

## National Peace Committee and Negative Mobilisation of Citizens for Electoral Violence in Nigeria Since 2015

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### **Abstract**

*Given the scenario of bad governance, Nigeria's democracy is beset by electoral violence, leading to wanton loss of lives and property through negative mobilisation of citizens. The consequence has been dastardly to both national integration and political stability of the country. The aim of this paper is to explain the role of political solutions in conflict resolutions especially in deeply divided societies like Nigeria. The National Peace Committee of 2015 was used as a case in point. The methodology is simply historical and counterfactual. The paper revealed that the Nation Peace Committee of 2015 was responsible for post-election peace of 2015. That if not for its interventionist role, tempestuous atmosphere would have also followed 2015 elections and others after it as was the case with 2011 elections. Given its role in the prevention of post-election violence which consequence is unpalatable to nation building, it is suggested that the body be retained in Nigerian politics. For it therefore to play its role well, its members must avoid partisan influence peddling in the corridor of power, among other things.*

**Keywords:** *Citizens, Electoral violence, National Peace Committee, Negative mobilisation and Nigeria.*

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### **Introduction**

Electoral violence is one serious problem bedevilling Nigeria's democracy, especially the aspect of conducting elections in free, fair and credible manner. Many lives and properties have been lost in this direction as most Nigerian politicians and their supporters do not wilfully accept outcomes of elections. Post-election violence predated Nigeria's fourth Republic. It was also witnessed during the first Republic. The experience turned to a political behaviour that has transcended into a highly ethicised electoral process of 1964/1965 which outcome was the employment of violence, rioting, arson and the inescapable intrusion of the military into governance with similar scenario experience in 1983 (Okanya, 2004). This is despite that security agencies did not fold their arms.

If the issue of post-election violence is seriously considered against the orbit of security of life and property and the near incapability of the security agencies to avert the violence on the one hand and the much time it takes to stop the spree of violence after it has started, it thus brings into perspective the importance of political solution to electoral matters. As Col. Hamid Ali (rtd) noted, while speaking for the Arewa Consultative Forum as Secretary, that:

*if we were dealing with normal and acceptable elections, then normal disputes arising from such valid elections would be resolvable by tribunals. But the situation we are with today is something else and its solution has to be political in nature* (quoted in Uwakwe, 2016:32).

To this extent, some other variables play significant roles in the maintenance of peace in plural societies like Nigeria. This brings into focus the roles of other socio-political agents in promoting stability and the integrity of the state. Nigeria as a country is geographically demarcated with Hausa/Fulani dominating the north and Yorubas and the Igbos dominating the southern part. The north is predominantly Muslim and the south predominantly Christian. There are clear demarcation lines also in terms of language, apart from ethnicity and religion. Hausa dominates the north, Yoruba dominates the west and Igbo dominates the south east.

In Nigeria from the first republic to the fourth republic, plurality has been a candle that lights intergroup crises. Since 2003, General Muhammad Buhari (rtd) has been participating in presidential elections as candidates of other parties except People's Democratic Party (P.D.P). The experience has been traumatic for Nigeria, not solely for his person, but due to the side of the country from where he emerged as political parties' candidates. The most troublesome of them all was post-election crises of 2011 which Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan won under the platform of People's Democratic Party (P.D.P). The ensued violence culminated in gruesome death of many people and wanton destruction of property. This makes Nigeria living in tandem with J. S. Mill's (1958, quoted in Gbadegesin, 2005: 12) law of federal instability that: "free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow feeling, especially if they speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government cannot exist."

However, the experience since 2015 has been significantly different from previous experiences in terms of post-election peace. The post-election time was peaceful, no burning, arson or maiming particularly in the Northern part of Nigeria. This paper is set to examine the reason (s) why this is so and the need to build on this palatable scenario as a mechanism of maintaining the integrity and stability of Nigeria, resting its argument on the notion of counterfactualism. Counterfactualism is a sense of probability that if something may be, it can be, and it will be (Olukoju, 2014).

To achieve the above, this paper, after the above introduction, is organised into the following sub-parts: the concept of negative mobilisation, analytical perspectives on electoral violence in Africa, governance and the post-election violence in Nigeria's federal system, National Peace Committee and the 2015 Electoral Peace in Nigeria, the achievements of the Nigerian 2015 National Peace Committee and lastly, conclusion and suggestions.

### **The Concept of Negative Mobilisation**

Mobilisation is simply the process by which the people are stimulated into taking some forms of action to which the people are committed (Adedokun, 2020). It is essentially the step taken by the elites to achieve desired change or maintain the status quo in the polity. It can be political, economic, social, religious, military and ethnic in nature. Here, mobilisation is regarded as negative when it entails unconstructive actions that debar the society from integration and stability and achieving the primary purpose of government which is the security and welfare of the citizens. Of course, negative mobilisation is being governed according to the calculus of the self-interests of the opportunistic ruling class. It takes forms such as thuggery, vandalism and many deviant behaviours including destruction of lives and property whether in small or large scale.

### **Analytical Perspectives on Electoral Violence in Africa**

Several theories have been used to explain the prevalence of electoral violence in Africa. Some related studies are reviewed below. There is the relative recency of election in Africa. It is argued, under this school of thought, that the security challenges in elections constitute only a phase in the growth of electoral democratic institutions. The Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA, 2009) appropriated in Ibeanu & Mbah (2012) emphasised that rising electoral fraud expressed in various methods of election rigging usually have violence as a spinoff. Thus, there is problem of excessive institutionalism. The problem therefore is that of weak institutions particularly those that moderate competition of which the rule guiding political competitions is a part. So, there is need for institution building. The weakness of this institutional approach, as Ibeanu and Mbah, (2012) pointed out is that though rules are important, but the problem is respect for rules. There is the proclivity of the reigning petty bourgeoisie to disrespect rules. That is the heart of the problem. The petty bourgeoisie has the intrinsic character, interest and instinct of not obeying rules.

Related to excessive institutionalism is the opinion that elections are violent because democracy is weak in African countries. Gilbert Khadiagala (Ibid:6). This idea forgets that elections are an intrinsic part of the democratic process and that cannot be separated from them as Ibeanu & Mbah, put it. This argument is circuitous: “elections are violent because democracy is weak and democracy is weak because elections are violent. It is therefore not clear which one is the causal variable between electoral violence and weak democracy credential. Furthermore, democracy remains humanity’s best form of government following the UNESCO survey of 1951 which showcased the popularity of democracy in Europe as; there were no replies adverse to democracy”. Elections constitute the act of democracy, and therefore, the best standards in democratic practice include the conduct of real, fair, free, peaceful, secure, and credible election, in which the will or verdict of the people (electorate stand supreme and inviolably sacred). Such elections have been conducted in nations like U.K, U.S.A, India, France and of recent Benin Republic, Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria (Nwolise, 2011). Therefore, conduct of election has global standard and Africa cannot be exception to this rule if democracy based on elective principle must thrive. Thus, electoral violence must not be encouraged in the literature of democracy, otherwise this amount to making “the interest of political science, the establishment and maintenance of domination over men” (Ake, 2003:89) and two, it amounts to tainting Africa as a ‘disorder space’ which cannot run general programme in conformity to established norms. It is an insult on African mentality.

Thirdly, there is the evolutionist school. Election violence is portrayed as a teething problem in the evolution of democracy in African countries opining that with time in the trajectory of that revolution, African countries would outgrow electoral violence. This is however not supported by empirical evidence. It appears or seems that election violence is getting worse in intensity and ramification, which implies that the problem is not with the evolution but with the fundamentals of the system. These fundamentals include the management of electoral agencies like the Nigeria’s Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the elites’ ability to abide by the rules, the tacit support from the civil society as well as that of security agencies’ covert and overt supports for the political incumbents, and the rejection of this deal by the opposition. The upturn of many elections of 2003 and 2007 put to question the impartiality and credibility of INEC.

Corruption of the political class is also provided as an analytical perspective to the prevalence of electoral violence in Africa. According to Farida (2009), corruption would never allow the circumstances of democratic dividend for two basic reasons: Corruption is the major

cause of and effects of all development vices- poverty, hunger, insecurity, lawlessness etc. Therefore, no dividend of democracy can be delivered in the wake of corruption in the society for two basic reasons: According Peter Egen, appropriated in (Farida, 2009: 45), “corruption is a major cause of poverty as well as barrier to overcoming it. The two scourges feed each other, locking their population into a cycle of misery.” Two, corruption has a self-sustaining and self-perpetuating character. By its very nature, it feeds and nurtures itself with the result that the cycle continues unabated. The political class is the first target of corruption. It buys-in the political class by ensuring that all political activities are regulated by everything other than transparency. The experience with democracy in Nigeria since 1999 is typical. The political class has diminished in transparency with every election. As this school of thought laconically puts it: “The immaturity of the political class manifests at every stage of the process. From nominations to the conduct of elections proper, the process has been fraught with violence, thuggery, bribery and manipulations” (Farida, 2009:45). Therefore, electoral insecurity is to be understood in the context of cancerous social vice (corruption) in the state.

In the above explanation, election related violence is being treated as *sui generis*. Why these explanations are not necessarily wrong, it is arguable that electoral insecurity cannot be treated *sui generis*. On this note, Ibeanu & Mbah (2012) on their analysis of 2011 general elections came with the hypothesis of negative mobilization. They stressed that elections are major events in which we select those who control the state, which in countries like Nigeria opens a vista of access to and control of enormous resources, broader security challenges become exacerbated during elections. Therefore, generally, electoral insecurity is to be understood in the context of wider insecurity, which has its rules in the evolution of Nigeria’s political economy, the Nigerian state and the character of its ruling class. More specifically, explanation of electoral insecurity in Nigeria, particularly during the 2011 elections, should be sought in a crisis of rising expectations in the context of zero-sum election. As zero-sum nature of petty bourgeoisie elections became persistent, there was negative mobilization of communal (ethnic and religious) feelings by politicians. Thus rising expectations turned to relative deprivation.

It seems therefore that negative mobilization of the populace by political parties was based on the message that if the elections are free and fair, then “our party” should win. The converse was then that if “our party” lost the elections, then they were not free and fair. It was this type of negative mobilization that accounted for much of the violence that followed the elections (Ibid: 25). Following this was the killing of about 800 souls with more than 65,000 people displaced in 12 days of rioting in 12 northern states (Bauchi, Yobe, Sokoto, Zamfara, Adamawa, Gombe, Borno, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina and Niger states) by the supporters of Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, candidate of the defunct C. P. C. in the election. This manifested in the hunting down of Christians and members of ethnic groups from southern Nigeria, accusing them of supporting Jonathan in the election. Churches, shops, and homes, police stations, ruling party and Independent National Electoral Commission office were raised. The casualties included 10 members of National Youth Service Corps who were murdered in Bauchi State on April 17, 2011 (Sunday Tribune, 8 February, 2015:43).

All the schools of thought of electoral violence discussed above are relevant to the Nigerian scenario, but given the heterogeneous ethnic composition on the one hand and the geography of the electoral violence of 2011 on the other hand, the negative mobilisation school seems more plausible and is even the problem which the National Peace Committee Chaired by Gen. Abdusalami Abubakar (rtd) was out to prevent recurring on the 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

### **Governance and Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Federal System**

Federalism is presumed to be enhancer of good governance in plural societies. Of the Nigeria's case, Richard Joseph (2006) attributed the problem of federalism to misgovernance. In essence, federal practice in Nigeria has not led to the presuming of good governance to Nigerians since the basic functions of a 'normal state' have not been discharged to Nigerian citizens by the state. Thus, Federalism is expected to enhance government through competition and thus it helps in fast-tracking delivery of good governance. According to Joseph (2002) what the federal system provides is the opportunity to have multiple sites of governance. Units of government which successfully serve their constituencies may generate a dynamic internal to Nigeria so that those which falters will find themselves pressured to improve their relative performance. Alas, Nigeria's Independence, like some other African States, is the replacement of the colonial masters by local politicians who distanced their people from power and ignore their people's wellbeing when they themselves retain the privileges of the colonial masters for themselves (Jega, 2011).

Federalism in Nigeria has thus not provided enough stability that can enhance national unity and development. This manifests itself well in elections, especially presidential elections, when major candidates originated from different ethnic groups. Because of their different ethnic backgrounds, supports for the candidates have ethnic colourations. This is typical of 2011 and 2015 presidential elections, and thus explains the geography of post-election violence that erupted after the declaration of the candidate of People's Democratic Party, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in the 12 states of Northern Nigeria. In this case, federalism as a political principle has not been capable of mitigating electoral conflicts in Nigeria in spite of creation of states, nationalization of political parties, creation of NYSC, establishment of Unity Schools, among others to reduce inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria.

For the avoidance of the repeat of the 2011 post-election violence with its devastating effects in terms of human and material resources, and the tempestuous pre-election political climate in the North (some people were stoning President Goodluck Jonathan at campaign rallies in the North), some notable Nigerians took some nationalistic and patriotic steps to ensure that the stakeholders accept the results of the election, without allowing any post-election violence to occur based on the *organic principle of infinite invariability*.

### **National Peace Committee and the 2015 Post-Election Peace in Nigeria**

Informal conflict resolution is not novel and peculiar to 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Alternative dispute resolution technique for conflict resolution featured committee of elder statesmen and women or what is known as Patriots in Nigeria. Examples include the intervention of some Heads of State in the impeachment impasse between the Obasanjo administration and the legislature. At the state and local government areas, the engagements of NGOs and CBOs, as well as the good offices of traditional and religious elites as conflict mediators have contributed in a number of cases to cessation of hostilities (Bassey, 2005).

The National Peace Committee on 2015 general elections is an addition to this inventory. It was a product of the Abuja Peace Accord. Its membership comprised of Gen. Abdusalami Abubakar, former Head of State, Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe (rtd), John Cardinal Onaiyakan, Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad AbubakarPastor Ayo Oritsejafor, Archbishop Nicholas Okoh, Justice Rose Ukeje, Alhaji Aliko Dangote, Mr. Sam Amuka, Prof. Zainab Alkali, Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi, Matthew Kukah, Dame Priscilia Kuye, Prof. Ibrahim Gambari, Prof. Ameze Goubadia and Alhaji Mohammed Musdafa. Others were Dr. Yunusa Tanko and Senator Ben Ndi Obi.



The objective of the committee was to continue peace mediation among stakeholders and to ensure that the spirit and letters of the Abuja Peace Accord was obeyed to letters. It therefore engaged the presidential candidates in the critical discussion on how to achieve and ensure violence-free election, run an issue driven campaign devoid of hate speech and on how to reduce the tensed political atmosphere. The Abuja Peace Accord made the presidential candidates participating in the 2015 general elections signatory to the following resolutions:

“To run issue-based campaigns at national, state and local levels. In this, we pledge to refrain from campaigns that will involve religious sentiment, ethnic or tribal profiling, both by ourselves or all agents acting in our name.”

“To refrain from making or causing to make in our names or that of our parties any public statement, pronouncement, declaration or speeches that have the capacity to incite any form of violence before, during and after the election. To forcefully and publicly speak out against provocative utterances and oppose all act of electoral violence whether perpetuated by our supporters or opponents.”

“To commit ourselves and political parties to the monitoring of the adherence of this accord, if necessary, by a national peace committee made up of respected statesmen and women, traditional and religious leaders. All the institutions of government including INEC and security agencies must act and be seen to act with impartiality” (Uwakwe, 2016:32).

Ahead of the 2015 general elections, and in line with the Abuja Peace Accord, the then government of the day organised the Offices of the Special Adviser on Intergovernmental Affairs and National Security Adviser to work separately on how to avoid a troubled situation. This problem was also internationalised by UNDP and a number of other international organisations including Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, which is based in Geneva, the same body which had provided support for the dialogue that followed the post-election conflicts in Kenya and Liberia, provided the logistics.

### **Achievements of Nigerian 2015 National Peace Committee**

Nigerian politics has over time been dominated by *clientelistic* ethnicity. This is a case whereby ethnicity becomes a destructive force for the economic and social development of the state. In particular ethnic favouritism replaces merit and need in determining who benefits from the resources controlled by the state (Bah, 2003). Politics therefore becomes war, and “each contender for power was desperate to retain or gain office without which chances for capital accumulation would be gravely jeopardised. Thus, violence and thuggery became synonymous with politics. People killed and were killed in the fight to gain or retain office. Politics therefore turned the political cosmology of Nigeria to Hobbessian state of nature where life was indeed ‘solitary, nasty, brutish and short’ (Ekekwe, 1986).

The worst betrayal of intelligence is finding explanation for the world as it is (Isumonah & Agbaje, 2014). This unwholesomeness must therefore not continue and the Nigerian National Peace Committee on Nigerian 2015 elections achieved the desired change in the following ways:

Given the tense political atmosphere, it helped in bringing the main stakeholders together to a roundtable discussion to chart the way forward and reach a resolution capable of dousing the already tensed atmosphere. It provided wider deliberations on an action plan that will lead to free, fair, transparent violence-free 2015 elections. Two, the over-politicization of Boko Haram menace was curtailed as the gladiators were brought together for the first time to chart the way forward towards taming the monster that could totally mar the 2015 general elections. Moreover, in addition, the forum laid the foundation for a peaceful, free, acceptable and violence-free 2015

polls. It has also helped to foster stakeholder's collaboration in ensuring a smooth transition from one regime to another, especially from one political party to another. It has also prevented the return of the military to the political scene as was the case with Nigeria's second republic.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

National Peace Committee on the Nigerian 2015 general elections contributed in no small measure to both the pre and post-election peace during the 2015 general elections through its members' statesmanship given the Nigeria's electoral behaviour i.e. zero – sum policies. It is therefore not inconceivable that tempestuous political situation that could threaten the continued corporate existence of Nigeria have been averted. The disparate socio-cultural backgrounds and composition of the members of the Committee, and the peace that dominated the environment during and after the Nigerian 2015 general elections have actually debunked the J. S. Mill's (1958, quoted in Gbadegesin, 2005: 12) law of federal instability that "free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow feeling, especially if they speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government cannot exist".

As a political solution to crisis in Nigeria, the National Peace Committee needs to be maintained as an election peace management strategy in Nigeria. To continue to be relevant, it must ensure the following:

Avoid unnecessary influence peddling in the corridors of power. If not, there level of integrity and neutrality will become assailable.

No tacit or open support to any candidate and adequate transparency to both local and international civil society organizations and even the international community.

Avoiding primordial sentiments like ethnicity, language, custom, region, race, assured blood ties and religion and even class interest to can generate the domination of the majority by the few ruling class.

Preaching and seeking for geo-political balancing in the distribution of political benefits to various socio-cultural groups in Nigeria. This will further entrench peace as consociation is an important instrument of promotion positive peace in plural societies in Nigeria.

The necessary support provided by the government, and that of the citizens must be continued for electoral conflicts to be maximally eradicated in Nigeria.

Above all, since the National Peace Committee is a temporary and central structure, permanent structures like the Nigerian Peace Corps can be established in Nigeria. This is so because the Nigerian grundnorm did not foresee the likelihood of conflict around political competitions between candidates from different socio-economic backgrounds that are socially and politically volatile like the North and Niger Delta, which Mohammadu Buhari and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan personified. The Peace Corps can work at all levels of the society since it is not only on general elections that violence is experienced but also on local elections (chairmanship and councillorship) in Nigeria. Thus, the Peace Corps can serve as dispute avoidance mechanism by providing first line information to the government and the regular security agencies. Beyond electoral violence, the Peace Corps can be a proactive measure in containing other forms of violence that are common in Nigeria (religious fundamentalism, religious militias and sectarianisms) as these forms of violence themselves are threats to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections which has been the concern of INEC since 2015. It can also help in the promotion of the secularity of the Nigerian state and the freedom of religion.

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