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The Socio-Economic Effects of Electoral and Ethno-Religious Violence in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Ethno-religious crisis and election related violence have been a growing trend in Africa countries since the inception of democracy. This trend has not only remained as a threat to the survival of democracy and human security in the continent, it has hampered its national cohesion, socio-political progress and economics transformation. Nigeria, like any other African countries has been a perennial victim of electoral and ethno-religious violence. It is in view of this ugly trend that the paper aims at examining the socio-economic effects of electoral and ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. The findings of this study reveal that there is a persistent and intensified nation-wide struggle for crisis-free election and peaceful co-existence among people of different ethnics and religions. It is also revealed that electoral violence are majorly caused by abuse of responsibility and institution weaknesses while ethno-religious violence on the other hand are caused by exclusive superiority and intolerance. Being an historical study, historical method of analysis is employed. Sequel to the findings above, it is recommended that intensive voter or civic education programmes should be persistently undertaken while dialogue should be allowed to thrive among different religions.

KEYWORDS: Electoral Violence, Religion, Ethnics, Conflicts, Democracy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The fundamental bed rock of democracy is the election of political leaders through the electoral box. It is however very unfortunate that electoral process in Africa have most often been characterized by violence at various stages ranging from pre- election to post election period. Electoral violence in Nigeria in particular often manifest in various forms like physical assaults, arson, snatching of ballot boxes and in most cases murder (*Mordern Gana News* 14th Dec., 2018). Being a plural society in term of its ethnic, religious, cultural, economic and ecological diversities, the country has continued to witness different forms of ethno-religious conflicts at various periods since independence. These conflicts have made peaceful co-existence among various tribes, ethnics and religions impossible. Individuals and groups exploit the variable of the country's diversities to unleash mayhem on others to fulfill their own selfish interest. At times, blames of these diversities and ethno-religious clashes are heaped upon the colonial masters who brought together people of different backgrounds and orientations to form a country (Adebimpe & Ogunsola, 2007). The seed of Ethnicity and religious sentiments have continued to grow more clearly and faster in our political scene that according to Galadima (2005), it has always torn apart the democratic setting along ethnic and religious lines. Some have seen ethno-religious conflicts and violence to be so counter-productive, a barrier to democratic stability and development to the extent that they are tempted to believe that the only way of the mess is by distingrating the nation along the ethnic line. The people of course have failed to realize that ethno-religious violence are not peculiar to Nigeria alone. America for instance does not only consist of ethnic groups but even nationalist or races, yet the country is able to succeed democratically (Galadima, 2005). Rather than advocating for disintegration therefore, we should see ethnicity and religious diversities as a means by which democracy can be sustained and developed.

This paper shall therefore examine history of electoral and ethno-religious violence, causes of electoral and ethno-religious crisis, the socio-economic effects of electoral and ethno-religious violence and the way out of the problem.

History of Electoral and Ethno-Religious Violence in Nigeria : The term “violence” is defined as any act which causes or may cause physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, verbal or economic harm, whether this occurs in private or public life, in peaceful or in conflict situations (Muhammed, 2006). Electoral violence in Muhammed’s view is any act of violence perpetrated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post-election periods, and may include any of the following acts: use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate, voters and other electoral processes or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes (Muhammed, 2006). Electoral violence is understood as coercive force, directed towards electoral actors and objects that occurs in the contexts of electoral competition, and it can target a variety of actors , including, candidates activists, poll workers, election observers, journalist and voters. Recent analysis of patterns and trends in electoral violence have found that it is a global phenomenon affecting mainly electoral authoritarian or hybrid states particularly those in Africa.

Violence has become part of the political culture in Nigeria such that all elections are virtually violence –ridden (Muhammed, 2006). The dimensions of election violence in Nigeria are broadly grouped into physical and psychological. Physical election violence include: physical attack, grievous bodily harm or death, disruption of campaign, use of abusive language and other forms of violence inflicted on individuals and groups. Psychological election violence as observed by Muhammed (2006) include: indiscriminate pasting of campaign posters, chanting slogans, intimidation of public servants and businessmen for opposing the status quo or the incumbent administration, use of media to inflict psychological violence on the opposition and the denial of access to such media by the opposition parties, reckless driving by those in a procession to campaign rallies, which intimidate other road users. In the words of Alananu cited in Ikyase & Egberi (2015), the history of violence in Nigeria politics dates back to colonial era. From the 1950s, elections in Nigeria according to him had been a tug of war being waged to determine ‘who get what? When, and how? All weapons were available for combatants to use which include religions, ethnic sentiments, outright bribery, the power of incumbency, corruption, the abuse of electoral processes and so on.

In the 1960s too, there were no parties that were not regionally bias: The Northern people’s congress (NPC), Action group (AG) and National council of Nigeria citizen (NCNC) were based in the North; west and East respectively. After independence, the first major national election by the political parties degenerated into conflict. It is very important to note that the crisis within the AG which spread to other areas of the western region and the whole country affected in no small way the elections of (1964) in its conception, execution and outcome. For example, the Nigerian national Alliance (NNA) brought the NPC and the Akintola-led Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and other minor political parties together under one umbrella (Ikyase & Egberi, 2015).The first Republic (1960-1966) collapsed due to the widespread violence unleashed by politicians in the disputed 1964/65 general election(<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng>).In fact, historians and political scientists recalled the ugly incident, tagged “Operation We-ti-e” which literally means “Operation spray it” in the Western Region in which many notable politicians and their supporters were murdered in broad daylight (<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng>). It is however very obvious that the electoral fraud of 1964 brought about the crisis that eventually led to the coup of 15th January, 1966. The situation in 1979 and 1983 was not cordial as the politicians resorted to electoral violence most especially during August 1983 general election (<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng>).

Nigeria from 1999 has had five successive general elections (i.e 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015) with each of them recording high electoral violence. The announcement of the results of 2011 presidential election sparked up violence demonstrations in some Northern states of the country (Iyase & Egberi, 2015). Following the declaration of President Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of the election, people believed to be supporters of opposition party, Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) burst into violent uprising unleashing terror, destroying properties worth millions of naira. The house of the Vice President was looted and palaces of prominent traditional rulers in the North were attacked. A number of members of national Youth Service Corp were killed in Mayhem in Bauchi, Gombe among others (Nkyase & Egberi, 2015).The activities of the colonial masters laid the foundation of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Uchend (2010) cited in Diara, Onah & Uroko (2017) observed that the growth of ethno-religious intolerance in the country has its foundation on the activities of the colonial masters that brought Christianity with them and antagonized African Traditional Religion as idolatry. Tracing the background of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, Uka (2008) cited in Onah, Diara & Uroko (2017) explains that Nigeria, before it was colonized by the British had a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic , multi- lingual, and even multi-political culture and was extremely heterogeneous and complex. It is worthy of mention that before the amalgamation, Nigeria was divided into southern and Northern protectorates for easy administration. Then in 1914 the two protectorates were amalgamated to form the country known as Nigeria under Lord Fredrick Lugard. Uka (2008) cited in Onah, Diara & Uroko (2017) noted that “Since this geographically expression known as Nigeria was forcefully put

together by a foreign power, its disparate unit live in mutual suspicions” The British colonial government further prepared the country for ethno-religious violence as they protected the North from Christians proselytizing influences. The emirs entered into a serious agreement with Lord Lugard that no Christian would be allowed to evangelize the North and that in the event of any “crusade or public preaching “ they must get permission from them to do so.” This restricted the church missionary society and other Christian missionaries from penetrating the Northern part of the country. This undue privilege given to Muslim North could be said to be the beginning of distrust and unhealthy relationship among the religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria that has led to the ugly trend of ethno- religious conflict that have ravaged the country for years.

Reflecting on cases of ethno- religious conflict in Nigeria, Adebayo (2010) cited in Onah, Diara & Uroko (2017) wrote that the 1980 Maitatsine riot in Kano metropolis was said to have claimed 4 , 177 lives. The Matatsine founded by Muhammed Marwa, used his base in the ancient city to launch his extremist views (Adebimpe & Ogunsola, 2007). Adebayo (2010) further stated that the Jimeta Maitatsine crisis of 26th February and 5th March 1984 took one thousand and four lives. Five thousand, nine hundred and thirteen families were displaced; while over one hundred people died in the Gombe Maitatsine uprising of 26th and 28th April 1985. The Kafanchan tumult of March 1987 which started in College of education over a crusade been organized by Christian students spread to Funtua, Kaduna metropolis, Zaria and environs (Onah, Diara & Uroko, 2017). In this crisis according to Onah (2017), 25 people died, 61 injured, properties valued at #75 million damaged. About 47 churches, 3 mosques, 46 private houses, 19 vehicles and 30 hotels were destroyed. Adebayo (2010) also noted that in 1990, the Muslims opposed the invitation of Reinhard Bonnke, a German Christian preacher to Kano; they were not happy because Ahmed Deedat, a Muslim preacher from South Africa was not allowed to come for the same purpose. The result was crises which took place between 11 and 14 October 1990 leaving over 500 lives and hundreds of millions of naira worth of properties destroyed.

Zangon-kataf riot of 1992, Futua 1993, Jos crisis of April 1994 were among the notable crises that took place in Nigeria. Another riot was also witnessed in Kano in December 1994 triggered by the beheading of an Igbo Christian known as Gideon Akaluka who was alleged to have desecrated the Koran (Tando, 2011). These crises though religious in their connotation, had touch of ethnic confrontation in them. Lives lost to such sectarian clashes between 1980 and 1994 were well over 10,000 and prosperities destroyed were enormous (Onah, Diara & Iroko, 2017). Kaduna riot in February 28, 2000 over the attempt to implement sharia law led to the killing of about 300 people within the first two days of the crisis (Jando, 2011). September 2001 crisis in Jos left over 1,000 people dead including women and children (Okafor, 2007). Other ethno- religious crises took place in Nigeria in Jos 2001, and 2002. There was reprisal attack on the Hausa indigenes in Onitsha, Anambra State leading to loss of lives and properties. On July 26-30, 2009 Boko-Haram Islamic sect unleashed Mayhem in Bauchi, Borno, Kano and Yobe. In these crises, several lives were wasted and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed (Onah, Diara & Iroko, 2017) Jos, Plateau State 2010 Christmas Eve bombing left many injured. On Christmas day 2011, bombing in Madalla Niger state left about 50 people dead while January 20, 2012, bomb attacks at Kano also left about 250 persons dead (Okpaga, Ugwu, Eme 2012 cited in Onah, Diara & Iroko 2017). In Maiduguri in August 2013, a Christian student reported an attack by Boko Haram on her university hostel. On the 9th of July, 2016, a female preacher, Mrs. Eunice Elisha the wife of a Redeemed Pastor was hacked to death in Abuja by suspected Muslim Fanatics (Sahara Reporters, 2016). The December 2016 Fulani herds’ men attack in southern Kaduna which continued in February 2017 can be described as another ethnic attack in Nigeria (Onah, Diara & Iroko 2017). On Saturday April 21, 2018, 15 people were killed and others injured as Fulani herds ‘men attacked Uzughul, Tse Ginde in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State (<https://amp.pulse.ng>).

II. CAUSES OF ELECTORAL AND ETHNO- RELIGIOUS CRISES IN NIGERIA

Violence is the greatest threat to free and fair elections of every nation. There are several factors that trigger violence in every democratic setting. These factors can be viewed from three different stages of election process which include: Pre –election, during election and post-election periods. Pre-election violence often manifests in issues such as problems of party formation, government sponsorship of certain party or parties, manipulation by political stalwarts, competition for power or candidature struggles even during the period before primaries; zoning problems in the selection of candidates or party executives; lack of ideology for many parties; interference of government in the affairs of electoral bodies; and sheer intolerance towards difference of opinion or ideology. The violence during election is reflected in these: lack of security of selected partisanship, or traditional rulers, abuse of responsibility by election officials. Institutional weaknesses (as seen for instance, in the role of the police), the ‘winner’ takes-all’ syndrome, which makes political contest a ‘do-or-die’ affair and the lucrative nature of political offices (www.gamji.com). By post-election violence we refer to those crises that take place even after the election process, and they are manifested in the following: government repression of failed candidates or politicians,

especially civil servants, marginalization of areas controlled by the opposition; poor handling of election petitions by the judiciary especially election tribunals (www.gamy.com).

A number of factors can be identified to be reasons responsible for the incessant ethno-religious violence in the country. Such factors include lack of tolerance, boundary dispute, unfavourable government policies and programmes, indigene-settler problem, superiority complex, distribution or sharing of resources and economic factors (Adebimpe & Ogunsola, 2007). Lack of tolerance has continued to be a major factor in ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. The inability of a group (ethnic or religious) to tolerate and accommodate others according to Adebimpe & Ogunsola (2007) often leads to misunderstanding and violence. This is the most pronounced in the issue of indigene settler crisis across the country whereby one side will be claiming ownership of land against the other. Boundary disputes are those between neighbours which occur when two people both believe they have the right to a piece of land. They often begin when one person puts up a fence or wall on land which another person thought belonged to him. Ijaw, Urhobo recent crisis that left scores wounded and others missing in Delta States is an example of boundary dispute (www.information.com).

Unfavourable government policies also often trigger ethno-religious violence. When a group of people (ethnic or religious) feel that particular government policy would work against their interest. For instance, the people of Modakeke in Osun State demonstrated over the citing of their local government headquarter within the confine of Ooni of Ife whom they regarded as their number one enemy. Many people also demonstrated in Delta over the location of Delta State Capital in Asaba (Adebimpe & Ogunsola, 2007). All other factors such as allocation of resources, political appointment, economic factor, indigene –settlers factors and contempt for other religious beliefs earlier pointed out in this work had in certain periods caused ethno-religious violence because of lack of tolerance.

Effects of Electoral and Ethno-Religious Violence in Nigeria :Electoral violence is a significant problem in the contemporary world. When it occurs, it can undermine participation and confidence in electoral processes and can derail emergent democratic institutions. Electoral violence threaten fragile peace-building process and have negative consequences for the quality of life of the victims. Both electoral and ethno-religious violence apart from those mentioned above, can have the following negative impact on any nation.

Destruction of lives and properties: More often than not, precious lives and properties that worth several millions of naira are usually destroyed as a result of violence in different parts of the country. The recent bloody clashes between the herds ‘men and people of different communities in Benue States where many people were killed is an example of terrible and negative effect of violence. The killing was so enormous that mass burrier had to be given to the victims (<https://www.vanguard.ng.com>).

Displacement: Those who are lucky to escape death are usually displaced from their original abode and made to become refugees elsewhere as a result of violence. According to Adebimpe & Ogunsola (2007), such people are likely to lose their sources of income, as they may not be able to continue to practice their profession or occupation in their new settlements. With this terrible development, it is therefore very obvious that the economy of the nation will be seriously affected as victims become liabilities in their new environment.

Economic Disaster: The economic problem that always emanate from persistent electoral and ethno-religious conflicts and violence are often very great because it often affects both individual citizens and the society at large. Crisis in the Niger Delta for example usually affects the production quota of the various oil companies and this often affects supply of essential needs of the people as well as the income of the government. Displacement of the people may also lead to the discontinuation of government economic activities in the affected areas.

Unemployment: As stated above, when the economic activities of the government in a particular area is affected and jeopardized, those people working in the government sector will be laid-off thereby causing unemployment that may seriously create a kind of negative image of the country. This by extension may continue to scare away foreign investors who might have helped to develop the nation’s economy. In all reality, no serious investor will invest in a violent-ridden economy.

Emergence of criminals and criminal activities: The persistent occurrence of crisis and violence in the country also has led to breeding of social miscreant and criminals who by their access to weapons of war become a major threat to their immediate community and the society at large. To retrieve the dangerous weapons from the criminals after the crisis is always very difficult. They are jobless and always ready to foment trouble.

Curbing Electoral and Ethno-Religious Violence in Nigeria: Since conflict are often associated with pre-electoral period, voter registration processes which are perceived as unfair or biased during the period can be controlled by transparent registration accompanied by voters education (<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng>). There should be persistent training programmes. Polling station staff training has to be more interactive in order to increase staff capacity to handle complaints effectively before they escalate to violence. Dialogue among electoral stakeholders (human rights organization, security forces and political parties) that will create an agreement on the rules of the game and make exchange of information possible should be allowed. Dialogue efforts are essential not only centrally but also at the lower levels. The stakeholders should ensure that conflicts at the local levels are resolved and that all actors should be compelled to respect the codes of conduct (<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng>).

It is undisputable that certain crises in the country are precipitated by government in-sensitivity to people's needs or introduction of bad policies that did not go down well with certain elements of the society who as a result of this often result to violence. In view of this, one would like to recommend that as much as possible government at whatever levels should always ensure that programmes to be implemented are in the best interest of the people who are going to be the beneficiaries of such policies. This can only be possible when people are sufficiently sensitized. Government activities should be transparent and its functionaries should be responsible and responsive to the masses. When those who are at the helm of affairs conduct themselves in an open door manner, there will be less acrimony and misunderstanding in the land. There should also be need for proper orientation among the various ethnic and religious groups to accommodate and tolerate one another within the country. As Adebimpe & Ogunsola (2007) has rightly observed, Nigerians should stop blaming Lugard as an individual responsible for the country problem but should rather forget about the past. The focus should be on how to forge a unity within our rich diversity.

There is also the need on the part of the government to provide job for the army of unemployment youth who are always ready to foment trouble. The "Yahoo boys" who were seriously committing cybercafé crime, have now changed their nomenclature, to "yahoo plus". They use human being for money ritual apart from the political and ethno-religious violence they cause on daily basis. If they are gainfully employed, they will be productive rather than being destructive. Closely related to the above is the need for government to ensure the provision of essential welfare needs of the people and this must go round the nooks and crannies of the country. Most of the violence being witnessed in Nigeria are often precipitated as a means of agitation for basic needs of life.

III. CONCLUSION

It is evident from the study that the phenomena of electoral and ethno-religious violence are compounding the generalized crisis of insecurity in the country and these are threatening to undermine the national quest for democratic development and peaceful co-existence. The phenomenon of violence could be effectively checkmated by concerted efforts by serious minded and committed stakeholders who can in any organized manner catalyze and facilitate necessary reform process. It is therefore recommended that discussions on political and electoral violence should be conducted at all level using the media and indigenous Nigeria languages of the respective areas so as to encourage the electorates. Persistent dialogue should also be organized among various tribes, ethnics and religions in the country as this will enhance peaceful co-existence.

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