

The State, Commercial Vehicle Drivers and Violence in Ado Ekiti, Nigeria

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Abstract: Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, incidences of violent conflicts associated with commercial vehicle drivers have been on a steady increase in Nigeria. The inclination and propensity of commercial vehicle drivers for violence have transformed these essential service providers into a notorious group, which the populace now associate with chaos and violence. In Ekiti State, the conducts of commercial vehicle drivers have become a subject of concern particularly, in Ado Ekiti the state capital. Their penchant for violence have manifested in the incessant destruction of lives and properties, as well as disruptions of the peace and tranquillity of the state, with government and politicians fingered as instigators of most of these violence. With the use of both primary and secondary sources of data, and Ado-Ekiti as the unit of analysis, the study examined the nexus between the State and violent disruptions of commercial vehicle drivers in Ekiti State. A total of 750 structured questionnaires were administered directly to respondents in Ado-Ekiti metropolis, with 734 retrieved. Also, a total of 71 people were interviewed including drivers, traders, security personnel and government officials. Findings of the study revealed that the State/government played a major role in the violence being perpetrated by commercial vehicle drivers in the state. This is done essentially for regime perpetuation and the intimidation of 'perceived' political opponents. The study recommended the need for value re-orientation, particularly for commercial drivers, prohibition of the sale of alcohols in motor parks, as well as intelligence gathering for proactive response by security agencies.

Keywords: State, Commercial Drivers, Violence, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary discourses on Nigeria's security challenges have consistently linked commercial vehicle drivers with several incidences of violent dispositions, particularly in the South-Western Region (Human Right Watch, 2007; Folarin, 2016; Casmir, 2017). The inclination and propensity of commercial vehicle drivers for violence have transformed these essential service providers into a notorious group, which the populace now associate with conflict and violence (Ogunmola, 2015, Bolashodun, 2015). Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, incidences of violent conflicts associated with commercial vehicle drivers have been on a steady increase. They now serve as a pool from where individuals with technical skills in violence are recruited to perpetrate violence either for self-serving or political reasons (Omobowale & Fayiga, 2015). Although the exhibition of violent tendencies by these operators (drivers) have been attributed to several factors, which among others include politics of succession in the motor parks; intra and inter drivers' union rivalries; disagreement over fare hikes, loading arrangements and movement of parks, however, state/politically instigated or induced violence appears to be the most pronounced and wide-spread in the South-West (Omobowale & Fayiga, 2015; Olaniyan & Bello, 2016).

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In Ekiti State, the conducts of commercial vehicle drivers have become a subject of concern particularly, in Ado Ekiti the state capital (Ogunmola, 2015, Bolashodun, 2015). Their penchant for violence have manifested in the incessant destruction of lives and properties, as well as disruptions of the peace and tranquillity of the state. Whether these clashes take place among themselves or with other segments of the society, the mayhem they unleash always leaves a sour taste, with devastating consequences for the socio-political and economic life of the state (Sulaiman, 2007, Ogunmola, 2015, Ogundele, 2015, Bolashodun, 2015).

Often times, the state government have been implicated as the major instigator of these violent acts (Olaniyan & Bello, 2016). For instance in 2007, Olaniyan and Bello found that state supported the leadership of NURTW against RTEAN in the controversy that broke out over the use of motor parks in Ado-Ekiti. Similarly, in 2014, the Fayemi led administration was alleged as being responsible for instigating the disruption of Labour Party Gubernatorial candidate Michael Opyemi Bamidele's rally using members of RTEAN and NURTW (Olaniyan and Bello, 2016). The configuration of such violence include but not limited to, politics of succession in the motor parks, intra-union disagreement; inter-union rivalries, state instigation, political patronages as well as disagreement over fare hikes, loading arrangements and movement of parks (Olaniyan and Bello, 2016). Manifestation of such violence are in some instances between drivers and drivers, drivers and traders, drivers and students of tertiary institutions; drivers against or for politicians, drivers against the general public to mention but a few (Sulaiman, 2007, Ogunmola, 2015, Ogundele, 2015, Bolashodun, 2015). A recent instance of such violence is the one that was triggered by the death of Chief Omolafe, the former state chairman of NURTW in Ekiti State; the violent conflict between students of Ekiti state university and drivers; the violent conflict between Hausa community and drivers, the violent conflict barricading and sacking the members of Ekiti State House of Assembly evidently instigated by the incumbent governor of Ekiti state, Mr Ayo Fayose to frustrate the legislators from impeaching him (Ogundele, 2015; Nejo, 2014; Ibekwe, 2015; Ogunmola, 2015; PM NEWS, 2014)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Umukoro 2014, Ojo 2009, Nzongola-Ntalaja 2004, Amadife 1999 all cited in Omobowale and Fayiga (2015) agree that democratization and governance have emerged prominently in the discourse about Nigeria development in the last two decades. In the processes of our democratisation, governance has created more poverty among the people than wealth consequent upon the corrupt nature of successive government since independence (Umukoro 2014; Smith 2010; Shaxson 2007; Amadife 1999 and Frank 1980; cited in Omobowale and Fayiga, 2015). The democratisation process of Nigeria thus far, has witnessed the contribution of different stakeholders of which Omobowale and Fayiga (2015) and also Animashahun (2010) identify commercial vehicle drivers as major players. To further buttress their allusion, Omobowale and Fayiga argue that "the establishment of the NURTW as the umbrella body of transport workers (particularly drivers) made a major turning point in the political relevance of these working class mass that ordinarily might not have caught the attention of political elite" Omobowale (2008) in a separate study and also in support of Omobowale and Fayiga posits that the mass membership of the NURTW, comprising principally the underprivileged and vulnerable, who have been toughened by the rough conditions of the street, which they are regularly exposed to day and night, present a critical mass of potential and real hoodlums, who respond to the command of political patrons and politicians who may need their services at election periods. In conclusion, Omobowale and Fayiga add that drivers' leaders are much sought after for their dexterity for violence and instrumentality for election rigging because, they believe whoever controls the leader automatically controls the members.

In separate studies, Olaniyan and Bello (2016) and Olaniyan (2015) argue that one of the major reasons why commercial vehicle drivers engage in violence is the state instigation and political patronages. Olaniyan and Bello (2016) specifically posit that the pervasive nature of drivers' union as claimed by Ikelegbe (2001) manifest significantly because of the intrusion of political contractors to the motor park spheres. They argue that the intrusion manifests in the courting of the leadership of the unions for political ends. They further argue that the invasion of the motor park space works in a number of ways. One, it makes the drivers a force to be reckoned with in the political spheres. Two, it turns the motor parks into spots of political mobilization to the extent that the drivers constitute major aspects of political campaigns. Three, the drivers become ready tools during election time as body guards to politicians, intimidators of political opponents, ballot boxes snatchers on election day or outright fomenters of troubles to achieve election cancellations. Quoting Albert (2007), Omobowale and Olutayo (2007), and Animashahun (2013), Olaniyan and Bello insist that the hands of the political class in

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the orgy of violence perpetrated by two major factions within the fold of NURTW in the quest for political succession and supremacy in Ibadan, Oyo state is obvious. They show how these studies connect the violence in the motor parks with the struggle for political ascendancy between godfather and godson in the persons of Lamidid Adedibu and Rashidi Ladoja in Ibadan, Oyo state. For a long time, Ibadan city was turned to a war zone, with casualties in human and materials. Olaniyan and Bello add that within this framework of political interference is located the role of the state, particularly, the incumbent state managers. They further add that every occupiers of state governorship seat always seek the support of the leaders of the drivers' unions. To this end, there is always the trend to influence the emergence of leaders that will be helpful in mobilizing members for political ends during election time. They argue, also quoting Nwagu, (2014) and Adeyemi, (2015) that a major consequence of this is the emergence of rivalry among the drivers' bodies. They further allude that the pattern of succession in the motor park has become a major source of violence. They conclude by citing Adekambi, (2011); Kayode-Adedeji, (2013) and Ezeobi, (2012) that hardly is leadership changed through the ballot or negotiation. It is always through the barrel of the gun or the unleashing of violence which is principally through the influence of both the state and political traders.

In his own opinion, Emeka (2015) posits that sometimes conflict among drivers is instigated by politicians irrespective of status. He agreed that both the politicians and state collaborate to instigate conflict among drivers for the selfish purpose of assuming political powers. Emeka believes that politicians do whatever within their powers to relegate any drivers' leader who does not share in their political vision by instigating and assisting an opponent to take over control of Motor Park. He gave example of how a rival drivers' group within NURTW assisted by some politically ambitious legislators of Ondo state attempted to take over Motor Park in Owo, Ondo state. He concluded that Kolade, the incumbent occupant of the motor park was drove out of town and the candidate of the legislators named Jugunnu took over control of the park.

In a report by Human Rights Watch (2007) it is recorded that both Ladoja and Adedibu turned to Oyo State's chapter of NURTW as a primary source of political thugs during any political season. It reported that NURTW has several thousand members in Oyo which is meant to represent the collective bargaining interests of drivers of commercial passenger vehicles. The report shows that there is considerable evidence that NURTW's Oyo chapter has long been used as a tool of political violence by Adedibu and other politicians. Some long-time members complain that the union has been largely captured by violent motor park "touts" who loiter about the motor parks harassing drivers and passengers alike. The report indicated that these set of individuals are ready warring soldiers for politicians

In the same report, former Oyo State Senator Lekan Balogun was quoted thus; "I would call for the complete proscription of NURTW. They do not have any purpose. They are available for negative activities including thuggery and the politicians draw their thugs from there." The report further states that the senator was once beaten and nearly killed by a group of NURTW thugs loyal to Adedibu while attempting to mediate the dispute between Ladoja and Adedibu in January 2007. Corroborating Lekan Balogun in the same report, former Oyo State Governor Victor Olunloyo echoed these sentiments, adding, "It has always been that way, it was like that when I was governor." HRW (2007) further reports that the Deputy Secretary of one NURTW branch in Ibadan acknowledged his members' involvement in "politics," explaining that, "We are supposed to be a separate body but the way they are playing politics in Nigeria, if you want to be anything you cannot rule out the godfather system.

The report also shows how political lords control factions of drivers' union for their selfish purpose. For instance, the pro-Adedibu faction was led by Lateef Akinsola, commonly known as "Tokyo" while Ladoja backed a rival named Wasilu Adegboyega, commonly known as "Tawa," to usurp Tokyo's role for his own benefit as governor of the state. The sad aspect of all these shameful and anti-democratic tendencies is the involvement of police in the whole saga. The report shows that the Nigerian police have made no effort to investigate the political contractors or the drivers' involvement in orchestrating political violence, corruption or electoral fraud despite evidence implicating them. The report concluded that Adedibu, other political instigators and the drivers were free not because the then PDP government does not know that they had criminal tendencies but because they needed them to win elections.

This has confirmed the extent at which political activities has negatively affected the activities of commercial vehicle drivers in Nigeria. It is very unfortunate and it is a clear confirmation of Ikelegbe's postulation on the pervasiveness of trade union which should be a leading driver of both political and economic development of a nation. The primary purpose of establishing the unions has been abandoned thereby causing more harm than good to both their members and the general public.

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STUDY AREA:

Ado-Ekiti an ancient city in Nigeria, is located between latitude 7° 34' and 7° 41' North of the Equator and Longitudes 5° 11' and 5° 16' East of the Greenwich Meridian. The city became the headquarters of Ekiti Divisional Council in 1916 and rose to the status of a state capital on October 1, 1996. The population of Ado-Ekiti according to the 2006 census is put at 308,621. Geologically, Ado-Ekiti lies entirely on Pre-Cambrian Basement Complex rock group which underlies much of Nigeria. It falls within Koppen's 'A' climatic belt that is tropical wet climate. The city is strategically located in Ekiti land at the convergence of major roads forming a radial pattern. These roads are Ado-Ekiti-Akure road passing through Ikere-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti-Ikare road passing through Ijan-Ekiti, Ilumoba, Aisegba-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti-Ilawe road, Ado-Ekiti-Iyin – Igede-Aramoko road and Ado-Ekiti-Ifaki road.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was derived from both primary and secondary sources. The technique of data collection involved the use of Key Informant Interview (KII), In-depth Interview (IDI) and structured questionnaire. The sampled population comprises of commercial vehicle drivers in Ado Ekiti operating under the banners of National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN) in the following motor parks: Akure motor park, Ikare motor park, Ikole motor park; new garage, Iyin motor park and Ilawe motor parks in Ado Ekiti. It also includes traders who operate around these motor parks; officers of the Nigerian police, students of tertiary institutions from Ekiti state university and Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti; bank officials along bank road in Ado Ekiti, civil servants, other government officials at the state secretariat and Ado-Ekiti residents. A total of 750 structured questionnaires were administered directly to respondents in Ado-Ekiti. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. A total of 734 of the 750 questionnaires were retrieved. Also, a total number of 71 drivers, traders, security personnel and government officials were interviewed. Library and archival documents, including text books newspapers and magazines constitute the main sources of secondary data. The data from both sources supplement each other while content analysis and simple percentages were used to analyse finding.

Table 1.0 Showing Size and Categories of Respondents

S/N	Respondents	Instruments of Data Collection		
		Questionnaires		Interviews
		Administered	Responded	
1.	Drivers	531	523	23
2	Security men	25	22	6
3	Students	167	162	25
4	Traders	21	21	11
5	Bank officials	Nil	Nil	13
6	Government officials	6	6	3
	Total	750	734	81

Source: Fieldwork, 2016

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Discussion of Findings:

Questionnaires Responses on the Role of State in the Violence by Commercial Vehicle Drivers:

Six issues were considered in this section, they were used in the course of this research to extract the appropriate response from the respondents on the role of the state in the violence by commercial vehicle drivers. Highest number of respondents amounting to 69.3% agreed that the state is a major contributor to the violence by commercial vehicle drivers; while 30.1% of the respondents thought otherwise and 0.5% of them were undecided. In finding out whether the state inappropriately interferes in the smooth running of motor parks, 64.9% of the respondents believed the state interference in the affairs of Motor Park is a major cause of violence by commercial vehicle drivers. 33.9% disagree with this opinion; while 1.2% of the respondents could not decide.

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On the possibility of state supporting a particular drivers’ union against the other for political reasons, 62.9% of the respondents concurred with this opinion. 35% disagree believing the support by the state is not an issue and 2% of them were undecided. 72.5% of the respondents believe that the manner at which the state interferes with the operations of security agencies to shield violent commercial vehicle drivers for purpose of sustaining violence for political gain is a major factor leading to violence by commercial vehicle drivers. 26.8% believe that such interference is not an issue to be considered as a factor leading to incessant violence by commercial vehicle drivers and 0.7% of the respondents were undecided.

On the argument that the service provided by commercial vehicle drivers as thugs to politician during electioneering campaigns and elections, 67% of the respondents believe such service is a major rider to the eventual violence unleashed on the public outside politics; while 32.4% did not agree with the opinion and 0.5% of them were undecided. Finally, 69.8% of the respondents see the state as major instigator of violence by commercial vehicle drivers; while 25.3% see it the other way round and 4.9% could not decide either way. The analysis of the respondents’ views on the roles of the state on the violence by commercial vehicle drivers as shown in table 1.0 below.

Table 1.1 Showing the Roles of the State in the Violence by Commercial vehicle drivers

S/N	The roles of state in the violence by commercial vehicle drivers	Agree	Disagree	Not Certain	Total
1	The state encourages violence by commercial vehicle drivers	509 (69.3%)	221 (30.1%)	04 (0.5%)	
2	The state interferes in the running of motor parks	476 (64.9%)	249 (33.9%)	09 (1.2%)	
3	The state supports drivers’ unions against each other leading to avoidable violent conflicts	462 (62.9%)	257 (35%)	15 (2%)	
4	The state interferes with the operations of security agencies in order to shield commercial vehicle drivers to sustain violence for political purpose	532 (72.5%)	197 (26.8%)	05 (0.7%)	
5	Commercial vehicle drivers serve as thugs to politicians during campaigns and elections	492 (67%)	238 (32.4%)	04 (0.5%)	
6	The state has been the major instigator of violence by commercial vehicle drivers	512 (69.6%)	186 (25.3%)	36 (4.9%)	

Source: Field Work 2016

Interview Responses on the Role of State in the Violence by Commercial Drivers:

On whether the state encourages violence by commercial drivers, all the respondents to the interview responded in the affirmative. This corresponds with the findings from the questionnaires where 69.3% also responded positively to similar question. This implies that the findings identify the roles of state as a major factor in the violence by commercial drivers. One of the respondent posited that the state has the power to regulate the activities of individuals and group, where such regulation is lacking, violence is one of the outcomes. Another respondent repeated that lack of prosecution of past offenders is a major reason leading to recurrence of violence by commercial vehicle drivers. A key respondent’s opinion who is a leader of one of the drivers’ union was captured thus;

The major problem in the transportation business is the government and the politicians who run it. The interference by these politicians has affected the running of the private affairs of our unions. It has got to the extent that we cannot freely elect our leaders without endorsement by key politicians most especially governors and prominent political leaders. Where such endorsement is rejected, the politicians sponsor their candidate from the opposing group through mayhem (Field Survey, 2016).

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Another key informant who is also a leader of drivers' union, in his own opinion, the government (state) and politicians sometimes goes to the extent of sponsoring conflict among drivers' union where one of the unions is in support of opposition political party. He gave the example of the plight of members of Road Transport Employer Association of Nigeria (RTEAN) during the government of Engineer Segun Oni. He said the drivers from that union were deprived access to several motor parks where only members of National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) were allowed to flourish. He said that act resulted in several cases of violent conflicts that ended in deaths and destruction of properties. His opinion is as captured below;

Most of the governments in Ekiti in the past give priority to NURTW against RTEAN. Members of RTEAN are treated as second class drivers. Our union was not properly considered in the distribution of government assisted buses. We don't have equal access to motor parks. Most times NURTW members were mobilised by the state against our members on the allegation that we were against the government but working for the opposition party. After such conflicts our members were detained and persecuted. Presently as am talking, many of our members are in prison custody for no reason but the allegation that they knew about the death of late Mr Omolafe Aderiye who was gruesomely murdered by unknown men. This is in addition to the destruction of the properties and several injuries sustained by our members. These are some of the reasons why drivers engaged in the violent conflict in the past (Field Survey, 2016).

It strengthened the respondents' position in table 1.1 that the state supports drivers' unions against each other leading to avoidable violent conflict with 62.9% in agreement. Another respondent posited that the security men during violence by commercial vehicle drivers are only active against members of drivers' union that are perceived as opposition to the government. His words are as captured below;

The police and other security men will never come to the spot where commercial vehicle drivers' are engaged in violence to do justice except in a situation where the state has no hand. Even if they come, they will only deal with the drivers that are not on the side of the government leaving the other side to perpetrate heinous crime against the people (Field Survey, 2016).

Table 1.1 supports this position where 72.5% agreed that the state interferes with the operations of security agencies in order to shield commercial drivers who support them. In conclusion, all the respondents believe that politicians through the state power emerge as the major instigators of violent conflict either among drivers or drivers and the public most especially during political campaigns and election in Ekiti state. 69.8% of respondents from the questionnaires also agreed with this position. This also aligns with the opinion of Olaniyan and Bello (2016) where they posit thus;

... in the case of the drivers, is the intrusion of political contractors to the motor park spheres. This intrusion manifests in the courting of the leadership of the unions for political ends. The invasion of the motor park space works in a number of ways. One, it makes the drivers a force to be reckoned with in the political spheres. Two, it turns the motor parks into spots of political mobilization to the extent that the drivers constitute major aspects of political campaigns. Three, the drivers become ready tools during election time as body guards to politicians, intimidators of political opponents, ballot boxes snatchers on election day or outright fomenters of troubles to achieve election cancellations (Field Survey, 2016).

The responses by respondents from this segment of the interview and the response of respondents from the questionnaires empowers the researchers to conclude that the State influence contributes to violence by commercial vehicle drivers in Ado Ekiti.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the analysis above that the violence of commercial drivers has the hand of the state. It would have been avoided if the government and politicians have not been encouraging the perpetrators in the past. The purpose of government according to section 14 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria as amended is to ensure security of citizens and also their welfare. This has been lacking in respect to the patronage enjoyed by commercial drivers from politicians who are suppose to drive good policies of the state that will benefit the people. Instead, the state has been partaking in the perpetration of violence which is inimical to the peacefulness of the state. It is the responsibility of the state to extend governance to motor parks to ensure orderliness. Contrarily, the state, most times, has been engaged otherwise.

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The people must insist that the politicians must desist from patronising commercial vehicle drivers. This will be achieved through a strict policy which is backed by legislation from the state parliament. Specific penalty must be spelt out for violators. This is in tandem with the suggestion made by Olaniyan and Bello (2016) that the state needs to put up a robust policy to tackle the menace

Commercial vehicle driving business should be reformed to transform it from its violent status to peaceful business. This is in agreement with the position of Cole (2005) that group or organisational conflict is unproductive at least and possibly even destructive which suggests that business environment should be peaceful to ensure organisational and individual satisfaction. This is for the collective benefit of commercial drivers, the people and the state.

Furthermore, the commercial driving environment, most especially Motor Parks should be strictly governed by the state to prevent the congregation of hoodlums who substantially influence innocent or unsuspecting transportation workers. Motor Parks should not be allowed to be a place of accommodation for homeless individuals or miscreants. Mingling of people should be restricted during the days while only park security men should be allowed to be in the park overnight.

In addition, security men most especially the police officers should be alive to their responsibilities by resisting the political elite from influencing them against the people. The policemen should not be involved in politics under whatever guise. The politicians too should be patriotic enough to avoid using the security personnel for selfish reasons. Influencing the police against the people during violence by commercial drivers is a serious criminal offence which should be viewed as such.

Another important issue is the judicious prosecution of offenders in any violent conflict. This will serve as a deterrent to others who may want to indulge in such; and consequently, it will prevent such occurrence in the future. It has become habitual by politicians in power to shield their allies in commercial vehicle driving business who indulged in violent situations. This is totally unacceptable and it should be stopped.

Selling of hard drugs like Indian hemp and all sorts of alcohols should be criminalised in Motor Parks. Several studies and also findings in this particular research have shown that the items are freely sold in motor parks despite their attendant consequences on human beings particularly commercial vehicle drivers.

'Agbero' activities should be formalised with each of them coded for proper identification and control. This will make it easy to identify them with the code on their uniform. The state should also find a way of engaging them as done by Lagos state government to prevent them from engaging in violent activities.

Equally, all commercial drivers should be coded and all commercial vehicles should also be given identities. This will serve as a serious security measure against incessant violent activities in Ekiti state and also provide a means of easy identification.

The state must insist on proper regime turnover whenever it is time for power to change hands within any of the commercial drivers' unions. Power must only change hands through election as stipulated in their various constitutions. Regime changeover has most times been a major source of violent conflict among commercial vehicle drivers; therefore, democratic means must be the way at all times.

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