



## Arms Proliferation and Political Violence in Nigeria: A Case of Kogi State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*Political violence is becoming a serious threat to security and democratic governance in Nigeria. This study therefore examines the impact of arms proliferation on political violence with specific reference to Kogi. It adopted a descriptive survey design because of the paucity of data on arms proliferation and political violence in Kogi state. Three hundred (300) respondents were purposively sampled. A self-administered structured questionnaire was the major instrument adopted for this study, while it was used as an interview guide to obtain responses from semi-literate and illiterate respondents. Data were collected, collated, summarised and described using frequency tables and counts. The following are the major findings of the study: there is an imbalance power sharing among diverse ethnic groups; the imbalance of political power breeds aggression resulting from frustration, Politicians and their agents are responsible for the availability of arms and the state security agents were handicapped by the limit of their fire-power and logistic supply. The study recommends that: there should be power-shift in the interest of peace; power balance or fair representation of both majority and minority groups; and that weapon control should be intensified to limit arms availability.*

**KEYWORDS :** Arms, Arms Proliferation, Political Violence, Security, Violence

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of arms proliferation and political violence in Kogi State, Nigeria can be analyzed in the concept of ethnicity, violence and democracy. These issues intercepted as concentric circles forming the relationship of pluralism, contradictions and confusion. Kogi State, is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious, - a classic case of pluralism. Like any plural society, the state faces the dilemma of achieving solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of multiple ethnic nationalities. These nationalities include the Igalas, Ebira, Oworo, Owe, Okun among others. This creates a unique problem of the various ethnic groups being in perpetual conflict and competition over resources.

The conflict is understood in the light of the fact that while inhibiting the same political environment, these ethnic groups consider themselves biologically, culturally or socially distinct from each other, and often view their relations in actual or potentially antagonistic terms.

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The posture of ethnic groupings in Kogi, the competitive short-term tactics and long-

term strategies that are deployed are a function of history and of the resources they seek to control through political office.

Although Kogi state is a political entity, the minority question remained unresolved. Democratic governance has not advanced equity, transparency, fairness at poll and even distribution of resources. Diverse ethnic nationalities in Kogi state have to look inward to themselves for political succour or survival in an incoherent polity lacking in requisite integration.

Sequel to the foregoing, ethnically consciousness citizens seeks the control of state resources – man, material and money including arms. Victory at polls is seen as ethnic victory and opportunity to dominate others. Political power game remained a “do-or-die” affair. The skewed political power in favour of the dominant group in Kogi state perpetuates the unrestrained political might. The minority often resort to armed violence in order to attract media and public attention.

In the light of the above, the following questions form the basis of the research problem:- What is the historical antecedence to political governance in Kogi State, Nigeria? What are the causes of armed political struggle in Kogi State, Nigeria? What are the implications of arms proliferation and political violence in Kogi State, Nigeria? What are the conflict management options available for curtailing political violence in Kogi State, Nigeria? How effective are these conflict management mechanisms? What are the factors militating against these mechanisms?

### CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Kogi State, Nigeria was carved out of the then Benue and Kwara State on August 27, 1991 by the then Federal Military Government of Gen-

eral Ibrahim Babangida. Located on Longitudes 6.450E and Latitude 7.490N, Kogi state is in the North Central geo-political zone of Nigeria. With a population of 3.3 million people, it has a land mass of about 28,313.5 square kilometre (Kogi State Government, 2010). It has the acronyms of ‘Confluence State’ derived from the fact that the confluence of Rivers Niger and Benue is located at its capital, Lokoja, which was also the first administrative capital of modern day Nigeria. Kogi State shares common boundaries with Niger and Nasarawa States to the west as well as the Federal Capital Territory to the north. To the east it is bounded by Benue, Enugu and Anambra states, to the south by Delta and Edo states, while to the west by Kwara, Ondo and Ekiti states.

Kogi state, Nigeria is made up of people of defunct Kabba Province of Northern Nigeria. It has three main ethnic groups: Igala, Ebira and Okun (Yoruba group), with other minorities such as Bassa, Nupe, Gwari, Kakauda, Oworo (Yoruba) and Eggan. There are twenty-one (21) Local Government Areas in the state. These are grouped along three ethnic (Igala, Ebira, and Okun) lines as Kogi East, Central and West Senatorial Districts respectively.

Christianity and Islam are the two dominant faiths in the state. Traditional African religion is also popular among the people. Agriculture, though at subsistent level, is the main occupation of the people. Obajana Cement Company is the only functional industry in the state. Ajakuta Iron and Steel and Itakpe Iron Ore Companies remained moribund.

The recurrent political violence in Kogi State has its roots in the continuous resentment among the three major tribal groups – Igala, Ebira, and Okun – over ethnic dominance and political positions. The feeling of injustices within Ebira and Okun against the Igala heightened with the disagreement over which ethnic group should produce the state governor. The proposal to rotate the governorship position among the main ethnic groups has always been met with fierce rejection by the Igala who has continually dominated the choice of political position since the creation of Kogi State. The Igala claimed fifty two percent (52%) majority, therefore continued to maintain political dominance, to which the remaining ethnic groups disagree. This value-based conflict culminates into armed political struggle which forms the basis of the study.

### 2.0 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

a. Arms proliferation: Proliferation of illegal arms has the attention and concern from international community in contemporary time. Cukier (2001) noted that the proliferation of arms contributed to the culture of violence and a cycle that is difficult to break. He opined that the negative consequences of the proliferation and misuse of small arms are impediments to economic development, provision of health care and education services as well as effective governance and democracy. Danjuma (2002) also affirmed that as long as large quantity of small arms are in wrong hands, there will be no future for democracy.

The Federal Government set up a National Committee in 2009 with a mandate of working with all stakeholders to surmount the intracta-

ble problem of proliferation and trafficking of illegal arms in Nigeria. However, in Kogi State, not much has been done to disarm the political thugs who have continued to kidnap, rob, assassinate, kill, intimidate and maim innocent citizens.

### b. Conceptualising Political Violence

Political violence refers to all forms of collective attacks within a political system. The concept presents a set of events, common characteristics of violence or threats of violence (Alanamu, 2005). Honderish (1989) posited that political violence is a destructive use of force against person or things, a use of force prohibited by law, directed to a change in policies, personnel or system of government, and hence directed also to changes in the existence of individual in the society. A more comprehensive definition was given by Anifowose (1982) that political violence is the use or threat of political act carried out by an individual or a group of individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals and property with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and/or destruction to property. Its objectives, choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation, and effects have political significance, that tends to modify the behaviour of others in the existing arrangement of a power structure.

From these definitions, political violence manifests the following characteristics: (1) It is a social behaviour involving the actions of stakeholders and role players on the platform of politics and the quest is to secure state power. (2) It is a crime of violence targeted at the person or property with ultimate purposes of instigating fear and removing obstacles to political power. (3) Its ultimate end is the brute use of force to alter the power structure in decisive ways, to eliminate opposition and other seemingly obstructive structure to attain political power. (4) It is targeted at the general political system which may include other sub-system such as election, party representation, and legitimisation of political office.

### c. Factors that cause political Violence

Azeez (2005) identified the following factors:

- (i) A sort of response to frustrating circumstances. In Kogi state and Nigeria, politics is a game of promises without fulfilment. Individuals, groups and communities had their aspiration raised without the possibility of fulfilment. The frustration arising from discrepancy between expectations and achievement are the root of political violence.
- (ii) Breakdown of consensual norms: trends such as industrialisation, urbanisation or modernisation are assumed to create new classes or groups of the population with different lifestyles.
- (iii) Relative deprivation: This is a state of mind where there is a discrepancy between what men seek and what seems attainable. The greater this discrepancy, the greater the anger and their propensity towards violence.
- (iv) A product of struggle for power among groups: In Nigeria, the possession of political power leads directly to economic power, hence power seekers can do anything to achieve political power basically to improve their economic status and well-being. Those who hold position in the power structure determine the location and distribution of scarce resources. Exclusion from this power position often provoke violence.
- (v) Violence as the ultimate alternative: Political violence is often a natural concomitant of the political process, particularly where there is a fierce competition over the sharing of power.
- (vi) The role of the media: Reporting violent events accurately is the hallmark of the media, which in a way, exposes the masterminds of such conflicts. Violence in Nigeria media may be sensationalised and exaggerated either for commercial consideration or social control (Adedimeji, 2005)
- (vii) Circumvention of the rule of law: The government and the ruling party benefit economically and politically from the mayhem. The violence appears to have been used as strategy to retain power. This is aimed at circumventing the rule of law and undermining the process of political pluralism (Osamba, 2001).
- (viii) Other factors: These include violence within the context of ethnic and religious agitation, reckless manipulation of the electoral process, imposition of unpopular candidates, disrespect for constitution, injustice and downward trend in the economy (Kalu, 2003 and Alanamu, 2005).

### 3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The diversity and plural nature of Kogi State entail the adoption of theories with dual perspective on the dynamics of conflicts that have led to proliferation of arms and political violence.

Frustration-aggression theory was adopted as a theoretical framework. Although this theory emphasised inter-personal conflicts, its assumption can be adapted for intergroup relation and conflicts. The proponents of the theory comprised, Dollard, J.; Doob L. W.; Miller, N.E. and Mower, O. H. who proposed the theory in 1939. Dollard et al. (1939) assumed that aggression is always caused by frustration. According to them, people often respond to stressful events by striking out at others with aggressive behaviour. Aggression is defined as any behaviour that is intended to hurt someone, either physically or verbally. There is therefore a causal link between frustration and aggression. Despite the weakness of this perspective, it is application to this study as a framework in the following ways:

- a. Real or imagined failure at poll may trigger frustration.
- b. Frustration from real or imagined political failure may result in verbal or physical aggression leading to violence.
- c. The real or imagined experience of victimisation from frustrated and aggressive opponent may trigger the need for self-defence.
- d. Both the need to strike out at other groups (via frustration and aggression) and the need for self-defence by would-be-victims may lead to proliferation of arms.

### 4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research. In this case, the research was designed to establish the extent to which arms proliferation relates to political violence in Kogi State, Nigeria. It is a survey of opinion of respondents' views on the subject matter. Such opinions were obtained as subjectively perceived by the respondents without manipulation. The variables of the study cannot be manipulated because they are already in certain entity as groups of towns, Local Government Areas (LGA) and senatorial districts in Kogi State. Hence, the study is "mainly ex-post facto".

The sampling method adopted was a multi-stage sampling process. Clustering of LGAs was achieved through the three (3) senatorial districts. From each of the districts, two (2) LGAs were selected. Two communities were selected purposively based on the prevalence of political violence. From the resulting twelve (12) communities, twenty five (25) respondents were chosen as key informants. The data for the study, self administered questionnaire were administered to three hundred respondents. None of the instrument was voided. The research instrument was structured and closed-ended. The analysis of the study data involved the collection, classification and comparison of variables using percentages and frequency tables. The use of descriptive statistics was adopted because the study described existing situation as ex-post facto type.

### 5.0 DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of the respondents showed that 75% (227) were between ages 31 – 40 years, 85% (256) had secondary and/tertiary educational qualification, 58% (176) were civil or public servants, 67% (203) who had lived in Kogi state for more than 20 years and all the respondents were resident in Kogi state, Nigeria between 1999 and 2009.

Descriptive analysis of research data by statement of objectives had the following patterns:

On the pattern of Governance in Kogi state from 1999 to 2009, it was found that:

- i. The two Executive Governors of Kogi state are from Kogi East senatorial Districts, which is mainly populated by Igala/Basa people.
- ii. The two Deputy Governors were from Kogi Central and West Senatorial Districts.
- iii. The Attah of Igala Land (the Paramount Traditional Ruler) remains a political rallying figure in the Kogi East Senatorial District. This factor is an advantage over and above the traditional rulers in both the West and Central Districts because they are more diverse and dispersed.
- iv. Kogi East Senatorial District comprised a block of majority (52%), which remains a great challenge to power shift from Kogi East to either Central or West Senatorial District.
- v. The chronicle of violent incidents involving the use of fire arms in Kogi state show a vicious cycle of inter-group conflicts across the state. These are manifested in clashes of loyal armed groups of Igala political class on one hand and those of Ebirá- Okun on the

- other hand.
- vi. Arson and related property crimes of party loyalists from opposing political groups.
  - vii. Politically motivated assassination of Local Government Council Chairman and the Chairman, Independent State Electoral Commission in 2007.
  - viii. Electoral malpractices – ballot boxes snatching and switching by armed political thugs in 2007.
  - ix. Disruption of political campaigns by armed thugs.
  - x. Assassination of the Divisional Crime office at Idah by political thugs and the reprisal killing of four of the political thugs by the police in 2007.
  - xi. The imposition of curfew in Okene, Adavi, Okehi and Ajaokuta where lives and properties were lost following the announcement of the 2007 gubernatorial election result.
  - xii. Police seizure of about 140 sophisticated weapons including AK47, locally made pistols and dane guns and paraded 47 politicians for illegal possession of arms in 2010.

Respondents' views on the effects of arms availability on political violence in Kogi state identified heavy casualty 21% (62), damage to property 16% (49), high electoral malpractices 27% (80), combined effects 28% (83) and no effects 9% (26)

(a) On sources of fire-arms used in violent political struggles in Kogi State, respondents showed:

- Unknown sources 42% (127), from politicians 21% (66), black market 30% (90) and 7% (20) from direct purchase.
- Unknown agents or thugs, (157%) and party agents 28% (85) were identified as main possessors of arms.

(b) Responses on the types of fire arms deployed by politicians in Kogi State showed that:

- Guns 38% (114), cutlasses, machetes and knives 35% (105), cudgel and battons 27% (81) were freely used.
- The brands of guns used are non-concealable 41% (48), both imported and local concealable 27% (31)
- Various weapons identified above were used during campaign rallies 7%, elections 36% and violent conflicts – 47%.

Responses on mechanisms deployed in the management of political violence and arms proliferation in Kogi state, it was found that:

- Security agencies response were untimely and ineffective 47% (142), timely but not effective 30% (90).
- Arms proliferation control by security agents did not reduce political violence in Kogi state 79% (137).
- Security agencies rarely forbade the use of fire arms by politician during elections.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Arms proliferation and political violence are inter – related social problems in Kogi State in particular and Nigeria in general. They are manifestations of poverty, youth unemployment, relative deprivation and marginalisation, leading to frustration and aggressive behaviour.

These problems will continue to grow and develop if urgent measures are not taken.

It is therefore recommended that:

- rotational political office holding should be practised in the spirit of fairness, equity and egalitarianism;
- governorship position which is an access to political influence and constituency development should not be practiced as 'winner takes all';
- all the major and minor ethnic groups in Kogi state should be fairly represented in governance;
- the role of 'god-father' in Kogi state should be de-emphasised;
- joint ethnic consultative forum should be encouraged to reduce inter- ethnic mistrust and suspicion;
- availability of arms for political and other brands of violence in Kogi State should be reduced through arms mopping and sting operations;
- all registered political parties and candidates should adhere to zero-tolerance in arms use;
- arms proliferation control should be dynamic to accommodate the variants of licensing confiscation and mopping-up of illegal arms in the hold of politicians and discharged security forces;
- dialogues, tolerance and mutual trust should replace violence and counter-productive conflicts in Kogi State and Nigeria in general.

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