

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Electoral violence, which is an issue in national development, has become a culture in Nigeria as every election conducted so far in the history of the country was marred with violence of various magnitude. Given its nature and effects, literature abounds on the subject from political, sociological and economic perspectives. However, much has not been said about the stance of religious ethics on electoral violence. Therefore, this paper discusses electoral violence in the context of religion and its implication for sustainable development. Since electoral violence has been the bane of political stability and development, application of religious moral values is considered to be a veritable tool for ensuring violence – free elections, which will ultimately impel the ever obscure development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Election, Violence, Religion, National Development, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1950s, electoral violence has been a major problem in Nigerian politics (Albert, 2007:132). This ugly development has led to several deaths and colossal loss of properties, both private and public, in different parts of the country. It is a major reason for the present crisis of development in the country. It should be noted that violence is not a one-off event but a continuum in the electoral process. Thus, we can talk of pre-election; during election, and post election violence. This paper is a religious analysis of the connection between electoral violence and sustainable national development. As earlier remarked, electoral violence has been a catalyst for underdevelopment given the havoc it has wreaked. Considering the socio-ethical relevance of religion, the application of religious moral values during elections is expected to stem the tide of violence (Dzurgba, 2009:29; Familusi, 2010). This becomes imperative given the fact that religion is usually a strong factor in the electoral process (Familusi, 2012:66).

STAGES OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

Electoral violence occurs before, during and after elections. Pre-election violence takes physical, psychological, and structural forms within and between political parties. It manifests also in some lapses in official preparation for election. The process of choosing flag bearers in different political parties is not always rancour free as each party is made of people of various interests. Consequently, interested party members do to try all means including violence to win the party ticket. In some cases, wining the primary election is as good as having won the major election depending on the strength of political party. It is not strange to have inconclusive primaries as a result of violence that often erupts. It can therefore be concluded that electoral violence is not an exclusively inter-party affair.

At inter-party level, electoral violence manifests in terms of physical and verbal assault on political opponents, closure of offices of opposition parties, destruction of posters, disruption of rallies, and creating a no- go area for opposition. Activities of electoral officials and the way security agencies intervene in pre-election conflicts within and between parties are also capable of resulting in violence. All elections conducted so far in Nigeria witnessed one form of violence or the other prior to the election day. It is to be noted that pre-election violence has claimed many lives in the country. For this reason, major opposition parties had on several occasions resorted to boycott having been assaulted, harassed or intimidated before the election day. This is common in local government or supplementary elections.

Violence on the election day includes partisan behaviour by security officials as well as maiming and killing of voters, electoral officials and security personnel. Ballot boxes may be snatched by political thugs, and at times, by security agents believed to be working for some influential politicians and political parties. Many deaths have also been recorded on election days in Nigeria. Post election violence, as the phrase suggests, occurs after results have been announced and it could take the form of burning private and public properties, killing, violent demonstration and offensive advertorial against those who won or lost in an election (Albert, 2007:137). While in most cases, violence is instigated by those who lost perhaps because of suspected cases of manipulation and rigging, winners may also attack losers while celebrating victory. One point that needs to be stressed is that violence during and after election is more common between political parties. What may bring about dissonance among party members after election is how offices and posts are to be shared.

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA FROM HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Writing the history of electoral violence is as good as writing the political history of the country. The first and the second republics were truncated by widespread violence across the country. The situation was most serious in the South-west. This earned the region the appellation, “Wild Wild West”. The said violence was a reaction to the regional elections of 1965. According to Osuntokun (2012:35):

The elections were so widely and flagrantly rigged that civil rebellion broke out in the region. When this could not be quelled by the militarised police, the army was called in. Thus, the political leadership of the country by this action exposed its weakness and when the military realised that political power depended on the military, some radical within the army simply shoved the political leaders aside through a *coup d'état* characterised by widespread bloodshed.

The general elections of 1979 conducted by the military were relatively peaceful. However, the year 1983 was a repeat of 1964/1965 experience as the elections were marred with irregularities. The then Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) could not be said to be neutral and the federal government of the defunct National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was accused of using the military and other security agencies against oppositions. It was also insinuated that there were many fake policemen in towns, who were detailed to do the bidding of the federal government. The South-west remained a theatre of war as people reacted violently to the outcome of gubernatorial elections in the Old Oyo and Ondo State where the ruling party, Unity Party of Nigeria, lost to the NPN. The scenario coupled with other socio-political problems confronting the nation culminated in the coup of December 31, 1983 (Ajayi and Olaniyi, 2004:72; Oyeneeye, Onyenwenu and Olosunde, 2002:186).

The third (aborted) republic which began on a smooth note did not achieve the expected result consequent upon the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election believed to be won (and later confirmed) by Chief Moshood Kasimawo Olawale Abiola. (<http://www.nigerianmuse.com/nigeria-watch>). Elections were staggered during this time and because of the method adopted (option A4) cases of pre and post election day violence were minimal. Thus, local government, state assembly, national assembly and gubernatorial elections were quite without much hitch. The presidential election as well was smoothly conducted. In fact, it is adjudged to be the freest and fairest in the history of Nigeria. As results were announced, the military president General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the election. This was what triggered protest and counter reaction from security operatives, which left many people dead. Troops were believed to be ordered by the Federal government to shoot protesters (Odey, 2003:25). The option of an Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan could not salvage the situation until the Defence Secretary and the most senior military officer, General Sani Abacha took over following the resignation of the former on November 17, 1993. The provision for possible takeover had been made by General Babangida in the decree establishing the interim government. The coming of General Sani Abacha was greeted with nationwide demonstration; virtually every sector embarked on strike, anarchy loomed resulting in deaths and mass destruction of property. There was no peace until June 8 and July 7, 1998 when Abacha and Abiola died respectively.

The current political dispensation started in 1998 as a way of restoring order to the nation and seeking acceptance in international community. Elections conducted were fairly smooth and violence-free. The need to get rid of the military through election impelled people to accept the results despite some irregularities. A common slogan then is, ‘the worst

civilian government is better than the best military regime'. Violence resurfaced in 2003; the reason being that some people wanted to attain power, while the incumbent government wanted to remain in office. Such violence was mainly before and during the elections. The South-west again became centre of action as the then president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba man who was not supported by his people in 1999 wanted the region to join what he called, 'the mainstream of Nigerian politics', which was going to involve voting out the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the ruling party in the South-west. The game plan as noted by Osuntokun (2013:39) is as follows:

The president...felt politically diminished for having no home support and he appeared determined to reverse the situation in the subsequent election of 2003. He somehow cajoled the A. D. state government in the South-west to support his re-election promising to support their own re-election. He turned the table against them by using the state institution of the army, police and intelligence organisation to rig them out of power.

Both the PDP and AD took to violence, but the PDP had an upper hand being the ruling party. It was only in Lagos State that the AD won. The late Lam Adesina, a former governor of Oyo State, once said that he lost the election to federal might, as, according to him, Obasanjo told the Commissioner of Police to be taking instruction from Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, a chieftain of the PDP (Familusi 2008:102). The violence was not confined to only South-west. For instance, in Kwara State the disagreement between the late former governor Mohammed Lawal and late Dr. Olusola Saraki engendered violence, while Alhaji Lai Mohamed of the AD reported that ANPP supporters attacked his convoy in October 2002 (Alanamu, 2005:51-52).

By 2007, politicians were becoming more desperate to win elections. Hence, violence occurred in virtually all states of the federation resulting in deaths and arson. In Osun State, like other states, there were reported cases of ballot boxes snatching that the gubernatorial candidate of Action Congress, Rauf Aregbesola, called a radio station to report the incident. There was a serious clash between the supporters of PDP and AC when the results were announced. The former governor of the state, Olagunsoye Oyinlola, was accused of using his military background to invite soldiers to kill and terrorise his opponents. Of course, deaths were recorded in Ilesa and Oshogbo. Several litigations followed the announcements of results, which led to the sacking of many governors and legislators. The late President Umaru Musa Yar'adua admitted the election that brought him to power was not free and fair. As a fallout of the elections, the Court of Appeal sitting in Ilorin ordered a rerun gubernatorial election in Ekiti State. Prior to the election, a former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dimeji Bankole, openly declared that soldiers would be deployed to the state, perhaps to curb or guard against violence.

Indeed, the two major parties, PDP and AC, were violent. However, PDP was more equipped. Several deaths were also recorded. The threat of intimidation and looming anarchy forced the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), Ayoka Adebayo, to resign, but her resignation was turned down by the federal government. The declaration of the results attracted serious protest from people that many old women came out half naked, which is the highest form of protest by women in Yorubaland. Beyond Osun and Ekiti, other parts of the country also experienced violent reactions. The statement credited to Chief Obasanjo that the 2007 election was going to be 'do or die' affair in no small way prepared the minds of political gladiators for violence, which was visible during the exercise. The 'rig and roast' slogan of the AC can only be explained in terms of threat of violence.

As expected in a country prone to violence, the 2011 elections were not in any way better than the previous ones. The climax was the reaction to the presidential election in some states notably Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Niger and Borno, all in the northern part of the country. Many observers concluded that the poll was generally peaceful and described the development as a new dawn in the political history of Nigeria. However, as people were celebrating the success of the election, many people took to the street raiding, looting and destroying private and public owned properties. So many lives were lost including those who knew little or nothing about the election. The protesters did not spare youth corps members from other parts of the country. The unrest was blamed on the type of campaign embarked upon by politicians and political parties before the elections. For instance, an Ijaw leader of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Kumse Okoko, while campaigning asked its members to protect their votes by all means. According to him, the reason was that they had the hope that they would win the election, but since the outcome did not reflect their wish, they embarked on demonstration (Onapajo, 2012:55). The governorship elections in Osun and Ekiti states in 2014 were more of wars than elections. The fact cannot be denied of non-neutrality of security agents. Also, many people were caught with weapons. It was a walkover for the PDP in Ekiti, while things were different in Osun State probably because the governor was able to outsmart the federal structure put in place. There was a revelation after the election about the involvement of the military in Ekiti State. The recorded voice of a former minister was audible enough to convince people that there was a siege on the state, which made the opposition to be vulnerable. The recent confession of a former state Secretary of the PDP, Dr Taye Aluko has further confirmed the nature of the election. Aluko was PDP's chief agent who endorsed the election results. At the election petition tribunal, he testified on oath that the poll was free and fair. By his voluntary confession, Aluko has held himself out as a participant in an orchestrated electoral offence. Aluko's confession is linked to a fall out of disagreement between him and governor Fayose, who failed to fulfill his promise to appoint Aluko as his Chief of Staff (<http://www.vanguardngr.com>). There was no improvement during the 2015 general elections as there was disturbance of various forms arising from desperate posture of politicians. Rivers and Akwa Ibom states among others were visibly shaken by fatal violence. The recently concluded elections in Kogi and Bayelsa states and the rerun legislative elections in River State suggest that the era of electoral violence is yet to be over. It is not possible to have a detailed account of the history of electoral violence in Nigeria in a single write up. Therefore, not all events or cases were reported and recorded. What has been done so far in this section is to establish the reality of electoral violence in Nigeria.

WHY IS NIGERIA PRONE TO ELECTORAL VIOLENCE?

Scholars have identified electoral violence as a variant of electoral malpractices. One reason for electoral malpractices is the attractiveness of politics owing to the luxury that is attached to political offices. It follows that people want to attain power at all costs. Consequently, the electoral process is usually marred with violence. In Dzurghba's (2003:51) submission, there is a view that 'politics is food'. In this sense, food means the type of life lived by politicians, which set them apart from the rest of the people. Invariably, this type of life is coveted by many people. Elections have become investments, and like any business outfit, people invest with the hope of reaping dividends. Odey (2003:12) also believes "that leadership in Nigeria has become huge investment and a life insurance where one has to engage in many abnormal things to be secure in perpetuity." Godfathers now triumph in politics because they have invested so much in it. Obaji opines that godfathers aim at political and economic control. They look at the entire political set up as a huge business empire from where endless profit must be made (Obaji, 2006:35). Oloruntimehin's (2012:13) conclusion on this scenario

is that many state actors have been obsessed with building a political system where institutions and official responsibilities are converted to personal gains. For these actors, the main concern is to sustain a *prebendal* state in which government is run as an eatery. Associated with this is the notion that politics is war. Thus, political competition has become a battle in which enemies are to be defeated or wiped out completely. Dzurgba (2003:51) asserts further that:

Each contestant adopts appropriate strategies, tactics and manoeuvres to ensure a great victory over his rivals. He counter-accounts his enemies who have been on the offensive and have fired several shots. Thus, a candidate who wins an election is a victor in a political war. So contestants have to mobilise their supporters so as to be able to demolish the strong resistance of their enemies in order to capture all available seats in a legislative assembly. Because politics is viewed in terms of war, it has been militarised, that hostility, aggression and violence have been taken to normal aspects of politics.

The word, 'capture' as used in the above quotation implies war. It is not surprising that politicians often boast that they would capture state presently ruled by their opponents. Governor Rauf Aregbesola of Osun State said at the 2014 convocation lecture of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria that the threat to capture states is a declaration of war on citizens and a misuse of language because in a democracy, elections are to be won, and seats, constituencies and states are not to be captured. Since politics is taken to be analogous to war, politicians prepare for, execute and react to elections violently. Lending credence to this, Oloruntimehin (2012:16) is unequivocal that "since 1999, electioneering has been conducted as war to be won at all cost ('*do or die*') to maintain a cabal that operates as an oligopoly, whose main concern is to run the Nigerian State as its estate". It is a common practice for private individual to import arms in preparatory to elections. When political thugs are supplied with arms during elections, such weapons become their property. In the spirit of impunity that is characteristic of Nigeria, arms and ammunitions have on several occasions been found in the houses of politicians with no legal action taken. Preparing for elections like wars also manifests during campaign as uncomplimentary remarks are made about opponents. The wife of former President Jonathan was quoted to have said that General Buhari is brain dead and that people should stone whoever says change, which is the slogan of the All Progressives Congress. There is obviously lack of political culture among Nigerian politicians. This is why they believe that every election must be won. It is almost impossible to hold elections that losers can accept without resorting to the courts or the streets in violent protest.

Much of the cases of violence are products of rigging or attempt to rig (Abogunrin, 1999). The issue of rigging is complex as every political party complains of rigging. However, experience has shown that virtually all contestants want to rig where possible. Consequently, whoever is out-rigged takes to violence. In 1983, violence broke out in the old Oyo State because of the provocative statement made by Chief Bola Ige, who believed that he was rigged out by the federal government headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Conducting a free, fair and credible election in Nigeria has almost been taken to the realm of impossibility. As Oyeleye (2016:9) asks: "Which of our democracies has not been characterised by subversion or distortion? Which of our elections has ever been free of rigging, ballot snatching, ballot box stuffing, ...specious legalism and other forms of irregularities?" Where the foregoing prevails, violence may be logically expected.

Lucrative nature of politics in Nigeria engenders lust for power, sit tight syndrome or tenacity of office. A case of paradox is obvious. Someone wants to grab power at all costs; another one wants to remain in office. Corroborating this, Odey (2003:12) says that "No Nigerian who has tasted the trappings of office has ever left them without fierce and often violent pressure, while those who aspire to be there spare nobody and nothing on their way." One cannot but expect

violence to occur in this situation. It was obvious during the 2015 elections that the All Progressives Congress wanted to win in all states, while the People Democratic Party did not want to lose any. The violence that took place in River and Akwa Ibom states lend credence to this. Although the results of the elections were challenged up to the Supreme Court, the petitioner could not legally prove their cases beyond a reasonable doubt. In his reaction to the affirmation of Nyesom Wike of Rivers State, a constitutional lawyer, Itse Sagay, said the former became a governor over dead bodies. It is not only Wike who got to power through violence as there was no state where deaths were not recorded. Similar to this is the fact that winners have always taken all and losers have always lost all (Familusi, 2008:117). Therefore, opponents are excluded while forming cabinet and when appointments into boards and agencies are made. Winners are rarely magnanimous to form a broad based government. Few attempts made so far did not reflect the spirit of all inclusive government. Hence, they did not achieve the expected result. In Oyo State, the alliance between the Action Congress of Nigeria and the Accord Party in 2011, and the government of national unity formed by the Yar'adua's administration did not see the light of the day. Even the All Progressives Congress, which is an amalgam of four political parties still experiences internal bickering over appointments.

Dissemination of information is a critical aspect of the electoral process because of the need to keep people informed. The political reporter should have an indepth understanding of the electoral law of his country and be in touch with the electoral body. Since politicians and their parties are trying to gain the attention of the public, electoral reports are expected to be presented without being sensational and judgemental (Ganiyu, 2004:102). However, this is not the case in Nigeria as many media practitioners are paid to present positive report about politicians to the public, while those who are not in their good book are not given fair treatment. Inflammatory statements about the opposition through the mass media and campaign of calumny have always resulted in violence. Instances are the documentaries on General Muhammad Buhari and Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu aired by African Independent Television (AIT). Also, there is usually inconsistency in the manner in which results are announced thereby misleading public. When results that are not authenticated are released, and after sometime, final results do not correlate with the previous one, violence will be the result. It is possible that candidates who did not win have been declared winners by a media outfit and their supporters would have started celebrating the supposed victory; and the reality dawns on them that their candidates did not win; there could be a clash with the supporters of the officially declared winners.

Much has been said about poverty as a cause of social vices in Nigeria; electoral violence is not an exception. Olukunle (1986:29) and Akanmidu (1995:51) are unequivocal in their submission that morality cannot be preached in the atmosphere of poverty. The level of poverty in Africa and Nigeria in particular is alarming. This has forced people to devise means of survival. Most of those who foment trouble during election are unemployed youths and victims of poverty. It is ironic that politicians and their key supporters rarely participate in violence, while those who are both idle and hungry are readily available. In sum, electoral violence is not alien to Nigeria and it is a reason for political instability, underdevelopment and the elusive democratic consolidation.

DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

Electoral violence is the bane of development in Nigeria considering the magnitude of its effects. Development in the context of this paper refers to a multidimensional process involving major changes in the social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the

eradication of poverty. At the centre of development is man, who is either a victim or beneficiary of policies or activities that have to do with development. Therefore, main indices of human development are life expectancy at birth, education attainment as measured by mean years of schooling and adult literacy as well as standard of living as measured by per capita income (Olaniyan and Lawanson, 2006:109). Also considered are conditions of infrastructures and institutions such as schools and hospital. It is no news that several lives have been lost to electoral violence in the political history of the country. Listing those who have been killed is not expedient as one would lose count. Life is precious and it is the only thing that human beings have in common no matter the status. Every individual rich or poor, young and old has one life and it is irreplaceable. Therefore, when a life is lost, the end of an era has come. The main argument is that those who have lost theirs to electoral violence had the potential to contribute to the development of the country in terms of manpower. It should be noted that much of political killing is a variant of electoral violence, which takes place at different levels. Therefore, political violence cannot be discussed in isolation from electoral violence. To show the extent of killings during the 2007 elections, corpses were brought to election tribunal in Osun State. Similarly, the 2011 electoral violence in the north led to widespread murder including the killing of electoral officers and thirteen NYSC members in Bauchi and attempted attacks on the palaces of Sultan of Sokoto and Emir of Zaria (Osuntokun, 2012:43). Okoosi-Simbine (2004:95-96) confirms the ubiquitous loss of lives in electoral violence as follows:

Civilian politics since 1999 and more so, the preparation towards the 2003 elections were characterised by acid attack and political assassinations (for instance, the killing of Chief Bola Ige in Oyo State, Lawyer and Mrs. Igwe in Anambra State, Chief Marshall Harry in River State and so on, with authorities seemingly incapable of finding those responsible not to talk of bringing them to book). Politically instigated inter-communal, ethnic and religious conflicts (resulting in the killing for instance, of Maimuna Katai, Commissioner for Women Affairs in Nassarawa State reportedly during a dispute over polling in her constituency).

As noted by Salau (2015), the foregoing loss of lives will always impel retrogression.

A research conducted by the Nigeria Watch revealed that between June 2006 and May 2014, there were about 915 cases of election violence resulting in about 3934 deaths. A further breakdown of the figures showed that the North Central geopolitical zone had the highest casualties among the country's six zones, recording 1463 deaths. It was followed by the North West with 911 deaths and the South-south with 644 deaths. The South East had the least figure of 152 deaths, the North East and South West recorded 319 and 386 deaths respectively.

Apart from loss of lives, properties, both private and public, that have been lost to electoral violence cannot be quantified and this has spelt doom on overall development. For example, if structures belonging to the government are destroyed, such will be replaced or rehabilitated with public money. It follows that many other things that could aid development will go for it. In some cases, property once destroyed may not be rebuilt especially if owned by individuals whose sources of income have been destroyed. One could imagine the experience of an entrepreneur, who is a victim of violence. What happens to his investments and employees when his business or businesses crumble? Among the casualties of 1983 post election violence was the first indigenous publisher, Honourable Albert Olaiya Fagbamigbe. He was murdered two weeks after his 58th birthday (<http://www.sharpedgenews.com/index.php>).

Violence of any kind breeds ecological problems which in turn could constitute social, economic and health hazard. The relic of the violence that followed 1983 elections are still visible in some parts of the South-western Nigeria, while many of the places destroyed in 2011 remain inhabitable and many farmlands become useless for cultivation (Onwuaroh, 2014:44).

Economic retrogression has always arisen from violence in that it is not possible for citizens to transact their businesses efficiently where/when peace is elusive. Of course, electoral violence portends danger for foreign investors who may wish to establish business in Nigeria. (<http://www.vanguardngr.com>). As new investors will not come, existing ones may not have choice but to leave for safety. Bello (2015) confirms that the anxiety over the outcome of the 2015 elections exacerbated economic and political risks in the country, resulting in foreign investors pulling N846.53billion from the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) in 2014. The figure represents 65.7 per cent increase on the N510.78 billion foreign portfolio investment outflow from the stock market in the corresponding period of 2013 (<http://www.vanguardngr.com>/ <http://leadership.ng/news>). Lending credence to this, Daniel (2015:30) is emphatic that: “as a result of economic losses caused by electoral violence in Nigeria, political investors within and outside the country have been discouraged because it is widely believed that a country without a stable political system will not be able to guarantee the safety of their investors and investment.”

Still on development, the image of the country in the international community is at stake. Emphasising this, Alanamu says that:

This becomes obvious when examined in the light of the value of transformation, which has taken place as a result of the end of the cold war and emergence of a New World Order. This development emphasises respect for human rights, which is an integral value of democracy. As such, failure to effectively protect human rights may create another round of international image for Nigeria.

Image problem in the context of this piece is an issue in development. Political instability, which has been experienced in Nigeria as a result of electoral violence, has wreaked much havoc in terms of development. The episodes of 1965, 1983 and 1993 are still fresh in the memories of Nigerians. One of the reasons petitioners usually give for challenging the results of elections is violence and many elections have been invalidated consequent upon this. When this happens, rerun elections are ordered. Such elections like normal elections involve money. Apart from money released by the government to the electoral commission, states concerned may not have choice but to fund the elections with money that would have been used for developmental projects. The INEC Chairman, Mahmud Yakubu, while presenting INEC’s 2015/2016 budget before the House of Representatives Committee on Electoral Matters said N10b would be required to fund rerun elections in eight states of the federation. (<https://www.today.ng/politics>). This is no cheering news at this time when the government at all levels find it difficult to pay workers and pensioners as and when due. Still on the economic dimension of electoral violence, Salau (2016) has this to say:

Under a subhead of the capital side of the 2016 Appropriation Bill is the sum of N2.5 billion for rehabilitation of public properties and places of worship that were damaged during the 2011 election as a result of violence and civil disturbances. Ironically, five years after the violence and civil disturbances that followed that election, those who suffered one loss or the other are still being compensated.

As established in this section, electoral violence is a major factor responsible for underdevelopment. This could be summarised in the words of Arazeem (2005:157) that:

Violence, regardless of its nature tends to slow down development because development can only take place under a peaceful atmosphere. As it would be difficult for a blind man to see even in the broad daylight, so it would be difficult for a nation to experience any form of growth or development where there is no relative peace. That is, no amount of national unity and social integration can be achieved under any kind of unstable atmosphere.

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Electoral violence is a variant of Machiavellianism, and an indication that morality has been removed from politics in Nigeria. Machiavelli believes that the essential thing in politics is to try to grab power by all means, fair or foul and having grabbed it, all means must be used to retain it (Omogbe, 1998:128). Those who belong to this school of thought will not think of the imperative of morality in politics. Our submission is that morality is an essential ingredient in politics if any meaningful development is expected in Nigeria. Moreover, electoral violence is a negation of religious moral values. No religion preaches violence; involvement of practitioners notwithstanding. Therefore, one should expect a violence-free electoral process given the religious inclination of many stakeholders on the electoral process. The ethics of the three major religions in Nigeria: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion will be used as our guide in analysing electoral violence in Nigeria. The fact has been established that electoral violence is an offshoot of electoral malpractices. The position of Familusi (2010:103-107) is that the three religions advocate credibility, decency and transparency at all stages of elections.

Peace is one of the cardinal virtues in Christianity (Shield, 2005:174). Therefore, Christians who are involved in electoral matters are expected to eschew violence or evil attitude toward other people. Both the old and new testaments condemn deliberate killing of human beings. It is only in the atmosphere of love that peace prevails. Love is the most fundamental aspect of values in Christian thought. It is demonstrated through kindness, gentleness, tolerance and peacefulness. On the other hand, anger, enmity or hatred are immoral practices, thus, they are detested. It imperative to note that Christianity as a religion preaches peace to all mankind. However, it is not silent about war and violence. Of course, so much has been said by scholars and theologians; and there is no consensus on what the attitude of a Christian should be. While some advocate pacifism, others opt for selective militarism. Origen and Tertullian, for instance, reject war, while Augustine and Thomas Aquinas hold that wars could be fought for some reasons, which are highlighted in the just war theory and permissibility of war as espoused by Aquinas and US Catholic Bishops (Robin Gill, 2014:261-312). Kunhiyop believes that the discourse is controversial given the divergent opinions expressed in respect of the biblical teaching. For instance, according to him, it can be said that Jesus was both in support and against war. On his advice to his disciples to buy a sword, he infers as follow:

Jesus is acknowledging that swords may be needed for self protection. When the authority provides no protection, it is appropriate to protect oneself. It would have been unwise to travel in the mountains where there were robbers and thieves without a sword, and it is right and proper to arm oneself in order to defend oneself, one's family and the weak. Advocating a non-violent response to oppression and injustice is not at odd with self-defence or defence of one's family or even one's church (Kunhiyop, 2008:119).

While one agrees that there are logical and justifiable reasons a Christian may be involved in war, fighting in the electoral process does not fall under any of the reasons (Shields 2004:182). The truth of the matter is that immorality cannot curb immorality. Therefore, whatever the reasons advanced for electoral violence, it cannot stand the test of Christian ethics. Not even provocation from political opponents should propel it.

In Islam, faithful Muslims are enjoined to be in peace with one another. Peacefulness, a prime virtue in Islam, means not harming others. All Muslims are expected to exhibit the spirit of neighbourliness, be tolerant and eschew aggression. As contained in the Hadith, Prophet Muhammed advocates the need to love and desist from anything that may lead to anarchy. The foregoing implies that violence is prohibited in Islam. Consequently, Muslims are duty bound not to engage in violence as such would be tantamount to disobedience to Allah (Katerrega and Shenk, 1985: 158).

Islam is understood as a religion of peace. Given this, violence must not have any part to play in it. The fact that there are some militant sects does not suggest that the religion is favourably disposed to violence. Readers should be reminded that many Muslims and Islamic organisations have openly dissociated themselves from Boko Haram insurgents because their activities are antithetical to Islam. In other words, even if a Muslim is involved in violence, it does not mean that the fellow is acting the script of Islam. Interestingly, nobody has come out openly to claim membership of Boko Haram. This perhaps explains why former president Goodluck Jonathan described them as faceless, hence his incapacitation to dialogue with them. As said by Archbishop *Desmond Tutu*, the problem is not faith but the faithful (*News Perspectives Quarterly*, 2010:68-71). Oftentimes, people mistake religion for practitioners, thus, Christianity is blamed for the misdemeanour of Christians.

Violence of any kind is also condemned in traditional African society. For example, among the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria, morality is codified in the word, 'Iwa' (character), which is the very factor that makes life pleasing to God and joyful for mankind (Oyeshile, 2004). It is expedient for human beings to exhibit good character and one expects that whoever possesses this attribute will refrain from electoral violence. African Traditional Religion also advocates harmony. It discourages discord and incongruous disposition. Harmonious life demonstrates contentment, patience, temperance, moderation, tolerance and seeking well-being of everybody (Akintola, 1999:157). These values are crucial to credible and violence-free elections.

As can be deduced from the analyses, religion is an agent of peace, and it emphasises sanctity of lives, which are often lost to violence. The problem is with those who use religion to foment trouble. If the value of peace is imbibed by all participants in the electoral process, particularly those who have religious inclination, religion will be a veritable tool for achieving free, fair and credible elections, which have continued to be a mirage in the political history of Nigeria.

TOWARDS VIOLENCE-FREE ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

In this paper, it has been established that electoral violence is a major factor militating against democracy and development in Nigeria. In spite of the reasons for which people take to violence, we want to submit that it is neither a remedy nor justification. On this ground, the following recommendations are made.

Making political office less attractive and less financially rewarding will go a long way in checking electoral violence. If politics is no longer seen as 'food' and government is no longer run as an eatery, only those who are willing to serve will

seek elective posts. It is difficult to distinguish those that are willing to serve from those who want to amass wealth among contemporary politicians.

Nigerians need new orientation in respect of politics. Election and other political activities must no longer be seen as a war of attrition but as a game. Therefore, when the people have spoken, their verdict must be accepted. In every competition, there will always be winners and losers. The spirit of sportsmanship, which entails magnanimity on the part of the winner and gallantry coupled with disposition on the part of the loser, is expected of all contestants. It can be said that losers may not want to accept the outcome if the process was not credible, violence can never be a remedy. As it is often said, two wrongs can never make a right; such will jeopardise higher good. This is the argument of those who advocate pacifism and resistance to injustice through non-violent methods in war and violence discourse. (Gill, 2014: 313).

The electoral commission must be truly independent so as to be able to discharge its duties fearlessly and dispassionately. With this in place, rigging that may incite violence will be minimised. The government must be responsible enough to be neutral even when the decision of the electorate does not favour the ruling party. If this is demonstrated, security agents will be out to protect people and not work for the government in power, as has always been alleged. Former president Jonathan has continued to receive accolade for accepting the result of the presidential election. There is no doubt that his action doused tension and prevented breakdown of law and order.

Media organisations must be guided by the ethics of their profession to guard against sensational reportage and inflammatory dissemination of information, while poverty, which is a major factor responsible for social vices must be honestly addressed by the government at all levels. People are no longer enthusiastic about superficial poverty eradication programme. It is also important that the law takes its course. In this case, whoever is involved in electoral violence will be prosecuted and dealt with according to severity of his/her offence. This will possibly serve as deterrent to others. Crimes abound in society because of the prevailing culture of impunity.

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