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**CRUDE OIL POLITICS AND
ELECTORAL VIOLENCE
IN BAYELSA STATE, 1999 – 2019**

Anthony B. C. Okoye¹ & James Profit Taylor²

¹ Anthony B. C. Okoye, Lectures in the Department of Political Science, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State. He can be reached through email: okoyeac@fuotuoke.edu.ng

² James Profit Taylor is of the Department of Political Science Federal University Otuoke. He can be reached through email profitaylor@gmail.com

Abstract

Since the return to civilian government in Nigeria on May 29th, 1999, elections in Bayelsa state have been characterised by violence. This intensification of the struggle for power often results in election related violence before, during and after the proper conduct of an election. The violence takes place both intra-party and inter-party. It is evidenced in the form of shooting, intimidation, compulsion, hate speech, bomb explosion, kidnapping, assassination, abduction, hijacking of electoral materials, disruption of campaign and voting process, compelling electoral officers to enter and announce false results, etc. The study attributes this regrettable state of affair on crude oil politics. It notes that electoral violence in the state is a manifestation of the struggle among political actor over who will control, expropriate and allocate the crude oil wealth as well as other crude oil production-related benefits such as surveillance contract, pipeline clearing contract, job placement, training and scholarship fund and oil spillage compensation, etc. The study concluded electoral violence in the state is tied to quest to use state power to determine the control of oil wealth and other crude oil related benefits. It suggested that awarding of contracts and employment should be based on merit instead of political patronage.

Keywords: Crude oil politics, elections, electoral violence, political patronage, resource curse.

Introduction

Across the globe, the conduct of regular free, fair and credible election has been acclaimed as the most acceptable means of leadership recruitment and succession. This is because it offers the candidates the opportunity to test their popularity while it affords the people an avenue to decide who governs them, on what terms as well as the quality of leadership to expect. Most importantly, it confers on the people, the power to recall or vote out underperforming leaders. In line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, election empowers the people, to hire and fire political leaders, while holding them accountable for their actions while in office. It is these qualities in addition to its inbuilt conflict resolution capacities that compelled nations to subscribe to it. In Africa, except such few places like the pre-colonial Igbo society, it took the 3rd and 4th waves of democracy to entrench this democratic value in the continent. This notwithstanding, there exist at the moment cases of tenure elongation through constitutional amendments, sit tight syndrome, life presidency and illiberal democratic

Practices and cultures across the continent. These are evidenced in several cases of election induced political crises in countries like Gambia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Guinea, etc. Even Nigeria, once had a third term agenda for the President. This does not suggest that electoral malfeasance is found only in Africa. Far from that, the challenges of electoral violence are global phenomena and no nation is immune to it.

In Nigeria, the mere mentioning of election generates serious trepidation in minds of people. Election in the country, with the possible exception of the colonial administered, and military administered elections, can best be equated to warfare. Here, actors and political parties exploit every means at their disposal in order to ensure they come out of the contest victorious. A situation that resonates the Machiavellian principle of *the end justifies the means*. Little wonder, former President Olusegun Obasanjo described the 2007 general elections as a do-or-die affair for the People's Democratic Party (PDP). An assertion that is very similar to the threat issued by Mohammed Buhari in the build up to the 2015 Presidential elections when he noted that "the monkeys and the baboons shall be soaked in blood" should he fail to win the election. Similarly, the Oba of Lagos, threatened that the Igbo's residing

in Lagos would drown in the Lagoon should they vote against his anointed candidate of the All Progressive Congress; Akinwunmi Ambode in the 2015 Lagos state gubernatorial election. These sorts of assertions from highly placed and respected personalities encourage their followers to indulge in electoral violence. These unfortunate developments compelled the Council on Foreign Relations (2019) to observe:

Elections in Nigeria, as elsewhere, are high-stakes, winner-take-all contests. With so much on the line, they are often, if not always, accompanied by violence. Politicians are all too willing to exploit simmering ethnic, religious, and regional divisions to gain political advantage. They stoke community tension and even target their rivals and their rivals' supporters. Not only do average Nigerians bear the brunt of such violence, the knock-on effects to the credibility of Nigeria's political processes is hard to understate.

In Nigeria for instance, where the control of crude oil production related revenues and largesse much more than ownership of its production processes and knowledge defines the contours of the struggle for state power. As each of the competing groups strives to emerge victorious and as such have unhindered access to the crude oil revenue and other benefits its control offers. Given that crude oil is the country's single largest foreign exchange earner, and also accounts for over ninety percent of its revenue. It therefore, becomes obvious that the competition for power within the context of Nigeria's peripheral capitalist formation in which the state serves as the primary instrument for primitive accumulation of wealth will be vicious. This explains why the major political parties in the country in addition to seeking to be win the governorship of crude oil producing states; ensures that their members control all major crude oil production related Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). The system creates army of unemployed followers that are at the beck and call of these appointees, whom are mobilized during election seasons to perpetuate violence in favour of their masters. This way, while political parties in other climes contest and win election to

formulate public policies; in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, where the state is heavily under crude oil dependence; political parties formulate policies to win elections. It is under this context that electoral related violence usually occur during post-independence elections in the country.

Worse still, elections in Bayelsa state often witness high level of violence. This is demonstrated in sporadic shooting, bombing, maiming, assassinations, snatching of electoral materials, etc. even the November 16, 2019 gubernatorial election that was adjudged to be one of the most peaceful elections in the electoral calendar of the state, witnessed pockets of these types of electoral violence. Although, scholars and political analysts have given reasons in attempt to explain factors that induce election-related violence in the state, which they have blamed in partisan politics, personalities of the contesting candidates, lack of party ideology, etc. Conversely, this study locates the roots of electoral violence in Bayelsa state on crude oil politics. It is therefore, against this background that the study interrogated the nexus between crude oil politics and incidence of electoral violence in Bayelsa state.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of analysis adopted in this study is predicated on certain propositions emanating from the resource curse theory. Due to its analytical adequacy in explaining the issue under discourse. The major proponents of the theory are Auty (1993) Ross (1999), Sach & Warner (1995, 1999a & 1999b), De Soyasa (2002), Collier & Hoeffler (2005) as well as Rosser (2006). Besides, Okoye (2011) used it to examine the probable link between oil and national development in the Ghana. Also, Okoye (2014), equally utilized it in interrogating how the struggle over oil resources instigate various kinds of conflict, especially boundary dispute among states in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Contrary to conventional thinking that the abundance of natural resources will spur societal development; the resource curse theory, argues that rather than being a blessing, the abundance of natural resources (or at least an abundance of a particular type of natural resources [in this case crude oil]) is more of a curse than blessing. This is because it increases the chances of countries suffering negative economic, political and social outcomes as well as poor economic performance, low level of democracy and civil war. Although, the literature that examined whether natural resources

are bad for development are broadly classified into three categories: 1) economic performance, 2) civil war, and 3) regime type. This study isolates and applies some basic propositions from civil war and regime type thesis on resource curse.

The civil war thesis suggests that natural resources abundance influences the onset, duration and intensity of civil war (conflict). Collier & Hoeffler (2000) specifically noted that natural resource wealth enhances the chance of civil war. Scholars such De Soyasa (2002), Fearon & Laitin (2003), and Fearon (2005) identified crude oil export and crude oil wealth as a determining factor in the onset of civil war (conflict). Also, Reynal-Querol (2002) implicates natural resources in the occurrence of various forms of political violence, which election violence is an integral part. In linking natural resources to conflict, Ross (2004) noted that it encourages combatants to fight for territory that would otherwise have little value to them. Similarly, Okoye (2014) observed that the history of oil exploration, exploitation and production in the Niger Delta region has been the history of conflict, which involves community-Multinational Oil Corporations (MNOCs), community-government, state government-state government, and community-community. On the other hand, the regime type thesis, associate natural resource abundance with low democracy. In this light, Ross (2001) stated that a state's reliance on oil or mineral export tends to make it less democratic. This suggests that natural resource abundance not only transforms a state into rentier state, it ultimately characterizes it politics with various forms of undemocratic practices.

In applying the theory to the study, it was observed that the quest over who will control the huge state treasury that largely comes from federal allocation, and most importantly, the 13% oil derivation fund. In addition to other oil production-related largess that accrues to the state such as rent, royalties, taxes, job placements, awarding of contracts, employments opportunities, selection of candidates for training, allocation of training funds, scholarships, disbursement of compensations from oil companies for environmental disaster such as oil spillage, political appointments, etc account for the intense brinkmanship and brigandage that witnessed during political struggle in the state. Under this context, politicians as well as political parties, recruits, imports and mobilise mercenaries, youths, cult

groups as well as militants that serve both for defense and offense. This way, opposition candidates are threatened, kidnapped, or assassinated (or attempt at), property are destroyed, political party offices are attacked, scuttles electoral rallies and campaigns, bill boards, sign posts and posters are destroyed, community members that are ardent supporter of opposition candidate are either banished from the community during election or forced to stay indoor throughout the election day; electoral material are high jacked, ballot boxes are snatched and stuffed with thumb printed ballots, electoral officers are kidnapped, mal-handled and molested, polling units are destroyed, voters are victimized, injured and killed in extreme cases; and elections prevented from holding. At times, when the announced election result does not favour a particular candidate and party, their supporters often indulge in another cycle of violence.

The first natural casualty of this state of affair is democracy. Apart from the fact that it risks enthroning mediocre and inefficient leadership in addition to lack of accountability and transparency. It encourages and entrenches a culture of violence that favours and sustains conflict entrepreneurs. Given this, the defeated party and candidate, instead of joining forces with the government to ensure sustainable development of the state in the spirit of sportsmanship; will immediately start plotting on the quantum of violence it unleash both on its opponents, their support base and even the process itself come next electioneering period. Worse still, it undermines the democratic culture of citizen's participation both in the process of leadership recruitment and decision making (policy making), etc. This therefore, suggests that crude oil politics defined in terms of the struggle over who collects, receives, controls, manages, distributes oil wealth as well as oil production-related largess that are due the state sits at the heart of the intense competition among political actors in the state. A struggle that often result in violence as evidenced in most election conducted in the state following the reintroduction of democratic governance in the country on May 29th, 1999. In this respect, the theory adequately captures and highlights the nuances of crude oil politics that breeds electoral-related violence in the Bayelsa state. This notwithstanding, the study equally understands that there other variables that triggers and sustains electoral violence in the state. It however, argues that there about the primacy of crude oil politics towards intensification of the violence.

Area of the Study

The area of this study is Bayelsa state. Bayelsa state is one of the 36 states that constitute the Federal Republic of Nigeria and it is located in the Niger Delta region. It is bordered on the East by Rivers State, on the West and South by Atlantic Ocean and on the north by Delta State. Geographically, the state landscape comprises of about eighty per cent riverine communities and just 20 percent of wet lands including the state capital, Yenagoa (Nwosu, 2011). Hence, most communities are surrounded by water and are inaccessible by road. In terms of occupation, the local population is mainly farmers and fishermen both at subsistence and commercial levels. The political economy of Bayelsa state revolves around oil and gas production. Indeed, the state has one of the largest crude oil and natural gas deposits in the country. The first oil found in commercial quantity in Nigeria in 1956 was in Oloibiri in Ogbia local government area of the state. It produces between 30 and 40% of Nigeria's oil and gas. Commercial fishing and agriculture, including oil palm, raffia palm, rubber, and coconut also make up a significant portion of the state's economy (Fund for Peace, 2015c). The people of Bayelsa state speak four major languages namely (1) Izon (2) Nembe (3) Ogbia and (4) Epie-Atissa. Interestingly, majority of the people are rural dwellers. The peculiar terrain of the state in conjunction with lack of adequate social infrastructures like transportation, communication, health and education facilities in addition to unemployment the state witnesses high rate of poverty and underdevelopment.

Understanding electoral violence

Electoral violence is a variant of political violence. It can be distinguished from the political violence family through its particular objective. Indeed, it is aimed at influencing the behavior of the voters, candidates or distorting the results of the elections. For this purpose, it attempts to delay, prevent the vote or compilation of votes, in order to obtain results, which do not reflect the verdict of the ballot box (UNOWAS, 2017). Birch & Muchlinski (2007) see it as coercive force, directed towards electoral actors and/or objects that occurs in the context of electoral competition. Electoral violence is often explained in terms of violence between actors competing in an election. Sisk (quoted in Birch & Muchlinski, 2007) provided an expansive definition of electoral-related violence 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. 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 outcomes: the determining of winners in competitive races for political office.

Corroborating the above view point, the Council on Foreign Relations (2019) states that election-related violence typically includes clashes between political party supporters, incidents that take place at campaign events, and attacks on existing or aspiring politicians. On the contrary, Mehler (2007) approached the issue from another perspective, specifically in terms of difference in motive. He noted that contrary to conventional knowledge of electoral violence as tool for influencing electoral outcomes; it is a tool aimed at preventing election from holding in the first place. In this wise, violence is used not only to influence the outcome of the election but to spoil the election process itself. This implicates the idea, that those promoting violence may not stand a chance of emerging victorious or may not be contesting the election at all (Taylor, 2018). In his part, Nwolise, (2007, p.159) while quoting Albert defined electoral violence as “all forms of organised acts of threats physical, psychological, and structural, aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process”. Table 1 below illustrates his further breakdown and components of these three major categories.

Table 1: Categorisation of violence related to elections

Dimensions of electoral violence	Components
Physical violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical assaults on individuals, during campaign, election or when election results are released • Assassination of political opponents or people perceived as a threat to one's political ambition • Burning down of public or opponents' property and cars among other • Shooting, shoot outs • Killing of individuals • Partisan harassment by security agent arrests, forceful dispersal of rallies, or shooting, wounding of killing of people • Kidnapping and hostage taking • Bombing of infrastructure • Forceful disruption by thugs of political campaign rallies • Destruction of ballot boxes and ballot papers from polling agents • Free for all fight
Psychological violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threats against and harassment by security agents of opponents of the ruling regime or party, which create political apathy • Shoot on sight orders that breed fear in voters • Terror inflicted by political assassinations, which makes people scared to participate in politics or elections • Publication or broadcast of abusive, insulting, or intimidating material or advertorial • Threat to life through phone calls, text message, etc

<p>Structural violence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coercion of citizens by government to register or vote or be denied certain national facilities • Exclusionary act and policies • Unequal opportunities for political parties and candidates • Deliberate changes in dates, venue or times of events to the advantage of others • Partisan delimitation of electoral constituencies and location of polling stations/booths • Excessive fees for the collection of party nomination forms • Absence of free campaign • Reliance on money and brute force instead of moral integrity and competence • Restraints imposed on voters • Use of the incumbency factor to give undue advantage to some candidates • Announcement of false or fraudulent results • Lengthy delays in announcing election results • Absence of adequate voting materials and electoral result forms • Delay in voting • Absence of electoral officers from polling booth at an appropriate time • Partisan behaviour of police and other security agents • Discriminatory acts and policies
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Source: Nwolise (2007).

Nwolise’s conception of election violence points to the fact that violence associated with electioneering process need necessary manifest in the form of harm, injury, application of coercive force. Rather it can equally manifest indirectly by implanting fears in the mind of the people as well as the manner in which the electoral processes are organised, administered, and managed. It is for this reason that UNOWAS (2017) stated that electoral violence includes: verbal and symbolic electoral violence, psychological electoral violence, and physical electoral violence, structural or institutional violence. The voters can be prevented from participating in the poll, forced to choose

a candidate against their will. As a result, the elections are either disrupted or cancelled straightaway. The amorphous nature of electoral violence is such that those that respond to acts of violence hardly agree that they are perpetrating violence. Instead, they argue that they are simply countering the use of violence by the opponent. This confusion stems largely from Frantz Fanon's thesis of violence begetting violence. It is for this reason that Kehailia (2014) distinguishes eight of election violence, based on who the perpetrators are, and why the violence occurs, namely: 1) Party-on-Party Electoral Violence; 2) Party-on-Voter Electoral Violence; 3) Party-on-State Electoral Violence; 4) Voter-on-Voter Electoral Violence; 5) Voter-on-State Electoral Violence; 6) State-on-Voter Electoral Violence; 7) State-on-Party Electoral Violence; and 8) State-on-State Electoral Violence.

This notwithstanding, electoral violence is defined by four criteria namely 1) the motive of the violence, 2) the timing of the violence, 3) the actors perpetrating the violence, and 4) the targets of the violence (Höglund, 2009). In terms of motive, violence is usually intended to influence the outcome of an election. The style and type of violence employed can take a variety of forms, but it is temporally close to Election Day. The perpetrators of violence are generally state and non-state actors who have vested interest in the outcome of an election, such as members of the state security apparatus (police, military, etc.), militias that are loyal to particular candidate, parties, and rank-and-file party supporters (Taylor, 2018). Similarly, (Taylor, 2018) outlined the following four key dimensions to include 1) the timing of violence, 2) the perpetrators of violence, 3) the victims of violence, and 4) the severity of violence.

As observed, electoral violence can take place in any stage of the electoral process such as before, during and after the election. At times, it occurs at the instance of announcement of election result. This means that it can happen before or on the polling day, as was the case in the Guinean elections in 2010. It can also break out just after the elections as in the 2005 presidential election in Togo and in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 (UNOWAS, 2017). Birch & Muchlinski (2007) noted that it can take place before, during or after elections and it can target different entities, including candidates, activists, poll workers, election observers, journalists and voters. Election related violence also

occur at the instance of announcement of elections result (Seeberg, Wahman & Skaaning, 2018; So`derberg Kovacs, 2018), as was the case in Nigeria, in 2011, Gambia in 2016-2017, and Zimbabwe in 2018, etc. The violence is often targeted at human and non-human materials associated with the electoral processes. The severity of violence meted out differs among actors and situations. It also depends largely on the capacity, and nature of violence deployed. Therefore, electoral violence may involve the use of bare hands, words of mouth (hate speech), gerrymandering, unnecessary delays, supply of insufficient electoral material, late opening of polling booth, absence of security personnel, election securitization, security saturation, stick, stones, abduction, kidnapping, assassination, maiming, compulsion, matchete, club, gun, explosives, etc, in determining the outcome of election, influencing the choice of voters or direction of vote, deciding who emerges as a party's flag bearer at general election, or in preventing the conduct of an election.

In the view of this, electoral violence is a means to an end, and not an end in itself. The sponsors and perpetrators of electoral violence are primarily driven by what they stand to gain through the violence much more than in the violence itself. Hence, the higher the pay-off, the more intense the violence and the more sophisticated the instruments of violence deployed in the process. In accordance, Birch, Daxecker & Høglud (2020), observe:

Electoral violence is typically selected from among available tools to achieve electoral ends, even if the use of force may simultaneously deliver on other goals, as when land is forcibly taken from a political opponent to reward a political ally. The goals of violence generally include political exclusion, be it exclusion from candidacy (via attacks on candidates); from campaigning (via attacks on or obstruction of campaign events); from the provision of electoral information (via attacks on media outlets, election observers, and NGOs involved in voter education); from electoral participation and free electoral choice (via the intimidation, coercion, and/or the displacement of voters); from electoral victory (via

attacks on polling stations and poll workers or the destruction of polling materials); or from power (via post-electoral protests contesting the outcome of the election (p.5).

The causes of electoral violence include lack of confidence in the electoral process, culture of impunity, gerrymandering, systemic disenfranchisement of a section of the society, inordinate ambitions, winner takes all mentality, as well as lack of compelling message, among others. For UNOWAS (2017) observed that it takes place more often in a context of real or alleged rigging of elections; major challenges involving ethnic groups, clans, economic powers, and political actors; a minor difference between the candidates' results; unclear or disputed legal framework; non-impartial management bodies; lack of transparency, including electoral data management, proven or alleged fraud in the electoral process; first-past-the-post system; exclusion of specific communities during the electoral process.

Crude oil politics and incidences of electoral violence in Bayelsa State

The political economy of Bayelsa State greatly revolves around crude oil production, its distribution and the revenue that it generates. The state is basically a civil servant state with no single industry. The absence of industries or industrial complex in the state has two implications. First, it means that the state has little or no viable source of internally generated revenue (IGR), second, it not only denies the state the benefit of organised private sector (OPS) but, also means that the state is the major employer of labour. Everyone in the state therefore, relies on government, and politics for survival. Although, the state boost of a number of contractors especially in the oil and gas sector, however, these contrapreneurs (or contraprenuerial class) depend largely on the state for contracts, jobs and patronage. Thus, fueling and supporting a vicious system of spoil politics. This suggests that most of the big names in the state are in one way or the other linked to the state or crude oil businesses.

As a result, elections in the state use to be hotly contested among different factions of the elites in the state. With all major political actors and stakeholders

in the state drawing their cheque from oil revenue that accrues to the state, and with oil being the only business in town, it therefore, becomes inevitable that high premium will be placed on the capture of the state's power by political gladiators in the state. The soul of the state is perceived by these actors as an object that must be captured at all cost and with every means necessary. This then, transforms (election that) what ought to be democratic process of conflict resolution among contesting parties into a zero sum affair in their struggle for state power.

A struggle that its outcome determines who receives, controls, disburses and appropriates the states oil wealth in addition to other benefits that are directly or indirectly linked to oil prospecting and production in the state. It is the lure of this largess that impels politicians to approach election in the state with a do-or-die mentality. Accordingly, they recruit and mobilise unemployed youths, cult groups, and militants to unleash mayhem on the electoral process, opposition candidates, opposition parties, royalties and supporters of opposition parties/candidates, electoral officers, voters, communities, electoral materials, public and private properties, etc. This results in bodily and psychological injury, population displacement, loss of property, loss of source of livelihood, destruction of property, cancellation of elections in affected polling units, wards and constituency (ies), and death in extreme cases. Decrying this ugly situation, Watts, (2008) noted that:

The militia for example got their start by being supported (financially and with arms) by politicians in the oil-producing states, the decentralization of corruption, the rise of powerful gubernatorial machine politicians, and the democratisation of violence that mark post-1999 Nigeria (p.40).

Evidently, politicians mobilise and perpetuate violence in areas they are in comparative disadvantage to their opponent. This is in line with the observations of Collier & Vicente (2014) when they observed that violence can be used to deter voters from exercising their rights. They also argued the use of violence may not always be to reduce turnouts in the beneficiary's – incumbent or challenger – strongholds, but in the areas the beneficiaries

may not be too sure of winning, especially in the swing areas. In the two gubernatorial elections, it is our view that both leading parties are equally capable to deploy violence for electoral purposes (Adigun, 2019). This prompted Obi (2010) to observe that violent conflicts in oil producing states are often the outcome of the struggles over oil. This, he noted is because of the strategic location of crude oil in global capitalism particularly the social relations of powers that are spawned around oil extraction and commoditization. Corroborating this, Egnweree (2014) opined that crude oil and politics are inextricably linked as politicians see its control as the major control of state power. This often led to intense competition for the capture of state power. On the basis of which not just oil resources, but the entire resources of the state are controlled, distributed and appropriated. Commenting on this, Omoweh (2005) argued that the oil wealth changed the character of politics in the country specifically the intensification of the struggle for the capture of state by members of the political class at all cost. Highlighting, this intricate relationship between benefits that are derived from crude oil politics through spoil politics and patronage system that triggers electoral violence in Bayelsa state, PIND (2015) observes:

In many ways, the results of the gubernatorial elections will be more directly significant for local constituents and ethno-political interests than the presidential contest, especially given the prominent role that political patronage plays in the state with political leaders rewarding their supporters with privileged positions in government establishments and lucrative government contracts (p.1).

Elections in Bayelsa state is symptomatic of the enduring character of electoral violence in most Niger Delta states where complex interplay of political and other socio-cultural forces complement each other in the struggle for the control of crude oil revenue. Having a history of electoral violence, political analysts now link the state's electoral calendar with oil violence as it often target both politicians and oil production (Thurston, 2012). Indeed, all the elements of Fund for Peace (2015a, p.2) description of election induced violence in the Niger Delta at the various phases of the process have occurred

in Bayelsa state. For them:

Elections at the national, state and local levels in the Niger Delta are often accompanied by complex conflict dynamics. Elections are seen as opportunities to influence the distribution of public wealth and to access large clienteles of political patronage, creating incentives for intra- and inter-party violence. Early in the process (before or after party primaries), those with a stake in the results may attempt to intimidate, abduct, or kill aspirants in order to influence which candidates ultimately run for office. Once candidates have been selected, violence may be used to intimidate voters and election officials during campaigns, registration, and polling. In some cases, violence can break out upon the announcement of the results if partisan polarization is very high and one group feels aggrieved by the outcome.

Since the reintroduction of democratic governance in the country in 1999, elections in Bayelsa state especially at the state, local government, and community levels have been marked by violence. For instance in 1999, while the Presidential election went on smoothly, the outbreak of oil wealth distribution induced violence delayed the conduct of state level of elections in the state. By the time of the 2003 general elections, the style and nature of the violence had increased. Most polling units and collation centres could not open due to high level intimidation. The election witnessed widespread violence across the state. In Nembe, it was reported that the clash between supporters of United Nigeria People's Party (UNPP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on April 10th, 2003 at Bassambiri led to death of many (Human Rights Watch, 2003). In Southern Ijaw, the clash between the supporters of the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and the PDP on April 19, 2003 at Oporoma, the Local Government headquarters resulted in the death of seven persons. In Sagbama Local government, similar clash resulted in razing of the house of a local transition committee chairman as well as the office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with dozen of cars.

The 2007 gubernatorial election in the state even though appeared relatively peaceful witnessed twin attacks on the headquarters of the state chapter of the PDP.

During the 2012 elections, Bayelsa State was polarized by the intra-party violence within the PDP, which created a volatile atmosphere in the build up to the election. In 2012, there were two bombings suspected to be linked to political tensions around the gubernatorial elections (Fund for Peace, 2015b). November of 2013 was characterized by violence reportedly stemming from continued political tensions surrounding the Ijaw National Congress Elections in October 2012. These ugly incidents included the reported targeting and kidnapping of youth group members and political allies supportive of each candidate (Fund for Peace, 2015b). It was on this note that PIND (2015) stated:

Transition of gubernatorial power has historically been fraught with violence in Bayelsa. In 2012, for instance, political tensions were high, with reported explosions at party secretariats, cultist violence targeting political aspirants, a reported assassination attempt, kidnappings, and general political thuggery (p. 1).

Moreover, the 2015 gubernatorial elections, was contested between the All Progressive Congress (APC) coming from the back of its Presidential victory where it became the first party in the political history of Nigeria to unseat an incumbent President and party from power. It has former Governor, Timipre Sylva as its candidate, and the PDP, which presented incumbent the Governor, Henry Seriake Dickson as its candidate witnessed murderous violence. The election presents a shadow rematch of the APC and PDP in the state from the Presidential elections where the APC candidate Mohammedu Buhari won over the PDP candidate, a bona fide son of the Ijaw nation. In fact, the heat of that election was yet to settle, especially among the Ijaw's by the time the state went to poll on December 5, 2015 to choose its governor. The intense atmosphere under which the election was conducted can be gleaned from assertions of Asari Dokubo in an interview with PM News on September 8,

2015 stated:

...the Ijaw nation will not allow Governor Henry Seriake Dickson and former President Goodluck Jonathan to be disgraced by losing the December 5 gubernatorial election to the main opposition party in the state, All Progressives Congress, APC (PIND, 2015 p.2).

He went further to reinforce the significance of the December 5, 2015 elections within the context of the Ijaw nation and pride. Thus:

We Ijaws don't run away from our enemies. Jonathan did a lot for all those who have turned against us. Nobody, wherever he is, can move the Ijaw nation. We've never been conquered, the British knows this fact. This fight is beyond Henry Seriake Dickson, it is beyond you and me, it is for all. He will never be disgraced on December 5. They have boasted that they have control of the Army, INEC, Police, Navy and SSS. But we will meet in the battlefield on Election Day (PIND, 2015 p.2).

The 2015 gubernatorial election in the state can be described as the most deadly in terms of the volume of violence that was recorded in the process. Whereas the divisive nature of the pre-election campaign necessitated the deployment of large number of security personnel to the state, the election was characterized by voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, hijacking of electoral materials in addition to tumultuous violence in most parts of the state namely Brass, Ekeremor, Nembe, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw, and Yenagoa local governments. These were evident in the pre-elections sporadic shootings in Nembe local government precisely in Ogbolomabiri where two persons were shoot, Brass local government. In Ekeremor, gunmen on the early morning of the Election Day attacked the house of Minister of State for Agriculture, Heineken Lokpobiri who was the Director-General of the campaign team of the APC candidate (Ebiri, 2015). Southern Ijaw witnessed on the Election

Day heavy gun play and dynamites at Oporomo, headquarters of the local government where it was alleged that five persons lost their lives. According to the Amnesty International, the violence in addition to lives lost, led to the displacement of 600 persons in Southern Ijaw (Oguntola, 2016). The violence also resulted to the initial postponement of election in Southern Ijaw from Saturday to the next day (Sunday) before INEC declared the entire process inconclusive and consequently ordered a re-run in Southern Ijaw and few wards in Ekeremor and other places across the state where election did not hold were where cancelled due to one challenge or the other on January 10, 2016. According to the Fund for Peace (2015b):

There were over two dozen instances of insecurity in the second half of 2014. Of those, three incidents were believed to be mainly related to the upcoming elections. One such event occurred in November when unidentified gunmen shot and killed the Secretary of Bayelsa State Independent Electoral Commission (BYSIEC). Later in December, suspected political thugs raided the Bayelsa State Secretariat of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) (p.15).

Again, in its report on the Niger Delta election violence update, the Fund for Peace (2015c) observed that in the build up to the 2015 general elections there were several reports of destruction of campaign materials by youths and thugs in Brass, Kolokuma/Opokuma, and Nembe Local Government Areas (LGAs). During the same period, tensions between parties and candidates escalated to violence on several occasions, particularly in Sagbama, Nembe, Ekeremor, and Southern Ijaw LGAs, often involving suspected paid thugs.

The November 16, 2019 gubernatorial election even though was adjudged to be peaceful; was not entirely violence free. This was demonstrated by the death of some persons as a result of bullet wound, and various degrees of injuries incurred by others in election related violence in Nembe Local Government during a botched PDP campaign few days to the election. It was alleged that over five thousand thugs were imported from neighbouring Delta state and Rivers states to cause violence in the state during the election

(Ebiri, 2015). In other pre-election violence, one person was killed and many were injured when an All Progressives Congress (APC) rally in Sagbama, Bayelsa state turned violent on 3 February (Amnesty International, 13 February 2019). Commenting on the violence that happened in Nembe few days to the November 16, 2019 elections Governor, Henry Seriake Dickson stated that “what took place in Nembe, should be referred to as, ‘Nembe massacre.’ It’s unfortunate that in this day and age this continues to happen from time to time in our country and in this state particularly” (Oyadongha, 2020). The report of the panel of inquiry set up by the Governor, Seriake Dickson to study the pre-election violence in Nembe Local Government Area revealed that an estimated 21 persons were killed, 195 persons suffered various degrees of injuries, 19 persons were reported missing while another 350 persons reported that their properties were vandalized in the violence witnessed during the 2019 governorship election in the state (Osahon, 2020, Oyadongha, 2020). Besides, election was cancelled in Ologi (ward 03) in Ogbia Local Government Area following the abduction of an election official and the burning of voting materials (*Punch* 2019; Adebayo, 2019).

Conversely, the 16 Brigade of Nigerian Army in Yenagoa on February 24th, 2019, arrested 15 armed men suspected to be political thugs implanted to cause violence during the Presidential and National Assembly elections in Ikebiri, Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa. According to the Brigade Spokesman, Danjuma, items recovered from the suspects include one General Purpose Machine Gun, two 200 horse powered speedboats, large quantity of ammunition, 16 mobile phones and seven Motorola radio. Also recovered were five Motorola battery charger, three wrist watches, five torch light, four identify cards, and the sum of sixteen thousand naira (*Vanguard*, 2019). Responding to the violence witnessed during the 2019 general elections in some parts of the state, Governor Dickson in line with Section 2 (1) of the Commission of Inquiry Laws of Bayelsa State, inaugurated a six man commission of inquiry to study the violence witnessed during the conduct of Presidential and National Assembly elections in the state. The Commission was charged with the mandate of identifying the sponsors and perpetrators of the violence as well as identities of those that were killed or injured in the violence; in addition to properties destroyed (*Punch*, 2019).

Implications of electoral violence on the socio-economic and political development of the state

Electoral violence just like all violent conflict results generates negative outcomes for the society where it occurs. Generally, violence in all its forms lead to injuries, population displacement, destruction of property, social dislocation, instability, etc. in addition to all these, electoral violence, specifically impacts democratic values and societal development in many ways.

First, electoral violence leads to the election of mediocre and incompetent leaders. Experience had shown that people that emerge ascend leadership position through violence rather than competitive electoral processes are often visionless, directionless, and planless. Violence are usually the instrument of those that believe they stand no chance of winning under free, fair and credible atmosphere. Democracy we all know works better in an enlightened society. Hence, the ascension of leadership position by persons not knowledgeable on the workings of human society and democratic order never augur well for societal transformation and advancement. It was on this note that the Chairman, BoT, G24 Embasara Foundation and former Executive Secretary/Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board, Arch Amagbe Denzil Kentebe observes:

Violence comes in when someone doesn't have something to offer. ...we believe that if there is no violence during election in Bayelsa State, we will have the best of leadership. And the best of leadership will always ensure great development (Salaudeen, 2019).

Second, violence during electioneering period use to give birth to leaders and government that suffer crisis of legitimacy. When the people assume that a leader imposes himself, or was imposed on them through *logic of the bullet rather than logic of the ballot*. They distance themselves from such a government, withdraw their support and hardly trust it and its policies. This lack of trust makes the people not to identify with the policies and programmes of the government. Alihodzic (2012) states:

Electoral violence reproduces repressive and non-democratic power structures including patriarchal repression in the institutional space. It doesn't only diminish trust in democratic processes, it undermines the quality of democracy both directly (repressing/killing voters, candidates, etc) and indirectly (limited inclusive participation) as well as through public perceptions of legitimacy. In some contexts, elections have already become synonymous with trouble and danger. Such associations have devastating effects on trust in democratic processes and institutions (p.57).

Third, another are that election-related violence is usually felt is voter-turnout. The popularity of a party's or candidate's programme in an election is measured by the percentage of the entire population of voting age (registered voters) that support his candidacy as expressed by the total vote cast in his favour. Interestingly, experience had shown that the rate of voter turnout and incidence of electoral violence are inversely related. Electoral violence scars people away from voting coming out to cast their vote. Decrying the situation, Akinola (2019) noted that during the November 16, 2019 gubernatorial elections, data from INEC shows that there are 923,182 registered voters in Bayelsa, however, only an abysmal 35.87% of them turned out to vote in the last election. Although, the November 16, 2019 gubernatorial election had been adjudged one of the freest and fairest elections conducted in the state in the recent times, the vestiges and memories of the one before and most especially the pre-election violence at Nembe and such other places across the state may have forced people to stay back. In so doing, it disenfranchises most of the eligible voters, violates their social and political rights and ultimately facilitates the election of an unpopular candidate. Fourth, is in the area of its effect on popular participation. Election-related violence undermines citizen's political participation in two ways: one of the ways it does this is by limiting voters turn-out on Election Day, as already mentioned. On the other hand, it discourages the involvement or citizens or their representatives in process of governance. As leaders having emerged relied on primitive accumulation of vote as well as efficiency norm as against legitimacy norm in winning the electoral contest, no longer see

the need for consulting or engaging the people in the process of policy making. This runs contrary to the Lincolnian understanding of democracy as government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Fifth, election-related violence seriously impact of economic activities. During violence, companies, manufacturing plants, business places, traders, farmers, transporters, teachers and fishers, etc, all shutdown. This way income lost and jobs are lost. Man hour are also wasted while crops in the farm ready for harvest spoil. Thereby triggering rise in the prices of goods and services. In the process, qualified labours, foreign companies and investments relocates their operational bases to areas they consider conducive for business. Alihodzic (2012) highlighted this fact when he observes:

Elections are the largest administrative undertakings in democratic societies, and consequently the costs associated with elections may represent a major financial burden. In some cases, governments are unable to finance elections and depend on international electoral assistance. In addition, electoral competition and election monitoring involve significant expenditures for political parties, and domestic and international monitoring groups. Election-related violence will not only squander those resources but will further cause destruction of local communities and infrastructure with numerous negative economic and developmental consequences, both direct and indirect (p.57).

Sixth, by destroying properties (both private and public) electoral violence indirectly enhances and worsens the underdeveloped situation of the environment. Given that the area suffers acute shortage of social infrastructures necessary for proper human functioning, the few available ones happen to be destroyed through the violence. For instance, when under the influence of election-related violence library facilities, building, markets, parks, water reticulation networks, etc are destroyed. It will not only set the state back, rather the government will be compelled to reallocate

its scarce resource. Suggesting that money that was previously budgeted for the provision of pressing needs to the people will be withdrawn in order to amend, reconstruct and replace what had been destroyed.

Seventh, electoral violence undermines the democratic character of electioneering processes. By not allowing the vote to count, electoral violence vitiates the democratic principles of electoral credibility and integrity from whatever elections that was conducted and opens the vortex for blame and counter-blames as well as claims and counter-claims that ends in electoral adjudications. Consequently, monies that ought to have been used in governing the state will be dedicated towards winning the court case while the society suffers. Throughout the period of litigation no meaningful governance takes place; thus reifying the idea of democracy without governance.

Eight after recruiting and mobilizing youths for to perpetrate electoral violence, politicians hardly retrieve these deadly weapons from them. This accounts for high rate of small arm and light weapons proliferations that often trail the elections in the state. it is these arms that use to fuel cult wars as well as increase in the rate of armed banditry, militant activities, and criminality in the state. This is evidenced in the daily reportage of cult related crimes in addition to armed robbery cases both inside commercial tricycles (popularly known in Nigeria as Keke), shop, business centres, markets, roadside kiosks and residential houses, etc.

Concluding remarks

The Bayelsa political space is high tensioned and volatile. This volatility is evidenced in the brinkmanship that characterized elections in the state. Although, factors that trigger electoral violence are naturally curvilinear such as party politics, ethnicity based politics, etc. The findings of this study suggest that the roots of election-related violence in the state should be located in crude oil politics. Given that the state depends largely on oil revenue and other benefits that accrue therein for survival. As a result, the violence is but manifestations of intra and inter group struggles among political actors in the state over who or which faction of the elite class is to dominate the state. And as such, control, appropriate, and allocate the states crude oil wealth.

On this note, the study makes the following suggestions:

It is imperative that the economy of Bayelsa state be reformed and diversifies away from its crude oil dependence that is at the moment the major source of revenue to the state. As it is the lure of this easy wealth that requires no direct effort or input of politicians that compels individuals and groups to place high premium on the capture of state power that grants its occupant unrestricted access to the crude oil wealth. In addition to distribution and allocation of contracts and rewards, etc in the crude oil production value chain reserved for locals.

There should be severe punishment for sponsors and perpetrators of electoral violence. In Bayelsa just as elsewhere in Nigeria, nearly all forms of electoral exercise be it Presidential election, National Assembly elections, Gubernatorial elections, State assembly election, local council election, party primaries in addition to Ijaw National Council (INC) and Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) elections, etc use to marred by violence. Unfortunately, despite setting up of various committees and panels of inquiries; no one had been arrested or prosecuted in relation to these violence that claim lives in their numbers. The non-punishment of these conflict entrepreneurs and their foot soldiers even when arrested by security personnel serve to reinforce their commitment and predisposition to election violence. In addition to the prescribed punishment in the electoral, which to this study is too pedestral, such persons should be banned for live from participating in any political activities in the country. This will serve as deterrent to others. Politics should be on a part-time basis. In Nigeria and Bayelsa in particular, politicians take to politics as full time occupation. Hence, they have no other source of livelihood aside politics (the state). it is this situation that engenders the do-or-die approach towards the struggle for power. As the loss of power or inability to capture it, is not interpreted just as loss of position. Rather, it is, loss of means of livelihood and power. This explains why those in power do everything within their reach to remain in power, even when it is obvious to them they are not doing well. And those outside of power are equally too desperate to take over.

The state should be autonomous (independent) from the struggle of classes. This suggests that awarding of crude oil production related contract be it

surveillance or pipeline clearance, appointments, nomination/selection into committees, job placement, scholarship, etc, should be on the basis of merit as against mediocrity and partisanship. For as long as the state remain privatized in the interest of the dominant class or a section of it. And is by this token, seen as instrument of class rule, it becomes difficult, as argued by Okoye (2019):

For competing groups to see the state as an impartial public force that is out to protect the interest of all. Rather they view it as a partial entity that habitually intervenes on behalf of the group that controls state apparatus at any given time. Second, they all hold the opinion that their interests can only be served and protected if, and only when one of their own controls the mechanism for determination of who gets what, when and how? (p.41)

It is within the above context that electoral violence and its collateral damages to the society festers.

The government, its agencies, Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), academic institutions, etc should provide value reorientation intervention. The study assumes that the sponsors and perpetrators of acts of electoral violence are ignorant of the consequences of their actions in terms of human and material cost as well as its implication for democratisation. In the view of this, there need for relevant agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to carry out a thorough value re-orientation campaign targeted at both politicians and youths. For the politicians, they need to understand that leadership is a call to service and not to be served or means of primitive wealth accumulation. And that it entails sacrifice and self-abnegation. On the part of the youths, they have to understand that violence is not a way of live. If it is to be, our politicians would have preserved and recruited their children for the jobs. Rather, than wasting their future maiming and destroying their available infrastructure, they should demand good governance as against guns, from politicians.

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