
CAUSES OF THE POST- APRIL 2011 GENERAL ELECTION VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

The 2011 General Election that was held marked the fourth general election in Nigeria since the democratically elected Government of General Olusegun Obasanjo assumed office in 1999 after about thirty years of Military rule in Nigeria. Elections in Nigeria since 1999 has been relatively peaceful but the General Election of the April 2011 recorded high level of electoral violence when compared with the elections in 1999, 2003 and 2007 respectively. The violence swept through twelve (12) Northern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara States respectively where there are lost of lives and properties worth millions of Naira. This paper x-rays the causes of the post April 2011 electoral violence amongst which are ethnic and religious inclination, rigging of election etc. The Paper recommends that until Nigerians and political leaders place the Nation and her economy above personal, ethnic and religious consideration, we cannot avert electoral violence.

INTRODUCTION

In May 1999 when the military Government of General Abdulsalami Abubakar was handing over power to a democratically elected administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo at the Eagle Square in Abuja, the Federal Capital City of Nigeria, people of Nigeria were all very happy and joyful that at last the long years of military government in Nigeria has come to an end. At that time, regardless of ethnic and religious inclination, all the people teamed up to welcome the then new civilian administration having exercised their franchised unanimously to elect leaders of their choice with nobody thinking that Nigerians would ever think of electoral violence or post election crisis as it used to be in the Nigeria election since 1964 during the general election. The 2003 general election was conducted with no serious post election crisis even though there were some disagreements over the announced general election results, the 2007 General Election though adjudged the worst and the most incredibly ever conducted election in Nigeria but no post election crisis was witnessed. Having successfully and successively conducted three general elections without any serious report of pre, during or post election violence, ordinary Nigerians and even the government and the security relaxed hoping that Nigerians would not want to give the military another chance of their intimidating "Fellow Nigerians" which was usually the military government language of fresh coup signifying the overthrow of incumbent government. All the above good and speculative thinking Nigerians were proved very wrong immediately when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) began the official announcement of the Presidential Election results which was held on the 16th April, 2011. Simultaneously across twelve states of Northern Region namely "Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara State" respectively (Human Rights Watch 17

May, 2011). Violence broke out where a lot of lives and properties were lost. Causes of the Post-May 2011 General election crisis could best be explained from two major perspectives namely, the remote and immediate causes respectively. This division become very necessary because the violence could only be understand from the accumulative issues that remains unresolved by Nigerian leaders despite the frequent change of leadership. Indeed, the remote causes explains the long years of protracted problems while the immediate causes explains the main direct causes of the post April 2011 electoral violence.

Remote Causes of the April 2011 Electoral Violence in Nigeria

British Colonial Administrators in Nigeria that lasted for about forty six (46) years ruled through the principles of Indirect rule for the various regions and direct administration for the colony in Lagos. Using the Indirect Rule system, the British Colonial Masters left the regional people to continue with their own way of life whether such tradition or culture is barbaric just to sway away the attention of Nigerians to their uncovered looting and siphoning of the nations god-given resources. This principle of self governance not only made Nigerians to be different but also gave them a wrong signal that nothing is good in uniting together as a nation. In a related development, the British administration in Nigeria recommended and introduced a deceptive federal system through a process of amalgamation of the North and southern Nigeria in 1914. Lord Lugard himself said that the amalgamation resulted into "administrative chaos" stating that it is "nearly impossible for amalgamating and merging a region where emirate autonomy had nurtured as the aim of government with the South" (Odoh 1995:23). Indeed:

It is only the accident of British suzerainty which had made Nigeria one country. It is still far from being one nation socially or even economically, there are deep differences between the major tribal groups. They do not speak the same language and they have highly divergent customs and ways of life and they represent different stages of culture.

In view of the above, Nigerians don't regard themselves as one and this is exactly the regrets of Tafawa Balewa when he said "the North as far back as 1914 would have preferred to take her own way"(Balewa in Ahmadu 1962;133). Influence of past electoral crisis on the May 2011post-election violence cannot be underestimated. It is a very normal thing to take to the street in the name of not wanting a candidate for a particular election where lives and properties were lost in Nigeria in the past and no punishment was given to the culprits even if they are caught. Fraudulent electoral practices are a common and normal occurrence in Nigeria and government and the judicial system have not being doing anything serious about correcting such ills. Therefore, the Northerners not believing that the 2011 general election was not rigged was the reasons gave by the North as reason that triggered the violence. Failure of past government to fully implement recommendations of past panels, committees, and commissions on electoral violence in some part of the country also contributed immensely to continuous electoral and post electoral violence in Nigeria. After a violence like that of April, 2011 occurred, government usually set-up a panel or whatsoever name it may be called to investigate the causes with a view to bring to book all those who perpetrated the act, However, after investigation, Nigerians never see the book where the name of the

culprits appeared any longer. Even in the case of the May 2011 post-electoral violence, government set up a panel to investigate it. Nigerians have not really know how the case went any longer. High level of unemployment rate could not be rule out for the easy and quick occurrence of electoral and other violence in Nigeria. Whenever opportunity of violence occur, there are thousands of youths who shall be ready to lurch out attack on innocent citizens and their properties. Usually, they carry out their complain and grievances through participation in violence. The remote causes of electoral violence will be incomplete without saying anything about bad leadership which had been the bane of Nigeria socio-economic development. The political leaders don't care about the plight and welfare of the people they lead and represented rather they apparently and transparently demonstrates their ill-gotten wealth before the people therefore, the frustrated masses always cause destruction to frustrate the government. In a related development, Nigerian leaders in particular hate relinquishing power after their tenure. They indeed go extra mile to continue in office. The politicians in Nigeria, have over the years become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power, more reckless and greedy in their use and abuse of power; and more intolerant of opposition, criticism and efforts at replacing them (Electoral Reform Committee Report 2008Vol. 1: 19). Uneven distribution of wealth is one of the major problems of Nigeria and all her attendant challenges including electoral and post-electoral violence in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country where the Karl Marx Vicious Cycle of poverty is in full operation.

The rich and the wealthy preserved wealth for their children. They made them to have access to all necessities and luxuries of life while the children of the poor lacks all the basic necessities of life. The end product of this unequal co-existence and relationship is internal and physical feud between the two categories of individuals. "Indeed, the prevalence of abject poverty is one of the root causes of the frequent deadly skirmishes"(Alkasim 2011:1). Failure of religions and religious leaders to correct and impart moral and religious value on their subjects is an important factor to reckoned with when considering causes of electoral vices. In Nigeria , the number of religions and place of worships are almost the same with the number of worshippers yet the religious teachings and injunctions could not be able to correct the followers and that is why the situation of Nigeria need God's special intervention. Corruption is another virus that is a source of problem to us in Nigeria, the entire system is infected with this disease. Resource meant for improving the welfare and standard of living of Nigerians are diverted to private pockets for selfish gains by corrupt politicians. The adverse effect of this on the society is frustration, decay of infrastructure and abject poverty of the masses. Consequent upon this, people reacted violently on any little situation to register their ungratefulness to the ruling elites. It is in quest to get rich at the shortest time that made people to contest and win election at all cost as Dudley (1961:21) put it "the shortest cut to affluence and influence is through politics. Politics means money and money means politics... to be a member of the government party means open avenue to government patronage, contract deals and the like". In the light of this, to stay in power, the politicians deploy corrupt practices, fan ethnic, religious and regional sentiments, organize and arm political thugs. Increasing moral decadence in Nigeria is one of the contributory factor in electoral violence. The youths due to system and family failure to properly bring

them in a society desired direction and ideals, grow on their own without any serious moral training. The negative effect of this development is violent destruction of lives and properties without remorse. Lack of opportunities for education and advancement for all is also a reason that likely cause electoral malpractice. Though, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provided for equal opportunities for all, It is more of theoretical postulations than practical applications. There is no equal opportunities for all Nigerians because the cost of acquiring education is very high and therefore it could not be afforded by many families. The resultant effect of this ugly development is that those who are from poor background permanently remain illiterate and as they grow they source for hard labour or menial jobs to keep them going. Unfortunately enough, this group of people are almost eighty (80%) of the total Nigeria population if not more. It is therefore, not surprising that at the slightest opportunity people revolt violently. Closely linked to the above factor is the unchecked increasing population that is growing at higher proportion. Due to this factor there is pressure on the little available amenities, unemployment opportunities, education and its facilities etc. therefore, there is always public outcry for neglect by the government following the poor standard of living of the populace. The simple logic here therefore, is that people always wait patiently for little situation to be magnify and cause mayhem.

Immediate Causes of the April 2011 Post General Election Violence.

There are some undeniable immediate reasons that caused the April 2011 post-General Election crisis as it could be seen below. Before the general election, there were attempts by some group of political parties to form an alliance against the ruling party to contest the April 2011 general election. however, the marriage of the alliance never succeeded. As a result of the above, it was the belief of s many that the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (that worked against the alliance therefore, people held the view that the post electoral violence may be assisted by undesirable party supporters. The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) also faced challenges of zoning of the presidency earlier before the April 2011 General election. The argument was that the PDP should zone the presidency to the Northern Region to enable the North complete her eight years tenure which Umaru Musa Yar'Adua started before he died.

The South will only start another eight years by 2015 based on the argument. The main trust of the argument was that the agreement for the zoning was entered into by PDP during the 2003 General Election which made Obasanjo to contest and won the 2nd Tenure accordingly. The Southerners however, counter argue that such zoning arrangement was only for 2003 because in 2007, the presidential candidates that contested that PDP primary were not only northerners as the case supposed to be therefore, no more zoning. Another line of argument is that Goodluck Jonathan is the vice president to late Yar'adua and that his continuity for the remaining four years is part of the completion of the Yar'Adua eight years. The rhetoric question is, how could Goodluck from the South-South geo-political substitute Umaru musa Yar'adua from the North west. This may be one of the grievances that was registered by other party supporters in the North through the electoral violence. The question left unanswered is could Goodluck Jonathan be a substitute to Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. " the elections were also marred by allegation of vote buying, ballot box stuffing, and inflation of

results most noticeable in South eastern-Jonathan's strong hold were official results in the presidential election in some rural areas recorded close to 100 percent voters turnout"(Human Rights Watch, 17 May,2011). As a result of the above, the other political parties believed that the 2011 was not free and fair as widely claim. The security agents have their own fair share of the blame for the post April, 2011 electoral violence. For the first time since 1999 general election heavy presence of security agents were absent in virtually all places except the few policemen at the polling stations. As a result of the lapses, the ever-ready trouble-shooter youths hijacked the opportunity and caused violent attack on innocent citizens. In the light of all the above enumerated and analyzed remote and immediate causes, "as the election results trickled in April 17, 2011, it became clear that Buhari (and others) had lost, his (their) supporters took to the streets of Northern towns, and cities to protest what they alleged to be the rigging of the results" (Human Rights Watch, May 17, 2011). What was at the initial time seem as peaceful demonstration later metamorphosed to fierce violence due to accumulative burning anger of persistent rigging of election in Nigeria. The demonstration recorded a high magnitude and lamenting proportion of destruction of lives and properties worth millions of Naira.

CONCLUSION

As Ejeba (2012) rightly put it "...election have meaning (let me add, election have a universally acceptable formula) for most people only in a democratic context, because it lead to choice of decision makers by the majority of citizens. The major purpose of election are :

1. Ensure that voters freely choose those who will represent them;
 2. Enable voters to make choices among parties, candidates and programmes;
 3. Ensure that elected officials are accountable to the electorates;
 4. Promote citizens sense of belonging in government
 5. Promote public confidence, trust and support for government and its programme and
- Finally, provide the mechanism for collective efforts towards the development of the country.

A country like Nigeria that her democracy and democratic rule truncate the above listed ideals shall always continue to experience deadly pre, during and post electoral violence as experienced by Nigeria after the April 2011 general election and even the previous electoral violence right from 1964. Its indeed, unfortunate that Nigeria after fifty two years of political Independence could not be able to conduct any credible, free and fair and crisis-free election. More unfortunate is that non of the eighty three (83) recommendations of the Electoral Reform Act headed by Justice Mohammed Uwais has been fully implemented. This is a clear indication that Nigeria is not ready to conduct free and fair election where there will not be a consequential result of bloodshed. Truly, leaders and politicians ought to have learnt from past electoral mistakes that results into electoral misfortune during all election period in Nigeria. The major cause of this is that no single Nigerian is patriotic to the nation. This calls for people to vote on ethnic, tribal, religious and regional consideration. This pattern of voting coupled with the structural inequalities that exist in the nation continue to enhance crisis and violence in all ramification. When we restarted our another democratic

journey in 1999 after about thirty (30) years of military interruption of the democratic journey that started after Nigeria gained their independence in 1960, Nigerians thought that the democratic immaturity being experienced is because we just started. But twelve years after Democratic Administration, the condition of Nigeria democratic culture is growing worse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When one think of what to recommend to stop or check electoral violence in Nigeria, it seems to be a herculean task simply because there are certain prevalent factors that could only be left to the Almighty God to handle but, to fulfill academic righteousness, the following recommendations are hereby proffered for possible stop electoral violence in Nigeria. The eighty three (83) recommendations of the Electoral Reform Committee headed by Justice Mohammed Uwais be implemented in fully if we to achieve our dream of conducting free, fair and credible election where the aftermath will not be blood letting and property destruction; Political parties should as a matter of unity, cohesion, and stability of the nation adopt the principle of zoning their presidency as this will go a long way to doze the tension that may mount up as a result of electing a particular candidate from a given ethnic origin; Government should map out a good strategy to improve the standard of living and life of the people socially and economically because most of the crisis including that of electoral violence emanates from accumulative frustration due to lack of social welfare and amenities. Though, it will be cost intensive but the government should as a matter of greatest good for the greatest number of people make education at all level to be free. This will give equal education to both the children of the poor and the rich. This will not only reduce violent but will also provide avenue for gainful employment for all category of the people in Nigeria.

Though, we know that the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) is trying but the Commission should embark on practical open trial of public officers who are found guilty of financial crimes and equal punishment be meted accordingly and names of such officers be publicly display with their full identity disclosed. This is how many of the great nations we are hearing of today found their way to level of development. Culprits of electoral violence must be given open trial and Nigerians should be made to follow proceedings of judgment relating to such case. The government must have learned in a hard way for that matter from her experience in the April 2011 post general election violence that Nigerians are immature electorally and need to be monitor under strict security surveillance before, during and months after any election. The conclusion and recommendations that any right thinking Nigerian and a political scientist shall drawn and make is that Nigerians need to come together to agree on a workable co-existence that will permanently stop any further future merciless waste of human beings and properties since it is only on this platform that tangible sustainable development could be attain where Nigeria shall be recognized to have taken off for the democratic journey to achieve a full economic, social and technological development.

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