

## **AGENT OF DESTRUCTION: YOUTH AND THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The use of the youth as instrument of political violence is rooted in Nigeria's political history. The destructive capability of the youth was displayed in the orgy of violence that emanated from the conduct of the 1964 general elections and 1965 Western region elections, respectively. In subsequent republics, the youth was maximally mobilized by different political groups, parties, and leaders as an agent of violence to be unleashed on perceive and real political opponents. This was the case in Kwara State in this present republic. In the state, youth groups were mobilized and utilized as agent of violence in the face-off between Dr. Olusola Saraki, the Waziri of Ilorin and acclaimed godfather of Kwara politics, and his then political godson, the late Rear Admiral Muhammad Lawal (rtd), then governor of the state. Youth violence masterminded by these political rivals manifested in all the stages of the electoral campaign towards the conduct of the 2003 general elections. In the aftermath of the death Governor Lawal and the weakening of opposition fronts in Kwara politics the incidence of youth violence has somewhat abated. The paper takes a retrospective analysis of the political conflict that consumed Kwara State prior to the 2003 Nigeria general elections. The paper takes the position that by arming, financing, and deploying youth groups for violence, the political elite are the real agent of violence.

**Keywords:** Youth; Politics; Election; Political Violence

### **INTRODUCTION**

Politics of bitterness, bickering, and violence remains a recurring issue in the third world political landscape. This was reinforced by the patron-client and patronage nature of their politics and attendant acrimony, discord, and violence that often emanate from such political practice. Violence often arises when the political and electoral processes are perverted by individuals and cliché in order to enthroned cronies in political offices and remains influential in national politics. In the course of settling scores by political heavyweights, youth groups are drawn into the fray and used as instrument to advance personal and groups political interests and gains.

As in most Third world countries, political fraud, manipulation of electoral process, the ostensible use of wealth to gain political office, recruiting, arming, and deploying of youth gang to unleash terror and mayhem has long been a blemish in Nigeria's political and electoral history (Osaghae, 1998; Anifowose, 1982; Joseph, 1987). As in past republics, political process and electoral contest in this present republic have been replete with varying forms of political brinkmanship, electoral fraud, and attendant violence.

Since Nigeria's return to participatory democracy in 1999, the nation has not fare better on issues of political accountability, transparency, and good governance. Instead, it body politics have been mired in a crisis of governance, consequent upon mismanagement of national resource, non accountability, and legitimacy crisis arising from the conduct and administration of her electoral processes. Since 1999, many of Nigeria's elected political leaders obtained their positions by demonstrating an ability to use corruption and deploy violence in order to prevail in sham elections. In place of free and fair democratic competition, struggles for political offices have been waged violently on the streets of Nigeria's major cities and urban centers by gangs of political thugs and cultist recruited, armed, and deployed by politicians to assist them in seizing control of power at all levels of government (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

In their bid to gain access to and/or hold on to political positions, many prominent political figures openly recruit and arm criminal gangs to unleash terror on perceive and real political opponents and ordinary citizens. In Rivers, Oyo, Gombe, Ekiti, Anambra, Delta, Osun, Kwara, and scores of other states across the federation, political godfathers and their godsons have recruited and armed youth gangs to fight opposition figures and their supporters, thereby unleashing reign of terror on the populace. In violent confrontations that characterized electioneering campaigns, particularly the 2003 and 2007 general elections, a number of political personalities were assassinated and property was destroyed, while peace and security of the population was threatened (Human Rights Watch, 2007; Saliu & Saka, 2006).

While politicians in Nigeria are noted for their penchant for perverting the political process and sponsoring violence, they do this using the youth as their foot soldiers. Given the sorry state of the nation's economy, unemployment, and pervading poverty, youth, the most productive segment of the population, has become the willing tool of violence in the hand of the political elite. The lack of meaningful and productive engagement meant that the youth are willing instruments that can be deployed for dirty assignments by the politicians, who control their loyalty. The manipulatory use of the youth for settling political scores was brazenly displayed in the political face-off between Dr. Olusola Saraki, the Waziri of Ilorin and acclaimed Kwara political kingmaker, and his erstwhile political godson, the late Rear Admiral Mohammed Alabi Lawal (rtd), the former state governor from 1999-2003.

In this face-off, which the political destiny of Kwara state was bitterly fought for, the two political figures recruited, armed, and deployed youth gangs for all sort of electoral fraud and violence. The situation, particularly in the Ilorin metropolis, was so tense in the months preceding the 2003 general election. Since the defeat of governor Lawal and, later, his death the incidence of a political clash and unleashing of violence by a youth gang in the state, has since abated. The position of this paper is that the political enemies, in their struggle to win the political control of the state, manipulated the youth for their selfish, personal, and cliché interests and gains. Without providing the youth with the means of violence and instructing them to unleash their weapons of destruction, the youth in the state would not have embarked on the campaigns of destruction and terror as witnessed during this period. With the benefit of hindsight, the paper took the position that the political elite in the state, rather than the youth, were the real agents of destruction and destabilization.

## **ON YOUTH GANGS, GODFATHERS AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

Youth, as a distinct social group, is taken in the extant literature as the driving force for societal development. It is widely believed that the future of any human society depends, to a large extent, on the innovation and dynamism of its 'engine room', known as the youth. Notwithstanding this general belief, the social categorization of youth has, for a long time, remains controversial. To Kenniston (1971), youth refers to a period of life between adolescence and adulthood in the post-modern era. On the other hand, Berger (1972) insists that youth cuts across age, identifying culture as what really matters in the youth categorization. In Nigeria, the general position is that the youth age bracket hovers between 15-30 years of age (Egbue, 2006; Albert, 1997).

This age bracket, by virtue of quality as spontaneity, impulsiveness, energy, and vibrancy that they tend to exhibit, has become the target group for recruiting an army of terror by politicians bent on capturing or retaining, at all costs, their political positions and influence. In Nigeria, particularly in this fourth republic, the practice is that the armies of unemployed youth are recruited, financed, maintained, armed, and deployed to carry out varying political assignments for the godfather who retained their services and to whom they are answerable.

Although godfatherism is not a recent phenomenon in Nigerian politics, it has, however, become a scary issue, given the negativities it has contributed to political process, particularly the electoral contest in this present republic (Ayoade, 2006; Gambo, 2006). As Gambo (2006) notes godfatherism is an ideology constructed on the belief that certain individuals possess a considerable means to unilaterally determine the outcome of the electoral contests, thereby determining who gets elected into which political office. The belief is that they are so powerful, influential, and witty to the extent of being able to decide who gets the party nomination to contest elections and manipulatory as to influence who will win in such elections (Jibrin, 2003).

Godfatherism means the practice by which political office seekers (godson) gets connected to an individual (godfather), who is believed to have the ability to deliver desired outcomes in an electoral contest. It is a symbiotic relationship in which the godson court and nurture the support of the godfather. While the godfather delivers victory in the electoral contest, the godson is expected to nourish the relationships by abiding to the biddings of the godfather. The godfather is not in the business of philanthropy, rather the intention is to be in control of the state and enjoy an unfettered access to state resources through the godson, the proxy that actually occupies political office (Ayoade, 2006).

The godfathers go to any length and employs dubious, illegal, and often violent tactics to ensure the electoral success of their protégé. Godfathers are merchants of fear as they are capable of unleashing violence on opposition camps by engaging youth gangs and cultists that they recruit, maintain, and arm for various political assignments. In order to perpetrate electoral fraud, they bribe, cajole, and intimidate election officials and security agents (Ayoade, 2006). Godfathers most often want to control and are actually in control of the machinery of the polity governed by their godson. They make critical governance decisions, determine the nature of political appointments, receive juicy contacts, and earn unimaginable stipends, all which is at the

expense of the state (Human Rights Watch, 2007; Ayoade, 2006; Gambo, 2006). Without mincing words, godfathers are perverts who manipulate the electoral process, sponsor violence, and live as parasites on the public wealth. In the same vein, godfatherism is seen as a practice given its negativities hindered competitive democratic contests and prevent accountability and good governance.

Violence, or social disorganization, is natural to all human societies. It becomes a social problem only where it increases to an intolerable level (Olutayo, 1994). The most common notion is that violence entails the use of physical force, usually aimed at injuring or damaging the object of the violence. The tools of violence can range from flying fists, to clubs, bullets, nerve gas, and nuclear missiles (Danzinger, 1998). Violence may be related to political or non-political aspects of human life (Alanamu, 2005a). Generally, with political violence, the issue of concerns refers to all forms of collective attacks within a political regime, directed at effecting changes in the body politics.

Specifically, political violence can be taken to involve the threat and actual use of physical act carried out by an individual or group of individuals within a political system against another individual, groups and their property. Such use of physical act are carried out with the intent to cause injury or death to a person, destruction of property and in which the objective, choice of targets, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effects all have political significance. Such significance is often directed at modifying the behaviors of others or altering the prevailing power matrix (Anifowose, 1982). Political violence is varied in relation to type and scale. Often subsumed under political violence and most importantly in electoral contest is electoral violence.

Electoral violence, which is mostly manifested in party clash and involves violent acts, like rioting, thuggery, looting, kidnapping, arson, and political assassinations, all directed at individuals and groups perceived to be the political opponents (Ugoh, 2004). Electoral violence mostly occurs in the conduct of an electoral contest before, during, and after elections. Most often they are directed at altering, influencing, or changing, by force, the voting pattern or manipulating the electoral results in favor of a particular candidate or political party (Ugoh, 2004; Alanamu, 2005a; Saliu & Saka, 2006). More importantly, political and electoral violence are orchestrated and sponsored by godfathers to ensure electoral successes of their political godsons and protégés using army of unemployed youth recruited, armed, and maintained by the godfather.

### **KWARA STATE: A HISTORY OF PATRONAGE AND PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP**

Kwara state christened the 'State of Harmony' is one of the first generation states in the Nigeria federation. It came into being as a result of the first state creation exercise consequent upon Decree No. 14 of May 27<sup>th</sup> 1967 promulgated by then Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon, Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces. In the midst of the political activities toward the return to party politics in 1979, a political personality that will so much determine the trends and influence the politics of the state emerged. That figure was Abubakar Olusola Saraki a trained medical doctor practising his profession in Lagos. Having made his money from medical practice Dr. Saraki assiduously used his wealth to cultivate goodwill through philanthropist service to the people of the state. This was later to translate to political gain for the emerging politician in the former Kwara state.

In the second republic political process, Dr. Saraki joined the then National Party of Nigeria, NPN, and contested and won a seat to the senate and emerged as the Senate Majority Leader under the party platform. Not only that, Dr. Olusola Saraki also deployed his influence to secure the state governorship position for the NPN as he mobilize his resources for the electoral success of Alhaji Adamu Attah as the governor of the state in 1979. Unfortunately, for governor Attah, his relationship with Dr. Saraki went sour. In preparation for the 1983 general elections, Senator Saraki withdrew his political support from the incumbent governor Attah and gave his blessing and support for Chief Cornelius Adebayo, the governorship candidate of the Unity Party of Nigeria, UPN. Chief Cornelius went ahead to win the fiercely contested governorship election in 1983, defeating the incumbent governor Attah. In the election, Senator Saraki was clearly the deciding factor as he demonstrated that whichever candidate got his support without recourse to the party affiliation will definitely win any elections in his political domains (Ayoade, 2006). With this performance, Dr. Saraki announced his arrival as the undisputed kingmaker and godfather of Kwara politics.

Senator Saraki, in this fourth republic, has continued to show that he is a political icon whose favor must be sought for any politician aspiring to any meaningful political position in the state. In preparation for electoral processes in this republic, Dr. Saraki pitched his tent with the, then, All People's Party, APP, later renamed All Nigeria People's Party, ANPP. In the 1999 governorship election, Senator Saraki ensured that the aspiration of the late Rear Admiral Muhammad Alabi Lawal (rtd) was realized by ensuring his electoral victory as the governor of the state. However, history was made to repeat itself as the relationship between Saraki (the godfather) and governor Lawal (the godson) turned sour in the twilight of the later administration, as the governor of the state.

Consequent upon the strained relationship, Dr. Saraki decamped to the People Democratic Party and fielded his biological son, Dr. Bukola Saraki, for the governorship position. In the ensuing political contest, governor Lawal was defeated as Dr. Olusola Saraki not only ensure the electoral victory of his son as the governor, but also went ahead to install one of his daughter's, Rukayat Gbemisola Saraki Fowora, as the senator representing the Kwara Central Senatorial district in the 2003 general elections. While Dr. Saraki, the Waziri of Ilorin, has re-affirmed that he remains the undisputed political icon and godfather of Kwara politics for now, the upcoming 2011 general elections may decide the fate of his political empire and hold on to power in the state. However, it needs to be reiterated that Dr. Saraki, given his antecedents, is not likely to broach any opposition and will be ready to use all means possible to ensure his political triumph and continue relevance in Kwara State.

### **THE GODFATHER, HIS GODSON, THEIR YOUTH ARMY, AND VIOLENCE IN KWARA STATE**

Electoral contest in Nigeria has been marred by fraud, intimidation, harassment, and at the extreme violent confrontations between and among contending political figures, their cliché, and parties right from the period after political independence (Jibo and Simbine, 2003; Okoh, 2005; Osaghae, 1998). These politically motivated arson and violence have, in no small measure, heightened the sense of insecurity and remains a troubling issue in Nigeria's democratization history. While political and electoral motivated violence has been an issue of serious concern in the previous republic, the ominous trend it

took in this present republic has raised it into a leading, national, security issue. This was as a result of the open manner by which a politician in this republic have recruited, armed, and deployed terror gangs, criminals groups, and cultist to perpetuate acts of violence against real and perceive political opponents and, by extension, the citizenry (Saliu & Saka, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2007).

Political violence is often carried out by youth gangs whose members are openly recruited, financed, and sometimes armed by public officials, politicians, party officials, and their representatives. These gangs, according to the Human Rights Watch (2007) report, was composed primarily of unemployed young men mobilized to attacks their sponsors' rivals, intimidate member of the public, rig elections, and protect their patrons from similar attacks. Politicians sponsor youth gangs to perpetrate acts of violent abound across the states of the Nigeria federation. However, notorious for financing army of terror are godfathers and godsons, bent on winning electoral contest at all costs. In Oyo State, Southwestern Nigeria, the late Chief Lamidi Adedibu (Ala'afin Molete), who acclaimed godfather of the Ibadan politics, is widely believed to have deployed youth gangs and members of the National Union of Road Transport Worker, NURTW, for a campaign of terror, violence, intimidation, and perpetrated electoral fraud to ensure electoral successes of his political godsons, overtime. He also deployed violence and fraud to ensure defeat of those that fell out of his favor, like his estranged godson Chief Rasheed Ladoja, former governor of the state (Human Rights Watch, 2007; Omobowale & Olutayo, 2007).

In Gombe state the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, who controlled the government, was alleged to have deployed the 'Kalare' gangs for all sorts of electoral frauds and violence. In Katsina state, the PDP government, under the incumbent President Umar Yar'Adua, was alleged to have a thousand of PDP youth thugs under the government payroll. This party youth organization was said to be a person of a youth empowerment initiative. In River state, Anambra and a score of other states across the nation youth gangs, cultists, ethnic militia groups, and members of drivers unions, were financed and armed to carry out politically motivated violence, before, during, and, in some instances, after elections (Human Rights Watch, 2007). The brazen manner by which the politicians deployed their rabid dogs of violence has heighten tension and made the various states concerns to be volatile, especially in months to and after the 2003 and 2007 general elections (Ajaero, 2007a; Ajaero, 2007b; Agekameh, 2001).

Like most other state, the peace, tranquility, and harmony that Ilorin metropolis and Kwara state, in general, is known for, was shattered owing to political violence by paid thugs. The violence and mayhem witnessed in the state between 2001 till the conduct of the 2003 general elections was a result of the political confrontation between Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki (the Waziri of Ilorin), acclaimed kingmaker of Kwara politics, and his estranged godson, late Rear Admiral Muhammad Alabi Lawler rtd the former governor of the state. The conflicts, though intra party at inception, later turned into inter party when Dr. Saraki decamped from the All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP to the People's Democratic Party, PDP. While the clash was centered on the two political figures, the conflicts and its attendant repercussions were far reaching for the peace of Ilorin, the state, and it people at large. Tense and destructiveness was the mayhem such that the story of political violence in this republic will largely be incomplete without relating to the experience of Kwara state, where two prominent sons of the

soil slugged it out in the supremacy battle for the control of the political machinery and governance of the state (Sambo, 2005; The Punch Newspaper, 2003).

Since his rise to political prominence in the second republic, Dr. Olusola Saraki has remained at the center of Kwara state politics. His ability to garner grass root support to ensure electoral success for those he backs for political offices in his turf has remained unrivaled by that of any politicians across the federation. While his support is critical for Governor Adamu Attah and the National Party of Nigeria successes in the state in the 1979 general elections, he also demonstrated that he can sway people's votes in the state as he wishes. This is attested to by his ability to installed Chief Cornelius Adebayo of the Unity Party of Nigeria as the governor, while ensuring NPN successes in other rounds of electoral contests during the 1983 general elections.

The same feat he repeated in the 2003 general elections when his political machinery was deployed to dethrone the incumbent governor, Muhammad Lawal, who he earlier helped to enthrone as governor in 1999 (Lawal, 2005). Attesting to Dr. Saraki political shrewdness is the fact that his anointed candidates have never lost any electoral contest in Kwara state since 1979. Dr. Saraki has remained the dominant and singular determining factor of electoral success in Kwara state (Olanrewaju, 2003). Having being instrumental to the electoral victory of five governors: Alhaji Adamu Attah, (1979-1983); Chief C.O Adebayo, (1983-December 1983); Alhaji Sha'aba Lafiaji, (1992-1993); the late Rear Admiral Muhammad Lawal rtd, (1999-2003); and Dr. Bukola Saraki (2003-2007), there is doubt that Dr. Olusola Saraki is the 'quintessential' godfather of Kwara politics (Raheem, 2003).

Unlike his political godfather, former governor Alabi Lawal was not a known political figure in the state before 1999. Prior to entering party politics, Muhammad Lawal was a retired Admiral in the Nigerian Navy. He was purported to have made his money while serving as the military administrator in Ogun state and during his stint in the Nigerian Port Authority. When he entered party politics and signified his ambition of becoming governor of the state, Admiral Lawal joined other contenders, like former governor Sha'aba Lafiaji; Alhaji Lasisi Ayinla Kolawole Jimoh; Babatunde Kasum; and Engineer Kola Shittu, among others, all courting the favor of the godfather (Dr. Saraki) as this was seen as the deciding factor of who occupies the state house, comes April 1999. As a new entrant, Admiral Lawal would not have got the backing of the kingmaker, but many factors worked in his favor (Lawal, 2005). Having given Admiral Lawal the party domination, Dr. Saraki deployed his political machinery to secure victory for him in the January 19<sup>th</sup> gubernatorial poll.

For more than a year after the assumption of office by the late governor Lawal, things were cordial between the godson and his godfather. However, this was not to last as a rift started to emerge between the duo over many issues with regards to the administration of the state and the running of their party, APP, later renamed ANPP. While issues at stake in the political confrontation between the duos cannot be authoritatively ascertain, it is pertinent to note that the clash of interest revolves around the direction of state governance and dispensing of political patronage. The issues that serves as source of friction between the two figures includes; the second term bid of governor Lawal, the control of the party machinery at the state, appointment and dissolution of the state executive council, the filling of other important appointive positions, upgrading of

traditional rulers, the manners for awarding state contracts, relations with personalities from other parties, among others (Lawal, 2005; Sambo, 2005).

Under normal circumstances, the dispute between the two political figures would have remained insignificant, as it would have been regarded as an individual clash of interest (Sambo, 2005). This was, however, not to be as the duo, backed by their supporters and sycophants, polarized the people of the state and introduced violent and destructive confrontational attacks against their respective camps, hitherto uncommon in the annals of political contest in the Kwara state. It is now publicly acknowledged that the duo of Dr Saraki and former governor Lawal raised, financed, armed, and utilized youth and militia members to settle their political scores. The 'Akaje' and 'Maja' gangs of youth, under the payroll of the Saraki's faction, hiding under the cover of the political association as BUFOG 2003 and MANDATE 2003, were deployed to protect and advance the political interests of the Saraki's camps, with their slogan being 'Sai Saraki', 'Oloye', and 'Sai Bukky'. On the other hand, the Lawal camps recruited their army of terror, popularly referred to as the 'Gbosa Boys', from among cultists from the state polytechnic (Kwara Poly), members of the dreaded Odua'a People Congress, OPC, in the state, and unemployed youth, particularly from Idi-ape, the homestead of former governor Lawal, their slogan being 'Gbosa' and 'Up Lawal' (Ibrahim, 2002).

The violent confrontation between the two opposing political camps in the state commenced with the alleged march on Ilorin by the OPC from southwest Nigeria. The group mission was reported to be the installing of a Yoruba Oba in Ilorin to rival the Emir of the Ilorin, the paramount traditional ruler of Ilorin, and the chairman of the state council of Chiefs (Aremu, 2001; Sambo, 2005). Although the group plan was foiled by the Nigerian Police, nonetheless it irked Ilorin indigenes who interpreted it as an affront on the traditional symbol of authority of the city. Not only did the supporters of Dr. Saraki see the incident as a direct assault masterminded by the governor to ridicule the Emir, it was also seen as a strong friend and astute sympathizer of the Saraki political dynasty.

Between October 2000 to the eve of the 2003 general elections, reign of terror and violence was visited on Ilorin and the state, at large, by the army of terror oiled by the political machineries of the two clashing politicians. The first open intra-party confrontation was recorded on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001 when a section of the ruling ANPP supporters went on a demonstration, demanding the removal of the, then, ANPP state chairman, Prof. Albert Ogunsola, a staunch Saraki loyalist. The demonstration was believed to have been orchestrated by governor Lawal. By June, the party had been totally factionized and violent showdowns between party thugs and miscreants became the order of the day in Ilorin and its environs (Alanamu, 2005b).

On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2001, the Aare ward I chairman of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and his secretary were beaten up by thugs believed to be controlled by the state government. Their crime was their purported expelling of governor Lawal from the party at the ward level for anti-party activities. In the same breath, the party secretary at the state level, Alhaja Nimota Ibrahim, was mercilessly beaten up by the irate youth on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2001, barely 24 hours after her press release denouncing attacks on Saraki's supporters by youth gangs believed to be loyal to and working for governor Lawal. In July



2001, the youth chanting war song prevented Dr. Saraki's motorcade from passing through Idi-ape, governor Lawal's homestead and stronghold at the centre of the city (Sambo, 2005; Sulu, 2003b).

The violent confrontation between the supporters of the political belligerents degenerated badly such that by March, 2002, trivial issues, such as the erecting and removal of political portraits from signposts and billboards, openly resulted in violent clashes (Sambo, 2005; Abdullahi, 2002). The most publicized mayhem that occurred in 2002 was the orgy of violence that was unleashed on Ilorin Township by armed youths from both camps from 30<sup>th</sup> of March till 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, 2002. In the five days of violence hell that was let loose, thugs went on a rampage killing, maiming, and destroying property worth millions of Naira. The genesis of the mayhem in April was alleged to be the pasting and removal of photo portraits of governor Lawal and that of Dr. Saraki by supporters from both camps (Sambo, 2005; Alanamu, 2005b; Sulu, 2003c; Ilor, 2002; Abdullahi, 2002).

Another incident of violence was the bombing of the office of the National Pilot weekly newspaper, owned by Dr. Bukola Saraki, son of Dr. Oulsola Saraki, been groomed for the governorship race in 2003. The newspaper was the official mouthpiece of the Bukola Saraki election campaign in the state. The bombing of the newspaper building occurred in the afternoon of Friday November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2002. In the explosion, five employees of the outfit were seriously injured and its building destroyed. The management of the outfit alleged that the bombing was carried out by agent of the state government. In a counter-offensive, the state government argued that the bombing was carried out to discredit the state government by its critics and supporters of the Saraki's (The Punch Newspaper, 2003; Ilor, 2002; Edemodu, 2002; Muhammad, 2005). Those behind the attacks were never unmasked and it remains a misery till this day date.

By the time the Saraki's camp began romancing with the PDP and their final decamping to the party, the violent clashes turned to an inter-party confrontation. On August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002, by the time the Saraki faction from the ANPP were officially moving to the PDP, the state chairman of the PDP, Alhaji Ahmed Pategi, was assassinated on his way to Abuja from Ilorin. Both sides claimed that Pategi was a political ally and that his assassination was meant to undermine their respective political support base. Political motive was written all over Pategi's assassination, given the extent of intra and inter party tension existing within the fold of the Peoples Democratic Party and between the Peoples Democratic Party and All Nigeria Peoples Party (Alanamu, 2005b; Muhammad, 2007). In a related incident, thugs, believed to be Lawal boys, disrupted a wedding ceremony in Ilorin in September 2002, killing two people. One of the victims, Yekini Gobiri, was said to be a loyal Saraki supporter used for protective functions in party and social functions of the Saraki's camp (Alanamu, 2005b).

Exactly a year after the 2002 April siege of Ilorin, mayhem broke out again between Lawal supporters from the ANPP and the Saraki's supporters from the PDP. In the ensuing confrontation that lasted for a week in March 2003, innocent lives were lost and property worth millions of Naira destroyed. It took the combined efforts of the anti-riot police and the men of the Nigerian Army before normalcy was restored. However, that was not enough to prevent the March 2003 crisis from spilling to Ajase Ipo, another town closer to Ilorin. In the Ajase Ipo clash, one person was confirmed dead and nine others injured (The Punch Newspaper, 2003; Sambo, 2005). Highly disturbing were the violent confrontations between the parties such that

the Federal government was been called upon to declare a state of emergency in Kwara (The Punch Newspaper, 2003). The clashes and tensions it generated last until the conduct of the 2003 general elections in which incumbent governor Lawal lost the governorship contest to Dr. Bukola Saraki, the son of the kingmaker of Kwara politics.

The confrontations have far reaching negative consequences for Ilorin, in particular, and the state, in general. The situation of lawlessness that resulted from the violent clashes plunged Kwara state into a level of violence that has never been witnessed in the political history of the state. It also polarized the people of the state along the two fault lines. It led to the rise in prominence of miscreants, thugs and conflict entrepreneurs that cashed on the situation to make money from both sides of the political divides. It led to the militarization of youth in the state and reifies violence as a tool of political contest. It further deepened the antagonistic feeling between the Afonja family and the Alimi descendants of Ilorin. And, most of all, it led to loss of lives, destruction of properties, and negatively effects economic activities in the state and shattered the image of harmony, for which Ilorin and Kwara state is known.

## **CONCLUSION**

Attempt has been made in the paper to show the extent of militarization of the youth and their deployment for violent acts in the political face off between Dr. Olusola Saraki and his estrange godson, the late governor, Muhammad Alabi Lawal. While Lawal rebellion against the kingmaker of Kwara politics might not have been the first, it must be noted that his deadly confrontation truly rattled Dr. Olusola Saraki and his political camp as the godson nearly dethroned the godfather from his enviable position in Kwara politics. In the ferocious and bloody battle for the control of the political destiny of the state, the late governor Lawal and Dr. Saraki deployed all weapons at their disposal to wage their battle of supremacy. The most disturbing and of concern is the use of violence using the youths as their agent of destruction.

As rightly asserted by Abdullahi (2002), at the heart of the crisis was the fact that the naval officer does not want to lose control of the ship. Rather than losing control, he is ready to sink, rather than allow the ship to sail without him in command. On the other hand, the political landlord in the state is also afraid of losing his claim on his territory and he is ready to do everything possible to prove that he is still relevant and that he, alone, can determine the course, speed, passengers, and who captains the ship of the state. In waging their battle for control, the duo used the youth of the state as the pawn in the chessboard of their political and personal confrontations with far reaching negative consequences for the stability, prosperity, and unity of Kwara State.

Their deployment of youth gang as tool of violence has far reaching consequences for the peace and harmony of Kwara state, the security and the economic prosperity of it people. The mayhem that the foot soldier of the opposing camps unleash on the peace loving people of Kwara state resulted in tens of death, destruction of properties worth millions of Naira and disrupt economic activities of the people of Ilorin township and its surrounding environment which is the epi-centre of violence during the period. The arming of youth gangs, their deployment as agent of violence and the mayhem and destruction that resulted from their activities was such that impacted negatively on the peace, prosperity and development of Kwara state for the time it last.

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