Multiculturalism, Electoral Violence and Sustainable Democracy

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Abstract

The paper examines multicultural nature of Nigeria vis-a-viz potentialities for electoral violence and the quest for sustainable democracy. The paper observes that Nigeria's diversity is increasingly becoming a source of concern rather than a source of strength. The plural nature of the country is manifested into intense competition translated into tribal, religious and regional sentiments and general instability. The 2010 electoral act as amended defined disorderly behavior and related offences before, during and after elections. The electoral act also defined penalties against those offences with a view to sustaining democracy. It has been the position of the paper that the sustainability of democracy is contingent upon the ability of the electoral body to sensitize the electorates and expose them to electoral guidelines through voter education and strict application of penalties already in place. Social structure and Weber's rationalization were the theoretical thrusts of the paper while review of conceptual and empirical literature as well as the documentary analysis of the 2010 electoral act (as amended) and allied electoral offences were the methods used by the paper.

Keywords: *Elections, Multiculturalism, Democracy, Violence, Crime and Rationality*

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Background to the Study

Nigeria is a multicultural and socially diverse society with a population of over 150 million and over 250 different ethnic groups. Its multicultural nature rather than becoming a source of the country's political and economic strengths, is on the contrary manifesting into hostile and intense competition over what is referred to as 'national cake' - land, share of oil revenue, political positions including employment opportunities and other privileges. The expression of this competition as is usually the case, takes the forms religious, tribal, political and regional differences and sentiments. The Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, and Taraba ethno-religious conflicts; Ife - Modakeke hostilities; Tiv - Jukun enmities; Aguleri and Umuleri communities' clashes are typical case in point (Malumfashi (2006), Michael (2009), Olufemi (2009), Nwanegbo (2009), Tagbo (2009) and Sani (2011). The essence of Democracy is therefore to resolve these conflicting issues through constitutional means, one of which is free, fair, and transparent elections. Yet the election itself is largely influenced by the country's multiculturalism and conflictual nature. Politicians commonly exploit these diversities and engineer electoral violence in pursuit of their political interest.

Objective of the Study

This paper examines the sustainability of Nigeria's democracy in the face of its multicultural nature and elections and/or politically motivated violence.

Nigeria: A Plural Society

Malumfashi (2006), once noted that 'Nigeria is a plural society. It is the most populous African Nation and most socially diverse with more than 250 ethnic groups. The country is characterized by diversity of norms, values, and beliefs, a distinctive multiculturalism that makes it vulnerable to conflict' (145). It is not uncommon therefore to find the interest of one group conflicts with that of the other.

Conversely, the same multicultural nature if managed, handled and utilized properly could be a source of the country's economic and political strength especially vis-a-viz its relation with other countries of the world. This is possible only if the constituent parts of the country emphasize more on their commonalities and less on their differences, and if the leadership is able to harmonized the unique talents, creativities, and potentials of each ethnic group for the purpose of economic development, political stability, and social solidarity. Poverty, corruption, weak and insensitive leadership and desperation for political office, however work against this ideal. The countries social diversity and pluralism are exploited and regularly manipulated by politicians for parochial political ends (see Sani (2011) and Malumfashi (2018). Accordingly, every governmental policy including that of election has its own religious, tribal, regional or political interpretations albeit in a very negative fashion and occasioned by mutual mistrust amongst the different ethnic groups. Under this situation, electoral and other politically motivated violence is very obvious.

Electoral Violence and Sustainability of Democracy

Democracy as a system of government is purposely design to ensure good governance where justice, equity and fairness are of prime concern. Good governance presumably guarantees

the provision of security and welfare to the citizenry. Jamo (2011 and Malumfashi (2018) stressed that the sustainability of democracy is predicated on election and electoral process. Elections function to ensure the consolidation of democratic culture and strengthen the power of the people to determine their leadership. Election is thus a crucial element of democratic culture. It is in other words, the manifestation of the power of people in determining the leadership of their country and shaping the political future of the country in question. The power of the people to determine their leadership is accordingly affirmed by the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. Elections and electoral processes are therefore the necessary prerequisite for legitimate authority and consequently good governance. Electoral processes include voter registration, voter education, stake holder's consistent consultations, publication of election time- table, training of ad hoc staff, screening of nominated candidates, storage of electoral materials, transportation of the materials to various centers, deployment of the trained officials, transparent declaration of election results, and securing the entire processes among others.

The intricacies involve in elections and electoral practices suggest that effective and successful elections management require considerable degree of experience and expertise. Where election officials are ill-trained, unprofessional, and employed on ad-hoc basis as has been the case with Nigeria, the credibility of the exercise is bound to be put to question. Hence, Jamo (2011), noted that the lack of expert electoral officials creates an opportunity for politicians and political parties to subvert the process with impunity. Thus lack of confidence in elections and recognition of the sanctity of the electoral processes was 'generally responsible for the near institutionalization of electoral malpractices and other irregularities in most of the elections conducted'(p4). Consequently, politicians hardly accept election defeat because of their lack of confidence in the entire exercise. That is why, Malumfashi (2018) observed that failure to accept election defeat has been responsible for most of the electoral violence in Nigeria. The 2011 electoral violence was largely influenced by the public including politicians' rejection of the outcome of the presidential election.

Again where electoral officials are incompetent and inexperience it is possible for the entire electoral processes involving conception, planning, logistics, funding, registration of voters and management of post-election reactions to be faulted (Jega 2013). Inability to handle these intricate issues appropriately could stimulate violence and general instability. In addition to the problem of incompetent, ill-trained and inexperienced electoral officials, electoral violence in the country is to a large extent influenced by the politicians' desperation for political office. Hence, political position in Nigeria is a key to the unrestricted access to national resources including massive opportunities and privileges and that justifies the intrinsic desperation. Electoral violence, given this perspective is a reflection of politicians' penchant for wealth and power and is manifested into outright killings of political opponents and destructions of their properties, mutilations of electoral materials, intimidation of voters, attack of party officials and the use of state's apparatus by the party in power to coerce and intimidate voters, officials and opposition parties for the purpose of rigging and other election malpractices (see also Sani 2011 and Malumfashi 2018).

These are among the electoral offences and irregularities that threaten any democracy and destabilized the polity if unchecked. The sustainability of democracy in Nigeria is therefore contingent upon the ability of the electoral umpire, the security agents, party officials, civil society organizations and most fundamentally the media, to play the game according to its rule. Enforcement of sanctions against forgery of voters' register or ballot papers, bribery and corruption, impersonation of voters or electoral officials, conspiracy, disorderly conduct, application of violence or threat of violence before, during and after election is accordingly recommended. The sanctions include, upon conviction, the payment of between 50,000 – 100,000 Naira or imprisonment for 1-3 years as the case may be (Iwu 2006). These type of offences leading to electoral violence and hampering electoral processes are subsumed under general offences i.e those day to day offences that can be committed not exclusively during election process and are enshrine in other laws not necessarily electoral laws e.g. assaults, kidnapping, intimidation, conspiracy, and defamation and exclusive offences i.e. offences committed during any of the electoral process (Kurfi 2013).

Specifically, Electoral Act 2010 as amended was very explicit on disorderly conduct during election. Section (128) of the act provides that 'Any person who at an election acts, or incites an offence and is liable on conviction to a maximum of fine of 500,000 Naira or imprisonment for a term of 12 month or both. Again, section (131) sub (1a –d) provides that ' A person who (a) directly, by himself or by another person on his behalf, makes use of or threatens to make use of force, violence, or restrain, (b) inflicts or threatens to inflict by himself or by any other person, any minor or serious injury, damage, harm, or loss on or against a person in order to induce or compel that person to vote or refrain from voting, or on account of such person having voted or refrained from voting; or (c) by abduction, duress, or fraudulent device or contrivance, impedes or prevents the free use of the vote by a voter or thereby compels, induce or prevails on a voter or refrain from giving his vote, (d) by preventing any political aspirants from free use of the media, designated vehicles, mobilization of political support and campaign at an election, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of 1 Million Naira or imprisonment for a term of 3 years.

These provisions intend to constrain individuals from inciting electoral violence for the purpose of safeguarding democratic values. Electoral violence and allied offences are obviously antithetical to democratic values and severely undermine the sustainability of democracy. Electoral violence and allied offences create conditions for incompetent and irresponsive leaders to occupy positions of authority and further jeopardize the survival of the entire system. To this extent, voter education is very paramount in educating both the electorates and party officials on electoral guidelines and qualities of candidates to be nominated by the parties. This is essential because democracy is not just a system of government but a culture in itself. Unless democratic culture is inculcated and internalized into the minds of the stake holders and other members of a society, the sustainability of democratic culture will continue to be spurious.

Voter education is essential to defining leadership qualities to the electorates. This is because leadership crisis has been the bane of Nigeria's development over the years.
As Malumfashi (2018) puts it:

Nigeria is blessed with all it takes to develop but for the lack of quality leadership, for instance, the country is amongst the first ten most populous countries in the world. With over 160 Million people, Nigeria is the largest in Africa. The country therefore has the potentials to develop rapidly because population was responsible for the 19thcentury British Industrial Revolution; it was also attributable to the economic transformation of China and India. Again, Nigeria is one of the most resourceful countries in the world with iron ore, coal, diamond, gold; silicon, gas and petroleum abound including vast agricultural potentialities. From Katsina in the North to Osun in the south (a journey of over 500 kilometer) is a whole gold belt. Yet the country is amongst the environmentally stable countries on earth, with absolutely no case(s) of earthquake or flood, extreme cold or heat, and no records of volcanic eruption, hurricane or wild fire. Its environment is very much compatible with sustainable growth and development. If resourcefulness and environmental stability could attract growth elsewhere in the world, Nigeria could have developed faster. Still, Nigeria could be rated as the most religious country on earth with sheer number of mosques and churches surpassing the number of factories and industries. Impliedly, if fear of God attracted development in Iran and Saudi Arabia, Nigeria would have developed faster because there are more Muslims in Nigeria than in those two countries. Likewise, if commitment to church was responsible for development in U. S. A, France and Scotland, Nigeria would have developed faster because there are more practically committed Christians in Nigeria than in those countries. Ironically, the country is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. In terms of living standards, Nigeria is also amongst the poorest countries of the world. About 70% of the population had income of less than one dollar a day. Basically, by contemporary standards, predominant population of Nigeria has less than enough income to keep it adequately fed, clothed and comfortably sheltered (P6).

Given these illustrations it is imperative for Electoral Commission to sensitize political parties on the need to produce a responsible and responsive leadership. A leadership that is community oriented, frugal and prudent, educated and exposed, and capable of denying itself in order to provides for its population.

Theoretical Considerations
Social Structure Theory
Electoral violence and other related offences are conscious and calculative. The purpose of those crimes is to win elections by omission or commission. The desperation for winning elections is already justified by the enormous privileges surrounding political office. Fundamental to this, social structure theories of crime explain crime by reference to the economic and social arrangements of society. Structures of society i.e. formal and informal arrangements existing within society, given this perspective, are the main causes of crime. Negative arrangements within society such as poverty, income inequality, social disorganization, and other forms of disadvantages produce criminal behavior. Hence in a society where poverty is aptly pronounced, family values are lost, youth unemployment is huge and where corruption is the norm, it is easy for desperate politicians to exploit such vulnerabilities through the use of money, drugs, and other means to violently disrupt the electoral processes to their advantages. Social disorganization or the ecological theory of

Robert Park (1920) and Burgess (1930); the strain theory of Robert K. Merton; and cultural deviance theory of Thorsten Selling (1938) grouped togather to constitute Social Structure Theories (see Dekeseredy and Elly 1996, Schmalleger 2011, and Giddens and Sutton 2013). Social structure theory is relevant to this study to the extent that its main basic premise is that, structures of society that dictate relationships between different segments of society are the main causes of crime. This theory therefore has much currency in attempt to explain and articulate the phenomenon of electoral violence under multicultural social structural arrangements. Accordingly, feelings of perceived and real marginalization, social inequality, poverty and lack of civic culture are veritable conditions for violence and disorderly behavior. Most often, expressions of these feelings take the forms of interethnic, interreligious, or electoral violence and other crimes. Politicians themselves exploit these opportunistic feelings to incite violence for their political interest.

Weber's Rationalization

Max Weber's (1858-1918) idea of rationality or rational action i.e. calculated means of achieving maximum goal at minimum cost is equally central to the concern of this paper. Weber's rationality is translated into application of the most advanced and sophisticated system of administration (bureaucracy and democratization of political institutions); advanced technology in the area of economic production; and rationalization of economic institutions. It is only through the adoption of rationality that society can, in Weber's view, be able to realized it maximum ends at minimum cost. The difference between western societies and African societies, for example, in the areas of administrative, industrial, scientific and technological development, reflects therefore the difference in the level of rationality between the two societies. In the area of administration, for instance, Weber observed that the west had fully adopted modern bureaucracy and democratization of institutions. In other words, 'rational - legal authority' is the dominant trend in the western world. African societies on the contrary still retain some elements of traditional and/or charismatic authority which are negations to the principle of rationality. Impliedly, even where democracy is being practiced like Nigeria, Nigerian society still retain some element of traditional values and incorporate them into their democratic experiment (see also Ritzer2008). Some of these values include tribal or religious sentiment, gerontocracy, nepotism, mediocrity, and other forms of disorganizations that subsequently manifest into violence. Both the two theories have enough currency on the analysis of the theme of this paper.

Conclusion

Election being the backbone of democracy is purposely designed and intended to ensure equity, justice, fairness and considerable representations of the various interests, and divers population of the nation. Election is thus a means of exercising the power of the people in determining their leadership. Desperation for political positions, conflicting tribal and religious as well as regional interests have, however been responsible for electoral violence in Nigeria. Yet provisions of 2010 electoral act as amended, clearly specified disorderly behavior and related electoral offences and accordingly stipulated penalties for the purpose of safeguarding democracy and sustaining the system. Sustainability of democracy in Nigeria is therefore predicated on the inculcation of democratic culture into the mind of the people through holistic and intensive voter education and strict applications of penalties against electoral including violence.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the discourse of the paper, the followings are recommended:

1. Voter Education is a key to election's success and consequently the stability of democracy, emphasis should therefore be placed on intensive and extensive voter education campaign, where electorates would be exposed to and acquainted with elections norms.

2. Adequate publicity of the activities of electoral commission is highly recommended. States and National Electoral Commissions must collaborate with media organizations, civil societies, and National Orientation Agency (NOA) in keeping people abreast with their activities, including management of post-election violence.

3. Election observers should be encouraged to be apolitical in the conduct of election observation and assessment of elections' results.

4. Finally, poverty must practically be alleviated, sense of nationhood instills in the minds of the people, social inequality reduced and culture of institutionalism and constitutionalism enshrined.

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