

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Political assassinations in Nigeria: An exploratory study 1986-2005

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Political assassinations have been the major outcome of political violence in Nigeria. The activities and actions of political individuals and groups are now centered on 'adoption of assassination' in settling political scores. The paper examines the spate of political assassinations in the Nigerian political terrain from 1986 - 2005. The central focus is the continued killing of political actors, with the dismal effort of the security agencies, particularly the police; in bringing culprits to book and attribution of reported cases to armed robbery. Utilizing secondary data, the study reveals that approximately 53% of the deaths took place in the preceding decade (1991 - 2000), while 45% occurred in the present decade and 2% was recorded two decades ago. The paper observes with sadness, the inconclusive state of the various cases of political assassination. The ineffectiveness of the national security outfit, the intra-and inter-party squabbles and the 'bloody' political war that looms in some parts of the country are some of the factors that account for the rising incidence of political assassinations in Nigeria. Finally, the study notes that the era of blood shedding is still on-going and may pose a serious threat to the upcoming polls in 2007.

**Key words:** Party squabbles, Political actors, Political violence, Political assassination, Nigeria, Politics, Assassination

## INTRODUCTION

Political conflict is an endemic feature of most political systems. This is particularly true of developing nations, including Nigeria, where political conflicts, crises, violence and even assassinations became essential characteristics of the political process, especially after independence. Experience of violence has shown that political conflict, when not properly managed leads to crisis. And crisis if not brought under control results in violence; and violence if not effectively dealt with could lead to assassination, as has been the case in Nigeria. The Nigerian state is one that has experienced different degrees of political assassination with the level of political assassination fast becoming a national nightmare replacing law with lawlessness, order with disorder, peace with violence and love with hate. The inordinate level of barbari-

sm being displayed by members of the Nigerian political class is giving Nigerians a cause for worry. The level of political assassination in Nigeria is a clear manifestation of political vendetta; where peace has given way to violence and assassination has become the norm; where political actors resort to assassination of political opponents all in a bid to attain political power or positions. The spate of political assassinations in Nigeria has reached an alarming stage with a good number of her prominent politicians and citizens alike lost to this hydra-headed monsters. The government of Nigeria is finding it extremely difficult in handling the level of insecurity in the country, which has put the lives of its citizens in danger. Right from 1986 till date, the spate of political assassinations has risen in a geometric progression, thus eroding human values such that violence grew in time.

This paper examines the rising incidence of political assassinations in Nigeria, linking it with the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the security outfit.

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## **Reasons/causes for political assassinations in Nigeria**

Attempt is made in this paper to identify the possible reasons why politicians engage in political assassinations. This is necessary for the complete understanding of the topic of the paper.

One reason why politicians engage in political assassination is the quest for political power/positions. The inordinate ambition of Nigeria politicians and the vigor with which they pursue it have made them to go to any length just to attain such power even if it meant taking the lives of those who may pose as hindrance in the pursuit of their ambition. It is regarded as a 'do or die' affair. That is, a must win situation. They see the position or power which they seek as more important compared to the lives they take.

Another reason for political assassinations is unhealthy political rivalry. Whenever there is a competition, there is always a rivalry. The desire to attain political power involves competition. This competition is supposed to be healthy if its purpose is to be achieved because competition it is believed brings out the best in any situation. But when such rivalry becomes unhealthy, a web of tension is created and conflicts have resulted. And most often these conflicts have led to the termination of lives of political opponents.

Politics is supposed to be people-oriented. That is, the authoritative allocation of values/resources to meet the needs of the people. But in a situation where politicians put self-interest first before the people and decide to engage in 'money politics', this also has led to political assassinations. They see political positions as a means of making money either through the award of contracts, or the monetary values attached to the positions they seek or out rightly looting public funds rather than an avenue to serve the people. And when they feel someone is standing between them and this position they become ruthless and destructive and resort to killing.

The ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the national security outfits particularly the Police Force is a major cause of political assassination in Nigeria. This is because they have been unable to apprehend the culprits and their corroborators of those killed in the past as well as provide the needed security for members of the public. Those who engage in political assassination have taken undue advantage of the lapses in the security outfits of the country to continue in this act. They believe that the Nigeria security outfit has a record of not being able to unravel the mysteries behind the various cases of political assassinations in the country.

## **Objectives**

The purpose of this paper is to;

1) To survey the incidence of politically motivated assassinations in Nigeria from 1986-2005.

2) To show the link between political assassinations and the ineffectiveness of the national security outfit, this is one factor that accounts for this trend (political assassination).

## **Propositions**

This paper is motivated by the quest to improve the level of security, to maintain national dignity and promote cohesion in Nigeria. It is also aimed at explaining the possible reasons why the level of assassination is on the increase. The threat to the stability of Nigeria is so plausible that even the United States Government had predicted the disintegration of Nigeria within the next ten to fifteen years, while well-meaning Nigerians see the road to 2007 general elections as a political mirage. The propositions put forward include:

- 1) The 'do or die' affair/notion for political positions or power and the attendant assassinations is as a result of 'money politics.'
- 2) The incapability of the national security outfit is a potential factor that aids political assassination.
- 3) Inter and intra-party squabbles and the attendant assassinations are result of the unchecked excesses of ethnic militia.

## **Proposition I**

The 'do or die' affair/notion for political positions or power and the attendant assassinations is as a result of 'money politics.'

Nigerian politicians see their venture into politics as a form of business enterprise, a quick way of making money with less effort. During the electioneering process or campaign, they somewhat invest by way of sponsoring candidates for elections and would go to any length in ensuring that their candidates win the elections (even if it meant assassinating their opponents) because it is only when their candidates get into power that they would be able to reap the dividends of their 'investments'. As Ivbaze noted:

"...it is so because politics in this part of humanity is business. In fact, it is a thriving business. And that is why those who are wealthy but opt to be at the background invest in it by sponsoring candidates so that in the event of victory they would not only recoup their investment fund but receive it more abundantly." (2006:13)

The cases Joshua Dariye, Governor of Plateau State and D.S.P. Alamieyeisegha, former Governor of Bayelsa State, Nigeria, lend credence to this. The Anambra State saga where Chris Uba, a political godfather claimed it was agreed that Chris Ngige, the Governor of the State was to pay him back an undisclosed amount of money on resumption of office as governor of Anambra State. The purported refusal of Chris Ngige to comply with this agreement, led to his abduction in July 2003.

## Proposition II

The incapability of the national security outfit is a potential factor that aids political assassination:

The continuous killing of political actors like party chieftains (Marshal Harry), elder statesmen (Alfred Rewane) ministers (Bola Ige) and political aspirants (Peter Eboigbe), the inability of the security outfit in Nigeria to apprehend the culprits, and the unending list of unresolved cases of politically motivated killings are best support to this proposition. Dating back to history, there is hardly any case of political assassination that has been successfully unraveled. (Appendix 1). Those who perpetrate this evil have taken undue advantage of the inability of the security outfit of the country to apprehend the culprits and bring them to book, to continue in this act. This is attributed to the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the national security outfit, resulting in the repeated clamour for the setting-up of state police. This has become an indirect way of supporting political assassination as the government of Nigeria both past and present have failed to see the need to equip the security service of the country in a bid to effectively and efficiently tackling issues of crime, particularly a crime as heinous as political assassination.

## Proposition III

Inter and intra-party squabbles and the attendant assassinations are result of the unchecked excesses of ethnic militia.

Militant groups like the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) in the South-West, Bakassi Boys domiciled in the South-East, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the Niger Delta, and Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) also in the South-East and a host of others that have tended to play the role of security outfits in their respective jurisdictions have become pawns in the hands of desperate politicians. The illegally possessed arms/weapons, which they used in the execution of communal and ethnic wars, are now being used to unleash terror on political opponents. When a feud breaks out between and among parties, (inter- and intra party squabbles) these party members hire the 'services' of youths of these ethnic militias (which have over the years become bellicose and violent) to settle political scores which most times involve the elimination of political opponents. Arms and ammunition have been found in the private residences of the leaders of these groups (Ige, 2005). The cases of Fasehun and Gani Adams who are OPC leaders lend credence to this. The bane of it all is that due to the unchecked excesses of ethnic militant groups, which carry out their nefarious activities with reckless abandon, they become potential assassins when their ethnic and communal wars are over. And because they are still in possession of these arms, they are quick to use them when

desperate politicians who most times are usually sponsor for the acquisition of these firearms approach them (Agbaegbu, 2005). The issue of thuggery is also linked with the unchecked excesses of ethnic militia. The thugs whom Nigerian politicians move around with are mostly youths of ethnic militant groups who have these weapons. Most politicians now move around with gun-totting boys who shoot sporadically into the air to intimidate people (Adegbamigbe, 2005). In the past, the Anambra State government had used the Bakassi boys, a vigilante group officially endorsed by the state and known as the Anambra State vigilante Services, to intimidate and kill opponents (Human Rights Watch/CLEEN Report, 2002). These gun-totting boys whom Nigerian politicians move around with are neither registered private bodyguards nor personnel of any security agency. The political crisis of the 1960s, resulting in the Nigerian civil war, made access to illegal arms easy; also the attendant violence eroded human values such that violent crimes grew in time (Nwankwo, 2005).

## Clarification of concepts

### Political assassinations:

This is a concept beset with two terms: 'political' and 'assassination'. Thus, an attempt to define the concept must begin with the definition of these two basic terms if it is to give meaning to the research.

'Political' is the adjective of the word politics. It is derived from the word politics. And politics is defined as the authoritative allocation of scarce values (Easton, 1960). Politics can also be defined as competition involving conflict over the distribution of resources by those empowered to do so (Edigin and Otoghile, 1994). Therefore, anything that has to do with politics is political in nature. Assassination as defined by The New Webster's Dictionary of English Language is the art of killing. That is, to terminate some else's life. Political assassination therefore, is the art of killing political opponents. In other words, in a bid to be able to allocate scarce values, politicians engage in killing their opponents or eliminating any obstacle standing in their way.

Money politics: Money politics in the context of this paper refers politics centred on money or material gains. This involves a situation whereby people go into politics not because they want to bring about a change in government but simply because of financial or monetary benefits they stand to get.

National security outfit: This is an institution or body of persons entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the necessary peace and security, protection of life and property, and maintenance of law and order in a nation. It is predominantly made of the Police Force, State Security Service (SSS), and Military. Political scores: This refers to the political differences between one political actor and another. It could also be seen as a misunderstanding or

rift between actors within the political system.

## Literature review

Assassination of political actors is a clear violation of the fundamental human rights of individuals involved in politics. And fundamental human rights are the inalienable rights of citizens of a state (Akamere, 2001), particularly the right to life. When political assassination found its way into the Nigerian political terrain, many wished it away. These assassinations take various forms such as; the use of 'professional assassins', food poison, calculated or planned or arranged accidents i.e. plane or car crash etc. Like corruption, evil walks on four legs on the streets of Nigeria unmolested (Director, 2003). Political assassination is one evil that walks the streets of Nigeria not only unmolested but aided and abetted. This is because of the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the national security outfit, particularly the police that has failed to live up to its duties by apprehending the culprits and their collaborators.

Nigeria is dripping with blood. Our record of orderly transfer of power has not been a particularly happy one as it has been marked most times by violence and death. Indeed, political violence has been a feature of our behaviour from the days of uncontrolled mayhem in Western Nigeria during the First Republic (1963) to later-day version of warring political brigade, fronts and vanguard. There are many illegally held guns in Nigeria and experience has shown that quite a number of armed groups and their collaborators are prepared to settle 'political scores' with immediate effects (Igbinovia, 2003). Assassinations are now commonplace events in Nigeria. For example, in 1995, fifty (50) assassination cases were recorded in Lagos within a period of 12 months alone (Igbinovia, 2003). Since then, the malaise has increased in alarming proportion. The list of macabre and unresolved assassinations and murder grow longer almost daily as the names of socially prominent and even the not-so-well known pile up on police ledgers and the morgue (see appendix 1). Indeed, systemic violence appears to have become an accepted mode in Nigeria. People are seen becoming beastly in hate, ruthless in violence and reckless in destruction. For example, in the year 2002 alone, Nigeria confirmed its billing as a 'mad house' where the cost of human life comes cheap, short and brutal, where the implacable spirit of violent death stalks the streets indifferent to the aspirations of youths, denying even the elderly the luxury of a peaceful transition (Edemodu, 2002).

Gani Fawehinmi, Senior Advocate of Nigeria describes the spate of political assassination in Nigeria as the darkest and saddest event in Nigeria. He noted: What we have been witnessing recently is not democracy Áby politicians, but a mindless display of craziness by members of the political class, and unless quickly checked, the democratic edifice will surely collapse and we

would have ourselves to blame for the unprecedented flow of blood that will follow (Ajani, 2001).

This statement, which was made as far back as the year 2001, appears not to have been given any credence by the government of Nigeria because since then, Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented flow of blood as rightly predicted by Gani Fawehinmi. Audu Ogbeh, former chairman of the ruling party in Nigeria, PDP, described the politically motivated killings as "a height of insecurity". He said the spate of political assassinations was an indictment on the security network of Nigeria and called for the immediate overhauling of the Police Force and other security agents (Akpoy, 2003). The Alliance for Democracy (AD) condemns the spate of political assassinations in Nigeria, noting that it poses a threat to democracy. The party expressed concern over the 'adoption of assassination' as means for settling political rifts. Joshua Yohanna, National Secretary of the Alliance for Democracy remarks, "the adoption of murder by some politicians as means of settling misunderstanding or elimination of opponents can best be described as barbaric, ungodly, and monumental waste" (Alliance for Democracy, 2005:3). He cited Oyo, Edo, Ekiti, Ogun, Kogi, Taraba, Anambra, Rivers, Benue, Delta and Plateau States, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, as some of the flash points of political assassinations in Nigeria (Alliance for Democracy, 2005). These killings are already sending frightening signals not only to politicians but also to all and sundry that assassins have taken Nigeria hostage. From January to December, from Bauchi to Nassarawa to Enugu; Maiduguri to Anambra and Cross River State, Nigeria in the year 2002 was one odious, bloodstained tapestry of politically inspired violence, unresolved murders and assassinations (Edemodu, 2002). Marshal Harry whom later became a victim of this trend -political assassination- referred to it as a national calamity while reacting to the killing of Bola Ige. He noted, "The murder of Bola Ige has dented the image of the country. Our image has been shattered and it would be difficult for us to redeem it. It is unfortunate for Nigeria. Nigeria as a nation should cover her face in shame" (Ajani, 2001).

The spate of political assassination is not only a dastardly act but also lengthens the list of politically motivated killings in Nigeria. However, some people have decided to tackle the ugly phenomenon by taking laws into their hands, saying, nobody has a monopoly of violence and urging people to defend themselves against the evil machination of those who do not believe in democracy (Nwokocha, 2004). These killings are already sending frightening signal not only to politicians but to all and sundry that assassins have taken Nigeria hostage. Another interpretation is that, the reign of blood thirsty bestial is here. The spate of political assassinations in the country has become a major threat to democracy (Moghalu, 2003).

Don Etiebet referred to the killing of Marshal Harry as

one assassination too many to bear. He said this while recounting the number of lives the All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP) has lost to politically motivated killings. Etiebet compared the level of violence in the country of late to that witnessed during the 30-month civil war in Nigeria. "Never in the history of this country, since the civil ended in 1970, have we experienced the level of violence, threat to lives and property and intimidating moves to undermine our democracy" (Agbaegbu, 2003). The fear and danger this trend of political assassination has driven into the minds of potential political actors leaves much to be desired. Tony Nted says, "The way people are being killed frightens me; this politics of assassination can't make me contest an election." He continues, "Election these days are fraught with thuggery because they are not transparent, once they see you as standing against them, they will eliminate you" (Awowole-Brown, 2005). Political assassination is fast becoming a nightmare as many people, politicians in particular now sleep with one eye closed and the other opened. They claim their lives are in danger. This is because politicians have resorted to assassination as a tool for settling disputes. Onwuka Kalu of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), who was the political opponent of Orji Uzor Kalu, Governor of Abia State, Nigeria, says that moments after challenging the victory of Orji Uzor Kalu at the election tribunal according to the Electoral Act 2002, suspected assassins have continued to trail him. He also said he has been receiving phone calls with the caller threatening to kill him and members of his family if he doesn't withdraw the case from the election tribunal (Onwuka, 2005).

Nigeria being a member of the United Nations and African Union has much to do in keeping with the principles of the Charter establishing these bodies. It would be recalled that one of the principles of the African Union, precisely Article III item 5 of the Charter establishing the body reads "unreserved condemnation, in all its forms, of political assassination as well as subversive activities on the part of neighboring state or any other state". The Nigerian state has completely and continuously flouted this principle yet she remains at the top of the Union with the headship of the Union assigned to the President of Nigeria at a time.

Nigeria's involvement in peace keeping and international security has further brought the political image of the country to ridicule. In her 36 years of independence, Nigeria's decision makers have continuously designed, shaped and maintained a foreign policy which has continued to have some impact on the international system, particularly in the area of facilitating peace-making at the international scene (Onoja, 1996). A nation that requires the maintenance of peace and security is not only one where there is absolute break down of law and order or where there are intra- and inter religious, ethnic or tribal conflicts and wars but also that where political assassination is rampant and inexplicable carried out by unknown

persons. A society that is riddled with politically motivated killings is more exposed to danger of insecurity because the reasons for such killings are unknown. Perhaps the lengthening cases of politically motivated killings may not although be new to our polity. This is because in time past, the country has recorded a good number of political assassinations. For instance, during the military interregnum such killings were commonplace. In 1986, Dele Giwa, an eminent journalist and editor-in-chief of News watch magazine was killed by a parcelled bomb under the Babaginda administration. The intriguing thing about these killings is the rumoured link to the government of the day. For a country with a litany of unresolved murders and worrisome security system, however, the president's recourse to God may be a little too late and far from reality (Orode, 2004).

## HISTORICAL REVIEW

The politics of the first republic (1963-1966) was not void of crisis and unrest that resulted in high profile assassinations. Before the 1966 coup, there was the 1964 Federal Government General Elections, which was characterized by malpractices that culminated in civil unrest and disturbances with the domino effect as killings and counter-killings. This, *inter alia* led to the fall of the first republic and the 1963 republican constitution on which it was based in January 1966. Thugs were used in various capacities by politicians to unleash terror on the people. The issue of thuggery and violence in the politics of Nigeria from the first republic has spilled over to the pre-sent fourth republic. Although these thuggery and violence may not have resulted in indiscriminate assassination of political opponents as it is now in the fourth republic, it however, laid the foundation for the present spate of violence and thuggery that has resulted in the high profile assassinations in the Nigerian political terrain.

The first military coup, which occurred in Nigeria on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966, accounted for the highest profile of assassinations in the first republic. In that coup led by young military officers, the Sardauna of Sokoto and Premier of the Northern Region, Ahmadu Bello along with his wife were killed, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister was also assassinated. The Minister of Finance, Festus Okotie-Eboh, Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Premier of Western Region were assassinated and a host of others. These killings precipitated further killings in a counter-coup led by Northern military officers (who saw the first coup d'etat as a tribal coup targeted at the Northern leaders) on July 29<sup>th</sup> of the same year, where the Head of State, Gen. J.T.U Aguiyi-Ironsi and his host Lt. Col. Adekunle Fajuyi were assassinated at Ibadan, Oyo State.

In that coup, a lot of Igbo military officers were assassin-nated in retaliation to the Northern leaders that were killed in the January 15<sup>th</sup> coup. In 1976, precisely February 13<sup>th</sup>, Nigeria lost a second Head of state to this monster. Gen. Murtala Mohammed was assassinated by

Lt. Bukar Sukar Dimka, who was unsatisfied with the progressive policies of the government such as the purge and action against corrupt military personnel (Ikelegbe, 2004).

The politics of the second republic (1979-1985) recorded the least case of political assassination. However, Dele Giwa, an eminent journalist, and editor-in-chief of the News watch Magazine, was killed soon after the second republic went down into chronological history in 1986, under the military administration of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. The outcome of his killing has up till today remained unresolved.

The third republic could not stand the test of time. It was aborted on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1993, by the military take over of Gen. Sani Abacha. The Abacha regime was characterized by high profile serial killings. Notable killings under the Abacha administration include: Babatunde Elegbede in 1994, Alfred Rewane in 1995, Kayode Awosanya in 1996, Kudirat Abiola in 1996, Suliat Adedeji in 1996, Toyin Onagoruwa in 1996, and Irene Obodo in 1996.

At the inception of the fourth republic on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1999, the citizens of Nigeria heaved a sigh of relief that the reign of the blood thirsty bestial was over. This was because at last democracy had come after so many years of military interregnum. Many thought that with the inception of democratic governance these needless and mindless killings would stop. But this has been the antithesis. The fourth republic alone accounts for the highest cases of political assassinations in history. A statistical look at the cases of political assassinations that have occurred in the fourth republic alone reveals that it accounts for more than those of the first- three republics put together. At least an average of seven assassinations is recorded each year. As at the time of writing this paper, various degrees of political assassinations were still being recorded. And from all indications, more are yet to come. This is because the present intra- and inter-party squabbles and the 'bloody' political war that looms in some parts of the country are a clear manifestation that the era of blood shedding may not be over yet.

The various cases of political assassinations listed above have a common feature; they have all remained inconclusive and unresolved. The security network of Nigeria has up till today been unable to present the culprits to her citizens much less the international community. This can aptly be described as one of the characteristics of a weak state. This is because the government of Nigeria has failed in protecting the lives of her citizens, which is a fundamental as well as an obligatory duty of the government of a state. A state is supposed to exercise hegemony over other social forces in the society. That is, it should seek to have control over the social forces in the society. It should be dominant if it is to remain strong. But in the case of Nigeria, the social forces that involve in political assassinations could be said to be dominating the Nigerian state presently. A weak st-

ate is seen as one where there is a breakdown of law and order, where the government is unable to provide the basic necessities of its citizens like security (protection of lives and property), stable power supply, good roads, and the inability to manage the transfer of power from one administration to another through the ballot box without massive rigging and gross manipulation of the electoral process. The visible presence of poverty and underdevelopment which brings about a sense of disillusionment and hopelessness is reflected in the long queues of youths and even adults at foreign consulates in the quest for visas in a bid to escape the nightmare the Nigerian state has become are examples of the weak state Nigeria turned out to be. The adoption of assassination by Nigerian political actors in the pursuit of their political ambitions, is best summarized in the words of Niccolo Machiavelli, "...in every case, especially that of a Prince, where there is no appeal, the end justifies the means" (Machiavelli, 1999). In his book "The Prince" Niccolo Machiavelli (1999) attempted to justify the means through which a leader (Prince) attains or retains power. He tried to explain that whatever means a leader adopts in attaining power doesn't matter, inasmuch as he attains or retains it, whether or not the means is acceptable or repugnant to human values. This vividly describes the attitude of Nigerian political actors, who would adopt any means of acquiring or retaining political power or position. Indeed, the end justifies the means, as the means employed in attaining power is not brought to question, making it out rightly inconsequential.

The chronological cases of political assassination in Nigeria as well as the mysterious circumstances in which they have occurred have put the country in a turbulent situation. The inconclusive state in which they have remained and the 'bloody' political war that looms in some part of the country, particularly the Southwest, have turned the Nigerian political terrain into a boiling cauldron, where the nation is frequently but rudely awoken to the news of yet another murder.

## **CASES OF POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS IN NIGERIA, 1986-2005**

Some high profile cases of political assassinations in Nigeria have put the political terrain of the Nigerian state in a precarious situation because the outcome of such politically motivated killings has remained a mystery. The increase in the number of killing of high class/profile political figures in recent months has heightened fears in Nigeria of a violent and turbulent election, come 2007. While the cases listed are samples of high profile killings in Nigeria, they do not, however, constitute an exhaustive list. (See Appendix I)

The tension that grips the nation whenever a general election approaches is better imagined than experienced. This is because a lot of active and vibrant politicians in various parts of Nigeria lose their lives to political assas-

sination. For example, Alfred Rewane was shot and killed in Lagos during the Abacha regime on October 6, 1995 by unknown gunmen. Alfred Rewane it would be recalled was a vibrant politician who dauntedly fought against the bad and unpopular policies of the Abacha regime.

The case of Kudirat Abiola, wife of M.K.O Abiola, presidential candidate of the June 12, 1993 general elections, was brutally murdered when she was shot by gunmen in the streets of Lagos in her car on June 4, 1996. Late Kudirat Abiola was in the forefront of her late husband's political ambition trying to see that he made it through even while he was in prison. She kicked against the annulment of the June 12 election, which her husband purportedly won. She was then taken out. Suliat Adedeji another prominent female politician from the South-West, Ibadan in particular was also assassinated on November 14, 1996.

Another and perhaps the most disheartening of them all was the bloody assassination of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation, Bola Ige. He was a member of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), one of the political parties that presented a candidate for the 1999 polls. Bola Ige was killed in his home in Ibadan, in the southwestern state of Oyo, on the 23rd December 2001. He was the highest-level politician to be killed in Nigeria since the government of President Obasanjo came to power in 1999, and his case provoked a severe outcry in Nigeria. He apparently had come to spend the Christmas with his wife when a group of gunmen came into his house and shot him. Bola Ige had publicly stated that he was going to resign his ministerial appointment in order to actively take part in party politics. Though the motive for the murder is not confirmed, it was likely linked to a political crisis between the Governor and Deputy Governor of Osun State, where Ige was from. Ige was perceived as supporting the Governor's faction. The circumstances and mysteries surrounding the erstwhile minister's death leave more questions than answers. The negative impact of this is that the citizens of Nigeria are beginning to lose the confidence they have in the government. They are beginning to have a myopic sense of security.

While the nation still mourned the December 23, 2001 brutal murder of Bola Ige, the country was on January 7, 2002 rudely awoken to the news of another murder. This time, it was that of Mr. S.A. Awoniyi, the confidential secretary to the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Muhammadu Lawal Uwais. Awoniyi was killed in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. He was not particularly involved in the politics but it is believed that his position as the confidential secretary to the Chief Justice of Nigeria posed a threat to certain persons. He was found soaked in his blood, reportedly stabbed to death by unknown persons.

The South-South Zone of the country, precisely Cross River State, experienced the spectra of violent death when Mr. Eyo Eyo was killed in his house in Calabar in April 2002. Eyo Eyo was an information officer attached

to the state's commissioner for agriculture. He was said to have been killed by seven gunmen who also shot and critically wounded his wife said to be nursing a four-month old baby (Edemodu, 2002).

Another dramatic assassination is that of Marshal Harry, the national vice chairman for the South-South Zone of the largest opposition party, the All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP). He was an important politician both nationally and within Rivers State, where he was known as a political "Kingmaker". Marshal Harry, ironically, had condemned the killing of Bola Ige saying it was a national calamity. In his words "the murder of chief Bola Ige has dented the image of this country. Our image has been shattered and it would be difficult for us to redeem it." After the 1999 elections, he was still a member of the Peoples' Democratic Party, PDP, and supported the Rivers State Governor, Peter Odili but he soon began to publicly disagree with Odili's policies and began a drive to ensure that he would not return to power in 2003 (Human Rights Watch, 2003). He also began campaigning against President Obasanjo, and helped form the Campaign for the Realization of a South-South Presidency (CRES-SOP). The PDP suspended Harry in 2001 because of these "anti-party" activities and the next year he joined the ANPP, which had long fielded Mohammed Buhari, Obasanjo's primary competitor in the presidential elections and former military head of state from the north. Harry became the ANPP's national vice chairman, with responsibility for the South-South zone of Nigeria covering his home state of Rivers and several other states of the Niger Delta area. He was a strong supporter of Sergeant Awuse, the ANPP's candidate for Rivers governorship and a bitter opponent of Governor Odili. He was killed few weeks before the elections. His death has been linked to the bad feeling between him and the Rivers State government. Harry was killed in Abuja on the March 5th, 2003. Marshal Harry's case, which appeared to be the only one to be conclusive, turned out not to be because the family of the deceased says that the killing was not an unfortunate case of armed robbery as the police claimed but a clear case of political assassination.

Reformers who criticize abuses of power have also been targets of political assassination in Nigeria. This was the case in Anambra state when Barnabas Igwe, chairman of the state branch of the Nigerian Bar Association, and his wife Abigail Amaka were ambushed in their car and brutally murdered in Onitsha, on September 1, 2002. There is strong and credible evidence that their killing was politically motivated (Human Rights Watch Press Release: 2002). Igwe had been a powerful public critic of Anambra's former Governor, Chinwoke Mbadinuju, openly calling for the governor's resignation due to his failure to pay government workers for several months. Igwe and other close colleagues who had denounced government abuses received direct threats from senior officials in the Anambra State government in the days preceding the killings. Close associates were also threat-



ened soon after the killing.

The killing of Ogonnaya Uche who was the All Nigeria Peoples' Party senatorial candidate in the southeastern state of Imo and former commissioner in the Imo state government is yet another case of political assassination. Ogonnaya Uche, was shot in his home in Owerri on February 8, 2003, and died two days later. Speaking to journalist before his death in the hospital, Uche reportedly said he believed his attack was political, and explained that two days before the shooting, he had been trailed to the party secretariat by a group of armed men, who had asked his driver where he was (Nkwopa, 2003). Uche was preparing to contest the April election for the Orlu senatorial zone, on the platform of the ANPP when he was assassinated. Another death in Imo shortly followed; Theodore Agwatu, principal secretary to the Imo state governor, was shot and killed in his home on February 22. The motive for the killings was not confirmed in either case. Nevertheless, politicians in the state used the fact of the killings as a political weapon, as frequently occurs in Nigeria, seeking to lay blame, however prematurely, at their opponents' doorsteps.

Aminasoari Dikibo, Chairman of Peoples' Democratic Party, South South Zone was killed on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2004, equally under circumstances termed to be inexplicable. The murder of Dikibo was so mysterious that it has come under public scrutiny. Dikibo was accosted while on his way to attend a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the party. Joining the list of victims of political assassinations is Alhaji Lateef Olaniyan, a close associate of the strongman of Ibadan politics, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu both of the Peoples' Democratic Party. Lateef Olaniyan became an unfortunate victim of this hydra-headed dragon (political assassination) on July 16, 2005 when he was shot in his car at Ibadan, very close to his residence. Prior to his killing, he had been trailed by some unknown men to the party secretariat some days preceding his assassination. The family of the deceased has linked the killing to the government of the state. This is because of the feud between Governor Rashidi Ladoja and Lamidi Adedibu. And Lateef Olaniyan was the acolyte of Lamidi Adedibu.

Peter Eboigbe, a Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) chieftain, was killed in Benin City on August 11, 2005 by suspected hired assassins. Peter Eboigbe had shortly declared his intention to run for the position of Chairman of Oredo Local Government in Edo State. The youths who took to the streets in protest of the killing sealed the secretariat of the Oredo Local Government and alleged that the killing was because Peter Eboigbe had declared his intention to contest the forthcoming Local Government chairmanship election (Okhomina, 2005:5). This spate of killings is giving Nigerians cause for worry.

The high profile assassination cases of prominent politicians discussed above, the places they resided, and the positions they held as at the time of their assassination show that they fall under a significant grouping - opposition group. This is because the victims of political

assassination mentioned were at their point of assassination in opposition, directly or otherwise to the ruling government. The cases of Alfred Rewane, Kudirat Abiola, Marshal Harry, Barnabas Igwe, and Lateef Olaniyan who always opposed the policies of the government, and Peter Ebiogbe, and Ogonnaya Uche who attempted to run for public positions against the incumbents lend credence to this. Also, prospective politicians have become target for assassination. Onwuka Kalu, of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), and opponent to Uzor Kalu, incumbent governor of Abia State, Nigeria, in the 2003 polls said that immediately after challenging the victory of Uzor Kalu, suspected assassins have continued to trail him. From the literature reviewed and the cases of political assassinations discussed, it is observed that most of the high profile cases of political assassinations have been linked to the government of the day. For example, the killing of Bola Ige was linked to Iyiola Omisore, the then deputy governor of Osun State, that of the Igwes was linked to former governor of Anambra State, Chinwoke Mbadiniju, Lateef Olaniyan's murder is linked to the incumbent governor of Oyo State, Rashidi Ladoja and Peter Eboigbe is linked to the current Chairman of the Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State. In the past, the assassinations that occurred were also linked to the government. For example, the killing of Dele Giwa was said to have been organized by military officers, Col. Akilu (Director of Military Intelligence) and Lt. Col. Togun (Deputy Director of State Security Service) who served in the Babangida administration. While many more Nigerians have lost their lives in small-scale political clashes than in targeted assassinations, these high profile deaths have provoked perhaps greater turmoil in Nigeria, and in some, though not all cases, a slightly more focused response by the government and police. In many of the cases, it is difficult to confirm the exact motive for the crime. It has become more reflexive for politicians in Nigeria to point fingers at one another when-ever a prominent figure is killed. Nonetheless, even discounting some of the cases as ordinary murders, the number of killings leave no doubt that political assassinations are a far too common occurrence, and action by the government and police to stem the problem have been insufficient and ineffective.

### **Outcomes/effects of political assassination**

No country in the world can thrive in an atmosphere that is riddled with tension, apprehension, brutality, serial or targeted killings and assassinations. Nigeria, a nation that is yet to attain the status of a developed state can neither survive nor grow in such brutality ridden environment. This study has done much to give details of certain political assassinations that have been witnessed in the political annals of Nigeria. To this end, the outcomes or effects of political assassinations is assessed towards their impact on the nation at large.



1). The insecurity in the country caused by the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the national security outfit which has hindered prospective investors from coming to invest in Nigeria is one effect of political assassination. This is because there is no guarantee for the safety of lives and property. This has an adverse effect on the economy. Economic development is stunted because when foreign investors come and invest in the country, a wider market is created and the economy booms. But when the country is unable to guarantee the safety of its citizens much less foreign investors, tourist and others, economic opportunities which should come through the aforementioned category of people are not only lost but the international image of the nation is mired in the mud.

2). The Quest for political power/positions which make politicians engage in political assassinations has brought about hostility and discord instead of unity. It is a fact that the more united a nation is, the stronger it becomes as all forms of disharmony, sectionalism, oppression, domination and marginalization would not exist. The main focus of a united nation would transcend survival for the moment, but towards economic growth, which would in turn have a bearing on infrastructural and technological advancement. But when a country is characterized by killings, the aggrieved party or section of the victim would tend to be hostile and if care is not taken, they would revenge the killing of their member and the domino effect of killings and counter killings might not just lead to disunity only, but also civil unrest. Therefore, a nation where anarchy, chaos, and unrest thrive would not channel its energy and resources towards development but focuses its attention on settling needless wars and attacks.

3). Political assassination has also impacted negatively on the political system. When politicians become targets for killing and assassination, the political system or structure of such nation becomes affected in such a way that oppositions would fizzle out and room for constructive criticism and opposition which is a vital tool for good governance would cease to exist. And a political system where the ruling party is not being opposed or criticized might either transform into an autocratic state or a personalized state, where the state would eventually be run as an inherited or private estate.

4. The unhealthy political rivalry that looms in the country has made youths (who are supposed to be the hope for the future) apprehensive on the one hand and instrument of violence on the other hand. The youths are the future of any nation because as the older generation fades away, the upcoming ones (youths) take over. But in a situation where there are assassinations of all sorts in the political terrain, the youths tend to be apprehensive towards the political system and hope not to be victims of political assassination. This is yet another negative outcome of political assassination. This is because the youths are getting less interested in the art of governance especially the female gender. Also, hoodlums and thugs are being made out of the youths. This is because politi-

cians, to unleash terror on the people are using the youths. The youths are now instrument of violence. They have become professional assassins and armed robbers. A lot of arms/weapons are now in the hands of these youths, who have over the years become restive, taking undue advantage of the porous nature of the security outfit of the country.

Nigeria is in a fix and at a serious constitutional cross-road. It is amazing to see what actors and actresses on the nation's theatre of politics have turned democracy into – government of a class working for selfish goal under the cloak of public interest (Mobolaji, 2005).

## Conclusion

In this short discourse, attempt has been made to cite some high profile cases of political assassinations in Nigeria and it is evident that since the inception of democracy in 1999 till date, there is hardly any year that has rolled by without the nation recording at least seven cases of political assassination and the perpetrators roam the streets of Nigeria freely, probably waiting for their next 'hit'. The intra-and inter-party squabbles and the frequent political clashes between political actors are some indications that the reign of the blood thirsty bestial may not be over after all. The continued laxity on the part of the national security outfit, particularly the police, whose duty hardly exceeds ensuring the maintenance of law and order and preventing crime, has not lived up to its billings. The police are fond of translating cases of political assassinations to unfortunate cases of armed robbery. Given the uncertain nature of the Nigerian political system, the strongest suit of the government should be the general protection of her political compatriots in particular and citizens in general. However, it is hoped that the government of Nigeria would make frantic efforts in ensuring that the spate of political assassinations in the country is reasonably reduced, if not completely eradicated, thereby restoring the hope and faith her citizens once had in her.

## Recommendations

In the light of the negative outcomes of political assassinations and how it affects the nation at large, it is pertinent to make the following recommendations which would serve as possible solutions capable of bringing an end to the assassinations or at least reducing them.

1. For any society to survive and to promote meaningful development, the maintenance of law and order is a *sine qua non*. In other words, the security system in the nation must be improved upon. The Police should be properly and adequately equipped with the necessary technology to enable them carry out their duties effectively. Proper training programme should be organized to acquaint them on how to carry out investigations in a bid to apprehending criminals.

**Appendix I.** Some cases of unresolved political assassinations in Nigeria, 1986-2005.

NAMES	DATE	LOCATION	MODE	OUTCOME
Dele Giwa	October 19, 1986	Lagos	Parcel bomb	Unresolved
Babatunde Elegbede	May 5, 1994	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Lekan Owolabi	March 1995	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Captain Tunde Ashafa	June 11, 1995	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Mr. Alfred Rewane	October 6, 1995	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
David Izegwere	December 1995	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Kayode Awosanya	January 1996	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Tajudeen Abiola (Mrs.)	February 9, 1996	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Alhaji Sama Kano	April 8, 1996	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Admiral Olu Omotehinwa	May 22, 1996	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Irene Obodo (Mrs.)	June 1996	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Alhaja Kudirat Abiola	June 4, 1996	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Chief Adejola Balogun	June 15, 1996	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Esther A. Tejuoso (Mrs.)	September 19, 1996	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Alhaja Suliat Adedeji	November 14, 1996	Ibadan	Shot	Unresolved
Toyin Onagoruwa	December 1996	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Engr. Adesoji A. Dina	September 1998	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Kola Tokunbo	January 31, 1999	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Patrick Okoye	January 31, 1999	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Sunday Ugwu	September 9, 1999	Enugu	Shot	Unresolved
Igwe Francis Nwankwo	February 15, 2000	Anambra	Shot	Unresolved
Nicholas Okhuakhua	June 2000	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Mohammed Shuaibu	September 2000	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Obatou Mumbo	October 17, 2000	Onitsha	Shot	Unresolved
Idowu Braimoh	November 5, 2000	Ondo	Shot	Unresolved
Joseph Osayande	December 4, 2000	Benin	Shot	Unresolved
Chief Layi Balogun	December 10, 2000	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Monday Ndor	August 19, 2001	Port Harcourt	Shot	Unresolved
Onyebuchi Ede	August 23, 2001	Ebonyi	Shot	Unresolved
Chibueze Idah	August 23, 2001	Ebonyi	Shot	Unresolved
Ogbonna Odimbaiwe	August 23, 2001	Ebonyi	Shot	Unresolved
Ifeanyi Nnaji	August 23, 2001	Ebonyi	Shot	Unresolved
Odunayo Olagbaju	December 20, 2001	Ife	Shot	Unresolved
Chief Bola Ige	December 23, 2001	Ibadan	Shot	Unresolved
Mr. S.A. Awoniyi	January 7, 2002	Abuja	Stabbed	Unresolved
Eyo Eyo	April 2002	Calabar	Shot	Unresolved
Ifeanyi Igbokwe	April 18, 2002	Lagos	Shot	Unresolved
Musa Dayo	May 9, 2002	Bauchi	Shot	Unresolved
Christopher Ogbonna	May 26, 2002	Nsukka	Shot	Unresolved
Maria-Theresa Nsa	June 11, 2002	Cross River	Shot	Unresolved

## Appendix I. Contd.

Chief & Mrs. Barnabas Igwe	September 1, 2002	Onitsha	Shot	Unresolved
Mr. Ogbonnaya Uche	February 8, 2003	Owerri	Shot	Unresolved
E. Emenike	February 13, 2003	Imo	Shot	Unresolved
Theodore Agwatu	February 22, 2003	Owerri	Shot	Unresolved
Emily Omope	March 3, 2003	Ibadan	Shot	Unresolved
Marshal Harry	March 5, 2003	Abuja	Shot	Unresolved
Bala Mai-Haice	March 17, 2003	Yamal tu Deba	Shot	Unresolved
Ajibola Olanipekun	June 21, 2003	Ibadan	Shot	Unresolved
Aminosoori Dikibo	February 6, 2004	Delta	Shot	Unresolved
Lateef Olaniyan	July 16, 2005	Ibadan	Shot	Unresolved
Peter Eboigbe	August 11, 2005	Benin	Shot	Unresolved

**Source:** Adapted from Igbinovia, P.E (2003); *The Criminal In All Of Us: Whose Ox Have We Not Taken*, University of Benin Inaugural Lecture Series 71, p.143

2. There should be a massive re-orientation of political actors as to what politics is all about. The mass media has a major role to play in this. Politicians should be re-orientated on political issues. Politics should be people oriented not self or party oriented. Also, 'money politics', which is largely connected with politicians putting self before the people should be discouraged. Politics should be seen as an avenue to serve not to be served.

3. Frantic efforts should be made to get illegally possessed weapons off the hands of citizen. A task force should be set up to carry out this function and check the movement of arms and ammunition within the country.

4. Nigeria should use her involvement in peace keeping and international security to seek assistance from the international community on how to bring lasting solutions to this ugly menace that has trod the Nigerian political system for so long. Security personnel should be sent for professional training so that they could use their expertise to improve the security of not only the international community but also their immediate environment.

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