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Sociological Appraisal of Political Crimes among Political Actors in Benue State

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Political crimes such as political killings, rigging, political violence, imposition of candidates, ballot box snatching, thuggery, kidnapping among others have become hard knots to crack in Nigerian polity today. Leaders are being forced on the masses daily and even on members of political parties by godfathers that have taken over the party machineries perpetrating all kinds of criminality. The study is an attempt to sociologically appraise social problem of political crime in Benue State among political actors. Conflict theory is used as a theoretical model for the study which the study utilizes secondary sources of data while data was descriptively analyzed using mean, variance, standard deviation with the aid of tables and charts. Findings suggest political crimes exist in Benue State with attendant socio-economic consequences and required aggressive efforts of the criminal justice system and security agents to tackle.

Keywords: *Sociology; appraisal; political crimes; political actors.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sociology as study of human society and all structures sees crime as one of the nagging social problems of all societies which causes need to be unearthed. Crimes politically motivated remain one the contemporary social problem in fledgling democracies such as Nigeria. The obvious political crimes in Nigerian contemporary democracy include cases of rigging of election, ballot box snatching, killing among others. According to Dauda [1] the current spate of crime and violence in Nigeria dates back to the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970 when arms began to filter into unauthorised hands. The situation was exacerbated by prolonged military interregnum, its brute force and the violence that characterised it. The sacredness, with which human life used to be held until the early 1970s, was soon thrown to the winds by miscreants and other criminals. The situation was further compounded by Nigerian media's romance with foreign films which were generously laced with crime, violence and sex. The Nigerian home video, currently in vogue, is not better in that it thrives on similar themes – crimes, violence and sex.

Since the return of power in Nigeria in 1999 to date there has been one form of political crimes in Benue State. Some of the political crimes in the State include reported cases of ballot boxes snatching at gun point by some youths in favour of their candidates in Ukum Local Government areas leading to loss of lives and property worth millions of naira. In 2003 general elections similar of such cases sprang up in areas of the State such as kwande, Ukum, Gwer East and Agatu among others. On December 11, 2007, the election petition tribunal in Benue State nullified the election of the speaker of the State House of Assembly, Mr Terseer Tsumba from Buruku State constituency on account of electoral irregularities. Also, apart from rigging they have been wide outcry of imposition of candidates by some political elite against the wishes of the people. Political killings and kidnappings is not left out, in July 10th, 2009 Pastor Gideon Adoor of NKST lortyer a cousin to former Chief of Army Staff, General Victor Malu was assassinated in Makurdi. An associate Professor of Law at Benue State University Makurdi, Gwadue Jande was murdered by gun men on 20th April, 2009, also in 2010 Chairman of Trade Union Congress; Comrade Tony Udu was killed in cold blood. In July, 2015 a Second Republic Member of Benue State House of Assembly Chief Atoza Hinda and

Chief Executive Officer of Labeth Pharmacy, Mr Ternenge Labe and most recently on 20th of May, 2016 Senior Special Assistant to Governor Samuel Ortom on Special Security Matters Mr Denen Igbana had their lives gruesomely terminated. Kidnapping which was uncharacteristic in Benue has also found its way as in 2009 a political stalwart Mr Simon Shango who hails from Tarka Local Government Area was kidnapped only for the intervention of well meaning sons and daughters including the then State Governor Gabriel Suswam [2]. Benue State has over the years witnessed various forms of crimes including those relating to politics such as rigging, political violence and assassination among others [3]. Crime statistics from Nigeria Police Command in Benue State from 2010-2015 indicated that only a total of 9 persons were arrested for kidnapping and 84 persons for breach of public peace. Inferring from the police statistics on crime in Benue State pointed a glaring picture that most of crimes relating to politics are not speedily given prompt attention. Cohen [4] while assessing Violence between and within Political Parties in Nigeria: Statistics, Structures and Patterns from 2006-2014 in Nigeria named Benue State as one of the states in Nigeria to have an average of 40 fatalities of electoral violence. Since electoral crimes with concomitant effects had been the bane of Nigeria's democratic and socio-economic development including Benue State, there has been the need to set in machinery to sociologically investigate and curb this dimension of criminality which constitutes the problem of this study.

1.1 Definition of Concepts

1.1.1 Political crime and political actors

Political crime is difficult to define by scholars in sociology and criminology. In classifying criminals, [5] identified eight (8) types of criminals including: Legalistic, moralistic, psychopathic, institutional, situational, habitual, professional and political criminals. He defined political criminals as those who commit crimes in order to gain political power or achieve other political motives [5]. Political actors can be defined as those who have capability to mobilize human and material resources and support in the election process for their own interest or supporters [6]. Political actors in Nigeria possessed the mentioned qualities in a bid to capture power and sometimes with outright criminal outlook which is often lowly checked by security operatives. In affirming this [7] posited that the state, armed

with its oppressive apparatus such as the army, secret service agents, and the police are not always responsive to combating various crimes.

1.2 Electoral Offences and Punishments Stipulated by Independent National Electoral Commission

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as established by section 153 of the constitution is constitutionally empowered to conduct democratic election processes, set up guidelines for that and prosecute political offenders among other functions. Section 150(1) and (2) of the Electoral Act, 2010 as amended gives the Independent National Electoral Commission the responsibility for the prosecution of electoral offenders while such offenders can be charged to the High Court or the Magistrate Court. Part seven of the constitutional and legal framework for the Nigeria General elections of INEC 2011 spate out some of the electoral offences or crimes to include offence in relation to registration, bribery and conspiracy, threatening among others. For example, section 131 under the electoral offence which deals with matters relating to violence and snatching of votes states that:

A person who vote, by preventing any political aspirant from free use of the media, designated vehicles, mobilization of political support and campaign at an election commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of N1,000,000 or imprisonment for 3 years [8].

However, good as such punishments are, it seems the Independent National Electoral Commission is overburdened with the responsibility of conducting elections, monitoring the activities of political parties and defending issues before Election Petitions and this has prevented the Commission from paying close attention to the issue of electoral offences and offenders in Nigeria.

According to NEVR [9], election violence in Nigeria has acquired more dangerous dimension wherein other traditional fault-lines like ethnic animosity, religious dichotomy and social discontent find convenient violent expression during election that are characterized by the desperation of politicians to win at all cost. The summary of the Nigeria Electoral Violence Report, NERV program indicated that beginning February 14 and as at June 30, 2011, a total of 424 incidents were reported with 655 persons killed and 211 persons wounded which is slowly

unchecked and unpunished which forms the problem of this study.

1.3 Theoretical View: Conflict Theory

Ross [10] regards conflict theory as the most valuable or useful to its explanation the social problem of crime. The conflict theory is attributed to the works of Karl Marx which explained criminal behaviours as attempt by classes in the society's struggle for economic and scarce resources. Marxist criminology in a summary claim that capitalism which promote competition and greed is responsible for crimes resulting from class struggles between the 'haves' and the 'haves not' [11]. The conflict theory therefore, is applicable in explaining the causes and consequences of political crimes in Benue state in particular and Nigeria in general because the vast majority of political crimes are traced to historical, material and dialectical nature of the society with economic infrastructure a major dominant factor for crimes [7]. Political crimes like all other disturbing social phenomenon in a class society like Nigeria in general and Benue to be specific is seen as the by-product of a conflict of political interests between the classes within the society [12,5]. Additionally, majority of the political crimes in a society like Benue and Nigeria at large are rooted to the material quest for power between the rich and the poor and institutional dislocation occasioned by factors such as poverty, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy and greed among others. As such, people see politics as the only fast way of getting into power and enriching themselves thereby indulging in all kinds of political manipulations and crimes which the conflict theory explained. The conflict theorists advanced for a radical transformation of the existing structures of capitalism which breed crimes of all kinds as the only possible way of solving the problem of crimes [13]. Considering the problem of political crimes in the present day Benue in particular and Nigeria at large with the explanation given so far, the conflict theory served as a good theoretical postulation to sociologically understand and appraise the effects of political crimes in Benue State.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Area

This study was carried out in Benue state which was created on February 3rd, 1976 by the then military administrator General Murtala Mohammed. The State is located in the North

Central zone of Nigeria and shares boundaries with five neighbouring states namely: Nassarawa to the north, Taraba to the east, Cross River to the south, Enugu, Ebonyi to the south-east and Kogi to the south-west. The state also shares a common boundary with the Republic of Cameroon on the north-east. Benue state lies roughly between latitude $6^{\circ}1/2$ north and longitude $7^{\circ}1/2^{\circ}$ - 10° east [14]. Presently, the state has 23 Local Government Areas¹. Benue state is one of the populous states in Nigeria with population over four million. According to NPC [15], the state has a total population of 4,219,244, a break down shows that 2, 164,058 are males, and 2,055, 186 are female. UNFPA [16] put the state population in 2013 at 5,287,129. The state also occupies a land mass of about 30, 955 square kilometers, [15]. Some of ethnic group in Benue State includes Tiv, Idoma Iggede, Etulo, Abakpa (Abakwariga), Jukun, Hausa, Akweya and Nyifon [14]. The state has over the years witnessed various forms of crimes including those relating to politics such as rigging, political violence, thuggery and assassination among others [3].

2.2 Source of Data

In collecting data for this study, the researcher utilized secondary sources of data. From Benue State Police Command from 2010-2015. Data was descriptively analyzed using mean, variance, standard deviation with the aid of tables and charts.

2.3 Data Presentation

Data presentation was done using Crime Statistics from Nigeria Police Force, Benue State Command.

3. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The table shows that, highest criminal cases occurred in the form of grievous hurt, assault and theft and other stealing with means of 124, 102.3 and 116.3 respectively. Their variations around the means are 145.5, 113.4 and 100.5 for grievous hurt, assault and theft and other stealing respectively. This shows that, even though they were highly committed within the study period, the rate they committed varied from

year to year especially pre and post election period as shown on table 1 in crime statistics of murder, assault armed robbery and breach of public peace. This is in line with studies by HRWR [17] report which estimated that a minimum of three hundred Nigerians were killed in violence linked to the 2007 elections adding that patterns of violence, corruption and outright criminality is the character of Nigeria's political system.

Next on the line of offences committed are armed robbery, house breaking, false pretence and unlawful possession with means of 30.3, 35.7, 33.5 and 31.3 respectively. Statistically, their variations within the period as shown by standard deviation are 18.74, 26.25, 41.89 and 22.26 which show moderate variations. This agrees with [18] that armed robbery in Nigeria is fast becoming an epidemic. It is being blamed on the dwindling economic fortunes of majority and the widening gap between the affluent and the poor in the society leading to violent crimes. Other crimes like murder and breach of public peace have means of 18.0 and 14.0 within the period with standard deviations of 12.1 and 18.5 rate of variation around the mean. The commitment of crimes whose averages are in single digit include rape and indecent assault, burglary, store breaking and receiving stolen property with means of 2.3, 1.2, 6.5 and 8.5 respectively for the study period. Their variations are 2.251, 1.602, 9.711 and 12.26 respectively and indicate low variations. This is in line with [19] that violent crimes such as robbery, murder, rape, cultism, Kidnapping, sea piracy and terrorism in Nigeria grew from minor offences to thus generating a state of insecurity and threat to National security. Crimes that were rarely committed within the period include attempted murder, suicide, child stealing, demand with menace, kidnapping and escape from lawful custody. Only two crimes manslaughter and slave dealing were not reported in the period under investigation.

Inferring from the crime statistics under review generally shows that major crimes committed are grievous hurt and assault as well as theft and other stealing. The research has also shown the highest rate of committing these crimes fall between 2013 and 2014, with drastic reduction in 2015. This could be attributed to drastic security measures put in place by various tiers of government to ensure security of lives and property of the citizens possibly to the preparation of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

¹ Local Government Areas in Benue State Nigeria: Ado, Agatu, Apa, Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer, Gwer-West, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi, Obi, Ogbadibo, Ohimini, Oju, Okpokwu, Otukpo, Tarka, Ukum, Ushongo and Vandeikya with Makurdi as the state capital (Lyam et al. 2003, p. 73).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of crime statistics from Nigeria police force, Benue State command table as shown below

| S/N | OFFENCE | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | MEAN | VAR | STD |
|-----|----------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Murder | 8 | 15 | 15 | 36 | 29 | 5 | 18.0 | 146.4 | 12.1 |
| 2 | Attempted Murder | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.2 | 0.167 | 0.408 |
| 3 | Manslaughter | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | Suicide | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0.3 | 0.667 | 0.816 |
| 5 | Grievous Hurt | 47 | 34 | 94 | 402 | 155 | 12 | 124.0 | 21144 | 145.4 |
| 6 | Assault | 52 | 32 | 94 | 322 | 104 | 10 | 102.3 | 12866 | 113.4 |
| 7 | Child Stealing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.2 | 0.167 | 0.408 |
| 8 | Slave Dealing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | Rape and indecent Assault | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 2.3 | 5.067 | 2.251 |
| 10 | Demand with Menace | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.7 | 0.667 | 0.816 |
| 11 | Kidnapping | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.7 | 0.667 | 0.816 |
| 12 | Armed Robbery | 20 | 18 | 24 | 44 | 62 | 14 | 30.3 | 351.1 | 18.74 |
| 13 | Theft and other Stealing | 96 | 20 | 138 | 292 | 132 | 20 | 116.3 | 10109 | 100.5 |
| 14 | Burglary | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1.2 | 2.567 | 1.602 |
| 15 | House Breaking | 33 | 8 | 50 | 75 | 42 | 6 | 35.7 | 689.1 | 26.25 |
| 16 | Store Breaking | 0 | 2 | 12 | 24 | 0 | 1 | 6.5 | 94.3 | 9.711 |
| 17 | False Pretence | 10 | 3 | 27 | 112 | 46 | 3 | 33.5 | 1755 | 41.89 |
| 18 | Unlawful Possession | 12 | 22 | 62 | 34 | 52 | 6 | 31.3 | 495.5 | 22.26 |
| 19 | Breach of Public Peace | 30 | 6 | 44 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 14.0 | 342.4 | 18.5 |
| 20 | Receiving Stolen Property | 0 | 2 | 0 | 32 | 11 | 6 | 8.5 | 150.3 | 12.26 |
| 21 | Escape from Lawful Custody | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0.2 | 0.167 | 0.408 |

Source: Authors computation, November 10th, 2016

4.1 Pictorial Representation of Crime Statistics from Nigeria Police Force, Benue State Command 2011-2015

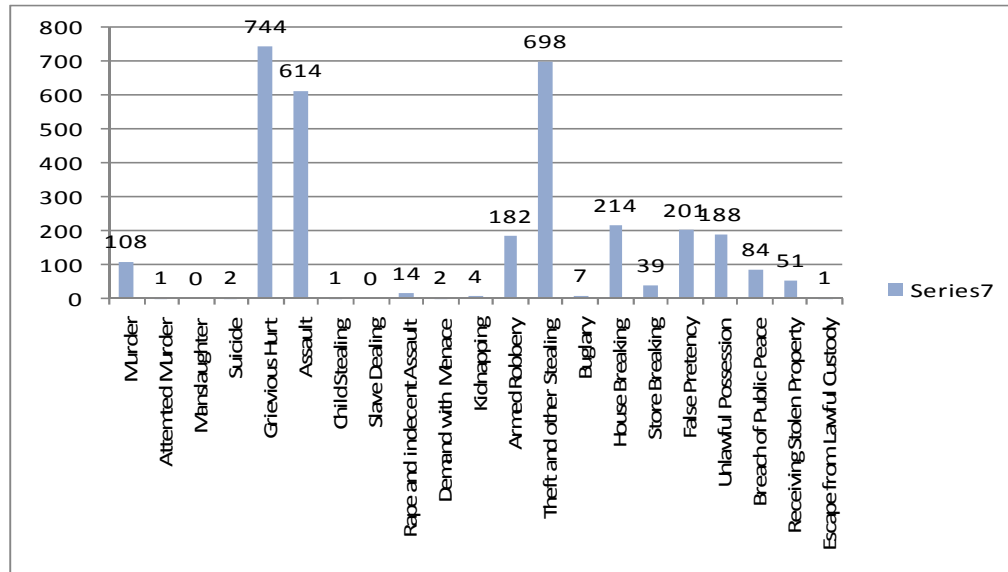


Fig. 2. Pictorial representation of crime statistics from 2011-2015

The rate at which these offences were committed within the study period as shown in column bar chart in Fig. 2 to further illustrate what descriptive statistics has revealed.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study indicated that political crimes do occur in form of grievous hurt, assault, murder, kidnapping and breach of public peace closely accompanied with theft and other stealing preparatory to election and election year proper. This is in line with the studies by Torruam and Abur [18], Omotor [20], Adebayo [2] that one of the greatest challenges facing the Nigeria economy is unemployment and crime which has maintained a rising trend over the years. That political crime affects the peace of the general public. This agrees with Ani [21], Soola [22], Obakhedo [23], Dauda [1], Ani [24], Peace and Security Working Group [25] that the history of political development in Nigeria has recorded the growth of multidimensional forms of violence as a major political behaviour in the quest by political-minded individuals and groups to attain state power and keep it with adverse effect on the society including peace. That political crime is retrogressive to the socio-economic and political development of any society in Nigeria which required aggressive efforts of the criminal justice system, security agents to clearly classify for all tiers of government to address head on.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended aggressive campaign against political crimes and strong penalties for perpetrators of political crimes, better classification of political crimes by the Nigerian Police Force for easier detection, improved education with political culture and provision of employment as well as reduction of poverty in State be made a priority as measures in combating political crimes in Benue State and Nigeria at large.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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