

The Tiv Uprisings in the Tiv Division and the Politics of Tribal Jingoism and Religious Bigotry in Benue Province, 1960-1964

By

Sadi Ibrahim Koki,

Department of History & International Studies, Sule Lamido University Kafin Hausa, and a Ph.D student at the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
Email Address: sadiibrahim6@gmail.com

Abstract

Studies in the Nigeria's political history have been marked by incessant political rivalries which often degenerate into violence. That was the situation in Benue province in the periods immediately after Nigeria's independence in 1960. Series of violent clashes, attacks and reprisals characterized the period. In 1960 major political violence erupted in Tiv Division between supporters of the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) on one hand and the traditional authority on the other which had support and backing from the regional party and one of the parties that formed the ruling coalition the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC). This violence resulted in the loss of lives and property. Again in 1964, another political violence took place where another loss of lives and property took place. This paper discusses the development of political violence in the Tiv Division of Benue Province in 1960 and 1964 respectively. The main contention raised is that religion and ethnicity played a pivotal role in the origin, spread and magnitude of the violence, more especially that of 1960.

Introduction

The history of political violence in Northern Nigeria could not be complete without the mention of the Tiv division, of the Benue province in the North Central Nigeria, otherwise called the Middle Belt region. This province was divided into sub-divisions, for administrative convenience. It covers an area of about 9,861 square miles. The area consists of the Tiv Division, the Idoma Division, and the Jukun Division. The Tiv Division was inhabited by the Tiv people who were mostly farmers and relied on land

for their farming activities. They were mostly Christians, traditional religious followers, and a very few Muslims.

The Establishment of the Tiv Division

In Tiv Division, the British followed the principles of Indirect Rule as practiced in the emirates of Northern Nigeria, where power was centralized and hierarchically organized with the Emir as an overall ruler. He was assisted in discharging delegated powers and in running a day-to-day administration of the state by officials such as village heads and ward heads. The Emirate system expects the subjects to give unwavering obedience to their rulers. This political structure was absent in Tivland before the British occupation of the area. The attempt to establish a centralized system in Tivland, patterned after that of the Emirate system, created many problems for the British.²⁵²

The Tiv granted no one political authority — that is, legitimate, institutionalized power. There were no offices to which authority could adhere. There were no named or acknowledged lineage heads, village heads, or judges. The compound heads exercised only magical and religious authority within their lineage and their power did not extend to political matters. Yet, it was in such a situation that a centralized system was imposed.²⁵³ The British colonial administrators made various attempts to introduce a type of chieftainship among the Tiv and followed a method of selection which would correspond with Tiv traditions. But these efforts

²⁵² R. Anifowose, (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba Experience*, Nigeria: NOK Publishers, Ltd. P. 77

²⁵³ P. Bohannon, (1958). "Extra-Processual Events in Tiv Political Institution", *American Anthropologists*, Vol. 60, No. 1, pp. 1-12. Cited in R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria*

only served to make the Tiv more resistant against foreign and imposed authorities.²⁵⁴

The early administrators realized the limitations of the authority of the compound heads. They therefore decided to give executive power to whom they believed to be prominent within the Tiv society. The institution of *Tor-U-Gbande* (Drum Chief) was adopted and was wrongly believed to be the nearest equivalent to chieftainship. These men were made District Heads and in some cases, were given the staff of office of fifth-class native chiefs.²⁵⁵ Administrative districts were created out of the merging of kindred and district heads were vested with executive and judicial powers and appointed as rulers. Tiv Division was for some time administered as two groups of districts with headquarters at Abinsi (later Makodi) and Katsina-Ala.²⁵⁶

In Abinsi Division, a Yoruba Muslim, Audu Dan Afoda, who had formerly served as a political agent for the District Officers was appointed *Sarkin Makurdi* (chief of Makurdi) in 1914. He became the dominant political figure in the Division. However, after his death, his son was made to succeed him and he met stiff opposition from the Tiv people, who viewed the move as an attempt aimed at producing a Hausa-installed Chief.²⁵⁷

In 1927, a tribal Council of District Heads was established in Tiv Division, as a consultative and judicial council of the Tiv to meet annually. Audu Dan Afoda, Chief of Makurdi, was appointed President of the Council. In 1929, a similar council was set up at Katsina-Ala, under the presidency of

²⁵⁴ P. Bohannan, (1958). "Extra-Processual Events in Tiv Political Institution", Op cit.....

²⁵⁵ See Freemantle (1914). "Annual Report for Muri Province, 1914," NAK, SNP/171. Cited in R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...* p. 78.

²⁵⁶ See G.L. Monk (1926). "Annual Report for Benue Province," 1926, NAI CSO 26/12874 vol. 5. Cited in R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...*

²⁵⁷ R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...*

Jato Aka, the District Head of Turan.²⁵⁸ This system soon produced violent unrest arising out of the people's general resentment at the increasingly autocratic powers of the district heads. They viewed the growing power of the district heads as a sign of unnaturally enlarged *tsav* or power, more specifically-magical power.²⁵⁹

The suspicion grew that the district heads were killing people to perform religious rites (*akombo*) which the possession of *tsav* made necessary. They were hence regarded as witches and were denied by their subjects. The increasing suspicion and distrust of the leaders led to political tension and resulted in a popular witch hunt, known to the Tiv as the *Haakaa* (throw things away) of 1929. During this, a group of young Tiv joined the district messengers and police to compel the elders to produce the emblems of witchcraft which were in their possession.²⁶⁰

This disturbance led to the reorganization of the Tiv NA in 1933, Katsina Ala and Abinsi Districts were merged into a single Tiv Division. Gboko was, therefore, chosen as the headquarters of the newly reorganized Tiv Native Authority.²⁶¹ With this new development, the Tiv, therefore, continued to agitate for a Paramount Chief of Tiv.²⁶² They wanted a Chief to serve as a symbol of unity of a previously divided group.

The chief of Tiv was an office not imposed by the administration but created artificially, at the request of Tiv, to

²⁵⁸ R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...*

²⁵⁹ R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...*

²⁶⁰ P. Bohannan, (1958). "Extra-Processual Events in Tiv Political Institution"... p. 372. Cited in R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...* p. 79

²⁶¹ See, McBride (1941). "Tiv Tribal Administrative Progress Report, 6 May, 1941" NAK SNP/AR/INT/T/40. Cited in R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...* p. 80.

²⁶² See Report of the Tiv Central Council, 1934, NAI/CSO, 28416; and also Beck, Annual Report for Benue Province, 1938, NAK, SNP 30844. Cited in R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...*

satisfy a tribal pride by putting Tiv on an equal footing with Hausa neighbors.²⁶³

Mr. Makere Dzakpe, who came from the Pusu side of the Tiv people, a former Sergeant Major in the RWAFF, and Chief of the NA police, was finally chosen as the prospective candidate in 1946 and was installed in 1947 to the satisfaction of all Tiv.²⁶⁴ His Deputy, Gondo Aluor was chosen from the other branch of the Tiv tribe, the Chongo, in 1949.²⁶⁵

The UMBC and Party Politics in the Tiv Division

Party politics in the Tiv Division, as in other parts of Northern Nigeria, did not start effectively, until the 1950s. In 1950, the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) came onboard and had its Headquarters in Kano. The party's objectives were among others; the emancipation of the *talakawa* (the underprivileged people of Hausa land) and the progressive reform of the Native Authority System. Similarly, the NPC which was founded in 1951, was a party dominated by the elite and traditional rulers and had no grass-root support in Tiv Division.²⁶⁶ Unlike NEPU which hitherto had friendly alliance with the UMBC before the latter formed strong alliance with AG in 1957.

This situation led to the resuscitation of the Tiv People Union TPU, which was formed in 1938, as a cultural organization. It served as a channel for expressing general discontent with the colonial administration over its handling of Tiv affairs. In 1945, some group of teachers, ex-servicemen,

²⁶³ M.J. Dent, (1966). "A Minority Party- the UMBC," in J.P. Mackintosh (ed.) *Nigerian Government and Politics*. London: Allen and Unwin. p. 466.

²⁶⁴ D. O. Tiv Division, Resident Benue Province, 19 September 1946. NAK/AR/INT/IT40

²⁶⁵ D. O. Tiv Division, Resident Benue Province, 19 September 1946. NAK/AR/INT/IT40

²⁶⁶ See B.J. Dudley, (1968). *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., pp. 77-90.

and other educated elements in Jos came together to form the Birom Progressive Union BPU. It objected to the domination of the Jos NA by the Hausa-Fulani and was always in conflict with the NA. In 1950, some of its members formed the Northern Non-Muslim League with the aid of some Christian missions.

In 1951 a Middle Zone League (MZL), demanded a separate state, under the leadership of Pastor David Lot, of the Sudan Interior Mission. But in 1953, the MZL formed an alliance with the NPC which was against the formation of a separate state. This led to friction within the party and led to the formation of the Middle Belt People's Party (MBPP) in July 1953. The Tiv were the largest and most important group in the MBPP because TPU had merged with the MBPP.

The main objectives of the party were:

- A) To achieve the creation of a Middle-Belt state.
- B) To bring about reforms in the Native Administration of the North.
- C) To win, in collaboration with other parties (but not the NPC), control of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

After the 1954 Federal election, the MBPP and MZL came together to form the UMBC at a meeting in Kafanchan in June 1955.²⁶⁷ After its formation, some members favored an alliance with the NPC while others such as Joseph Tarka objected. Tarka was willing to cooperate with NPC only if:

- A) The NPC was committed to the creation of a Middle-Belt state and
- B) The NPC agreed that the UMBC should be represented at the 1957 constitutional conference in London.

²⁶⁷ See R. L. Sklar, (1963). *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 345-346.

Despite, these conditions which NPC was not ready to meet, more especially, creation of a Middle-Belt state, as against the NPC's motto: **"One North, one people, irrespective of religion or tribe,"** the MZL still opted to cooperate with NPC. As a reward, its leader Pastor David Lot was appointed a Minister of state in the Northern Regional Government, while Dokotri was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Federal Minister of Mines and Power. This led to the split of the UMBC into two factions, with one faction under Moses Rwang, while the other was under Pastor Lot. However, before the 1956 Regional Elections, the Lot faction severed its alliance with the NPC and the two factions reunited.²⁶⁸

In January 1957, UMBC held a conference in Lafia, where Joseph Tarka emerged as President-General of the party and Dokotri as the Secretary-General. A formal alliance between UMBC and the Action Group was formed. This, according to Tarka, was because the Action Group was recognized as the best organized and disciplined of all Nigerian parties at the period.²⁶⁹ This alliance further buttressed the fact that AG wanted to become a nationwide party, by winning support in the North and East. It, therefore, had an efficient organization and ample funds, as well as appeal to tribal discontent among the minority groups in the Regions. Action Group wanted to play nationwide politics, its alliance with UMBC therefore, became imperative, as Tiv rallied around the UMBC/AG alliance. The party became a dominant protest movement of the Tiv, as they did not hesitate in their opposition to NPC. Other Middle-Belt groups such as Idoma, Igbirra, Igala and other ethnic groups in the area had in one way or the other aligned with the NPC.

²⁶⁸ R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...* p. 87

²⁶⁹ R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...*; interview with Joseph Tarka,

Throughout the Nigeria's First Republic (1960 – 1966), in the Northern Regional Legislature, the NEPU and the UMBC formed the only significant opposition to the dominant NPC. They were, however, barely represented for most of the period between 1956 and 1966.²⁷⁰ In the 1956 Regional election, UMBC won eleven seats, and in the 1959 Federal election, the UMBC/AG alliance won twenty-five seats. During the 1961 Regional election, which had now become essentially the Tiv protest movement, won nine seats, seven of which were in the Tiv Division.

The continued opposition stance of the UMBC, like its Northern ally-NEPU, led to more stiff and marginalization by the NPC-led Northern Regional government. The dissolution of the Tiv Native Authority Council, in 1959, where some members of the UMBC supporters were not re-elected further alienated the Tiv, especially the UMBC members and sympathizers from the Northern Region government. The Tor Tiv in conjunction with the Chiefs dissolved the Council, where only Five Councilors were due for re-election. Ten new Councilors appointed then were pro-NPC. This meant that the majority of the Tiv who were UMBC supporters were excluded from political influence and power. Thus the stage was set for violence which was inevitable given the attitude of the Tiv towards NPC. This action was among the ingredients that fueled the Tiv riot of 1960 and again further violence occurred in 1964.

The First Violence in Tiv the Division 1960

The first phase of the series of the Tiv violence of 1960, had its root causes in the prevailing political situation in the Tiv Division. The political rivalry

²⁷⁰ In 1963, the UMBC allied with the NEPU which had been in alliance with the NCNC since the 1950s. The new alliance was called the Northern Progressive Front (NPF). See R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...* p. 106.

between the regional party, NPC, and Tiv's dominant party, UMBC, was the salient factor that accelerated the violence. NPC as a major party in Northern Nigeria, controlling the Federal and Regional governments had no strong base and support in the Tiv Division of Benue Province. The Tiv had resisted the forceful incursion of the NPC into the hinterland of the Tiv Division. Partly because of their perceived prejudice against Hausa-Fulani as Muslims, who wanted to “**Islamize**” the Northern Region? Therefore, as mostly Christians, they thought it necessary to block NPC, seen as the representation of the Hausa-Fulani Muslims, from gaining ground in the Tiv land. They rallied around UMBC which was their party and canvassed for support to achieve their goal — an autonomous Middle-Belt state out of the then Northern Region.

The activities of the NPC as the ruling party in the Northern Region, especially towards opposition, was another factor that caused an outbreak of violent riots and breakdown of law and order. Members and supporters of opposition parties were victimized, harassed, and oppressed simply because of their political affiliations with opposition parties. This system of maltreating opposition and the forceful appointments of unpopular people to the Native Authority administration, and the use of NA Police to witch-hunt oppositions, led to the violence that erupted in the Tiv Division. In the Tiv Division where the majority of the people were members and supporters of the UMBC, the people started to defy and resist the lawful authorities in protest of their perceived neglect by the regional government. For example, in August 1960, the efforts by the Tor Tiv to impose unpopular kindred heads on the local inhabitants were resisted, sometimes violently. In the Kindred of the *Mbatie* clan, an armed crowd gathered to meet the Tor Tiv to protest against the imposition of an unpopular kindred

head. This made the Tor Tiv to give way and return to Gboko. In other clans, such as *Mbatiav* and *Mbakor*, people protested violently against the serving of court summonses.²⁷¹

The precipitant event of the first round of Tiv riots began in Yandev, a small clan of about 5,000 people near Gboko, the administrative capital of the Division. In this clan, one Mr. Kumbul Akapi had for long established a market under section thirty-two of the Tiv NA Law, No. 4/1954. On August 8, 1960, Mr. Ol Ako, the clan head of Yandev and a strong NPC supporter, addressed his people in the market, in the incidence, conflicting reports concerning his speech therefore abound. The official police report indicated that he spoke about tax collection, but others, including the UMBC, alleged that he was partisan in his remarks and criticized members of his clan who supported the opposition party. According to the UMBC version, he asked for silence and then declared that he forbade the shouting of 'Tarka', and 'Awo'. Some of his listeners were alleged to have laughed at him for using such partisan expressions. Following this scornful treatment by the audience, the Chief left in fury, threatening that the market would be closed.²⁷²

On the next market day, 13 August 1960, the clan head, accompanied by some NA policemen, ordered the people in the market to disperse immediately or face arrest. However, the people were determined to deter authority, they mobilized and chased the policemen out, using dangerous weapons such as poisoned bows and arrows. Tor Tiv immediately visited the scene, to ensure the compliance of the order, but the people resisted his interference in the case.

²⁷¹ R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria*...p. 112

²⁷² R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria*...

On 25 August 1960, a complete anti-riot squad of the Tiv NA police, armed with batons and shields, was sent to enforce the closure of the market. They were fiercely resisted by an armed mob with bows and arrows, during which three policemen were wounded. Further attempts to arrest some of the riot leaders were also stubbornly defied. This violence started in Yandev and was to serve as the catalyst for a more widespread riot throughout Tiv land within a few days. Later on 30 August 1960, the Tor Tiv in the company of the NA administration attempted to make contact with the Yandev people, but the people refused to talk with the Tor Tiv, unless their clan head Ol Ako, was present. This led to the continuation of the riot for the next week.²⁷³

What further aggravated the riot and its spread to other parts of the Division, was the ambush targeted at the NPC members. In September, an NPC convoy from Gboko on their way to Wukari, was ambushed by an angry mob, near Yandev. They were armed with poisoned bows and arrows, spears, and Dane guns. They were mostly, from the Mbatie clan near Yandev.²⁷⁴ They were forced to return to Gboko and sought the assistance of the Nigeria Police force. The second attempt was also met with staunch resistance and ambush, the police had to open fire and in the process killed one Gbantiogh from the Mbalagh clan.²⁷⁵ This incidence accelerated the widespread arson and wanton destruction of properties, and killings from September up to October 1960.²⁷⁶ This led to the gathering of an angry mob at the compound of the clan head of Mbalagh, demanding

²⁷³ R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria*... p. 114

²⁷⁴ B. J. Audu (n.d.). "Tiv (Nigeria), Riots of 1960-1964: The Principle of Minimum Force and Counter Insurgency," Retrieved from www.academia.edu. p. 8 accessed on 24/07/2022

²⁷⁵ B. J. Audu (n.d.). "Tiv (Nigeria), Riots of 1960-1964..."

²⁷⁶ B. J. Audu (n.d.). "Tiv (Nigeria), Riots of 1960-1964..."

him to join the UMBC and forcing him to shout the party slogan- 'Tarka!', 'Awo!'.

This was followed by widespread arson, killing, and burnings in virtually the whole Tiv Division. On September 3, a Muslim village of Gidan Uga was razed, by the rioters who were bent on avenging the killing of Gbantiogh of the Mbalagh clan. This was ostensibly because of the Pro-NPC supporters in the village.

The Tiv elders now carried out a dance of special significance called 'kwan', moving around the market in silence several times, ceremonially waving machetes and spears. The elders then disappeared and the young men of the Mbalagh came and proceeded to set fire to the mosque; subsequently, they burnt every house in the area belonging to the Gidan Uga people.²⁷⁷

From that moment onward, indiscriminate destruction of burning and looting in most parts of the Tiv Division were directly targeted at the NPC members and supporters, government functionaries, the Tiv NA and court presidents, tax collectors and the police.²⁷⁸ The burning continued unabated and had spread to most parts of Tiv land. The rioters identified themselves, blackened their faces, and festooned themselves with palm leaves which was the UMBC/AG alliance symbol. By the end of September, the riots, especially the burning, had spread over the whole of Southern Tiv (southern Jemgbar, Kwande, and Jecira areas) and into Ukum Shitire and Wukari Divisions.²⁷⁹ The Tiv NA Council was therefore dissolved in the middle of September to please the rioters. But still, the violence continued having spread to almost the entire division. The UMBC saw the dissolution

²⁷⁷ B. J. Audu (n.d.). "Tiv (Nigeria), Riots of 1960-1964... p. 115

²⁷⁸ B. J. Audu (n.d.). "Tiv (Nigeria), Riots of 1960-1964... p. 132

²⁷⁹ B. J. Audu (n.d.). "Tiv (Nigeria), Riots of 1960-1964 p. 116

of the Council as a victory for the rioters. This made the party supporters to have write and circulate letters among the rioters saying that: "We have finished the work, and we have won. Stop burning and go home".²⁸⁰

After the riot, the government carried out some reforms in the NA and courts. Following the dissolution of the Council of Ten members, the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) was vested with the power of the Council. An advisory Council was, therefore, set up to assist the SDO who was now the Sole Native Authority, in his task of reconciliation and administration of the Division. Twelve members were then nominated, the NPC, UMBC, and traditional leaders each had three representatives. The Tiv Progressive Union had one member and the remaining two members were two Senior Administrative Officers. The Council was effective in restoring unity to the Division immediately after the riots. An appeal was also made to Mr. Anja, the Divisional President of the NPC, and to Tarka, the UMBC President-General, to assist in restoring peace. Their response had helped in the return of normalcy in the Division.²⁸¹

The violence intensity and the casualty figure were conflicting. An official source put it at sixteen deaths, four of which were due to police shootings, and the remainder were killed by people depending on their property.²⁸² A police report also put the number of those injured at eighty-three.²⁸³ Over 5,000 Tiv rioters were arrested, for offenses such as murder, arson, rioting and property damage, and injury to persons. Of these, 3,882 were convicted.²⁸⁴ The extent of property damage was assessed by the Fletcher

²⁸⁰ B. J. Audu (n.d.). "Tiv (Nigeria), Riots of 1960-1964... p. 125

²⁸¹ B. J. Audu (n.d.). "Tiv (Nigeria), Riots of 1960-1964... p. 128.

²⁸² B. J. Audu (n.d.). "Tiv (Nigeria), Riots of 1960-1964... p. 124

²⁸³ See Northern Nigeria White Paper, p. 8.

²⁸⁴ See Annual Report of the Nigeria Police, 1960, p. 15 and also Northern Nigerian Provincial Annual Report, 1960, p. 24. Cited in R. Anifowose (1982). Violence and Politics in Nigeria... p. 139.

Commission of Inquiry, which discovered that about 30,000 houses were burnt and that the estimated cost stood at ~~₦~~1, 011,954. Many people were rendered homeless. A large number became refugees and had to move to urban centers. To repair the property damage and to teach the rioters a lesson, the Northern Premier directed that:

The sum of ~~₦~~1,011,954 shall be apportioned amongst and payable by every adult male taxpayer resident in the area, in the financial year 1961/62 who is directed to pay tax under the Direct Taxation Ordinance, in equal proportion.²⁸⁵

The Second Violence in Tiv Division 1964

The 1960 riot that took place in the Tiv Division was barely suppressed, after burnings, arson, looting, and killing that were targeted at the NPC members, supporters, and sympathizers by the UMBC supporters. This political violence was made to come to a terminal end and peace was restored. Later in 1964, fresh violence resurfaced following the 1961 regional election in Northern Nigeria, whereby in the Tiv Division, the UMBC suspected foul play. This led to the worsening of relations between the belligerent factions; the UMBC on the one hand and the NPC and its NA allies on the other hand, which led to the 1964 violence.

Also, the payment of indemnity for the damage caused as a result of the 1960 violence was another factor that caused the 1964 violence. More than 50,000 tax-payers south of the River Benue and in Wukari were forced to find an extra ~~₦~~5. 10. per head in addition to the general annual tax of ~~₦~~ 4.50. Thus, in the same year, the taxpayer was expected to pay ~~₦~~ 9.60; in three weeks only, failure of which attracted six months prison terms.²⁸⁶ The

²⁸⁵ See Northern Nigeria Provincial Annual Report, 1960, p. 26.

²⁸⁶ R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...* p. 128.

fine was heavy, especially for those poor peasants who were dependent on their farmlands. Also, even those that did not participate in the riot were forced to pay, whereas others were exempted from the fine.²⁸⁷

The NPC having realized the importance of penetrating the Tiv Division and gaining a proportion of membership amongst the Tiv, used incentives, such as; issuance of loans to farmers, gifts of bicycles, and cloths, and award of contracts, money, and license to traders. This made the NPC to attract members to its side, while the UMBC could not afford this; they relied on dues collected from members and sales of party badges.²⁸⁸

The UMBC could only counter these NPC tactics by mere propaganda where they likened those that decamped to NPC as sycophants and beggars. They also attacked them by associating them with being converted to Islam.²⁸⁹ This propaganda yielded some fruits, as many people refused to cross-carpet to the NPC for fear of intimidation from their UMBC supporters who were the majority in the Tiv Division. The popularity of UMBC which had since the 1960 riot increased, won the 1961 Northern Regional election. The arrest of Tarka which coincided with the period of this election provided another opportunity for the party supporters to show their persistent dislike of, and opposition to NPC as well as their consistent support for the UMBC. They elected all the candidates of the UMBC in the election, where Alhaji Ibrahim Imam, a non-Tiv won a majority of over 30,000, the largest in the election. He was expelled from his hometown in

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ S. Ayati. & E. T. Orodi, (2006). *Tiv Integration and Power Politics in Nigeria*, Makurdi: Aboki Publishers. pp. 88-96.

²⁸⁹ T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot: Inter-Partisan Perspectives", p. 7. Retrieved from www.academia.edu.org on 22/07/2022

Maiduguri on political grounds. Tarka welcomed him to Tiv land and nominated him as one of the candidates for the election.²⁹⁰

The 1964 Tiv riot broke out immediately, after the refusal of the Tiv to obey the constituted authority. The UMBC supporters disregarded the orders and unlawfully displayed palm leaves (the UMBC/AG party symbols) in their houses and even threatened those who failed to do so. They were issued a court summons, which some of them refused, while others refused to be served with the summons. One of the accused was therefore subsequently arrested, but was rescued by his fellow Tiv men, thus making any further arrest impossible.²⁹¹ The police team sent to make an arrest was driven back by an armed gang with poisoned bows and arrows.

The UMBC congress held in Agasha served as the main issue that developed into the 1964 riot. Tyoor Gbargbar Apinega, the clan head of Tombu, and three others believed to be his staff and also tax collectors under his watch were attacked and killed at the clan head's residence.²⁹² Though according to Remi, he was the clan head of Mbalagh, he was a wicked NPC supporter who had a private cell in his compound where he indiscriminately and arbitrarily detained his opponents. His people did not, therefore, spare him.²⁹³ After this incident, a free-for-all fight between supporters and opponents of the clan head, which means that it was political violence between the supporters of NPC and those of UMBC/AG. The police detachment that was drafted to the riot scene, was on their way ambushed by an armed gang, where six policemen were reported killed and

²⁹⁰ R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...* p. 129.

²⁹¹ R. Anifowose (1982). *Violence and Politics in Nigeria...* p. 131

²⁹² T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot" p. 10.

²⁹³ T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot..." p. 131

several seriously injured, while others were reported missing.²⁹⁴ The riot quickly spread to most parts of the Tiv Division, and large-scale arson, killing, and destruction of property ensued. Unlike the 1960 riot, this time most of the rioters resorted to killing their targets rather than burning their houses.

Most of the targets of the 1960 riot, were those in authority-the clan heads, kindred heads, tax-collectors, court presidents, and the police. In many areas, the police were ambushed and then killed or wounded. The level of intensity of the 1964 riot was far greater than that of 1960. The casualty toll, both civilian and police was heavy. Twelve policemen were officially confirmed dead, with several reported missing.²⁹⁵ The casualty figures were conflicting. It was estimated that over 300 people including 11 policemen were slaughtered like animals in the Division. However, unofficial estimates put the number of those killed at between 2,000 and 4,000, with several hundred wounded.²⁹⁶

The Nigeria Riot Squads were drafted and dealt decisively with the rioters. They still faced challenges as the number of rioters and their *modus operandi* was different from that of 1960. They showed a lack of organization or effective leadership and operated more or less autonomously in different parts of the Division and their activities were uncoordinated.²⁹⁷ When the police could not contain the spread of violence, some 240 troops of the Nigerian Army, from Kaduna were sent as reinforcements. This sped up the stopping of the brutal killing and restored

²⁹⁴ See Annual Report of the Nigeria Police for 1964, Lagos, p.10 and West Africa, 29, February 1964, p. 226. Cited in T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot..." p. 140.

²⁹⁵ See Africa Diary, March 20-26, 1965, p. 2243, see also Africa Diary, December 12-18, 1964, p. 2085. Cited in T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot...." p. 141.

²⁹⁶ T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot..."

²⁹⁷ T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot..." p. 132

peace. Over 4,000 UMBC supporters were arrested, and several were convicted for their participation in the riot. Many were tried and sentenced to various terms of prison ranging from two to three years, and a fine of ₦600 and twelve strokes of cane. This heavy tax was levied on the rioters who were mostly farmers. The over-crowd of the prison necessitated the transfer of some of the inmates to other prison yards in Northern Nigeria.²⁹⁸ The government on its part, had acted toward the stoppage of the riot, through a Commission of Inquiry known as the Coomassie Commission, which was given the following terms of reference:

Given the unrest in Tiv Division over the past four years, to examine its background, and recommend a system of Local Government that will be capable of providing the services required of it as well as commanding the support and loyalty of the Tiv people.²⁹⁹

After its sittings, the Commission issued a White Paper, summarizing its findings and recommendations. It explained the root causes of the riots and offered some recommendations that could proper lasting solutions in the Tiv Division, as follows:

- A) Those in authority did not behave with tact and that party politics was brought into the sphere of administration.
- B) The Tiv resent authority and persons holding authority.
- C) "... Abuse of office in default of constant checking by seniors and age-mates is a vice to which the Tiv are especially prone." This is true today but the traditional checks have been greatly weakened or are non-existent.

²⁹⁸ T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot..." p. 133.

²⁹⁹ See Nigerian Citizen, 21 April 1965.

- D) The Tiv will never respond to force but can be easily persuaded by the use of reason.
- E) The District Administration was confused ...they (the Clan and District Heads) realized that the power of their appointments and dismissals was in the hands of the NA and not in those of their people.... This allowed them to become autocratic and oppressive to their people.

The Commission recommended that:

- A) Emphasis must be placed on the diffuseness of power and decentralization and the system of Local Government must accord as far as possible with the indigenous social structure.
- B) The political structure must be modified since it is impossible to prohibit party politics in Tiv political structure.
- C) Executive functions, judicial functions, and authority must not be exercised by the same man.³⁰⁰

The reports were warmly welcomed in the Tiv Division, especially by the UMBC/AG supporters. Thus, the government accepted and the Regional government recognized the presence of an opposition party in the division: the UMBC/AG. The government incorporated the AG members into the Tiv NA and approved the inclusion of six UMBC/AG members in the twelve Advisers to the DO.³⁰¹

The Aftermaths of the Tiv Riots

The Tiv riots of both 1960 and 1964, had exposed the extent to which political violence destroyed lineage harmony and mutual respect of a once

³⁰⁰ A White Paper, pp. 11-12.

³⁰¹ See White Paper, for the proposed re-organization of the central and District Administrations. Cited in T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot..." p. 141

united society, into a violent-turned one. The Tiv had a long history of ancestral lineage among themselves, but the introduction of the political party system and electoral process led to the deterioration and eventual collapse of the family ties that once united them. The violence created division among the different Tiv Clans, especially those that supported NPC who were the minority and were maimed, burnt their property, or butchered in the violence.

The *Nande-Nande* violence, as was tagged which occasioned the 1960 conflict opened up the passage for the *Atemtyo*,³⁰² violence of 1964. The violence led to a demographic reduction of the Tiv farmers who were mostly the members of the UMBC/AG and the unemployed Tiv youth that participated in the riots. This led to urban migration of the villagers to urban centers like Makurdi, Gboko, and Katsina-Ala, for safety. This push factor of migration had adversely affected the areas for they became congested, and as such social vices had risen. Unemployment, armed robbery, prostitution, drug addiction, and political thuggery increased.³⁰³

The violence created or intensified deep hatred and suspicion between the Tiv and the Hausa-Fulani. This could be seen in the selection of targets during the 1960 riot. Gidan Uga was a Muslim settlement but was on September 3, 1960, razed as a result of their sympathy with the NPC. All the houses in the village and the mosque were burnt. Herders were also attacked, their cattle rustled and property burnt.³⁰⁴

³⁰² It is a term used to refer to the 1964 riot in the Tiv Division? It means head breaking or head smashing. Cited in T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot..." p. 6. Retrieved from www.academia.edu.

³⁰³ T. Haa-Orpin (2014). "The 1964 Tiv Riot..." p. 11.

³⁰⁴ M. J. Dent (1966). "A Minority Party: The United Middle Belt Congress," in J. P. Mackintosh (ed.), *Nigerian Government and Politics* London: Allen and Unwin. p. 495

The violence also led to the deterioration of the relationship between the members of the two belligerent factions, despite their long ancestral lineage. The Mbalagh clan whose clan head was murdered during the 1964 riot became embittered and rallied around their clan in opposition to the killing. The UMBC/AG alliance greatly supported the UMBC in gaining ground in the Tiv Division and influenced the support of the majority of Tiv. While the NPC which was the ruling party in the north continued to be a minority party in the division, with control of the NA and other government functionaries.

Conclusion

The paper discussed the two violent riots that characterized Tiv Division, Benue Province between 1960 and 1964. These violent uprisings led to the loss of lives and property, of the people in the division. It created a schism among the various Tiv clans as a result of the intensity of the violence. The targeted victims were members of the NPC, Native Authority staff, tax collectors, court presidents and their staff, police, and NPC sympathizers. The violence created a deep suspicion and attacks on Hausa and Fulani Muslims who were regarded as aliens in the division. The paper also discussed the pattern and intensity of the violence which led to the involvement of the military to curb the incessant arson, killing, and destruction of property in the division. The causes of both riots were also analyzed and the aftermaths, the Coomassie Commission of Inquiry, and its recommendations were also highlighted.