



## **Governance and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria**

**O. Oarhe and E. Oyibo**

*Department of Public Administration  
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria  
Department of Political Science  
Novena University, Ogume, Delta State, Nigeria*

### **ABSTRACT**

The fate of any nation rests on the effectiveness and efficiency of its governance. The purpose of governance is essentially to promote collective interest of the citizenry of the state through effective and efficient management. In the recent times, the phenomenon of governance has assumed a central place in the analysis of various issues such as pervading underdevelopment, macro-economic disequilibria, policy performance failure, leadership crisis and recurring conflicts across the world. This paper examines the recurring violent conflicts in the context of the nature governance in Nigeria. The paper, which is based on the study of secondary sources of data revealed that successive governments in Nigeria largely exemplify the phenomenon of bad governance, which manifests in chronic poverty, massive unemployment, pervasive corruption, policy performance failure and infrastructure decay that engenders frustration, disillusionment and psycho-moral dislocation that create the enabling environment for the eruption of various forms of violent conflicts. Thus, the paper concludes if the recurrence of vicious conflicts in Nigeria can be effectively checked governance must be intended to address common needs, problems and interests.

**Keyword:** Governance, violence, conflict, power, and Nigeria.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The fate of any nation rests on the effectiveness and efficiency of its government. In fact, the primary essence of government as an agent of the state is to preserve life and property. More than anything else, an understanding the nature of government is of crucial importance in comprehending the complex and recurring problems that confronts a state. The concept of governance has assumed such important place in analysis due to the challenge of responsive, accountable, open and efficient government in the third world. The consequences of bad governance has been economic decay, corruption, institutional erosion, collapsing infrastructures and social services, autocracy, tyranny and despotism, warlordism and unabating violent conflicts (Joseph 2003).

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The task of this paper is to examine the extent to which bad governance contributes to recurring violent conflicts in Nigeria. In order to meet the objective of this paper, two critical questions are posed to direct our focus. First, what are problems of governance in Nigeria? Second, how do the problems of governance contribute to the recurring violent conflicts in the country? However, before we proceed to address the above questions, it is necessary to clarify the central concepts of the subject matter for the purpose of easy comprehension.

#### **Governance**

The term governance is not new in political science literature still its analytical framework is nebulous, vague, dubious and imprecise (Lewis 1996:199). Essentially, governance refers the manner in which the affairs of a state is managed, administered and regulated for the purpose of the common good. The World Bank (1989) defined governance as the exercise of political power to manage the affairs of a nation (cited in Hyden 1999). Governance encompasses the state institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making processes and implementation capacity and the relationship between the government and the governed. Governance has been used synonymously as good government (Boerlinger 1991 cited in Hyden 1999:134). For governance to be qualified as good it must be perceived and accepted as legitimate, and committed to promoting the well being of the people individually or collectively. Good governance is associated with salient attributes. A summary of the attributes is presented as follows.

Good governance is accountable. Accountability denotes formal, legal requirement to answer to others for obligations conferred and to subject to sanctions for failures of performance. Thus, a good government shuns abuse of power and authority, laxity and negligence.

Good governance is transparent. This implies openness, prudence and lack ambiguity in the management of the affairs of the state.

Responsiveness is a key element of good governance. For any government to be qualified as good, it must be responsive to the legitimate needs and aspiration of the people.

Good governance guarantees effectiveness and efficiency in transacting public business, produces concrete results and ensures sustainable development in the state.

Good governance ensures respect for the rule of law. It protects the fundamental human right and ensures impartiality and justice in dealing with every member or segment of the state. It equates equal opportunities for all.

Popular participation\inclusiveness is a fundamental pre-requisite of good governance. A good government provides all equal access and sense of belonging in the management of the affairs of the state. It manages the interests of the majority and minority with a reasonable sense of inclusion, equity and justice.

#### **Bad Governance**

Based on the discussion of good governance, it is easy to appreciate the concept of bad governance. Literally, the opposite of good is bad. Quite implicitly, bad governance can be regarded as the anti-thesis of good governance. Thus, the elements of bad governance can be given as follows:

Bad governance is associated with arbitrariness, and utter disregard for the principles of the rule of law such as equality before the law, supremacy of the law and independence of the judiciary.

Poor management of public affairs characterizes bad governance. It is ineffective and inefficient in the management of public resources. Quite evident, under bad government are elements of poor results, wastefulness squanderism, prodigally, extravagancy, ineptitude, profligacy, brazen financial indiscipline and rascality.

Bad governance is intended to mainly promote personal interest rather than public interest. A bad government uses public resources to pursue private interest and justify it in public interest. A bad government pursues policies and programmes that are highly insensitive and unresponsive to the plight of citizenry.

Bad governance is associated with low level of transparency. It limits popular participation in decision-making. It hoards, conceals and hinders free flow of information about government transactions.

Bad governance is rent seeking. It encourages a rentier economy through excessive rules and regulations, licensing requirements among others that impede the operations of perfect market system.

Bad governance is grossly unaccountable and irresponsible. It treats the citizens with laxity, negligence and reckless abandonment palpable hubris and arrogance.

The above elements of good or bad governance provides analytical framework for comprehending the transaction of government activities, which have implications for stability or violent conflicts in the polity of a nation. Instructively, these elements do not apply to a particular political system, whether democratic or authoritarian. However, one is tempted to argue that a democratic government is more supportive of good governance than authoritarian government. In fact, democracy provides the foundational requirements for good governance.

### **Violent Conflict**

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in human society. As Williams (cited in Basse 2001) noted conflict occurs where there is interaction between at least two individuals or groups whose ultimate goals differ. There is no universally acceptable definition of conflict among scholars. Coser (1955) defined conflict as the struggle over values and resources, in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. White and Bender (1986) defined conflict as the interaction of independent people or groups who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in

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achieving those goals. To Imobighe (2003), conflict denotes a condition of disharmony within an interaction process, which usually occurs as a result of clash of interests between parties involved in some forms of relationship. Conflict may either be non-violent or violent.

Violence is a harm perpetrated on persons or property ranging in the case of persons from restraining their freedom of movement to torture and killing, and in the case of property from simple fine or damage to complete expropriation or total destruction. A comprehensive treatment of violence cannot be divorced from conflict. All conflicts may not often be violent but all forms of violence as is the concerned of this paper are necessarily conflictual and destructive.

Violent conflicts have been ascribed to several factors such as displacement, dissatisfaction, and frustration arising from group competition for scarce values in social life situation. The individuals and groups value many things such as wealth, status, power, security, equality and freedom. When there is constrain to achieving these values the individual or groups becomes dissatisfied and frustrated. This rebound in violent conflicts (Aghemelo and Osumah 2005:7)

Having examined the major concepts governance and violent conflict, it is germane to show the links between them. Good governance entails elements, which promote peace and stability. Conversely, bad governance entails neglect, injustice, marginalization, exclusion and denial of value as well as restrain on equality and freedom. This engenders frustration, dissatisfaction and disillusionment and disenchantment, which rebound in violent conflict. Thus, violent conflicts can essentially be regarded as indications of poor governance. Ineffective governance affects the mental consciousness, dispositional and attitudinal components of the citizenry. Thus, on account of neglect and insensitivity to their legitimate demands, the people can persistently question the legitimacy of government. As Buzan (1992) noted any system that exposes a majority to agonizing hardship, monumental social justice, severe neglect, and insensitivity must necessarily be an embattled one due to irrepressible desire of people to pull themselves out of such imposed disability.

### **Governance in Nigeria**

Nigeria has existed for almost forty-six years as a sovereign state. Since the country attained political independence on October 1, 196 its governance has been cyclically rotated between the civilian and military ruling class. For the records, within the post independence era Nigeria has experienced civil rule for almost seventeen years under four chief executives. In all, the military ruled Nigeria for about twenty-nine years with eight military heads of state/president. Although the military governance covered longer period of the post independence era in Nigeria, the quality of leadership within the period can at best be regarded as bad. The premise for this conclusion

becomes clear as we examine the different elements or perspectives of governance under the various military and civilian regimes.

### **Governance under Civil Rule**

When Nigeria became independent the first attempt at self-governance was under a civil rule with a blossoming but problematic parliamentary system with Alhaji Tafawa Balewa as the head of government. The administration, which lasted between 1960 and 1966, was characterized by corruption, regional and ethnic polarization. There was no clear-cut policy intended to serve the interest of the average Nigerian. The major investments and policies were intended to serve the interest of the colonial bequest and local ruling class. Thus, the euphoria, hope dimmed in rapidity. The people encountered numbing frustration, general expectation and aborted hope. It was not surprising that the public welcomed the military coup of January 15, 1966, which truncated the first civil rule. After thirteen years of unbroken military rule, civil rule with presidential system of government was put in place. This second attempt endured between 1979 and 1983 under Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Like the first republic, the performance of the governance was dismal. There was decline of infrastructure and social services. Incidences of fraud corruption, illegalities, over-invoicing, inflated contracts, scandals and embezzlement were widespread in the country. The economy was grossly mismanaged. The nation was hugely indebted and became beggarly, with widespread economic woes such as hyperinflation, scarcity of essential commodities, mass unemployment and retrenchment. The government responses to the economic woes have been ad-hoc, uncoordinated and search for scape-goats, e.g. expulsions of illegal aliens.

By 1983, the legitimacy and credibility of the Shagari government was completely eroded. There were public outcries for change {Osaghae 22}. On December 31, 1983 the military intervened.

Governance in the third republic was not in any way better than the previous republics. It was a transitional administration, which comprised civilian and military. While the military chiefs operated at the federal level, the elected civilians operated at the state and local government levels. At whatever level, governance was generally poor. Corruption was rife. The performance of the elected state and local governments was abysmally low. The low commitment of the elected leaders in governance is reflected in their eventual support and acceptance of the illegitimate Interim National Government {ING}.

The democratic governance under Obasanjo Presidency which came into being in 1999 inherited a parlous national economy from the military which occasioned disillusionment and disenchantment among many Nigerians, the military regime was alleged to have left on its trails, as it were, mass poverty, burgeoning unemployment, devalued national currency, energy crisis, decay in infrastructure and dearth of social welfare services. Thus, the inauguration of the current civilian governance raised the hope and expectations of the

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populace. Civilian democratic rule was perceived as a better alternative of governance. Many Nigerian indeed, believed that the socio-economic problem of Nigeria was essentially military rule and that these problems would go underground as soon as civilian democratic governance was enthroned.

However, after over nine years of civilian democratic governance the dividends have been very scanty and the citizens are increasingly manifesting exasperation and frustration as they are far being alienated from government than before. Nigeria has descended to the 13<sup>th</sup> poorest nation in the world despite the guzzling chunk of financial resources mobilized by the government to combat poverty. In 2002 over N2.27 billion was approved for the implementation of the poverty alleviation program. Yet the programme is unclear, unfocused and riddled by lack of accountability corruption inefficiency; acknowledged lack of accountability, poor implementation and very low performance {Okocha 2002:1 Vanguard Feb. 23, 2004:14}. A study of the poverty index shows that the poverty level has risen. However, the government has delivered in the telecommunication sector with the introduction of Global Mobil Communication System, the dissemination of information has improved drastically. But this service has been at a very huge cost to the individual consumer. Meanwhile, this laudable drive by the government is yet to be noticed in the other sectors. In fact, due to the profligacy and wastefulness of the government, dearth of social welfare services has persisted with greater ferocity in the last seven years. Roads, water and power supply and the security of lives and property are still in worrisome state. The energy crisis has worsened in spite of deregulation of the down stream sector and its attended hike in prices even as unemployment still remains unabating. There are currently threats by the government to downsize the workforce in the public service. There has also been hyperinflation rising cost of living, and depreciation of national currency exchange power. By 2003 the Naira, which was in exchanges for 85 to a dollar, has slide with about 80% {Adesanya 2003}.

At the end of Obasanjo Presidency in 2007, majority of Nigerians were disillusioned with the economic situation. Consequently, on inauguration, the Yar'Adua presidency lashed into the mood of the nation and rekindled hope of Nigerians with the announcement of the Seven-point Agenda, which is aimed at critical infrastructure development through improvement in transportation, electricity, and telecommunications, agriculture development and food security through mechanized farming, human capital development through effective health care delivery service and functional and qualitative education, wealth creation through poverty alleviation, land tenure change and affordable housing through mortgage facilities, national security through the rule of law, and electoral reforms as well as resolution of the protracted Niger Delta crisis through dialogue and actual development. After one year, though some optimists may contend still too short to start judging the administration, without any contradiction one can say thus far that the Yar'Adua presidency has been slow, lethargic and lazy in responding to the inherited problems. In fact, the Nigerian state is increasingly manifesting the

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symptoms of a failed state. Out 177 states, Nigeria is in the 18<sup>th</sup> position of the top states at the risk of becoming a failed state. The nation is worse off than war torn countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Somalia (Akinnaso 2008:14). The state of infrastructure is deteriorating especially in the power sector, transportation, health and education sectors. There has been renewed inflationary pressures with sharp increase in the prices of essential items especially foodstuffs. Interest rate has increased considerably (The Punch Editorial 2008:14). Many Nigerians remain impoverished. Corruption is still rife. The Niger Delta remains an open wound. Soft pedal.

### **Governance under Military Rule**

The Major General Aguyi Ironsi administration was the first military administration. The administration, which lasted only six months, came into being on January 15, 1966 following the collapse of the first republic. The Ironsi administration committed a lot of muddles and blunders in the administration of the state. The Ironsi administration failure to prosecute the principal characters of the January 1966 military coup who were mainly Igbos and its promulgation of the Unification Decree No. 34 of 1966 aroused so much dissatisfaction and fear of domination especially in the North that consumed it by July 29, 1966 in military coup, which brought the General Yakubu Gowon administration into governance.

When the Gowon administration came on board the nation was already grouping on the path of perdition. He made efforts to restore peace and unity. For the purposes of dousing the fear of domination hallucinated by the minority groups and efficient governance, Gowon created twelve states out of the four regions. This effort could not however, stop the eruption of the fratricidal civil war {1967 – 1970} which created the deepest cleavage in Nigeria to date. Gowon administration embarked on the 3Rs {Reconstruction Rehabilitation, Reconciliation} programme to fast track the nation's recovery process from the ruins of the civil war. After the civil war, the oil face of petrodollar, the government lost focus and became boisterous that money was no problem to Nigeria but to spend it. Ostentatious living became a national ethic. Like a Father Christmas the Gowon administration grant-aided several African countries such as Sudan, Niger, Sierra, Leone, Somalia, Chad, Mali among others for various purposes. The government embarked on ambitious, prestigious and white elephant projects. Other sectors of the national economy were relegated to the background. The nation became dependent on import {Osaghae 2002}. Corruption became pervasive. The leaders became two powerful and inaccessible. The nation was plunged inexorably into chaos. This circumstance, motivated the military intervention of July 29, 1975, which brought General Muritala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo administration into being.

The Muritala/Obasanjo administration attempted to clinically rid the nation of political and moral decay. To promote effective governance, it created nineteen states. The administration probed former military

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administrators and other top government officials. The properties of those found to have illegally enriched themselves, were confiscated. Also the administration purged the civil service of deadwoods. The administration encouraged a low profile orientation to counteract the profligate ostentation, which the oil boom era had made a way of life. To demonstrate transparency and accountability, Muritala decided to do without elaborate security paraphernalia but this cost him his life.

Unfortunately, his successor General Olusegun Obasanjo {perhaps for his un-readiness for the enormous task of governance} could not sustain the measures put in place to change the fundamental social antecedents such as prebendalism and corruption. The Operation Feed the Nation {OFN} launched by Obasanjo made no concrete

### **Violent Conflicts in Nigeria**

Since independence Nigeria has actually witnessed violent conflicts from time to time. These violent conflicts are of various dimensions. They range from domestic violence, communal conflicts to state violence. In a non-exhaustive search of literature a catalogue of some of the cases of violent conflicts are presented hereunder

#### **Violent Religious Conflicts**

Mailatsines violent uprising (1982) Muslims verse Christians Kaduna (2002), Jos (2004), Kano (2004), Maiduguri (2006) Adamawa (2004), Reprisal attacks Onitsha (2002), Umuahia (2002) Aba (2002)

#### ***Violent Ethnic/Communal Conflicts***

Tiv versus Jukun (existing since 1962), Auchi versus Uzairue (1981), Ogoni versus Ndoni (1994), Jukun versus Kuteb (1999), Aguleri versus Umuleri (1999), Ife versus Modakeke, Ijaw versus Itsekiri, Tiv versus neighboring communities (2000), Yoruba versus Hausas, Lagos (2000), Ibadan (2000), Kaduna (2000), Kwara (2000), Igbos versus Hausas, Kaduna (2002), Kano (2004), Onitsha (2002), Aba (2000), Umuahia (2002), Duman versus Demsa (2001).

#### ***Oil Company versus Community Violent Conflicts***

Iko versus Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) (July 1987), Oboburn versus Elf (October 1987), Umuechem versus SPDC (October 1990), Uzere versus SPDC (July 1982), Ogoni versus SPDC (1990 till date)

#### ***State Invasions/Bombardments***

Igbo massacre (1967-1970), Ogoni Invasions (1992-1995), Odi Invasions (1999), Okigwe killing (2003), Tiv military Invasion, Zaki Biam Invasion



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Literature is replete with the common causatives of these violent conflicts in Nigeria. In sum, the causative for the purpose of this paper is rooted in the crisis of ineffective governance. It has in fact been noted that all the poor quality of governance at all levels overheats the Nigerian polity (Lohor 2002:). The crux of the next section of this paper is the analysis of the implications of bad governance on violent conflicts

### ***Analysis Of The Implications Of Bad Governance for Violent Conflicts In Nigeria***

Governance in Nigeria has generated intense hegemonic struggle for control of federal resources and power. Since independence the huge fortunes and stakes of the national government has been dominantly hijacked, control and dominated by Hausa/Fulani and northern ruling elite. The hegemonic control has been to the detriment of other groups. Those who control political power have used it for the benefits of their region and ethnic group. This orchestrated the feeling of marginalization, exclusion, injustice and inequity. In fact, the orchestrated agitation and violent implosion in the Niger Delta reflects the feeling of neglect, injustice and marginalization. Also, it has fuel coups and counter coups. The April 1990 abortive coup was undertaken to break the yoke of northern hegemony. At the root of the civil war was crisis of confidence and participation. The intense call for sovereign national conference and even secession emerged due to hegemonic control of government.

Furthermore, the MASSOB agitation reflects deep frustration, alienation, dissatisfaction and loss of confidence in the nature since the end of the civil war. The Ogoni Crisis is also a deep reflection of frustration and grievance with successive government neglect. Also the feeling of alienation deprivation and marginalization among individual and groups owing to the hegemonic control and prebendal use of governmental power has been ascribed to the emergence of militant communal and ethnic organization which have been readily available for prosecuting communal and ethnic wars. The Oodua People Congress (OPC), Arewa People Congress (APC) and Egbesu Boys emerged to secure their respective ethnic interest.

Accountability is a measure of good governance. Unfortunately, successive governments in Nigeria have been deficient in terms of accountability. Evidence of corruption abounds at various levels of government under successive administration since 1960. There is no doubt that widespread corruption in government circle skewed the economies against the poor, deepens poverty and exacerbate inequality, sustains informal structure that contribute to a further weakening of vital institution of governance. As corruption engenders wide and growing income gap, disempowerment it consequently becomes a principal cause of violent conflicts. Indeed entrenched corruption, which induces wide income gap and disempowerment engenders and stokes anger, distrust, resentment and desire for revenge, terrorism and violence. As the Secretary General of the UN in a

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letter to the General Assembly on October 31, 2003 on the adoption of the UN Convention Against Corruption rightly observed;

Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by directing funds intended for development undermining a government's ability to provide basic service, feeding inequality and injustice and discouraging foreign investment and aid (Dress, 2005:19)

There are instances of domestic violence and violent military coups in Nigeria justified on the basis of high level of corruption. The maiden coup of January 15, 1966, the July 29, 1975, and the December 31, 1983 were largely rooted on lack of accountability, embezzlement, fraud, kickback, over-invoicing, inflation of contracts, nepotism and illegalities. Also, the Youth Democratic Movement (YDM), which claimed responsibility for burning down of the Lagos Zonal Office of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) on December 23, 2002 justified its action on the corrupt activities of the political class. According to Julius Agba, Secretary General of YDM, "the political class is incurably selfish, blind and dumb to reason and as such needed something to violently shake them to wake up to their responsibilities of putting the nation first in their calculations" (Momodu 2003:4).

Respect for fundamental human rights is a measure of good governance. Lack of respect for human rights such as freedom of association and freedom of expression in Nigeria is also the basis of state violence with the aid of military and police personnel. Government little or no respect for human rights is at the root of most of the state violence and bombardments as manifested in the Okigwe killings, and bombardments and massacre of communities in the Niger Delta region, Zarki Biam in Benue State, Odi in Bayelsa state.

Good governance requires sound economic policies that can guarantee economic prosperity. We have shown that in more than four decades of independence successive governments have largely not been able to generate sound and coherence economic policies for the managing the huge resource endowment and guarantee economic prosperity. Most of the government policies have been effective. Most public policies such as SAP have generated macroeconomic disequilibria, social exclusion, income inequality and poverty. These have accounted for the progressive worsening inter and intra communal conflicts in the country (Ikelegbe 2001).

The poor and unemployed who the most affected segment by such policies are readily available weapons of mass destruction for use by disgruntled elements of the society to mastermind violent conflicts. According to Imobighe (2003) in any small crisis these jobless youth break into both public and private properties and cart away whatever they find. Many of the ethno-religious violent conflicts are generally perpetrated with the poverty stricken, frustrate and jobless youths.

Also, the content and implementation of government policies have direct effect for the fuelling or renewal of violent conflicts in the country. Successive governments in Nigeria have often directly or indirectly influenced decisions that have become ready fuel for violent conflicts. At the

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root of the Ife-Modakeke conflict in Osun state, Ijaw-Itsekiri conflict in Delta State are the inconsistent decisions of the location of government headquarter under Abacha administration.

Bad governance as noted earlier is rent seeking. Since independence successive governments left the control of the commanding heights of the economy in the hands of foreign investment companies such as multinational oil companies and depend on rents and taxes collected from them. The revenues that the nation derives from such economy are usually squandered in an ostentatious life style while paying little attention on the level of compliance of such enterprises to international standard of operations. Thus, these organizations carry out their activities with little or no care for the environment of their host communities. The deleterious effects of the activities on the source of livelihood of their host communities and the responsiveness and sensitivity of the companies are at the root of the antagonism, hostility and conflicts between the oil companies and their host communities in the Niger Delta region. The violent conflicts between the oil communities and oil companies are also discernible in the context of poor or lack of corporate governance include Iko versus Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) (July 1987), Oboburn versus Elf (October 1987), Umuechem versus SPDC (October 1990), Uzere versus SPDC (July 1982), Ogoni versus SPDC (1990 till date).

## CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of the “failed state” in some parts of the world has been a direct consequence of leadership failure as exemplified in bad governance. Since independence Nigeria has suffered bad governance. Governance in the country has been characterized by declining legitimacy, erosion of authority, lack of credibility and corruption. Governance has generated various violent conflicts with the consequent insecurity that has impeded and even retarded development. Thus, there is urgent need to take bold steps to address the crisis of governance if violent conflicts can be checked in Nigeria, we must learn to imbibe the values of good governance and resist the ills that have characterize the process of governance since independence.

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