.

Oladeji, I.O. (2016). Security of Life and Property: Armed Robbery and Kidnapping in Nigeria. In Femi Omotoso& Michael Kehinde (eds.),

Democratic Governance and Political Participation in Nigeria: 1999-2014, Denver: Spear Media Press. pp. 359-380.

Oladeji, I.O. (2019). Indigeneity, Democratic Citizenship and Governance in Southwest Nigeria: 1999-2017, *Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis*, College of Postgraduate Studies, Ekiti State University.

Olasupo, O., Oladeji, I.O. & Ijeoma, E.O.C, (2017). Nationalism and Nationalist Agitations in Africa: The Nigerian Trajectory. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, Vol. 44(3-4), pp. 261-283. DOI: 10.1007/s12114-017-9257-x.

Omotola, J.S. (2010). Explaining Electoral Violence in Africa's "New" Democracies, *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 10 (3): 51–73.

Omotola, J.S. (2013), Trapped in Transition? Nigeria's First Democratic Decade and Beyond, *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 9(2), pp. 171-200.

Omotoso, F. (2019). Politics of Power and Power of Politics: The Anatomy of Nigerian Government and Politics. *56th Inaugural Lecture of Ekiti State University*, Ado-Ekiti: Ekiti State University Press.

Partners for Peace (2015). Peace Building Map'. Available at www.p4p-nigerdelta.org/peace-building-map (accessed 20 August 2019).

Peters, K. (2007). From Weapons to Wheels: Young Sierra Leonean Excombatants Become Motorbike Taxiriders', *Journal of Peace, Conflict, and Development*, Vol.10 (10): 1–23.

PM News (2016). We Still Have Contract with Tompolo's Company, *PM News*, 30 October. Available at www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2016/10/30/we-still-have-contract-with-tompoloscompany-nimasa/ (accessed 20 August 2019).

Pratten, D. (2008), Introduction. The Politics of Protection: Perspectives on Vigilantism in Nigeria, *Africa*, 78(1): 1-15.

Przeworski, A. (1986). Democracy as a Contingent Outcome of Conflicts. In John Elster and Rune Slagstad (eds.) *Constitutionalism and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roberts, G. and A. Edwards (1991). *A New Dictionary of Political Analysis*, London: Edward Arnold.

UNDP, (2011). Understanding Electoral Violence in Asia, *Global Programme for Electoral Cycle Support*, Asia-Pacific Regional Centre.

Vanguard (2015) 'Nigeria: Time we Moved the Dogma', *Vanguard*, 22 March. Available at http://allafrica.com/stories/201503232026.html (accessed 18 November 2015).

Walker, R.E. and Seegers, A. (2012). Securitization: The Case of Post-9/11 United States Africa Policy. *ScientiaMilitaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol. 40(2), pp. 22-45.

Walt, S. (1991). The Renaissance of Security Studies. *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol.35(2).

Yoroms, G. (n.d.) *Electoral Violence, Arms Proliferation and Electoral Security in Nigeria: Lessons from the Twenty-Fifteen Elections for Emerging Democracies*. Department of Political Science, Bingham University, Karu, Nasarawa State.